



ST. FRANCIS DE SALES



St. Francis de Sales (1567 – 1662)

Fr. Martin Bialas, C.P., states, "The author who had the most decisive influence on the thinking of Paul of the Cross and one whose works Paul read throughout his life was St. Francis de Sales. Hence it is he who is designated here as Paul's favourite author. Of Francis' works, Paul favoured The Treatise on the Love of God. This treatise fascinated him the reason being that the infinite love of God was, for Paul, the fundamental principle and end of his spiritual life. Some of his contemporaries knew of the affinity between him and St. Francis de Sales, and it was to the "mild bishop of Geneva" that they mostly compared Paul. (cf. Martin Bialas, The Mysticism of St. Paul of the Cross, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1990, p. 110.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

The biggest mistake that most of us make about God, the one that most consistently undermines our peace of soul, is the idea that God demands a lot of us, more than a fragile being like ourselves could ever give. Such a God is frightening. But God in reality is content with the little we can give, because God knows – and accepts – the little that we have. Do the best we can to find and honour God in everything we do. Do whatever – however little – we can to live this way. Let God do the rest. If we follow these simple rules, we will possess God. And possessing God we will not be disturbed, we will not be anxious, for we will have no need to fear a God who never asks of us more than we can give. (St. Francis de Sales)

There are three things about living in peace that you should never forget. Peace does not mean living without pain. You lose peace not when you are trouble free, but when you cease to be dependent on God and fail in your duties. You must expect pain and not be disturbed by it. Our set ways of doing things are not let go of easily. God is never the source of our anxiety because anxiety is the enemy of peace, it cannot come from God. It is the enemy of the spirit. Treat anxiety like the temptation it is. Fight it. Send it on its way. Whatever you must do, whether it is defending yourself against temptation, or welcoming joy, do it peacefully, without anxiety. You cannot keep your peace by losing it. (St. Francis de Sales)

It doesn't take much to remind us of our fragility. At any moment, however lofty our prayers, however convinced we are of our spiritual strength, we can find ourselves with little or no notice, plunged into chilling reality humbly pleading for God to save us. Think of Peter. There he was so sure of his faith, that he stepped from the boat to walk on water. But when the wind came up unexpectedly and the waves became threatening, he was quick to cry out: "Lord, save me!" The response of Jesus was just as swift. He reached out and took Peter by the hand, and then he chided him, "Where is your faith? Why do you doubt?" It is any different with us? Doesn't it often take the winds of temptation, our overconfident steps to bring us to the call of God? We lose our footing and God takes us by the hand. "Where is your faith? Why do you doubt?" Where indeed? Why indeed? (St. Francis de Sales)

We are on a journey to a more blessed life. Let us not, along the way, be angry with one another. Instead let us go forward with our fellow travelers, our brothers and sisters, gently, in peace and in love. And whatever happens along the way, however great the provocation, do not let anger into your heart. Take with you the advice of Joseph when he bid his brothers goodbye: "be not angry along the way". Don't let anger get the smallest foothold in your heart. Exclude absolutely, as Augustine advises, even its slightest presence, however justified and reasonable it may seem. For once it gets into your heart it is hard to uproot and more rapidly becomes a beam. It will stay with you and if you ignore the apostle Paul's advice and let the sun go down on your anger, it will harden into hatred. Constantly fed by imaginings and illusions, it will become all but impossible to set yourself free from it. It is best to avoid all anger rather than try to come to terms with it; for if we give anger an inch it will surely take a mile. (St. Francis de Sales)

When you are in love, lovers say, the whole world speaks of the one you love. It is hard to think of anything else. Your heart overflows. When you speak, it is hard not to speak of him. And when you are silent you daydream of her. His absence is intolerable. So too, those who love God are never weary of thinking of him, living for him, yearning for him, and talking of him. To them the whole world speaks in a silent language of love, exciting them to thoughts of the one they love – exciting us, if we listen to thoughts of the one we love – firing an insatiable yearning to be in his presence. Speak, then, when you are spoken to. Do not be embarrassed to acknowledge that everywhere and always you hear the voice of the one you love. Go where your heart takes you. (St. Francis de Sales)

Do you remember how, when you were a small child, you would take an abandoned carton or a fistful of sand and turn it into a castle? Inevitably, it seemed, someone would knock it over and your heart would be broken. But now we understand that those things that were so earth shaking when we were children were in the end not all that important. Our world did not end when our castle fell. Yet here we are, still frantic and anxious about the frail castles of our adult years. They too will fall and it will not matter that much in the light of eternity. But it takes a while to gain this perspective. We can spend our days, running in circles, obsessed by a thousand things, convinced that each of them is all important to our happiness or we can stop for a moment and think of eternity. Then we see how very unimportant the thousand concerns that clutter our minds and preoccupy our souls truly are. How little they matter! (St. Francis de Sales)

An old proverb bids us “make haste slowly.” Likewise King Solomon reminds us that “hurried feet stumble” and those who worry themselves sick over every detail of their lives do little, and what they do they do badly. The noisiest bees produce no honey. We need to nourish our spirit diligently and carefully, but this is very difficult from anxiety and debilitating worry. Care and solicitude don’t undermine tranquility and peace of mind but anxiety and spiritual nitpicking, to say nothing of upset and frenzy, most certainly do. Be conscientious in all you are called to do, but do not let hurry, upset, anxiety and nervousness get in the way of common sense and good judgement, and prevent you from doing well what God calls you to do. Our Lord rebuked Martha by calling her back to the one thing necessary. “Martha, Martha, You are careful and troubled about many things.” We may need to hear this same rebuke. (St. Francis de Sales)

The way to honour God whose handiwork we are, is to be who we are, as perfectly as we can. It is enough to be what God wants us to be, rather than some perfect creature that God never had in mind. Suppose you were the most perfect being you could ever imagine, so what? If you were not the person God had in mind at the moment of your creation, what good would it do you? It is also enough to do whatever it is that you can do being who you are, and where you are. Just do wholeheartedly what you know God is asking of you. Don’t bother yourself about whether or not what God asks of you is important and grand. Whether your actions are insignificant or not does not matter, if they are God’s will. How could you be disappointed at

even the smallest opportunity if you know that it is God's will – born of his providential concern for you, and chosen for you in his eternal wisdom. (St. Francis de Sales)

If you hope to succeed in whatever you do, place your trust in God's providence. Cooperate with him, then rest secure that whatever happens will be best for you. Think of a little child walk with her father. One hand clings tightly to his but with the other she gathers fruit from trees along the way. Imitate the child. With one hand go ahead and gather what you need of the world's good things, but with the other hold on to your heavenly Father, check regularly whether or not he approves of what you are doing with your life. Above all, beware of letting go of your Father to free up both your hands to gather more of the world's goods. You will find that by yourself you will stumble and fall. And when your gathering does not require all your attention, turn your mind to God as often as you can. Like a sailor returning to port, look to the sky and not just to the waves that carry you. (St. Francis de Sales)

Stop worrying. Whatever it is that you must do to follow the path that God has shown you do to the best of your ability. And when you have done it move on to the next thing. Don't keep rerunning it in your mind trying to decide whether your efforts were too little or too much whether it was a great deed or a small one whether you might have done better. If it wasn't sinful and you were trying to do the will of God it is enough. Don't worry. Move on. Simply. Calmly. Peacefully. Follow the path the Lord shows you free of anxiety. Otherwise your anxiety will undermine your efforts to grow. If you do fail, don't let anxiety overcome you, but admit your failure, quietly, humbly, and in God's presence. then get on with following the path that God will continue to show you. (St. Francis de Sales)

THE SPIRITUALITY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

- God is love and all creation is an outpouring of that love
- All creation has been made for Christ, with Christ, and through Christ
- All creation should be treated with respect and care
- Jesus is the model for all fully human living
- You possess divine dignity and thus are worthy of profound respect
- God has testified that you are good, worthy of divine love and mercy
- Despite your weakness and sinfulness, God loves you so much that he sent his son to become human
- You are called to be holy, that is, to grow in union with God
- Pursuing a holy life is called "devotion", that is, doing what is commanded and counselled by God promptly, actively and diligently
- The pursuit of holiness must be practical. It must transform your attitudes, attributes and actions
- Acknowledge your sins and failings, learn from them, but do not dwell on them
- God gives you talents and abilities, gifts that should be discovered, developed and used for the good of others
- Relationships are essential to living a full human, that is, a holy life

- Each moment of the day comes from the hand of a loving God and is graced for your salvation. The only time you have is each present moment. Don't live in the past; don't dwell on the future
- Living each moment to the fullest with an eye to loving God must lead you to show compassion for others
- The challenge of each moment is discerning God's will, that is, the particular unique way that God may be calling you to love God, yourself and others. God's will is frequently communicated through the events, circumstances and relationships in which you find yourself
- God seldom requires you to perform great and extraordinary feats, but God always challenges you to perform everyday actions with extraordinary attention and enthusiasm
- The "little virtues" of patience, humility, gentleness, simplicity, honesty and hospitality are powerful means for growing holy
- All prayer and meditation must lead to action
- The motivation with which you perform some action may be far more important and powerful than the action itself
- Freedom is one of the most powerful and precious gifts God gives you. You are to use that freedom to grow in conformity to God's will
- Intellectual learning, prayerful reflection, social interaction, work, play and all things creative should be valued as graced by God and viewed as a means for growing into a fully human person
- Each new day is a new beginning, a new opportunity for growing in holiness
- Let your passion be disciplined. Let your discipline be passionate
- Keep things in perspective
- Develop a sense on humour

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