

NOVENA IN HONOUR OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES
15th – 23rd January
PRAYER TO ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

Dear St. Francis de Sales/, by your life and in your writings/ you teach us to follow Christ/ by loving God, our Father/ and all other persons. / Obtain for us the grace to be led by the Holy Spirit/, so that we show our love for God/ by fidelity to prayer/, by diligence in our work/, by our cheerful service of others.

Teach us to be patient and forgiving/, kind and helpful to all/. Help us to face the difficulties/ and sufferings of life/ with heart full of trust in God/ our ever- loving Father./

Dear St. Francis/, while on earth /you were always ready to help/ those in need/. Come to our aid/ and obtain for us from God/, through the intercession of Our Lady/, the special grace for which we now pray. **(Pause)**

O gentle St. Francis/, bless our homes with your presence/. May our hearts glow with love for God/ and a sincere concern for others/, so that our lives may show in word and deed/ the blessings of your patronage. Amen.

Let us pray:

O God who for the salvation of souls, was pleased that blessed Francis, your confessor and bishop become all to all men, mercifully grant that being plentifully enriched with the sweetness of your charity, by the help of his merits, we may obtain life everlasting. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN

While Heaven Proclaims O Francis

While heaven proclaims O Francis,
Thy glory fair and bright,
Our earthly choirs are chanting,
Thy praise in festive hymns

**Thou glory of the Church.
In thy eternal joy,
O listen to our prayers,
That we may follow thee.**

In youthful strength and vigour,
Thou spurnest earthly joys,
And rushest holy warrior,
To join the hosts of Christ.

Thy heart is brave and mighty
In fighting heresies
And dreaded are thy triumphs
By mankind's hellish foes

Thou bringest back as Bishop
The sheep that went astray
Thus of the perfect shepherd
Thou art the truest type.

15th January - Day One

TRUE DEVOTION

“All true and living devotion presupposes the love of God” When God created the world He commanded each tree to bear fruit after its kind; and even so He bids Christians,—the living trees of His Church,—to bring forth fruits of devotion, each one according to his kind and vocation. We are well aware that the life of our Founder Fr. Peter Marie Mermier stood erect amidst the times of trials only due to his firm resolve to love God. The Chablais mission of St. Francis shows us his courage in taking up the challenges arisen due to Calvinism.

St. Francis says, “however, all true and living devotion presupposes the love of God;—and indeed it is neither more nor less than a very real love of God, though not always of the same kind; for that Love one while shining on the soul we call grace, which makes us acceptable to His Divine Majesty;—when it strengthens us to do well, it is called Charity;—but when it attains its fullest perfection, in which it not only leads us to do well, but to act carefully, diligently, and promptly, then it is called Devotion.” (IDL. Part I, Ch. 1).

❖ **Life’s Teaching:**

Jacob’s ladder:—it is a true picture of the devout life; the two poles which support the steps are types of prayer which seeks the love of God, and the Sacraments which confer that love; while the steps themselves are simply the degrees of love by which we go on from virtue to virtue, either descending by good deeds on behalf of our neighbour or ascending by contemplation to a loving union with God. Consider, too, who they are who trod this ladder; men with angels’ hearts, or angels with human forms. (IDL. Part I, Ch. 1).

❖ **Reflection:**

How much of it is my personal effort to be in union with God? I can be His imitator and devotee only when I have made attempts to know Him more. Do I strive to be in His presence at every moment of my life? Do I depend on Him and seek His help especially when I am weak? Do I feel the need to rise again with Him to new life? As a missionary of St. Francis de Sales what are the challenges that I am ready to face?

❖ **Reading:** IDL. Part I, Chapters 1.

16th January - Day Two
PERFECTION WITH PATIENCE

“Be perfected, as my heavenly Father is perfect”

“Be perfected, as my heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:48) Jesus calls each of us to be perfected, that is, to allow ourselves to be purified and transformed by the saving power of God’s love as well as to be sources of that saving power in the lives of our brothers and sisters. In short, we are to display in our own lives, each in our own way, the image and likeness of a God in whose image we are created, and in whose glory we are destined to share.

Set goals for growing in perfection that is reasonable. “Your imagination has formed an ideal of absolute perfection which is impossible to achieve,” Francis de Sales wrote to a devout woman, “leaving you, as it were, heavy with child” and unable to give birth to a deeper level of the spiritual life. Patience is the surest means of attaining perfection, Francis de Sales claims. “Be patient with everyone, but above all, with yourself. I mean, don’t be disturbed about your imperfections, and always have the courage to pick yourself up after a fall.”

❖Life’s Teaching:

•A reporter asked the famous George Bernard Shaw that “what if” question before he died. Here is how he put it: “Mr. Shaw, you have visited with some of the most famous people of the world. You have known royalty, world renowned authors, artists and teachers. If you could live your life all over again, and be anybody you have known, or any person from history, who would you like to be?” Shaw replied, “I would choose to be the man

George Bernard Shaw could have been before but never was.”
(Don’t wish to be somebody else. Wish to be yourself – but better).

❖Reflection:

What is your understanding of perfection? If you were “perfect,” what would that look or feel like? Do you ever experience perfectionism? Which of the ways of being “perfected” in the Salesian tradition are most attractive to you? Which one do you experience as most difficult? Which would be most helpful to you right now, at this point in your life?

❖Reading: IDL, Part 1, Chapters 1 - 4.

17th January - Day Three
DISCERNING THE WILL OF GOD

“Discernment never occurs in a vacuum”

The Salesian tradition describes discernment as the experience of living between the “two wills of God.” God’s *signified will* is that which God is communicating in general through the Commandments and Counsels found in Scripture; the authority and teaching of the Church; the lived experience and tradition of the Christian faithful; the inspiration of the Spirit; the duties of one’s state, or vocation, in life. God’s *signified will* in particular may also be expressed through the actual circumstances in life over which you have no control.

All of these invite you to ask, “What is really important here?” God’s permissive will involves those things over which you do have control or influence. Discernment is the process of being open to how God’s permissive will is inviting you to live out God’s signified will in ways that are appropriate

– and even required – by the circumstances, relationships and events in which you find yourself.

❖ **Life’s Teaching:**

• Monsieur Gaidon was the only one who remained with Fr. Mermier at the end. Without showing the least emotion, Fr. Mermier went up to his young companion and said to him, ‘My friend, you are free, just make up your mind which side you have to take. If you leave me, after ten year’s trial, I shall be alone. My resolve is unshakable, my longings are the same. *I want mission work.*’ (Adrien Dual: *Monsieur Mermier 1790-1862*, SFS Publications, Bangalore, 1982).

❖ **Reflection:**

Discernment must lead to choices, to action. **Do your choices:** help you to practice virtue? Enable you to be faithful to your state or stage in life? Increase your sense of peace? Deepen your experience of joy? Enrich the lives of others? Respect the needs of others? Make you a better listener? Help you to do what is good, right and just in the eyes of God? Help you to successfully integrate the various demands and responsibilities in your life?

❖ **Reading:** Love of God: Books 7, 8 and 9; & IDL. Part V, Chapters 8 and 9; Part II, Chapter 6.

18th January – Day Four
A DISCIPLINED LIFE

“Discipline is the basic set of tools we require to deal with life’s challenges.”

Author M. Scott Peck, MD, opens his book *‘The Road Less Traveled’* with a simple, yet universal, truth. “Life is difficult.” Why? “What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting or dealing with life’s challenges is a painful one. Challenges, depending on their nature, evoke in us frustration or grief or sadness or loneliness or guilt or regret or anger or fear or anxiety or anguish or despair. Since life poses an endless series of challenges, life is always difficult and is full of pain as well as joy.”

Health, happiness, and holiness ultimately rely upon being disciplined enough to be extraordinarily flexible. This is real freedom. St. Francis de Sales observed: “the effects of this freedom are a great inner serenity, a great gentleness and willingness to yield in everything that isn’t sin or an occasion of sin. It’s a flexible disposition, able to do gracefully the virtuous or charitable thing... We have occasion to practice this freedom whenever things don’t go the way we’d like them to go; for anyone who is not attached to their own ways will not grow impatient when things go otherwise.”

◆Life’s Teaching:

•St. Jane de Chantal wrote to a friend who, in fact, chose to scrap something into which he had invested much time and energy: “I believe that it was God who inspired you not to go on with your original plan. In this, I assure you, you have certainly followed the true spirit of our blessed Father (Francis de Sales), for, as you know, he wished us to be courageous in our undertakings, and flexible in letting them go when God, in His good pleasure, indicates *that we should.*” (*Letters of Spiritual Direction*).

◆Reflection:

How flexible am I? In what areas of my life do I experience – or demonstrate – the most flexibility? In what areas of my life do I experience – or demonstrate

– the least flexibility? How do I react when things don’t go my way? How adaptable am I to changes in my life? How good am I at “rolling with the punches?” In what areas of my life do I need more discipline?

◆**Reading:** Thibert, VHM, Perrone Marie; Wright, Wendy M.; and Power, OSFS,

Joseph F. *Letters of Spiritual Direction*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1988.

19th January - Day Five

RICHNESS OF SPIRIT

“Receive with humility what will be given to you and accept the refusal with gentleness”.

“Blessed are those who are thus poor, for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them” (Mt. 5:3). St. Francis says, “He is rich in spirit who has riches in his spirit or his spirit in his riches. He is poor in spirit who has neither riches in his spirit nor his spirit in riches.” Make a virtue of necessity and make use of this precious stone of poverty for what it is worth. Poverty did not come to you by your choice but solely by the will of God who made you poor without the consent of your own will. Therefore, what we receive from the will of God is always pleasing to Him, provided we revive it with a cheerful heart and love of His holy will. Where there is less of our will there is more of God’s will. Francis narrates saying, “the halcyons make their nests like the closed palm of the hand and leave only a small opening from the top. They put them on the seashore and yet they remain so strong and impenetrable that, even when washed by the waves, water never enters them. Thus always floating, they remain in the midst of the sea, on the sea and masters of the sea.” He says that our heart must be like that, ‘open only to heaven, impenetrable to riches and perishable things.’ Francis says that there is always difference between, keeping poison and being poisoned.

◆Life’s Teaching:

•Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Lk 21: 1-4).

◆Reflection:

With my vow of poverty do I really love this vow? Do I really make an option to love the poor? Do I welcome the poor with dignity when they come to see you? In your place of work do you make more visits to the rich or to the poor? Very often do you have the poor as your friends or the rich? Do you choose to give gifts to the poor or to the rich especially on birthdays and feast days? Do you find joy and satisfaction when you meet the poor or you feel uncomfortable and want to get rid of them as soon as possible?

◆Reading: IDL Part III, Chapters 14, 15 and 16.

20th January - Day Six
REFORMING ONESELF

“One ‘Our Father’ said earnestly is of greater value than many recited in a hurry”

St. Francis de Sales writes “I strongly recommend to you prayer of the mind and of the heart, and especially that based on the life and sufferings of our Lord. By looking at Him often in meditation, your whole being will be filled with Him. You will learn His attitudes and model your actions on His.” “Begin any kind of prayer, whether mental and vocal, by recalling the presence of God. Keep to this rule without exception. You will soon realize how helpful it is for you. Do not hurry in order to say many prayers by take care to say those that you do say from the heart.”

St. Francis says, “In case you are not able to find time for mental prayer during the whole day, you must make good this loss by saying numerous ejaculatory prayers, reading some spiritual book and doing some acts of penance to prevent the repetition of this fault. With this make a firm resolution to take up the practice of daily mental prayer from the following day.”

❖Life’s Teaching:

•St. Francis would say, “I could never approve the method of those who begin by the exterior in order to reform a person. We should begin by the interior. Yes indeed, anyone who has Jesus Christ in one’s heart, will have Him soon after in all one’s exterior actions. I wish, therefore, to engrave on your heart, before everything else, this sacred maxim: LIVE JESUS. Just as

this gentle Jesus will live in your heart, He will live also in your conduct. Then you could say reverently like St. Paul: “I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).” (IDL: Third Part Ch. 23)

❖Reflection:

Am I striving to make prayer of the mind and heart a vital part of my life? Do I pray earnestly and meaningfully? Do I go for community prayer with personal obligation or with the obligation to please the community members? Do I count on myself with what I am or with what I have? Does my life bring impact on the lives of others or my personal popularity?

❖**Reading:** IDL. Part III, Chapter 23; Part II, Chapters 1 and 6.

21st January – Day Seven

LITTLE VIRTUES

“Learn of Me for I am gentle and humble of heart”

“Let us simply, humbly and devoutly exercise ourselves in small virtues the conquest of which our Lord has entrusted to our care and toil. Such are patience, good-naturedness, mortifications of the heart, humility, obedience, poverty, chastity, tenderness towards our neighbor, bearing the imperfections of others and diligence.”

“Practice these little humble virtues which are like flowers growing at the foot of the Cross: the service of the poor, visiting the sick, care of the family with the work that goes with it, and useful diligence which will not permit you to be idle.”

St. Francis says, “Humility makes us perfect towards God and gentleness towards our neighbor. If our anger can gain the night and the sun sets over anger (Eph 4:26) it turns itself into hatred... When we struggle against some vice, in as far as it is possible we ought to embrace the practice of the contrary virtue. If I am attacked by pride or anger, I should in all circumstances incline and direct myself to the practice of humility and gentleness, and make use of prayer and the Sacraments to this end.”

❖Life’s Teaching:

•The princes bring incomparable honour and comfort to people when they visit them with a peaceful retinue, but when they come with armies, though for the welfare of the people, their visits are always disagreeable and harmful. Even though they enforce the exact observance of military discipline on the soldiers, they cannot, however, do it so effectively that no disorder occurs in which a good civilian is oppressed. In the same way, when reason governs and peacefully administers punishments, corrections and admonitions, everyone loves and approves it even though it is done strictly and exactly. But when reason brings with it anger, fury and wrath which are its soldiers, it renders itself more terrifying than lovable: the very heart of reason remains always oppressed and ill-treated.

❖Reflection:

What are the virtues that I hold in my life as a human person? I am aware of the little virtues but do I attempt to practice them in my daily relationship with God, neighbour and nature?

❖**Reading:** IDL –Part III, Chapters.1, 2, 8, 9, 35.

22nd January - Day Eight

LIVE IN THE PRESENT

“As you grow in the image and likeness of God, you open yourself to the power of God’s forgiveness.”

St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal frequently counseled people who were either imprisoned by past sins, struggles and failures or fixated upon future challenges, trials or tribulations. Some especially tormented souls were consumed by both. Living in the present is good psychology. The present is the only place where you grow. As you grow, you can gracefully let go of a painful past. As you grow, you can peacefully embrace an uncertain future. In short, you experience forgiveness and fortitude. Living in the present is sound theology.

St. Francis would advise that “the practice of self-purification cannot and should not come to an end as long as we live. Therefore, let us not be disturbed by our imperfections, because our perfection consists in fighting them. And we cannot fight them unless we see them.”. We must seek for every help from God at the present moment and not postpone his grace. “The examination of conscience is to be made always before going to bed: thank God for the day, examine your behaviour during each hour of the day.”

❖ **Life’s Teaching:**

•The Angels on Jacob’s ladder, even though they have wings, do not fly but rather go up and come down step by step in an orderly manner. One who rises from sin to devotion is compared to the dawn which when it breaks does not drive away the darkness suddenly but little by little. So too is our self-purification is done with every effort and step by step.

❖ **Reflection:**

Do I make every attempt to check on my daily behaviour? Do I look at myself or at others when I am the cause of distraction for others? Do I make attempt to correct myself by asking the grace of God from time to time? Or do I postpone this precious time? How good am I at living in the present? Are there things in my past upon which I dwell too often? What are they? Why do they hold my attention? Are there things in my future about which I am anxious or distracted? What are they? Why do they hold my attention?

❖ **Reading:** IDL. Part I, Chapter. 22; Part V, Chapters. 4, 5, 6; Part II, Chapter 11.

23rd January – Day Nine

ENCOUNTERING AND COUNTERING TEMPTATIONS

“Temptations cannot make us Displeasing to God unless we delight in them and/or consent to them.”

The Salesian tradition identifies three steps that can lead to sin: 1). The sin, great or small, is suggested; 2). The person being tempted is either pleased or displeased with the suggestion; 3). The person either consents to the temptation, or refuses it.

Let us be clear: being tempted is not, in itself sinful! Temptations cannot make us displeasing to God “unless we delight in them and/or consent to them,” Counsels St. Francis de Sales. “Let the enemies of our salvation set before us their snares and allurements as much as they like. Let them remain always at the door of our hearts seeking entrance. Let them make as many proposals as they like. As long as we are determined to take no pleasure in this, we can never offend God.” Our first line of defense against temptations is to turn our attention from them, but to do so gently, calmly and simply.

What small temptations may lack in quality they more than make up it in quantity. Like small flies or gnats, they buzz about our ears, bite us on the nose or cheeks, obscure our vision. Don't waste time examining them. Simply brush them away or practice the opposite virtue.

◆**Life's Teaching:**

St. Jerome speaks of a young man tied down upon a very soft bed with silk scarves. He was provoked with all sorts of vile touches and allurements by a sensual woman who lay with him for the express purpose of breaking his resolution. Must not he have reacted to her touch? Must not his senses have been possessed by pleasure and his imagination filled with the presence of these voluptuous objects? Certainly, Yet in the midst of so much distress, such a terrible storm of temptations, his spirit saw the complete pleasure, he proved the victory of his heart and his will's refusal to consent. (IDL. Part IV, Ch. 4).

◆**Reflection:**

What kinds of temptations do you most frequently encounter? What strategies do you employ for resisting them? What opposite virtues could you practice to counter these temptations? Do you have a spiritual director, confessor or friend who can support your efforts to resist temptation and practice virtue?

◆**Reading:**

IDL. Part IV, Chapters 1 – 10.