

St. Francis de Sales

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1567–1622 • France

Francis de Sales was the eldest son of a French noble family. The young Francis was intelligent and handsome, quiet and sensitive. He was brought up to be a gentleman with a fine education, and his father cherished hopes that Francis would someday have an important political career.

Despite all this, when Francis finished his studies, he declared that he would become a priest. Terribly upset, his father refused to accept his decision. He had arranged for Francis to marry a wealthy heiress to help further his son's political career. The bishop of Geneva, however, saw that God was calling Francis to the priesthood. But knowing that honor and position were important to Francis's father, he promised to give Francis an important position in the diocese if he became a priest. Won over by the high honor offered by the bishop, Francis's father gave his approval for Francis to enter the priesthood.

After being ordained a priest, Francis desired to preach the Catholic Faith in the nearby Calvinist territory. Calvinists are Protestants who, at the time, were extremely anti-Catholic. Francis knew it would be dangerous for him to preach to the Calvinists, but he wanted to share the true Faith with them. When he arrived in the nearby Calvinist city, the people shut their doors against him. They threw rocks in his face. A few even tried to assassinate him! All throughout, Francis was gentle and kind. He would pass booklets under the closed doors that explained the truth of the Catholic Faith. Eventually, the people opened their doors to him, and his gentle kindness won many of them over. About forty thousand Calvinists converted to the Catholic Faith.

When the bishop of Geneva died, Francis was made the next bishop. Soon after, he met the widow Jane de Chantal, who would also become a saint. Together they founded the Order of the Visitation. Francis also gave spiritual guidance to many laywomen, advising them on how to live holy lives in the married state. At that time, most people believed that only priests and nuns could be holy in this life. Francis believed that everyone could be holy if he or she lived the way Jesus did. His most famous book, *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, was written for laypeople.

Until his death, Francis was known for his patience, gentleness, and great love. St. Francis de Sales, help me to be gentle and kind to others out of love for Christ!