

A Gentle Reflection for the Feast of St Francis de Sales.



When I think of St. Francis de Sales the first word that comes to my mind is gentleness. Gentleness and humility are often seen as signs of weakness. But in reality only a person who is very strong can be humble and gentle.

I don't think anyone would describe Francis as weak once they have read of his experiences when he went to bring the protestant Calvinists back to the Catholic Church. For three years, he trudged through the countryside, had doors slammed in his face and rocks thrown at him. In the bitter winters, his feet froze so badly they bled as he tramped through the snow. Since the parents wouldn't come to him, Francis went to the children. When the parents saw how kind he was as he played with the children, they began to talk to him. By the time Francis returned home, it is believed he brought 40,000 people to the Catholic Church.

At times the exceeding gentleness with which he received heretics and sinners scandalized other Catholics, including the Bishop of Geneva. But Francis said " I would rather account to God for too great gentleness than for too great severity. Is not God all love?"

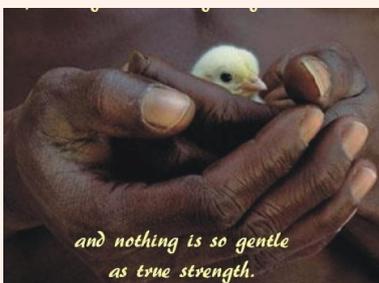
For Francis "Nothing is so strong as gentleness - nothing so loving and gentle as strength. Gentleness and humility flow from the inner strength of a person. Francis said, "Were there anything better or fairer on earth than gentleness, Jesus Christ would have taught it us; and yet he has given us only two lessons to learn of him—meekness and humility of heart."

These are the challenging words which we are called to live. We live in a violent, unjust and chaotic world and we are called to be beacons of gentleness.

Being gentle isn't doing 'acts of gentleness', it is cultivating an 'attitude of gentleness'. Being gentle is part of who we are, it begins in the heart of each one of us and radiates out to all those who meet us.

A gentle person is one who is attentive to the strengths and weaknesses of the other. A gentle person treads lightly, listens carefully, looks tenderly and touches with reverence. A gentle person knows that true growth requires nurture not force. Gentleness is a vivid reminder of God among us.

Do I always live these words? To my shame I have to say 'No' There are times I fall far short of them, but I try each day to start again and each time I fail I start again remembering that failing is not the worst thing, the worse thing is when I don't start again. When I fail I turn to the One who loves me more than I can ever understand and who constantly invites me to *'Come and learn of Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart'*



As I celebrate the feast of St. Francis de Sales, I will remember that he was given to us by Fr. Victor Braun as one of our spiritual founders and I will – again - try to become a gentle reminder of God among us.

*and nothing is so gentle
as true strength.*