

# De Sales

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## SPIRITUALITY CENTER

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*"First Things First"*



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Mary D. Ford

Our lives are filled with choices. Should we do this or should we do that? Should we go here or should we go there?

Indeed our complicated lifestyles often bring conflicting demands which frequently can become too much for us to handle. How often have we thought to ourselves, "If life would just slow down a little, I could get things done easier." But the question remains, "How can I slow myself down and make life better each moment as it comes?"

Francis De Sales tells us that the Salesian spirit is deeply rooted in our efforts to grow in grace through the little day-to-day experiences of life. De Sales knew that stress, anxiety and even panic are not the answer to either accomplishing things or finding peace. He compares our frenzied lives to a caged bird, and our finding peace to a bird who is free. The former flutters his wings so much that he entraps himself all the more. But, like the second little bird without constraints, when we stop the wing flapping, we soar closer to God. We can start this growth process by praying and prioritizing our daily activities.

We should take time everyday to pray. Francis writes that when little bees are caught in a storm

they take hold of small stones so that they can keep their balance when they fly. Prayer, like the stones, can balance us. It helps us to make the best use of each day, each moment as it comes.

Eventually, as we fly, we free ourselves to see that our vocation, or our *calling in life*, is our means to holiness. Imagine being holy by just doing our everyday jobs! De Sales terms this process *living in the present moment* and he teaches that everybody can achieve it and achieve it well!

Slowing down our pace and living more simply can still permit us to engage in the busyness of everyday life. But it is a new sense of peace which helps us to stop dwelling on the past or being anxious about the future.

De Sales was a busy bishop, and a professional man. In his Introduction To A Devout Life, he writes that a lawyer must go from prayer to the courtroom, the merchant from prayer to his store, a homemaker from prayer to her responsibilities. Each person, he writes, needs gentleness that will not cause distress. This gentleness helps us pray and work better and to see that both are a gift from God.

St. Jane de Chantal was a wife, widow, mother, single parent, businesswoman and later, a

nun. Indeed, Jane was one busy lady. When, for example, she responded to God's call to transition from widowhood to founding the Sisters of the Visitation, De Sales warned her that she would come under some serious criticism both from her family and friends: he was quite correct. Still, she moved on with her life. She was truly a lover of God finding peace in everyday simplicity and prayer.

Sometimes, even when we seek to live in the present moment, we may regret the past, or fret about an uncertain future and sadden ourselves. De Sales paraphrases St. Paul. (2 Cor 17:10) when he states that human sorrow is both a blessing and a curse. Like a compass needle which always points north regardless of the ship's course, if we will aspire toward God, De Sales says, those changes of life will not unsteady us. Though sadness can appear negative, it can instill in us a sense of repentance and compassion and lead us to virtue as we strive to overcome it.

Salesian Spirituality invites us to trust in God's providence. Either God will protect us from misfortune, or God will give us the strength to bear it. With confidence we can "cast our cares on God", because He cares for us.