

Homily
Memorial of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, Religious
Monday of the 19th Week in OT
August 12, 2024

Who remembers this famous quote by the Man in the Black Mask from the 1987 movie, *The Princess Bride*: “Life is pain. Anyone who says differently is selling something.” It is true: we all seem to be just recovering from some painful experience, currently suffering from a painful experience or will soon be entering into some painful experience, or all three at the same time. Life is beautiful yet is often peppered by painful moments. Body aches associated with getting older, accidents resulting in physical injuries, knock-down, drag-out fights with a spouse, family member, or dear friend, the death of a loved one. Life throws many things at us, usually when we least expect it.

In today’s Gospel, we hear, “And they were overwhelmed with grief.” Matt 17:23b. This was the second time Jesus told of His impending fate at the hands of men. His disciples didn’t understand what Jesus was saying, and certainly didn’t want to believe it. Yet today we know the joy as a consequence of His Passion, death and Resurrection. Today, we celebrate Christ’s sacrifice. We remember His Words, “Do this in remembrance of me.” We recognize the love He has for us in our union with Him and each other in the Eucharist, His flesh freely given, His blood outpoured. And still we struggle with our own challenges, physical, emotional and spiritual, wondering, “Why, oh, why, God, do you let me suffer?” God has a plan. It is not our plan. And until we align our will to His, we will remain lost and confused. It is when we relinquish control, empty ourselves and embrace God, pick up our cross and follow Him, that we find peace and joy.

St. Jane Frances de Chantal knew a life of struggles. Although she was born into an affluent and noble family, her mother died when Jane was only 18 months old. Although she was instilled with a strong and devout faith, she married into severe debt. Although she courageously and steadfastly brought her faith, good sense of humor and organizational skills into her marriage, she lost two of her six children and her husband after only eight years. Although she had to move in with her ill-tempered father-in-law whose household was ruled by a tyrannical housekeeper, she bore her servitude patiently and gently until she won over their hearts.

She is known for meeting with and placing herself under the guidance of St. Francis de Sales. Although she continued to grow spiritually, her sufferings continued. Her adult son was murdered, her daughter-in-law and son-in-law died, St. Francis de Sales died, and a plague ravaged France. She personally suffered great trials of the spirit – interior anguish, darkness, and spiritual dryness, but she never lost her faith. By the time she died in 1641, she had founded eighty-six convents. She is the patron of mothers, widows and wives.

Our Bishop reminds us in his Pontifical Motto, “In all things give thanks,” that even in our struggles, God has a plan. St. Jane Frances de Chantal responded to promptings of grace over and over, and God did incredible things through her. God’s plans for our life might not be what we expect. Every cross and every twist and turn in life has the potential to be a new beginning to a new and glorious life. As St. Jane teaches us, we can find meaning in all our struggles, knowing that we are playing a part in God’s great plan, for which we all know the ending; joy and peace in heaven.