

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Practice...makes Perfect"



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Mary D. Ford

"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.

We need to be clear about what being "perfected" *is*, as well as what it *is not*.

It is about the journey. It is about cooperating with the grace of the Holy Spirit to allow the Divine to permeate every sinew of our being. It is about avoiding sin. It is about practicing virtue. It is about learning to be fully, completely human...in ways that give glory to God and give life to one another.

It is about "living Jesus."

It is not about *perfectionism*. It is not about being without blemish. It is not about living like angels. It is not about a destination. Salesian spirituality keeps perfection in perspective.

Be realistic: set goals for growing in perfection that are rea-

sonable. "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.

Use everyday means. Lofty paths are not always the most effective: "Practice the ordinary virtues – forbearance with others, service to others, humility, gentleness of heart, affability, tolerance of our own imperfection and similar little virtues."

Perfection requires that we *name our imperfections*. "Dear imperfections," Francis de Sales tells us, "they force us to acknowledge our misery, give us practice in humility, selflessness, patience, and watchfulness; yet, notwithstanding, God looks at the honesty of our hearts and sees that it is perfect.

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."

Be willing to begin as many times as it takes. "Make a fresh start each day. There's no

better way of growing toward perfection in the spiritual life than to always be starting over again and never thinking that we have achieved it."

Being perfected is not about being what *I think* that I should be. No, perfection is about knowing what *God thinks* I should be, and relying upon grace to make that happen according to God's timetable, not mine. St. Jane de Chantal admonishes us: "Try to perform all your actions calmly and gently. Keep your mind ever joyful, peaceful and content. Do not worry about your perfection or about your soul. God, to whom it belongs, and to whom you should completely entrust it, will take care of it and fill it with all the graces, consolations and blessings of divine love in the measure that they will be useful in this life. In the next life, God will grant you eternal bliss."

Keep being perfect in perspective. It is about *transformation* in *this* life. It is about *glory* in the *next*.

In short, how do we become perfect? It may be surprisingly similar to the advice given to folks who one day hope to make it big on Broadway: "Practice, practice, practice."

That's right: *Practice* makes *perfect*!