

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Step by Step...Meeting Life's Demands"



(copyright De Sales Spirituality Center)

Mary D. Ford

In a hectic world of frenzied activities, multiple commitments and looming deadlines, the thought of walking a gentle, prayerful path might seem idealistic and unattainable.

More than ever, we need to practice Francis de Sales' spirit of gentleness and calm in the midst of all our busyness.

His world, lacking the gadgets, the multimedia and the rush that pervade our era, was nonetheless jam-packed with the responsibilities demanded of a bishop, a spiritual director, a pastor, and a prolific writer. Francis had trained himself to walk gently and calmly through the busyness of the most hectic days, keeping a part of his heart focused on God. He wanted his spiritual children to do the same.

"It is here, Philothea, that I want you to firmly follow my advice, for it deals with one of the surest means for your spiritual advancement. Remember to withdraw frequently into the solitude of your heart, even though you may be in the midst of conversations and affairs."

The latest saint among the followers of Salesian spirituality, Leonie Frances de Sales Aviat, learned to do this, to stay in God's presence in the midst of busyness. *"How good to let*

Providence guide you step by step," she advised her Oblate Sisters.

From the moment she followed God's will for her and consented to begin the Congregation of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales, her days were filled with a multitude of activities. The young working girls needed the constant attention of the Sisters to supervise and guide them in their factory work. The boarders needed the daily maternal care of the Sisters in preparing the meals, running the house, and managing funds when sometimes not even a penny could be found in the convent purse.

Even Sunday, the proverbial day of rest, was devoted to the Sunday Clubs, with the Sisters providing the girls with games, activities, and time together.

This constant devotedness to the working girls and the boarders, to managing the newly founded schools, and to organizing the Sunday Clubs left our saint with little leisure time for herself. How did Leonie Aviat fare in the midst of all this busyness?

She, like Francis de Sales, learned to use the countless unforeseen events that thwart the planned agenda of each day as

little stepping stones to a greater union with God.

She mastered the wonderful spiritual secret of spinning straw into gold by taking the very things that could annoy or aggravate and transforming them into events fertile with holiness, by surrendering them gently to God. She followed St. Francis de Sales' ideal of sanctifying each "present moment" and instructing her Sisters to "live in the present moment in order to receive all the graces which it brings".

So what is the great secret of walking a gentle, prayerful path? We must make a serious effort to train our hearts to stay focused and centered in the midst of busy activities, practicing a gentle surrender to all the happenings of the day.

Has not Jesus, Himself, challenged us to this gentleness? He even offers Himself as a model: "Learn of me that I am gentle of Heart...and you will find rest for your souls". (Matthew 11:28-29)

And so let us learn, like Francis de Sales and Mother Aviat, to turn all the little daily annoyances—the traffic jam, the delayed air flight, the impatient clerk, the lost keys—into grace-filled opportunities to remain rooted in God.