

## Homily

Monday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week in OT  
Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

January 24, 2022

St Francis de Sales lived from 1567 to 1622, dying peacefully in his sleep at age 55. But what he did during those few years was effective and significant.

He was born into nobility and expected to go into law and politics. He was privileged and well educated. He was intelligent and well liked. Then at the tender age of twelve was exposed to the Calvinist teaching of predestination. This troubled him greatly, enough so that he fell into despair, making him physically ill and bedridden. He was certain that he was destined for hell.

Soon after, he prayed the “Memorare” before the statue of Our Lady of Good Deliverance, consecrated himself to our Blessed Mother, dedicated himself to God with a vow of chastity and entered the Minim Order. He ultimately concluded that God had good in store for him, because “God is love,” as John's First Epistle attests. This faithful devotion to God not only expelled his doubts, but also influenced the rest of his life and his teachings. His way of teaching Catholic spirituality is often referred to as the Way of Divine Love, taken from the book he wrote ‘Introduction to the Devout Life.’

At the age of 25, he earned his doctorate in law and theology and decided to become a priest. Even so, his father continued securing him in various noble positions, including senator, and arranging a marriage with a noble heiress. He refused, maintaining his chosen path. He officially and legally signed his title and right of succession to his younger brother and was ordained a priest at age 26.

Right away, he was tasked with difficult and dangerous assignments. This was the age of the reformation and the region of the Calvinists. He used his wealth and position to secure money and goods, which he distributed to the poor. Much of his ministry was done privately and individually. He was one of the first to use religious tracts, writing and printing pamphlets which were eventually collected and published as *The Catholic Controversy*. It is believed over his lifetime, he converted more than 30,000 souls. At the age of 32, he was appointed coadjutor bishop of Geneva. At age 35, he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Henry IV of France to negotiate the restoration of Catholic worship in a part of the diocese that had been returned to France from Calvinist control. Upon the death of the local bishop, he was consecrated Bishop of Geneva in 1602.

King Henry and others regarded St. Francis as devout and as a gentleman. He was consulted for both political and church matters for his integrity and morals. He continued establishing orders and converting souls until his death. He was beatified just 39 years after his death and canonized four years after that.

His episcopal motto was “Non Excidet” which means, “He will not falter, fail, fall down, collapse.” Based on his life, I would suggest that it means that he will stand his ground and won’t be swayed from his beliefs.

He did as Jesus did: taught with authority and faith, never to be swayed. Just as Jesus stood His ground against the scribes who accused Him of being possessed by the devil, St. Francis stood his ground against the heresy of predestination. And he did it with integrity, humor, knowledge and faith with a persistence that only an aneurism could stop.

We would do well to follow the example set by St. Francis, standing up to falsehoods and misrepresentations such as we now live in with the culture of death. Tens of thousands marched in Washington DC last Friday to March for Life. Only a third of US Catholics believe in the real presence. Not much more than those attend Sunday Mass regularly.

There are so many beliefs we can stand up for, so many truths we can share.

We may not be able to convert thousands as St. Francis did, but we can start at home, with our families, with our friends and our neighbors. We are called as fully initiated Catholics to march for Christ and bring as many souls to heaven as we can.