

# Conference on Saint Francis de Sales

Msgr. Gilles Wach

Retreat of the Society of the Sacred Heart

Saint Patrick Oratory, Waterbury, Connecticut

Coming back from Rome where I met with cardinals who are friends and some prelates from Roman dicasteries, I must admit that I easily share their pessimism but also their hope regarding the near and distant future of humanity.

A very real pessimism, these friends lament the absence of God in every sphere of human life; they see that religion and God have been consciously cast aside; and that today man himself and the natural law are being attacked.

Indeed, along with our Roman friends, we see that our world is suffering from the absence of God in political, cultural, and even ecclesiastical spheres.

After having heard these truths coming from the highest authorities in the Church, after having seen it around us in schools, families, workplaces, and neighborhoods,

It seems to me that in our place and with the means that divine Providence has put at our disposition, we must show forth more than ever our attachment to Christian values and to Christian civilization. Such are our reasons for hope.

How, you ask? I answer you with Saint Francis de Sales: “By being well what we are,” and with his motto: “No more, no less.”

So, who are you? Christians! Christian families!  
And Saint John Paul II already taught us in the  
discourse he addressed at the jubilee of  
families in October 2000:



“May your families be ever more true domestic churches, where every day the praise of God rises and shines on society in a stream of beneficial and regenerating love.”

In Saint Matthew, we are told: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Our Lord Jesus Christ made it a commandment for all of us Christians.

This evening, I would like us to understand together the need for each one of us to tend toward perfection, to tend toward charity, to tend toward holiness, to tend to what Saint Francis de Sales, doctor of the Church and spiritual master, calls “the devout life.”

And as long as we are not convinced that we must unceasingly, with the grace of God, work toward our sanctification, our perfection,

We will never be what God wants from us,  
what the Church reclaims of us, and what the  
world would like to see in us: the salt of the  
earth, the light of the world.

It is with Saint Francis de Sales that I invite you to enter into this path of charity, of perfection, of holiness. He will be for us a teacher, a support, a fine psychologist, knowing so well both God and man.

Our holy doctor first of all wants to convince us that the devout life, that the spiritual life, is fitting for all sorts of vocation and professions.

“When God created the world,” he wrote, “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.



“A different exercise of devotion is required of each — the noble, the artisan, the servant, the prince, the maiden and the wife; and furthermore, such practice must be modified according to the strength, the calling, and the duties of each individual.

“I ask you, my child, would it be fitting that a Bishop should seek to lead the solitary life of a Carthusian? And if the father of a family were as regardless in making provision for the future as a Capuchin, if the artisan spent the day in church like a Religious,

“if the Religious involved himself in all manner of business on his neighbor’s behalf as a Bishop is called upon to do, would not such a devotion be ridiculous, ill-regulated, and intolerable?

“Nevertheless, such a mistake is often made, and the world, which cannot or will not discriminate between real devotion and the indiscretion of those who fancy themselves devout, grumbles and finds fault with devotion, which is really nowise concerned in these errors.

“No indeed, my child, the devotion which is true hinders nothing, but on the contrary it perfects everything; and that which runs counter to the rightful vocation of any one is, you may be sure, a spurious devotion.

“Aristotle says that the bee sucks honey from flowers without damaging them, leaving them as whole and fresh as it found them — but true devotion does better still, for it not only hinders no manner of vocation or duty, but, contrariwise, it adorns and beautifies all.

“Everybody,” he insists, “fulfills his special calling better when subject to the influence of devotion — family duties are lighter, married love truer, service to our King more faithful, every kind of occupation more acceptable and better performed where that is the guide.”

So, I need to have a spiritual life, to strive for perfection, but what exactly is it?



You see, my very dear friends, the perfection of the Christian life that is asked of us consists in the conformity of our will to that of God, which is the sovereign rule and law of all of our actions.

In all things, we must consider and recognize what is the will of God. One can affirm that the perfection of Christian life lies especially in charity. In Saint John, we read: “He who abides in charity abides in God and God in him.”

Saint Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* affirms this: “Above all things, have charity, which is the bond of perfection, because it binds, as it were, all the other virtues together in perfect unity.”

How does Saint Francis de Sales go about leading us — you, mothers and fathers of families, and me, a priest of the Christ's Church — to charity?

“God is God of the human heart.” That is how Saint Francis de Sales presents God to us: a being in relation with man in order to be loved by him.

“As soon as man thinks a bit attentively about the divinity, he feels a certain sweet emotion in his heart that testifies that God is God of the human heart. And our power of understanding never has such pleasure than in this thought of the divinity, of which the least knowledge is worth more than the greatest of other things.”

“And our power of understanding never has such pleasure than in this thought of the divinity, of which the least knowledge is worth more than the greatest of other things.”

To better penetrate the divine mysteries with Saint Francis de Sales, a brief biography is needed. Who is this man?



He is not well-enough known, in my opinion, this man who speaks so well of God. King Henry IV praised him as “the phoenix of bishops, he is a rare bird on the earth.”

**First of all, his nature and countenance:**

He was impressive from his majestic beauty, leaving a feeling of grandeur. His physical appearance showed assurance and perfect equilibrium.

An aristocrat, he was conscious of belonging to an ancient and respectable race. All praised the elegance and distinction of his manners, combined with a great urbanity and total humility.

Quite the opposite of a debonair appearance, or of one who is approachable because he is common, he possessed a sovereign ease in his stance, a little slow majesty that gave him a singular grace.

He had all that was necessary not only to please but also to impose. He had charm and authority. He was gentle and not indolent.

His whole life, he manifested a certain goodness, but pay attention, if meekness was well-rooted in him, it is because it is a Christian virtue.

With him, meekness is always accompanied with firmness. Already when he declared his vocation to his parents, he was firm, despite their tears and the anger of his father. His patience and tenderness would finally obtain his parents' blessing.

Later, he would succeed in the conversion of the Chablais region, entirely Protestant, in spite of all the measures taken to prevent him to speak, in spite of all the calumnies and all the intimidations and even assassination attempts.



Also, those close to him would testify: “I know that I can say very surely, for I have seen and remarked it the whole time that I resided with the Blessed, that he was always and everywhere very gentle and gracious in his discourse, extremely considerate and indisputably respectful.

“He said that he had acquired by the grace of God the power of taming the angry passions toward which his nature was inclined. This he had practiced very well all the time that I knew him, and I never saw that he was moved by anger toward his servants or others. It was that he had no other thought than inculcating his listeners to the love of God and neighbor.”

How could we not quote this well-known anecdote in the life of this holy prelate? One day in the bishop's palace in Annecy, entering into a room, he surprised a domestic servant who was in the process of writing a love letter to his fiancée, who then tried to hide it from his master's eyes.

“Let me see,” the saint said to him. Reading through it, he concluded with gentleness and a smile of exquisite goodness: “Not like that! You don’t understand anything; let me do it.”

Unfortunately, we do not have this love letter written by Monsieur de Genève to help his servant avoid embarrassment. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, didn't our saint call "gentleness toward neighbor, the flower of charity"?

“He who is meek,” he wrote in one of his letters, “does not offend anyone, stands and voluntarily endures those who treat him badly, and lastly, patiently suffers the blows and does not rend evil for evil. The meek man does not trouble himself but soaks all his words in humility, vanquishing evil by good.”

His nature is impregnated, one could say, with his home country, his native Savoy, as well as with the time spent in Italy and France for his studies.

We can say that a happy blend was found between French Catholicism, where one could say that in general reasoning and intelligence dominate, and Italian Catholicism, where sensitivity seems to rule.



Gentle, tender, and sensitive by nature, he disciplined his heart through eight years of French culture. Lucid, reasonable, and penetrating, he refreshed, immersed, and magnified his clear intelligence in the sweet Italian atmosphere.

After having looked at his nature, let us look at his birthplace, Savoy. Let Henri Bordeaux tell us about this enchanted landscape: “The traveler who crosses over Lake Geneva and regards toward the coast of Savoy, has before his eyes an incomparable scenery, a true miracle of sweetness, harmony, and grace.

“It is the green plains of the Chablais bordering the blue waters of Lake Geneva that surround the delicately-curved mountains, wooded up to the top, and farther away, jagged peaks that rise in the pure sky with their great whiteness, and the evening seems to hold on the colors of sunset like a military standard.

“There, in this blessed region, where the air is transparent and clear, it is a fitting place to cultivate a contemplative soul. Autumn especially gives this enchanted nature all of its moving qualities.

“By the melted harmony of its colors, autumn tempers the excess of joy that summer lavishes on it; it changes the bursting laughter of its waters and prairies, its plains and hills,

“Into a poignant smile of voluptuousness that becomes fragile and yet wants to still enjoy and does not fear to mix, in a bitter and eminent way, the love of life and the knowledge of coming death.”

How wonderfully this is expressed and ravishingly reflects the qualities of nature: the harmony, grandeur and balance that are so impregnated in the soul of young Francis, the future bishop of Geneva and great spiritual director.

## His education

He was born on August 21, 1567, just after the close of the Council of Trent, into an ancient noble family, going back to Charlemagne, and which possessed an even higher nobility: that of faith and virtue (motto of the Martelli family: “sola virtus, vera nobilitas”).



Born premature at seven months, a “delicate and tender boy,” wrapped in cotton. Baptized on August 28 on the feast of Saint Augustine. He received from his mother a pious and just education.

His first words were: “My God and my mother love me very much” – and received from his father, an education of a knight, of a man of the military; he applied himself to hunting, fencing, competitions and the practice of very generous charity toward the poor.

Formation to charity, to the good. His studies of humanities finished, he received, at his own request, the tonsure. Then he continued his studies in France and Italy.

At Paris, he studied theology at the Sorbonne, where he became a disciple of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas. At Padua, he studied law and philosophy.

In 1587, at 20 years old, he had a terrible crisis. God often permits that the greatest souls pass by this trial: the temptation to despair.

Calvin was reigning in Geneva, and our young student believed himself to be predestined to hell. He went to a church, Saint-Étienne-des-Grès, and before a statue of Our Lady of Good Deliverance, he was delivered from this temptation and came out of it even stronger, with even more love of God.

Listen to Madame de Chantal – Saint Jane de Chantal, foundress of the Visitation — who tells the story: “Once entered into the church, Francis goes straight to the chapel of the Black Madonna. He then made a heroic act of abandon.

“Whatever you have decided, Lord, in the eternal decree of your predestination and reprobation, You, whose judgments are an immense abyss, I will love you, Lord, at least in this life, if it is not granted to me to love you in the eternal life. If my merits demand that I must be damned among the damned who will never see your sweetest face, grant me, at least, not to be among those who curse your holy Name.



“Then Francis took a tablet hung from the chapel’s baluster, which proposed to the visitor the text of the Memorare. Francis recites it all the way through.”

The temptation vanishes: “In this same instant,” says Mother de Chantal, “he finds himself perfectly cured. The evil fell at his feet like the scales of leprosy!”

He suffered the temptation of despair. It is, according to the mystics, to suffer the true fire of hell.

## **His doctorate**

He passed his exam to become bishop in front of Pope Clement XIII. The pope descended from his throne and said to him: “My son, drink the water of your cistern!”

Later, one could say, thanks to this education: “if you want to confuse, convince a heretic, send him to Cardinal Perron (bishop of Sens, great chaplain of France and the King’s ambassador to the Holy See, endowed with great education, eloquence, a genius of things of the world, of ideas of his time); but if you want to convert him, send him to Saint Francis de Sales.

This was so by the ravishing Savoyard which strongly permeated his being; by the refined, delicate, and profoundly Christian education from his mother; by the education full of good sense, realism, and manhood given by his father;

And also by the instruction received in different schools and universities; without forgetting, of course, his natural inclination toward gentleness and charity: he became, and no one would argue with it, the teacher *par excellence* of divine Love.

Blessed Pius IX presented him to the Christian world as doctor of Love. Saint Vincent de Paul defined him during the beatification process as the one who has best represented Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth.



Thus, it is Francis de Sales who will help us to love, to love Love. How? “By loving,” he says: “It is the Heart of God that made the heart of man.”

Remember: God is God of the human heart. God, communion of persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, call man to a similar communion. It is this that will drive all of Salesian spirituality.

And it is in the Incarnation that God reveals Himself fully. It is the favorite mystery of Francis de Sales.

The essential purpose of the Incarnation is God becoming man. It is shown from what Saint Paul writes in Ephesians: “Blessed be God the Father. He has predestined us to be his adopted sons through Jesus Christ.” It is shown as well, in the famous phrase of Saint Irenaeus, “God was made man that man might be made God.”

The Salesian optimism was born in the contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation. Following Saint John's footsteps, he will spend his life teaching the love of God. He remains struck by the abundant means of salvation. (This is contrary to the doctrine of the [Jansenist] Monsieur le Saint-Cyran.)

He affirms, “Though we be greatly depraved in sin, the holy inclination remains, to love God in all things.”

“This redemption is copious, abundant, superabundant, magnificent, and inordinate, which we have acquired and likewise recovered with all the means necessary to obtain glory, so that no one can ever suffer as if he was lacking divine mercy.”

This plan of providence, which Saint Francis de Sales depicts so well, comes from the spreading of God's will: "In this way, the creature was entered and inserted into the divinity.



“Indeed, our loss was profitable to us. Human nature received super-eminent graces by the redemption worked by Our Lord Jesus Christ that it never would have received if it had remained in the innocence of Adam.

“The state of redemption, he affirms, is a hundred times better than the state of innocence. He illustrates thus the ‘happy fault’ of the holy liturgy.”

Here, we see the Salesian optimism, but still a realistic optimism. We are saved, but of course, we must collaborate and participate in this redemption which our Savior Jesus offers us.

The force of all his spirituality: it is charity. “All by love,” he says, “nothing by force.” “Everything cries to the ears of our heart, love, love. Do not do anything without love” wrote the saint from the beginning of his spiritual direction to Madame de Chantal.

“Gather this holy love on all occasions.” “All that is done for love is love: work, yes, even death is nothing but love when it’s for love that we receive them.” As we can see, he is very far from the Jansenist error or Protestantism that teach that man after the fall is nothing but weakness, corruption, and misery;

Pascal said: “We are born contrary to the love of God,” or, “Original sin is an extreme denaturation, an almost irreversible degradation,” while Saint Francis de Sales tells us: “even though greatly depraved by original sin, the holy inclination to love God above all things has remained in us.”

And thus, we are left with a pessimism in which the spiritual life is limited to conforming oneself to a few rules, means, or commandments. Of course, this is also foreign to Pelagius or Rousseau, who advocate that nature is pure and good.

Saint Francis de Sales will pass between these two extremes and preach, practice, his optimistic realism. Saint Francis de Sales is too fine a connoisseur of souls, too fine a psychologist and pastor as well for this optimism to be utopian.



Yes, God's restored plan is sumptuous, but even so, man must not put up an obstacle. Now, Francis knows by personal experience and by the confidences of his penitents what drama there is playing deep in the human heart.

Liberty, “free will,” as he says, with which God has endowed us and which gives us our dignity, has the terrible ability to thwart the all-good will of God. Free will can say “no” to God who invites.

All of our Christian life is to say yes to the will of God, yes to His love. And this “yes” pronounces itself in our everyday life and in the vocation that Providence has assigned us:

“We do not know what it is to love God,” writes Saint Francis de Sales to Madame de Chantal, “Love does not consist in great tastes and feelings but in the greatest and most firm resolution and desire to content God in everything.”

He also writes: “It is not by the grandeur of our actions that we please God but by the love with which we do them. It is love that gives the price and perfection to our works.

I say even more: here is a person who suffers martyrdom for God with one ounce of love; she merits very much, for one would not know how to give more than their life; but another person who only suffers a very little thing with two ounces of love will have much more merit, because it is love which gives the price to everything. Where there is more love, there is more perfection.”

It is why Saint John of the Cross will tell us: “At the end, we will all be judged on love!” We are therefore at the heart of Salesian spirituality which adapts itself well to all sorts of conditions, professions, and states.

It is the spirituality of the *fiat* of the Annunciation, of the “*fiat voluntas tua*” of the Pater Noster. If you reflect well on it, this spirituality is **crucifying**, for in everything and at every moment, God is at the center, God is enthroned in our intelligence, our will, our heart.



Crucifying spirituality that is for today's world, for the spirituality that is proposed to us today – more of less Buddhist or New Age – puts man at the center of everything, and God becomes a product of consumption that one needs (after the abundance of material goods, man has need of spiritual goods).

This is where the devil is very present to our contemporaries. As Malraux said: “The 21st century will be spiritual or will be nothing.”

The demon is there to propose an exaltation of the spiritual *me*. After having turned temporal goods from their end, the devil also subtly reverses, inverts the end of spiritual goods.

Saint Francis de Sales can cure us of this omnipresent temptation of our days. Listen to our holy doctor: “The commandments of God are gentle, gracious, and sweet, not only the general commandments, but also the particular ones of the vocation.

“And therefore what is it that makes them bothersome to us? Nothing, truly, except our self-will, which wants to reign in us at any price; and even the things that our self-will desires, if we had commanded them, we would reject them for having been commanded.

“Of a hundred thousand delicious fruits, Eve chose the one that had been forbidden, and without doubt, if it had been permitted, she would not have eaten it. In brief, it’s that we want to serve God, but in our own way and not in His way...

“God commands me to serve souls, and I want to remain in contemplation: the contemplative life is good, but not to the prejudice of obedience.

“It is not for us to choose according to our will; one must see what God wants, and if God wants me to serve Him in one thing, I shouldn’t want to serve Him in another...”



“It is our frail human nature that always wants that its own will be done and not that of God. Now, insofar as we have less self-will, the will of God will be more easily observed.

“One must consider that there is no vocation without its annoyances, bitterness, and repugnance; and what is more, if not for those who are fully resigned to the will of God, each would very much like to change his state to that of another: those who are bishops would not like to be; those who are married would like not to be; and those who are not married, would like to be.

“Whence comes this great restlessness of mind, if not from certain displeasures that we have in constraining ourselves, and a malignity of mind that makes us think that each other one is better off than we?

“But, it is all the same: whoever is not fully resigned, let him turn here and there, he will never have rest. Those who have a fever find that no place is good; they have not spent a quarter hour in one bed before they would like to be in another; it is not the bed but rather the fever that torments them everywhere.

“Someone who does not have the fever of self-will is content with everything; provided that God be served, he does not worry how God uses him, as long as He does His divine Will, it is all the same.”

The first concern of Saint Francis de Sales, the base of all spiritual life, the teaching that he gives, that he addresses to us over the centuries, is to do the will of God, to do it with joy and with love, for love, and by love.

“If I were not a bishop,” he says, “perhaps, knowing what I know, I would not like to be, but being one, I am not only obliged to do what this disagreeable vocation requires, but I must do it joyously, and I must be pleased in it and accord myself to it.

“It is the saying of Saint Paul: Each remains in his vocation before God. One must not carry the cross of others but rather his own, and in order to carry his own, Our Lord wishes that each renounce himself, that is to say, his own self-will.



“I would like this or that; I would be better here or there. These are temptations. Our Lord knows well what He does. Let us do what He desires, and remain where He has put us.”

Remember the expression, remember the expression: “be well what we are...” (in the family, in the Church)

“It is the evil of evils,” he says. “Among those who are of good will, there are those who always want to be what they cannot be and do not want to be what they cannot help but being.”

“Do not start considering in detail what we do for His love, provided we know that we would never do anything but for His love. For me, I think that we remain in the presence of God even while sleeping, for we fall to sleep before His eyes, according to His desire, and by His will, and He puts us there on the bed as statues in a niche;

“And when we wake up, we find that He is there near us, He has not moved, and we have not either; thus we held ourselves in His presence, but with our eyes closed.”

“Do not regard the substance of the things you do, but at the honor they have of being wanted by the divine will, small as they are, of being ordained by His providence, arranged by His wisdom.”

Admit that this spirituality is none other than the imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ. What did He say in the Garden of Olives? “Not my will, but yours, Father!”

“I have come into the world to do the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Therefore, let us imitate Christ who says in Saint Matthew: “Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.”



This is not just asked for consecrated religious but for all Christians. Thus, I invite you to read or reread the works of Saint Francis de Sales, the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God*.

What comes first is the love of God, which is materialized in the will of God. To love is to do the will of the one who is loved.

How? The secret of all spiritual life, the secret of the mysticism of action, it is the love of God. It is charity, and to maintain our mind, our heart, all our being in this continual love of predilection, the secret of secrets: what is it?

And our holy doctor reveals it to us: humility.  
And right away, he tells us, he teaches that the  
most excellent intention for humbling oneself is  
because Our Lord humbled Himself.

And with his habitual humor, he tells us: “What do you call a great mind and a meager mind? There is no great mind but that of God, who is so good that He voluntarily resides in paltry minds.

“Never,” he continues, “will one reach the peaks of perfection of the love of God if he has not lowered himself by humility. Our Lord sets such value on humility that He makes no difficulty in permitting us to fall into sin in order to draw holy humility from it.”

Saint Teresa of Avila read the lives of saints who had converted. And so, in the life of these great sinners, she contemplated the infinite mercy of God, as well as their practice of humility after their conversion.

Saint Francis de Sales gives us the example of the Blessed Virgin, who only loves places deepened by humility, debased by simplicity, and enlarged by charity.



She is pleased to be found near the manger and at the foot of the Cross. She does not worry about going into Egypt, away from all comfort, provided she has her dear child with her.

Charity and humility are closely linked. “Humility is so tied to charity,” says our holy doctor, “that the degree of one corresponds to the degree of the other, for charity is an ascending humility and humility is a descending charity.”

Humility is the base and foundation of our spiritual life, of our life of love of God. Pride is the cause of all of our pains, and even our faults can serve to humble us and then to save us.

According to Saint Francis de Sales, “pride is an evil so common among man, that one can never preach to them enough on it and inculcate the necessity of persevering in the practice of this very holy and very lovable virtue of humility.”

This language is that of several other Fathers of the Church. Saint Augustine says boldly: “God is more pleased to look on bad actions accompanied by humility than good actions infected with pride.”

Saint Optat of Milevis: “Better sins with humility than innocence with pride.”

Saint Gregory of Nyssa: “A chariot full of good works but driven by pride leads to hell; driven by humility, a chariot full of sin leads to paradise.”

Lastly, Saint Bernard finishes a magnificent apologetic of virginity and humility like this: “The sinner who has taken the road of humility to walk in the steps of the Lamb has taken a surer road than the man who, in his virginity, follows the way of pride; for the humility of the one will purify him of his stains, while the pride of the other can do nothing but stain his purity.”



Remember that Saint Francis de Sales called Saint Mary Magdalene the “arch-virgin.”

Saint Francis de Sales distinguishes five degrees in the virtue of humility: knowledge of self, of our misery; acknowledgement of our misery; confession; love of scorn, desire for it; to imitate Christ on the Cross, often to regard the crucifix.

We can see that it is all in our manner of being.  
Attitude of one who receives, who gives, and  
not of one who is full of himself and who takes.

Even before our errors and sins, Saint Francis de Sales puts us on guard against discouragement which is also the fruit of pride, while humility makes it so that we don't trouble ourselves over our imperfections.

“For, remembering those of others, why would we be more perfect than them? And similarly, do not be troubled by those of others, remembering our own. Why would we find it strange that others have imperfections, given that we have them as well?”

“Humility renders our heart meek toward the perfect and the imperfect, towards the one by reverence, towards the others by compassion. Humility makes us receive afflictions meekly, knowing that we merit them, and makes us receive goods with reverence, knowing that we don’t merit them.”

“Therefore, hate your imperfections because they are imperfections; love them because they make you see your nothingness and nullity, and because they lead to the exercise and perfection of virtue and the mercy of God.”

Humility thus leads us to charity. It is the base necessary to any spiritual life.



Let us note that these virtues are gifts of God (supernatural gifts, from which stem the necessity of receiving them at baptism when we are **very little**)

“The charity that gives life to our hearts is not extracted from our hearts but poured into them, as a heavenly liqueur, by the supernatural Providence of His divine majesty.”

The charity that animates us, we Christians, is a love of delectation: incomparable, sovereign, supernatural delectation. God served first.

“Leave your father, your mother, (...) Come and follow me.” “He that loveth father or mother more than me (...) is not worthy of me.” This charity, it is like a sun in our soul.

And Saint Francis de Sales desires that all his disciples have this spirit of devotion, those who live in the midst of the world, that they be animated by this divine love, for this divine love, and give witness of this divine love in the diverse duties of occupations and obligations in the world.

This spirituality applies the word of Saint Paul:  
“And I *live*, now *not* I; but *Christ* liveth in *me*.” “  
Charity never enters a heart where it does not  
lodge with itself the whole train of other  
virtues.”

“One must see God in all things and all things in God. It’s a little ray of paradise where God is all in all.” The love of God becomes the driving force, and thus all that we are, everything that we have to do, to say, to suffer, to love, all is accomplished with the love of God.

We are far from a religion that is distant, terrifying; far from a sad, negative, pessimistic devotion. “In the Church of God, all is for love, by love, in love.”



“Many people keep the commandments in the same way one would swallow medicines,” he writes, “more by fear of dying in damnation than by delight at living as the Savior desires.”

It is holy abandonment that he asks us to practice, according to the well-known phrase of Saint Catherine of Siena, in which man loses nothing in exchange: “Lord, I occupy myself with your affairs, occupy yourself with mine!”

The love of God will give you the peace, the joy that is so lacking in our tormented and troubled minds. The love of God, such is our life, such is our eternity.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his apostolic letter *Totum Amoris est* published for the 400th anniversary of the death of Saint Francis de Sales, reminds us that: “true devotion finds itself deeply engrained in the divine life in us. True and living devotion presupposes the love of God, it is nothing but a true love of God.”

So, to be witnesses of the Lord, to be missionaries of Christ, we must before all else live it intensely ourselves and put it in the forefront of our hearts and our souls.

Let it reign in our families, our homes, in the hearts of our children and even in places of work and recreation, and convince ourselves that, without charity, we are, as Saint Paul says, tinkling cymbals.

With our holy doctor, let us take the road of devotion where the Love of God gives life to all of our thoughts and all of our actions, and thus our lives sing, even here below, what we will sing eternally in Heaven: “*Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat!*”

Allow me to re-read to you this beautiful poem  
which summarizes so well the thought of our  
dear holy patron:



“What I love,” said Saint Francis de Sales one day

In his gracious tongue,

“More than all the treasures that this world displays before us,

More than all the treasures of heaven:

“Yes, what I love more than the glistening  
flower

On the bank of transparent waters,  
More than the sighing breeze,  
More than the bird’s song and sublime flight

“More than the sea’s wave erased by the  
following wave

Whose murmur lulls me to sleep,  
More than the golden glimmering stars  
Blooming in the marvelous fields of space,

“More than the lightening striking the evil  
man’s heart

With happy and lively alarm,  
More than the blue eyes of a child  
Smiling through his tears,

“More than the golden torch whose vague  
glow  
Shines from the back of the sanctuary,  
More than sweet moments of ecstasy and  
prayer  
That one spends close to the Lord,

“More than Paradise where my soul takes flight  
Paradise where God waits for me,  
And more than the secrets of His Holy Word  
That my Heart hears in silence,

“More than His gentle smile and even His grace  
Shining everywhere, shining in every place,  
What I love, at last, what I love:  
Is the Will of the Good God.”

I borrow my conclusion from Saint John Paul II, from his letter of November 23, 2002 to the bishop of Annecy for the 400th anniversary of the episcopal consecration of Saint Francis de Sales:



“Giving thanks for the witness of the priestly and episcopal life of this Apostle of the Chablais, and for his written work, I ask the Lord to inspire in the contemporary world an ever greater number of men and women who know how to live Salesian spirituality and how to present it to our contemporaries,

“So that all may have a ‘watchful faith,’ which ‘not only performs good works, but goes into and subtly and swiftly understands revealed truths,’ in order to transmit them to the world.

“May God alone be your repose and your consolation!”

Amen.

Text