

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jan 24th 2015

Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Today is the feast of St. Francis de Sales, 1567-1622. He is noted for his gentleness and humility in his efforts at mending relationships within the Church after the Reformation. He had the potential of a successful civil career, but chose instead a life of simplicity and austerity sharing what he had with the poor.

With St. Jane Frances de Chantal, he founded the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. The Visitation Sisters are still ministering in several countries and in the United States. Those same two virtues, gentleness and humility, are stressed as essential characteristics in their formation. Their life was to be patterned on bringing the Love of God to those who needed Him, not waiting behind convent walls for people in need to find them.

St. Francis's goal was to create an alternative way of religious life, neither cloistered nor subject to the rigors of the usual nun's life of the time: prayers in the middle of the night, severe fasts, total abstinence and so on. He hoped to present a second choice to older women for whom the usual practices were thought to be too strenuous. The nuns were to be dedicated to service of the poor.

In the nineteenth century, long after his death, a number of religious orders were founded based on his simple, gentle approach to spirituality. He was also ahead of his time by believing that lay people could aspire to the heights of holiness and spent much time in spiritual direction with them. Today, many of the orders still exist and are running schools, for example, in India.

What does St. Francis's life say to us in January, 2015?

In today's Gospel, there is a brief passage that describes briefly a scene in which Jesus, having begun his public ministry of preaching and sharing the Good News, arrives home with a large crowd trailing behind Him. The response of some of his family is set out to seize him, murmuring, "He has lost his mind."

Perhaps you are beginning 2015 with the commitment to make a needed change in your habits or life decisions. By now, people are beginning to notice. Some people are getting uncomfortable around

you. You're not so much fun to be around.

Even if the intention is not a major one, now might be the time when sticking to the promise is getting tough. It may help to recall that St. Francis and even Jesus had to keep moving ahead despite the difficulties they encountered. And persevere they did. Let's pray for that kind of perseverance in each other.

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