

# De Sales

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## SPIRITUALITY CENTER

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*"ANXIOUS? DON'T BE"*



Mary D. Ford

Have you ever worried about the future? The destiny of a son or daughter, outliving your retirement investments, or caring for an aging, disabled parent?

Have you ever worried about the past? Regretted decisions, broken relationships or unfulfilled dreams? Have you ever had the experience of being worried about everything in general, but nothing in particular? If you said "yes," then you know something of anxiety.

There are many things in our lives that cause us to be anxious: regrets about the past, uncertainties about the future, and everything in between. But, as you probably know, anxiety can be as bad – or sometimes even worse – than the thing about which we were worried in the first place.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines anxiety as "a state of intense apprehension, uncertainty and fear resulting from...a threatening situation or event, often to a degree that the normal physical and psychological functioning of the affected individual is disrupted."

St. Francis de Sales certainly knew the danger of anxiety. In his Introduction to the Devout Life (1609), he wrote: "Anxiety is

the greatest evil that can befall us, sin excepted." Strong language. He continued: "Sedition and internal troubles ruin a nation utterly and prevent it from being able to resist a foreign invasion. Similarly, when we are troubled and restless we lose our power to maintain the virtue that we have acquired. We also lose the means of resisting the temptations of the enemy who then makes every effort to fish, as they say, in troubled waters."

Anxiety not only hinders us from resisting evil. It can also prevent us from achieving what is good. How many first dates, interviews for a job promotion, or efforts to win that "big" contract have gone up in flames because of anxiety?

St. Francis de Sales wrote: "Anxiety arises from an inordinate desire to be freed from the evil we experience or to acquire the good for which we hope. Yet there is nothing which so aggravates the evil or impedes the good as anxiety and eagerness."

St. Jane de Chantal was a contemporary and friend of St. Francis de Sales. In her advice to a woman who had recently been widowed, St. Jane offered her remedy for anxiety: "Try to calm your passions and inclinations and live according to the sound

reason and the holy will of God. Otherwise, you will always be anxious and perturbed."

St. Francis de Sales wrote: "When you are taken up by a desire to be delivered from some evil or to obtain some good, place yourself above all in peace and tranquility. Compose your judgment and your will. Then, quietly and gently, pursue the object of your desire, taking in order the means that are fitting. And when I say 'gently,' I do not mean 'negligently' but without eagerness, confusion and anxiety. Otherwise, you will spoil everything."

So, when faced with some sin or setback to avoid, or when striving to obtain some gift or good, remain calm and avoid all solicitude. Ask God for the presence of mind and heart to stay centered. Consider what God gives you the courage and ability to do on your own behalf. Consider, too, that which is only in the hands of God.

Perhaps St. Jane says it best. "What I mean is that in all your good works you should unite yourself to the Will of God's good pleasure, and in your faults and imperfections, you should unite yourself to God's compassion gently, quietly and with peace of mind."