

St. Francis de Sales

Referred to as the “Gentleman Saint” because of his meek and humble demeanour, St. Francis de Sales became bishop of Geneva at the age of 35. During his life, he wrote and published books and pamphlets that taught God’s love and how to live the Christian life. His two most famous books were Treatise on the Love of God and The Introduction to the Devout Life. The latter taught that all are called into the service of God, as well as to be saints.

St. Francis de Sales is the patron saint of deaf individuals. He is also the patron of journalists and writers because of his many written religious works. Because of these publications, he is depicted with a book in the left hand and a quill pen in the right. His feast day is January 24th.

It is commonly said that “Patience is a virtue.” A very patient and deliberate man, St. Francis de Sales most certainly led a life of great virtue and holiness. Known as the patron of writers and journalists, St. Francis de Sales was relentless in his mission to evangelize and teach others (through his writings) about the Truth of the Catholic Faith in order to convert their souls to God.

St. Francis de Sales was born in France in 1567. His father wanted him to become a soldier, so he was sent to Paris to begin his studies. At this time (and even before this time), St. Francis de Sales felt he may be called to be a priest, but did not pursue this vocation until he was absolutely sure that it was the will of God. After his studies in Paris were finished, he was sent to Padua, Italy, in order to get a doctorate in law. He also studied theology and continue to discern his vocation to priesthood. St. Francis de Sales wanted to enter the priesthood knowing that it was truly the will of God and not him forcing his own wishes upon God. A very clear sign from God came to St. Francis de Sales one day while riding his horse. He fell off three times, and each time he fell off, his sword and scabbard would fall to the ground in the shape of a cross. St. Francis consequently became a priest, and later the provost of the diocese (second in rank to the bishop).

Saint Francis de Sales with Quill

St. Francis de Sales felt his mission was to go to the newly-Calvinist land of Switzerland (this was during the time of the Protestant Reformation), and bring the people back to the Catholic Faith. Only his cousin was willing to go with him on this mission, so great was the challenge of evangelizing among this population at the time. St. Francis de Sales trudged through the countryside having doors slammed in his face and rocks thrown at him. His feet bled in the icy conditions and he had nowhere to sleep, sometimes sleeping in haylofts or trees to avoid wolves. St. Francis de Sales’ cousin grew tired of the conditions and left St. Francis de Sales to his continue his mission alone.

Since the adults of the land would not listen to him, St. Francis de Sales tried to evangelize the children through his joyful character. He would play games with them, earning their affection. When their parents saw how the children loved him, they began to listen to him, too. Sometimes when the adults would not listen to him, though, he would write up his sermons and slip them under doors in order to allow the families to read them on their own terms. It is for this reason that St. Francis de Sales is noted as the patron of writers and journalists.

One day, after being ordained a bishop, St. Francis de Sales came across a widow named Jane Frances de Chantal who became a great friend to him as they challenged one another on their journeys to holiness and oneness with God. St. Francis de Sales opened the convent of the Visitation Sisters where Jane Frances de Chantal began the community of women devoted to accepting women who were rejected from other communities due to age or health. St. Jane Frances de Chantal remained friends with St. Francis de Sales until his death. In 1767 she was canonized by Pope Clement XIII.

St. Francis de Sales was committed to not only leading those in the religious life (priests, monks, nuns) to grow in sanctity, but was also attentive to the spiritual needs of the laity. He wrote the book, "Introduction to the Devout Life," in 1608 for all people to use in their pursuit of holiness. The book was instantly a success throughout Europe, and is read by many Christians the world over to this day. He believed that love of God should drive all action, and that the worst thing a person could do would be to gossip about another (whether the information was true or not). He said everyone should treat one another with gentleness and respect.

St. Francis died of a stroke on December 28, 1622 after giving a nun his last word of advice: "Humility." He was canonized April 8, 1665 by Pope Alexander VII.