

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Seasons of the Soul"



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In the Fourth Book of his Introduction to the Devout Life, Chapter 13, St. Francis de Sales begins with the following observation: "God keeps this wonderful world in existence amidst constant change. Thus day passes into night, spring into summer, summer into autumn, autumn into winter and winter into spring. One day never exactly resembles another: some days are cloudy, some rainy, some dry, some windy. Variety gives great beauty to the universe."

"It is the same with us," Francis continues. "We are never in the same state. Our lives flow on earth like the water that surges and swirls in a perpetual diversity of movements. Sometimes we are lifted up by hope, sometimes cast down by fear; sometimes bent to the right by joys, sometimes to the left by sorrow. Not one day nor one hour is exactly the same."

Indeed, how diverse, how fluid and how varied are the seasons of the human heart, of the human mind and of the human soul. In so many ways, Heraclitus (Greek philosopher, 500 B.C.) was right when he said that "the only constant is change."

These seasons of the soul challenge us in two ways: (1) We need to accept, embrace and

learn from all of the seasons of our lives, and (2) we nevertheless need to find some source of constancy in order to effectively deal with the changing tides of the ocean within us that are our thoughts, feelings and attitudes.

St. Francis offered advice regarding the former in a letter to St. Jane de Chantal (Letters of Spiritual Direction, p. 148) written in 1608: "You would like it to be always spring or summer; but no, you have to experience interior as well as exterior changes. Only in heaven will everything be springtime as to beauty, autumn as to enjoyment and summer as to love. There will be no winter there; but here below we need winter so that we may practice self-denial and the countless small but beautiful virtues that can be practiced during a barren season."

Just as every season of the year plays a part in our particular role in God's plan for our world, so, too, all the seasons of the heart have their place to play in God's plan of salvation for us. Joy, sadness, success, setback, faith, fear, anxiety, confidence...all can teach us something more of who we are and who God calls us to be.

Who wouldn't always like to be happy and fulfilled? Who

wouldn't like to avoid sadness and emptiness? Nevertheless, every season of the soul has its own voice that needs to be heard.

Where can we hope to find the stability to deal with the seasons of the soul? Francis de Sales wrote: "We must try to keep a constant and unchanging mind...Though everything turns and changes about us (*and within us*) we must always remain firm, our eyes fixed on God, seeking God and moving towards God. Whether we are in sadness or joy, in consolation or bitterness, in peace or in trouble, in light or in darkness, in temptation or tranquility, in liking or disgust, in dryness or warmth, scorched by the sun or refreshed by the dew, yet the highest point of our heart (*like the compass of a ship*) should always be turned to God, our Creator and Our Savior, our unique and sovereign good."

Our spiritual path may be filled with uncertainty. God's plan for us may be full of surprises: some consoling, some maddening. The challenge for us is to believe that in all—and every—season of the soul, it is the same loving God who creates us, redeems us, and inspires us to take confidence in God's constant, unchanging and eternal love...for us.