

## St. Francis de Sales



### *The Spiritual Directory*

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#### Preface

Come, O sons blessed from all eternity, and as was said to Ezekiel and to St. John the Evangelist; Come, take hold of this book and eat it, swallow it, fill your heart and nourish your soul with it. Let its words remain day and night before your eyes that you may meditate on them and in your hands that you may put them into practice, and let your entire being praise God for them. This book will prove bitter to your interior, for it will lead to the perfect mortification of your self-love. It will, on the other hand, be sweeter than honey in your mouth because there is no consolation equal to that of mortifying our self-love in order to let live and reign in us the love of him who died for love of us. In this way your bitterness will be transformed into the sweetness of a perfect peace, and you will be filled with true happiness.

I ask you, my sons, nay rather I beg and exhort you, be strong, firm, persevering, unchanging and so remain in order that nothing may separate you from Jesus Christ who has brought you together, nor from that community which can keep you one with him, so that, all of you having but one heart and one mind, he himself may be your only mind and heart.

Blessed the man who lives this Rule, for it is reliable and true. May the grace, peace and consolation of the Holy Spirit be given abundantly and forever to all who follow it, Amen.

*Live Jesus!*

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## Intentions and Wishes of our Holy Father

The intention of our holy Father was that our whole life and all our works be dedicated to union with God, so that we might assist in the renewal of the Church and the salvation of our neighbor by our prayer, works and good example, and that we might excel in every kind of virtue-this he desired more than anything else.

This desire drew from his fatherly heart, aflame with the zeal of the Holy Spirit, the following three wishes, which he wrote on the first pages of the Profession Book.

### The Humble Glory of the Congregation

We have no bond but the bond of love, which is the bond of perfection. For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion. How then could there be any bond stronger than the bond of love, which is the bond of perfection?

*The love of Jesus Christ impels us.*

### Prayer to Jesus Christ Our Lord

O true God, who will grant me so great a favor that the Almighty heed my wish and himself write this book, so that I may wear it over my shoulder like a cloak and place it on my head like a crown, that I may proclaim it at each step and offer it to him as to a king?

Yes, Lord Jesus, listen to the cry my heart makes for those in your service: you, yourself write in this book. Never allow anyone to put his name in it except by your inspiration and invitation, so that it may be a cloak of honor on my shoulders and a crown of glory on my head. Thus in all my prayers to you I will mention the names written therein as a song of joy and praise, and offer the list of them as a fragrant bouquet to your divine Providence.

Grant, O Jesus, that the year in which each Oblate writes his offering in this book be for him a year of sanctification; the day, a day of salvation; the hour, and hour of lasting blessing. May the hearts which you have brought together in your name and in that of your dear Mother be not scattered, those you have called together be not dispersed, and those you have joined together be not separated. Grant rather that the names found on these perishable pages be written forever in the *Book of the Living* with the just who reign with you in the life of unceasing happiness. So be it. Amen.

### Wish Addressed to the Members of the Congregation

Therefore, my brothers and sons whom I love and long for, you who are my joy and my crown, continue, my dear ones, to stand firm in the Lord. I invite you, I even implore all of you to have one and the same love and to live in common accord about this vocation in Jesus Christ, Our Lord, and in His Mother, our Lady. Amen.

*Francis, Bishop of Geneva (Annecy, 1611)*

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## Article #1

### Rising

First of all on awakening, followers of the Directory are to direct their minds completely to God by some holy thought such as the following:

*Sleep is the image of death and awakening that of the resurrection;*

or they may think of that voice that will ring out on the last day:

*O dead, arise and come to judgment:*

or they may say with Job:

*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that on the last day I will rise again. My God, grant that this be to eternal glory; this hope rests in my inmost being (Job 19:25-26);*

at other times they may say:

*On that day, O God, you will call me, and I will answer you; you will stretch forth your right arm to the work of you hands; you have counted all my steps. (Job 14:15-16)*

They will make these holy aspirations or others which the Holy Spirit may suggest, for they do have the freedom to follow his inspirations.

After the Angelus they will make the morning exercise, adoring Our Lord from the depths of their being and thanking him for all his benefits. In union with the loving offering which the Savior made of himself to his eternal Father on the tree of the cross, they will offer him their heart, its affections and resolutions, and their whole being, and beg for his help and blessing. They will greet our Lady and ask for her blessing, as well as that of their guardian angel and holy patrons. If they wish, they may say the Our Father. All this should be done quickly and briefly.

As they begin to dress, they will make the sign of the cross and say:

*Cover me, Lord, with the cloak of innocence and the robe of love. My God, do not let me appear before you stripped of good works.*

### Direction of Intention

They who wish to thrive and advance in the way of Our Lord should, at the beginning of their actions, both exterior and interior, ask for his grace and offer to his divine Goodness all the good they will do. In this way they will be prepared to bear with peace and serenity all the pain and suffering they will encounter as coming from the fatherly hand of our good God and Savior. His most holy intention is to have them merit by such means in order to reward them afterwards out of the abundance of his love.

They should not neglect this practice in matters which are small and seemingly insignificant, nor even if they are engaged in those things which are agreeable and in complete conformity with their own will

and needs, such as drinking, eating, resting, recreating and similar actions. By following the advice of the Apostle, everything they do will be done in God's name to please him alone.

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## Article #2

### Meditation

For meditation they will form themselves by following the instructions in the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, the *Treatise on the Love of God*, the *Spiritual Conferences*, and other good books in harmony with these. They will particularly heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the direction given them. They should never lose time on subtleties nor on supereminent, but unproductive, abstractions. These are nothing more than delusions and deceptions.

The serious practice of this exercise is one of the most important in the religious life.

### Preparation of the Day

To form themselves for meditation they will prefer to all other means the exercise of the preparation of the day. Since the preparation makes provision for all their actions, they will make use of it according to varying circumstances. By this means they will endeavor to be disposed to carry out their activities competently and commendably.

#### *Invocation*

They will invoke the help of God, saying:

*Lord, if you do not care for my soul, it is useless that another should do so. (Ps 127:1)*

They will ask him to make them worthy to spend the day with him without offending him. For this purpose, the words of the psalm may be helpful.

*Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Your good spirit will guide me by the hand on level ground (Ps 143:10), and your divine majesty by its inexpressible love and boundless charity will give me true life.*

#### *Foresight*

This is simply a preview or conjecture of all that could happen during the course of the day. Thus, with the grace of Our Lord, they will wisely and prudently anticipate occasions which could take them by surprise.

#### *Plan of Action*

They will carefully plan and seek out the best means to avoid any faults. They will also arrange in an orderly fashion what, in their opinion, is proper for them to do.

### *Resolution*

They will make a firm resolution to obey the will of God, especially during the present day. To this end, they will use the words of the royal prophet David:

*My soul, will you not cheerfully obey the holy will of God, seeing that your salvation comes from his? (Ps 62:2)*

Surely this God of infinite majesty and admittedly worthy of every honor and service can only be neglected by us through a lack of courage. Let us, therefore, be consoled and strengthened by this beautiful verse of the psalmist.

*Let evil man do their worst against me. The Lord, the king, can overcome them all. Let the world complain about me to its heart's content. This means little to me because he who holds sway over all the angelic spirits is my protector. (Ps 99:1)*

### *Recommendation*

They will entrust themselves and all their concerns into the hands of God's eternal goodness and ask him to consider them as always so commended. Leaving to him the complete care of what they are and what he wants them to be, they will say with all their heart:

*I have asked you one thing, O Jesus, my Lord, and I shall ask you again and again, namely that I may faithfully carry out your loving will all the day of my poor and pitiable life. (Ps 27:4; 40:9)*

*I commend to you. O gracious Lord, my soul, my life, my heart, my memory, my understanding and my will. Grant that in and with all these, I may serve you, love you, please and honor you forever. (Ps 31:6; Luke 23:46)*

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### **Article #3**

It is especially recommended that they show simplicity and readiness in praying the Liturgy of the Hours. Each time they begin, they should place themselves in the presence of God and, in imitation of St. Bernard, ask themselves what they are about to do.

They can also use this method in all their other exercises, so that they may bring to each one the spirit proper to it. They should not have the same deportment and expression at the Liturgy of the hours as at recreation. In exercises which directly concern the honor and service of God, their spirit should be humble, serious, devout and genuinely loving.

Before beginning the Liturgy of the Hours, they will stir up in themselves similar affections. Then, after the act of adoration, they will offer this action to our Lady and Mother and for the salvation of all creation. When they say:

*O God, come to my assistance,*

they should think that Our Lord answers:

*Be attentive to my love.*

In order to maintain the proper respect and attention, they should consider from time to time what an honor and privilege it is for them to perform here on earth the same role the angels and saints fulfill in heaven, and that they are praising the same Lord whose majesty makes the highest seraphim tremble.

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#### Article #4

First of all they should place themselves in the presence of God. When the celebrant invites the faithful to repentance they should acknowledge their sins, be truly sorry for them and ask God's pardon.

At the Gospel, they will rise promptly to give witness to the fact that they are ready to walk in the way of its precepts saying interiorly:

*Jesus Christ was made obedient to death, even to death on the cross. (Phil 2:8)*

As they make the sign of the cross, they will declare:

*May God be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart, that I may accept his holy Gospel.*

If the Profession of Faith is to be said, they should recite it affirming interiorly their willingness to live and die in the belief of the Church.

After the Sanctus they should very humbly and reverently reflect on the blessings conferred by the passion and death of our Savior. They ought to implore him to will their application to the salvation of the whole world, especially to their own and that of all the members of the Church, for the glory and happiness of all the saints and for the relief of the souls in purgatory.

At the elevation of the Blessed Sacrament they are to adore it with deep contrition of heart. Then they will offer it with the celebrant to God the Father for the remission of their own sins and those of the whole world, and offer themselves with the priest and the entire Church. After the elevation they will thank Jesus Christ for his passion and for the institution of this Holy Sacrifice of the Altar.

When the celebrant says the Our Father, they will say it with him with great humility and devotion just as if they were hearing him saying it to the Father and they were repeating it word for word with him.

If someone does not wish to receive Communion sacramentally, he ought to do so spiritually, drawing close to Our Lord by a holy desire to be united with him and to receive him into his heart.

At the blessing they should recall that Jesus Christ is giving them his blessing at the same time.

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#### Article #5

They should examine their conscience twice daily, in the evening and at midday.

In the evening, they will thank Our Lord for all his benefits, especially for his passion, his divine sacrament, the grace of their vocation and for having willed to preserve them during the day, providing for all their needs through this sweet goodness.

They must confess and acknowledge before God that the day has not passed without their having offended him in some way. Because everyone is blind in his own concerns, they should ask for the grace and the light of the Holy Spirit to know their faults clearly.

Then they will begin by reviewing their actions, words and thoughts since their last examination of conscience. Reciting some penitential formula, they will humbly ask Our Lord pardon for their faults.

They will make a firm resolution to correct themselves with the help of God's grace, which they should request with all the love and devotion within their power.

After this, they will recommend their soul, their body, their whole being to the mercy of God. They will pray for the Church, their parents and relatives, and all those toward whom they have a special obligation; they ought not forget the poor souls in purgatory. They should greet our Lady, their guardian angel and holy patrons.

If in their examination they find no faults, let them humble themselves profoundly before God and thank him, admitting nevertheless that they have committed some faults about which they have neither recollection nor awareness.

To make this examination easier, it will be helpful for them when they commit some fault during the day to examine themselves right away, consider briefly their motive, humble themselves before God and make a mental note of this fault in order to include it in the examination that evening.

At the midday examination such formality is not necessary. They need only consider briefly how they have conducted themselves during the morning. If any fault is found, they should add it to the preceding ones and make an act of contrition with a firm purpose of amendment.

To help their memory have a correct knowledge of their faults, they should consider how they have conducted themselves at meditation, at the Liturgy of the Hours, during silence and at community gatherings. If they were engaged in some special work, they will reflect upon what matters were discussed, for here there is danger of failing.

In addition to this examination common to all, they may make a particular one. This concerns the practice of a special virtue most useful to them and directly opposed to those imperfections toward which they feel themselves more inclined.

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## Article #6

### Meals

They should not go to the refectory merely to eat, but to obey God and to take part in a community exercise.

If some tend to be too particular or too eager in eating, they should, upon entering the refectory, make a firm resolution and invoke the grace and help of Our Lord to courageously exercise self-control.

Let him who is too particular consider the gall offered to Our Lord at the height of his bitterest sufferings. Let him who is too eager think of the abstinence and strict fasts of the Fathers of the desert and of so many other saints who so effectively mortified their appetite.

They should never leave the table without having denied themselves in some way. Nevertheless, they ought to eat without hesitation or objection any foods given them for their well-being. With a spirit of indifference they are to accept from the hand of the Lord what they like as well as what they do not like, be it food or anything else.

## Recreation

When they recreate, they will ask Our Lord for the grace to say and do only what contributes to his glory. Let them not come to recreation with a sad and disagreeable countenance, but rather with a pleasant and affable one. Just as they should recreate in a spirit of simplicity and openness, so, too, should they take pleasure in speaking often of good and holy topics.

If anyone is inclined to speak too much about himself or is subject to other faults like this, let him, in beginning recreation, briefly recall this imperfection and resolve to be on guard against it. To this end, he should implore the grace of the Holy Spirit and the help of his guardian angel.

They ought not think that there is little virtue in recreating properly. They should not come, therefore, out of habit, or as a matter of form, but with preparation and devotion.

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## Article #7

When they begin work, they should say interiorly:

*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.* (1 Samuel 3:9-10)

*O my God, make me worthy to accomplish your holy will.*

On entering the appropriate place to do their assigned tasks, they should, in a more special way, put themselves in the presence of God, asking for his grace to make use of silence in accordance with the holy purpose for which it was instituted. This purpose is not only the prevention of idle chatter, but also the curtailing of wandering and useless thoughts while speaking with God, and the obtaining of new strength to work unceasingly in his divine service.

They may make use of their meditation, looking at Our Lord in the mystery which they considered and dwelling on certain points which they particularly appreciated. If, for example, they had meditated on the mystery of the scourging and if the gentle and loving glance which our blessed Savior cast from time to time upon those who were flogging him touched their heart, they should often recall this and then offer the following plea:

*O Sweet Jesus, look down on me with your merciful eyes,*

or:

*Lord, take away from me anything that might be displeasing in your sight.*

They may remain quietly at the feet of Our Lord, listen to what he will say to their heart, consider his goodness and love, and speak to him from time to time with heartfelt aspirations, and with these or similar ejaculatory prayers:

To Almighty God:

*O God, you are my Father.*

*My God, have mercy on my weakness.*

*O Lord, let me live only for you.*

To the Blessed Virgin:

*Mother of mercy, pray for me.*

To their guardian angel:

*O glorious angel, my protector, pray for me.*

In like manner they should address the saints toward whom they have a special devotion.

At each hour, let them regret hours wasted and recall that they will have to give an account of this hour and of all the moments of their life. Let them remember that they are approaching eternity, that hours are centuries to the damned, that they are running toward death, and that perhaps their last hour may soon be at hand.

After such thoughts, they should make devout aspirations that God be merciful to them at that last hour. This certainly will happen for those who have been very faithful in doing this. They ought to practice this at all times and on all occasions. By this means they will grow and progress daily from virtue to virtue, even to the perfection of divine love.

Those who suffer from some strong temptation or emotion can find courage and strength in considering the pains of Our Lord, picturing him undergoing them.

When they experience difficulty in the practice of virtues, they will be enlightened and aided if they consider him in the exercise of those virtues which he practiced while on earth.

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## Article #8

While undressing, they should keep their mind attentive as much as possible to the point to be taken for meditation.

In bed they ought to remember that Our Lord and some saints used to sleep on the cold ground, and how much they are obliged to love and serve him, since his gentle goodness provides for their slightest comforts in such a fatherly way. Lying there, they should picture to themselves that one day they will be like this in the grave and ask God to assist them at the hour of death. Let them act as if they were seeing Our Lord with their own eyes, for he really sees them in this action as well as in any other.

They should always try to fall asleep with some good thought.

### **Thoughts of St. Francis de Sales for the Night:**

If they awaken during the night, they will stir up their heart immediately with these words:

*At midnight someone shouted: The groom is here! Come out and greet him. (Matthew 25:6)*

From the view of the darkness around them, they will turn to a consideration of the darkness of their own soul and of all sinners and offer this prayer:

*O Lord, since your merciful heart made you come down from heaven to earth to visit us, please enlighten those who lie prostrate in the darkness of ignorance and in the shadow of eternal death; if it be your will, guide them also into the path of interior peace. (Luke :78-79)*

At times they will turn to their God, their Savior, and say:

*You neither slumber nor sleep, you who guard the Israel of our souls (Psalm 121:7). The most intense darkness of midnight can present no obstacle to your divine activity; at that hour you were born of the holy virgin, your Mother;’ at that hour, too, you can cause your heavenly graces to be born in our souls and completely fill us with your choicest blessings. Merciful Redeemer, so enlighten my poor blind heart with the beautiful rays of your grace that it may never remain in any way in the death of sin; O, I beg you, do not allow my invisible enemies to say: We have overcome him. (Psalm 13:4)*

Finally, after having considered the darkness and the imperfections of their soul, they may say with Isaiah:

*Watchman, watchman, does much of the night of our imperfections still remain? (21:11-12)*

And they will hear him answer them:

*The morning of good inspirations has come; why do you love the darkness more than the light? (John 3:19)*

In addition, they may use these holy words:

*Neither the sun nor its rays are my principal light, but God alone, who is as merciful to me by night as he is by day.*

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## Article #9

When they wish to go to confession they will prepare themselves in this manner.

In a spirit of deep humility at the feet of their crucified Lord, they will ask for the grace and light of the Holy Spirit to discern their faults well. Then, they should recall everything they have found in their daily examinations since their previous confession and consider for a moment if there is anything else. After this, let them humbly ask Our Lord for pardon and for the grace to correct themselves. For this purpose they will make a firm resolution, especially concerning the more important things they have noticed. They will renounce their faults and attempt to stir up true sorrow for them, however slight they may be, because it is always too great an evil to have been displeasing to the sovereign goodness of our Savior who is so merciful to us each day.

After having noticed their current faults, they should add something from the past which is clearly sinful and make an act of contrition for all these together. Then they will go humbly to their confessor honoring God and the sacred priesthood in the person of the priest. They ought to look upon him in confession as an angel whom God sends to reconcile them to his divine goodness.

Let them be brief and clear in their confession. Let them never confess out of routine or scrupulosity, but rather out of devotion and attention as in an action of great importance and value.

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## Article #10

The principal intention which they should have at Holy Communion is union with Our Lord.

To prepare themselves better for this union, it would be good, in their prayer and recollection the evening before, to raise their thoughts somewhat to Our Lord in this sacrament. They should stir up in their soul a holy reverence and spiritual joy that they should be so blessed as to receive our gentle Savior. Then they ought to renew their decision to serve him fervently. When they have received him, they can reaffirm this decision, not by a vow, but by a good and holy resolution.

At the moment of communion, they could use some mental or vocal aspirations, such as

that of St. Francis:

*Who am I, Lord, and who are you?*

or perhaps that of St. Elizabeth:

*Where does this blessing come from - that my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:43)*

or that of St. John the Evangelist:

*Yes, come, Lord Jesus. (Revelation 22:20)*

After Holy Communion they should consider Our Lord seated in their heart as on his throne and bring before him, one after the other, their faculties and senses to hear his commands and promise him fidelity. They can also summon their soul to some holy affections such as:

FEAR OF DISPLEASEING AND LOSING THE LORD:

they will say with David:

*My Lord, be not far from me.* (Psalm 38:22)

or with the travelers on the road to Emmaus:

*Stay with us. It is nearly evening.* (Luke 24:29)

CONFIDENCE AND COURAGE:

again with David,

*I will fear no evil because you are at my side, Lord.* (Psalm 23:4)

LOVE:

with the Spouse she will say:

*My lover belongs to me and I to him; he will rest in my heart; I have found him whom my heart loves. I will not let him go.* (Song of Songs 2:16; 1:13; 3:4)

THANKSGIVING:

*O Lord, because you have given me this great grace, I will bless you eternally and forever and I will make your praises as countless as the stars of the sky.* (Genesis 22:16-19)

DETERMINATION TO SERVE THE LORD:

with the words of Jacob:

*The Lord shall be my God, and the stone of my heart, heretofore hardened, will be his abode.*  
(Genesis 28:21-22)

They can also think of the interior fervor of Our Lady, her devotion, her humility, her confidence and her courage when the angel told her that the Holy Spirit would come into her. They can recall, too, that at the same time that she understood that God was giving her his heart, namely his Son, she in turn gave herself to God and her soul was overwhelmed with love. They, too, receive a similar grace in Communion. It is not an angel, but Jesus Christ himself who assures them that in this action the Holy Spirit comes into them and in a way Christ is conceived and born in them. O God, what delight and peace!

Consequently after this consideration the soul can truly say as did this holy Lady:

*I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to his word which he spoke from his sacred mouth, that whoever feeds on him remains in him and he in them, and that whoever feeds on him will live for him, by him and in him and will live forever. (Luke 1:38; John 6:50,55-59)*

For both Holy Mass and Holy Communion, they may use these thoughts or such others as the Holy Spirit will suggest to them.

Each month they will offer Holy Communion for:

1. The renewal of their vows;
2. The Church, the Pope and the clergy;
3. The preservation of the Congregation and the maintenance therein of union and mutual charity;
4. The conversion of sinners and of those who do not belong to the faith: and
5. All the needs of the people.

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#### Advice of St. Francis de Sales on the Directory

It is true that the Directory proposes many exercises. Yet it is good and fitting to keep one's interior orderly and busy in the beginning. When, however, after a period of time, persons have put into practice somewhat this multiplicity of interior actions, have become formed and habituated to them and spiritually agile in their use, then the practices should coalesce into a single exercise of greater simplicity: either into a love of complacency, or a love of benevolence, or a love of confidence, or of union and reunion of the heart to the will of God. This multiplicity thus becomes unity.

Moreover, if there be someone, even in the novitiate, who fears too much this submission to the exercises indicated, provided this fear does not come from whim, presumption, contempt or annoyance, a prudent director may lead him by another way, even though ordinarily, as experience has shown, the practices of the Directory are useful.

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