

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Pursuing Perfection Patiently"



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The Salesian tradition holds the human person in high esteem. Notwithstanding the effects of original sin, we are good by design and are destined for glory.

Of course, the road to glory has its share of potholes: we frequently fail to do the good to which we are called; we often do the evil that we are called to avoid. In short, we don't always measure up to our God-given dignity or destiny.

St. Jane de Chantal believed in the possibility of human perfection. However, she was very clear as to the motive for seeking perfection: "Do you think it is to please your understanding or to give you satisfaction? No, it all must be for the glory of God alone, making you pliable, humble, cordial and frank" toward others. (Conferences)

The problem with pursuing perfection is that while we may begin this endeavor with the aim of being more of who God calls us to be, our efforts can result with our simply being more full of ourselves. True perfection should lead to humility and gentleness; false perfection leads to pride and arrogance.

The art and discipline of pursuing perfection, for St. Jane de Chantal, is to pursue it without obsessing about your progress.

Think about it: isn't the best way to get the most out of a leisurely car ride is to get to the point where you are enjoying the ride so much that you forget that you are driving?

St. Jane wrote: "I am pleased to see that you are cutting back on all of your self-scrutiny and that you are more peaceful about your desire to make progress. Eagerness about becoming perfect comes from self love: always be on guard against this, I beg of you."

Put another way, an inordinate desire to be perfected by the Will of God can actually be a not-so-camouflaged attempt to glory in one's own will and preference. Such compulsion can be the source of great pain and perplexity in our lives, observed St. Jane. "This is all about your overeagerness to attain the true happiness that you desire. You lack the patience and docility to do the Will of God who alone can grant you the progress and perfection for which you are striving." For those who truly wish to pursue perfection, they must "correct this overeagerness" and anxiety.

Pursuing perfection needs to be less about us and much more about God. It is about our relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit. Seen in this light, true

Christian perfection is all about focus. The way to perfection "is very narrow, but it is solid, short, simple and sure, and soon leads the soul to its ultimate goal: total union with God."

Patience has a lot to do with pursuing perfection. St. Francis de Sales remarked: "Know that patience is the one virtue that gives us the greatest assurance of our reaching perfection. While we must have patience with others, we must especially have patience with ourselves. Those who aspire to the pure love of God need to be more patient with themselves than with others."

Another secret to the discipline of pursuing *perfection* includes *accepting* our *imperfections*. St. Francis de Sales observed: "We have to endure our own imperfections in order to attain perfection; I say endure patiently, not love or embrace them: humility is nurtured through such endurance."

In the end, pursuing perfection is about leaving the results of our efforts in the hands of God. Said St. Jane: "We must be as satisfied to feel powerless, idle or inert before God as to be full of life with ease and devotion. The whole matter of our union with God—and our perfection—is to be content either way."