

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"A Heart...for Justice"



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St. Francis de Sales is best known for the practice of two virtues: humility and gentleness.

Humility might be described as 'living in the truth.' The truth is that we are created in God's image and likeness. The truth is that we are good. The truth is that we do not always live up to that goodness. The truth is that we need God's forgiveness and grace to make that goodness real. The truth is that we need one another.

Gentleness might be described as the practice of *proportionality*. It is about keeping things in perspective. It is about knowing when to stand firm. It is about knowing when to give ground. Most of all whether in good times, tough times or in all the times in between, gentleness is about relating to ourselves and others with profound respect, a graciousness rooted in the recognition that each of us—all of us—are sons and daughters of the living God.

In short, being humble and gentle is about trying to embody the words of Jesus found in St. Matthew's Gospel: "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart."

The daily practice of these

two virtues fashions a particular kind of heart in those who follow Jesus: a heart that longs and strives for justice.

"Be just and equitable in all your actions," wrote St. Francis de Sales in Part Three, Chapter 36 of The Introduction to the Devout Life. "Always put yourself in your neighbor's place and put your neighbor in yours, and then you will judge rightly."

He continued: "Imagine yourself the seller when you are buying; imagine yourself the buyer when you are selling. In this way you will sell and buy according to justice."

This is not always easy to do. We are frequently tempted to relate to others in ways that are not just, that are not reasonable. We are tempted to promote only our own concerns, to first ask "what's in it for me?" or to always be concerned about taking care of "number one."

At times like these "we have two hearts. One heart is mild, favorable and courteous toward ourselves; the other is hard, severe and rigorous toward our neighbor." At times like these we have "two balances: the one to weigh out conveniences to our own greatest advantages, and the other to weigh those of our neighbor to their greatest possible

disadvantage."

Humble, gentle people frequently check to see if they relate to others reasonably. Humble, gentle people frequently check to see if their hearts truly strive for justice.

St. Francis de Sales challenges us: "Do not neglect to frequently examine whether your heart be such with respect to your neighbor as you would desire your neighbor's to be with respect to you, were you in the other's situation."

Such an ordinary thing. Such an everyday thing. In the Salesian tradition, such a powerful, life-giving thing. In the end, claims St. Francis de Sales, we "lose nothing by living generously, nobly, courteously, and with a royal, just and reasonable heart."

Not only do we lose nothing, but in the eyes of God, we gain everything: a place in God's heart forever in heaven, a place in God's plan for salvation now, here on earth.

Walk humbly; relate gently; live justly; love generously. In ways great and small, strive to follow the example of the Gentleman Saint, a follower of Christ who challenges us to embody the Heart of Jesus—to embody the Heart of Justice.