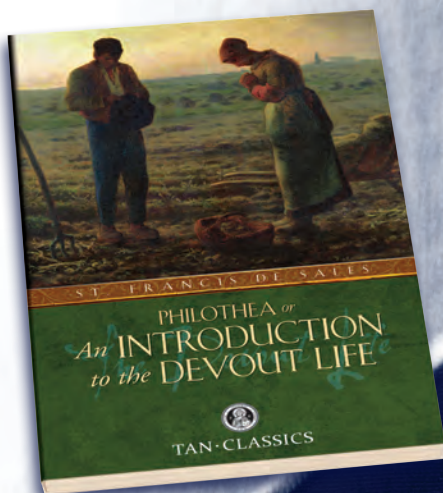
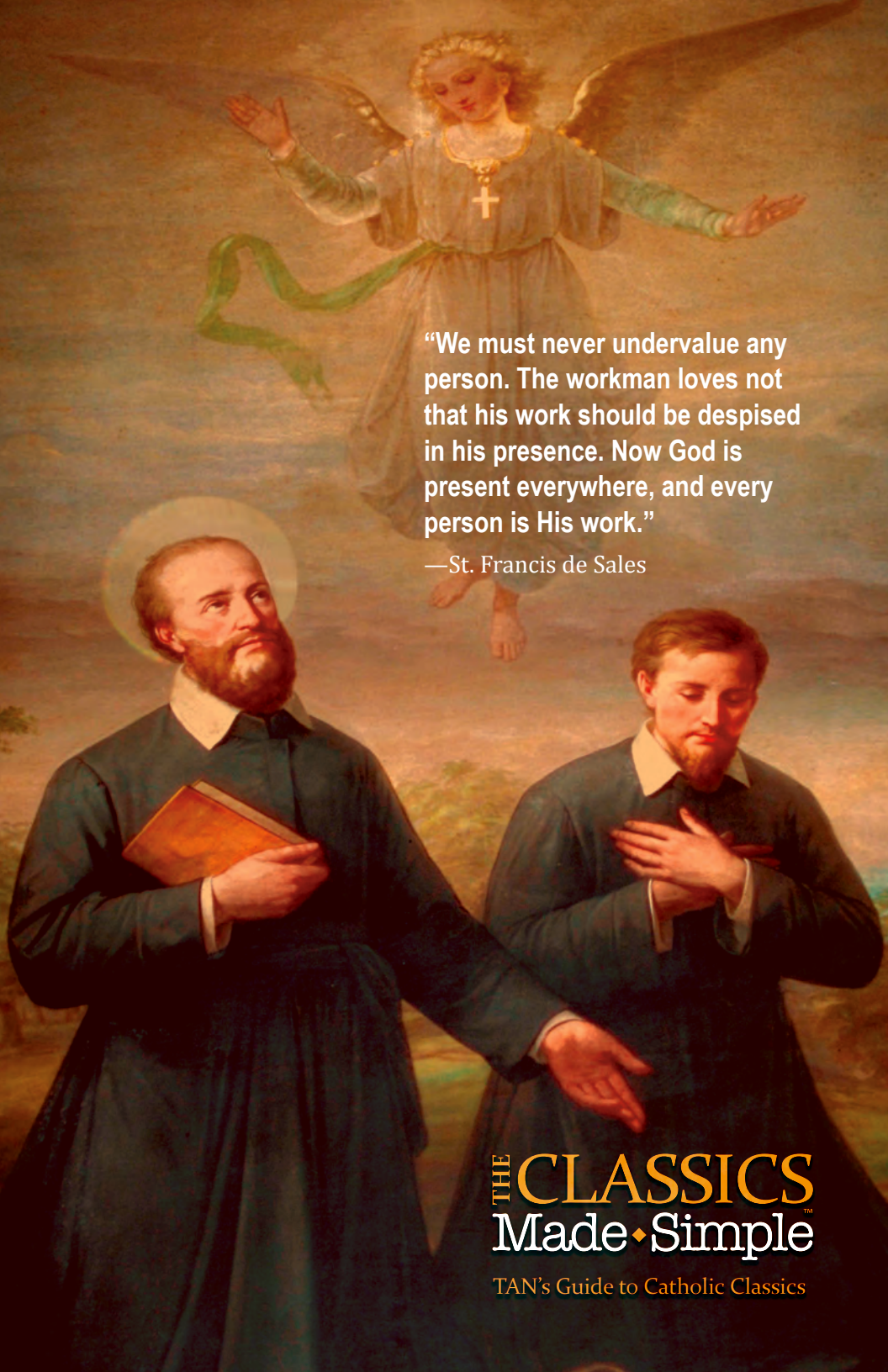


THE CLASSICS
Made ♦ Simple™



The TAN Guide to
*An Introduction
to the
Devout Life*

St. Francis de Sales



“We must never undervalue any person. The workman loves not that his work should be despised in his presence. Now God is present everywhere, and every person is His work.”

—St. Francis de Sales

THE CLASSICS[™]
Made ♦ Simple

TAN's Guide to Catholic Classics



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Gallagher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Gallagher
Publisher
Saint Benedict Press, LLC
TAN Books

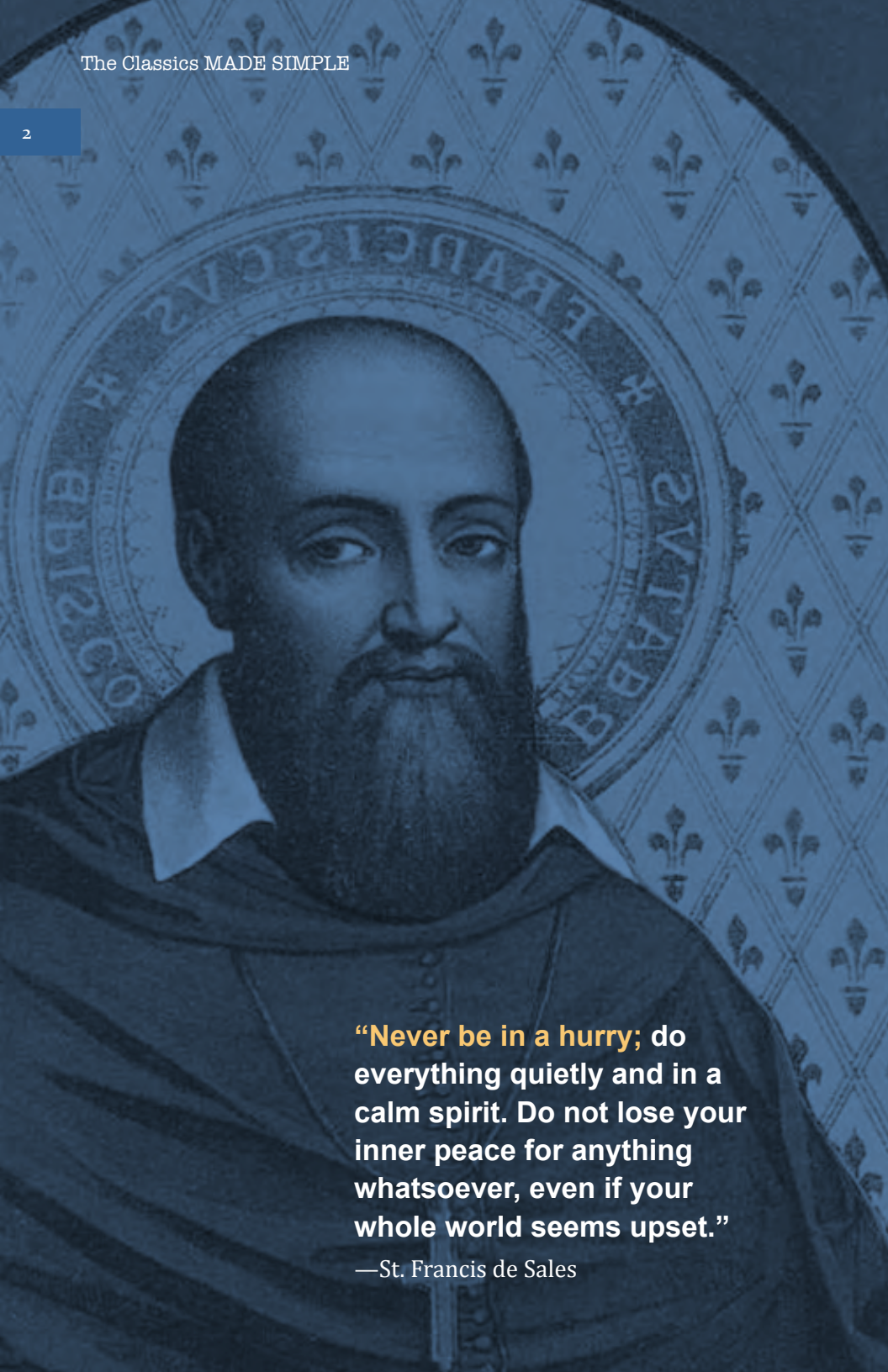
Publisher's Preface

If you're not sure what it means to be "holy," or even how to begin developing a spiritual life—this little booklet was written to get you started. Far more than a brief biography or a summary of the Classic, this booklet is the perfect guide for learning how to read St. Francis de Sales's timeless work on Catholic spirituality and living a truly devout life.

The *Classics Made Simple* series aims to introduce the great works of Catholic literature to a wide readership. The Classics of the Faith are not meant only for saints and scholars: they're meant for everyone. They're wise, human, practical, and they have something important to say to each of us.

The Classics are also timeless. Other books come and go, passing with the tastes and fads of each generation. But the Catholic Classics remain and God has used them to teach and sanctify men and women of every age.

We hope this *TAN Guide* will stir within you a desire to read *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, or if you've already read it, to re-read it with a renewed interest. You'll discover each *TAN Guide* is a perfect vehicle to introduce your newest favorite Classic to your friends and family. Give this little booklet a few minutes of your time and see what happens!



“Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly and in a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset.”

—St. Francis de Sales

Introduction to—*An Introduction to the Devout Life*

To understand any great work of literature—spiritual or otherwise—we have to understand the world in which it was written.

St. Francis de Sales's *An Introduction to the Devout Life* was composed at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Savoy—the mountainous area in eastern France bordering Switzerland and Italy. For the previous fifty years, many of the faithful Catholics of the area had been converted to the Protestantism of John Calvin. Some of them were dismayed by stories of corruption in the Church, and were attracted by the fervent preaching of the Protestant Reformers and the opportunity for what they thought was a simple, Bible-based, personal experience of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of this religious and cultural revolution, God raised up a group of reformers from *within* the Catholic Church. In the mid-sixteenth century, during the turmoil of Calvin's preaching in France, St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Francis Xavier founded the Society of Jesus. Those first Jesuits led the Catholic Church's fight back after the devastating losses of the Reformation. The Jesuits were passionate priests—

radical missionaries who were not afraid to be uncompromising soldiers of Christ. St. Francis de Sales, born about fifty years after St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Francis Xavier, was deeply influenced by the Jesuits and by St. Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*. As a diocesan priest, he complemented the fiery zeal of the Jesuits with his own gentleness, stability, and solid sweetness that secured their gains and won even more souls back to the Faith.

Holiness Is Within Everyone's Reach

St. Francis first wrote *An Introduction to the Devout Life* as a spiritual manual for an aristocratic lady named Louise de Charmoisy, the wife of an ambassador of the Duke of Savoy. St. Francis wrote to her as “Philothea,” which is Greek for “lover of God,” and, indeed, Madame de Charmoisy desired to lead a devout religious life—but her duties as the wife of an ambassador meant that she had to live among the wealthy and within the diplomatic demands and social niceties of courtly life.

St. Francis de Sales was himself from a noble family and understood well the complexities and contradictions of striving for holiness within the corridors of

power and wealth. Nonetheless, he believed that all the faithful, in whatever state of life, were called to be made perfect by God's grace; in *An Introduction* he makes it clear that following Christ is possible for people in all walks of life and at every level of society. In 1609, realizing that his notes to Madame de Charmoisy might be useful for a larger audience, he collected and published them for the first time. It was an immediate success, and Francis kept adding to the book until the publication of its final edition, just three years before his death in 1622.

Within the text we get striking glimpses of the context of its times: chapters on "Forbidden Games," "When We May Play and Dance," and "Balls and Recreations Which Are Lawful but Dangerous." Such anachronistic details can

make the book seem inaccessible in places to the modern reader, but they add to its charm and impart instruction which is easily adapted to life today. Once we understand and make allowances for the historical context (as we do when reading Shakespeare, Dante, or the Douay-Rheims Bible) the historical context ceases to be a difficulty and starts to become a delight. We see why it's no wonder that *An Introduction to the Devout Life* was not only a huge success in its time, but to this day remains one of the perennial classics of the spiritual life, popular among both Catholics and Protestants.

At the heart of the book's popularity is the certain belief that holiness is possible, not just for priests and nuns, but for everyone. The incarnation of Christ teaches us that God's love is interwo-

Christendom at War with Itself



1517

Martin Luther signals the beginning of the Reformation by posting his ninety-five theses at Wittenberg. Subsequently, he is excommunicated on more than forty charges of heresy and remains the dominant figure in the Reformation in Germany until his death in 1546.

1539

St. Ignatius Loyola and his companions found the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in Paris.



1545

The Council of Trent convenes for the first time in Trent, Italy, as part of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. In twenty-five sessions, the council will reaffirm and define Church doctrine on the Bible, Original Sin, Salvation, the Sacraments, and, especially, the Mass and the Eucharist, which were under attack by the Protestants.



1550

The eminent Renaissance art critic Giorgio Vasari publishes his *Lives of the Artists*. At this time the artists Titian and Tintoretto are great masters of Mannerism, an art style focused on the human form depicted in intricate poses and exaggerated settings.

ven with the most ordinary aspects of life. As the poet Henry Vaughn has written, "Here in dust and dirt, O here/ The lilies of His love appear!" Whether in the refined royal courts of aristocratic France, in the courtyard of a farmhouse or the grinding life of a modern home or workplace, St. Francis de Sales's wisdom can be applied. That's because, although this work comes from a particular place and time, it transcends both place and time. The saint's homely wisdom and profound understanding of God's way with the human heart makes the work valuable to all who take the trouble to read and understand. *An Introduction to the Devout Life* may be 400 years old, but it is fresh for each new generation.

The Structure of Sanctity

A good spiritual director understands

that the journey to heaven requires a map, and a map requires clear structure. You can't wander aimlessly and hope to get to heaven. Instead, you need to follow directions carefully and take instruction from a master. St. Francis de Sales is the master spiritual director, and it is no surprise, therefore, to discover that his book has a very sound and logical structure.

An Introduction to the Devout Life is composed of five parts, each representing a stage on the journey to Christ. The first part consists of twenty-four short chapters in which the individual who is seeking instruction learns about the basics of the spiritual life. Here we learn about the foundational need to orient our heart toward God and away from our own worldly desires and inclinations. At the heart of the first stage are

1552

Mary, Queen of Scots, an avid golfer, coins the term "caddy" by calling her assistants cadets. The famous golf course at St. Andrews is built during her reign.



1560

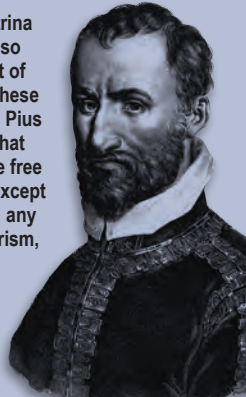
Gianfrancesco Cresci publishes a book to teach good handwriting with images of examples printed from engraved copper plates.

August 21, 1567

Francis de Sales born in the Duchy of Savoy, the eldest child of a noble family.

1570

Compositions by Giovanni Da Palestrina and Orlando di Lasso mark the high point of vocal polyphony. These works satisfy Pope Pius IV's requirements that all church music be free from instruments except the organ and from any evidence of secularism, harmony and folk melody.



ten meditations designed to move the soul from mere theory on the spiritual life to actually laying a sure foundation for growth.

These meditations take the reader on a journey to establish true perspectives and priorities. So, we meditate on creation and the reason we were created, God's mercy and the reality of sin, death, judgment, hell, and heaven. These considerations lead the soul to a new resolve, a general confession, and determination to be purified from sin in order to truly seek God. This first section sheds light on our souls so that we can see clearly what needs to be corrected. In his usual gentle style, St. Francis writes, "As the light waxes fuller, we see the more plainly in our mirror the stains and specks upon our faces. Even so, as the Holy Spirit enlightens our

conscience we perceive more clearly and distinctly the sins, inclinations, and imperfections which hinder us in attaining true devotion."

The second section explains the vital role that prayer and the Sacraments have in the spiritual life. St. Francis explains the importance of meditation, and how to train the mind and heart to meditate effectively. He weaves in the importance of morning and evening prayer and encourages short, moment-by-moment prayers to God in order to experience the presence of God regularly. The section concludes with instructions on reverent reception of the Eucharist and the importance of proper preparation before Mass. As a priest, St. Francis de Sales understood that God's love is what motivates and draws all things and that this love is

Christendom at War with Itself



1581

The first dramatic ballet, the *Balet Comique de la Reine*, is presented during French wedding festivities.

1583–1588

Francis studies rhetoric and humanities at the college of Clermont, Paris, under the care of the Jesuits.

1587

The first public banks for safe deposits and credit transfers are opened in Venice (starting with the Banco della Piazza di Rialto).

1588–1592—Francis studies law at Padua, receives his diploma of doctorate, and is admitted as a lawyer before the senate of Chambéry.

1594–1599—Francis volunteers to evangelize Le Chablais, where the Genevans had imposed Calvinism; his zeal, learning, kindness, and holiness prompt many to return to the Faith.

the beginning and the end of the soul's search for Him. That this love is found in communion with Christ overflows in St. Francis's writing: "Your chief aim in Holy Communion should be to advance, strengthen, and comfort yourself in the love of God; receiving for love's sake what love alone can give."

Section three is a practical exposition on the virtues of the Christian life. Beginning with humility, Francis encourages us to build a solid, modest, reliable, and stable Christian character. There is real, practical advice and wisdom packed in here. We learn about true poverty of spirit and true wealth of spirit. We learn to distinguish true humility, and this helps us manage the distractions that a Christian in the everyday secular world must face. The section ends with instructions on true friendship, the sanc-

tity of marriage, and advice for widows and the unmarried.

St. Francis de Sales realizes that the spiritual life is grounded and motivated by God's grace, but he also reminds us that we must cooperate with that grace, and this is where the hard work comes in: "Our aim is to become good, devout, pious men and women and to that end we must labor . . . let us simply, humbly, and devoutly practice those lowly virtues, the acquisition of which has been appointed by our Savior as our daily task."

Only after he has described how to lay a good foundation, build the first level of prayer and Sacraments and add a second level of solid Christian virtues, does the saint go on to discuss the problem of evil—of temptation and how to resist it. This shows great wisdom. Many direc-



1595

The writings of Matteo Ricci introduce Kung Fu Tzu to Europe under a Latin version of his name: Confucius.

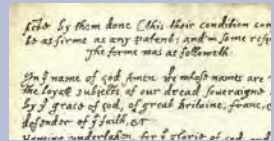
1602

Francis is consecrated as Bishop of Geneva.



1618–1648

The Thirty Years' War, one of the most destructive conflicts in European history, is fought primarily in what is now Germany.



1620

The Mayflower Compact, signed by forty-one of the Pilgrims who crossed the Atlantic seeking religious freedom, becomes the first governing document of Plymouth Colony.

tors might attempt to deal with the problem of sin and evil first, but St. Francis de Sales realizes that first we must orient our hearts toward God then receive the graces from the Sacraments and prayer and strive to live a stable Christian life. Only after receiving all the graces from these actions will we have the strength to confront temptations head on. The realities of temptation and conflict in the spiritual life cannot be avoided. He may be the gentlest of souls, but St. Francis is also a great warrior. He says with confidence and courage, “We can never stand well with the world except by coming to an open breach with it. To satisfy it is impossible . . . whatever we do the world will find fault . . . We are crucified to the world, and the world should be crucified to us. It counts us as fools, let us count its votaries as madmen.”

The last section of the *Introduction* consolidates what went before. St. Francis shows how to examine the conscience, to take our “spiritual temperature” and to cultivate awareness of God’s activity in our lives. In this final section, St. Francis de Sales is intent on keeping the spiritual fires burning. “You must . . . repeat and renew your devout purpose of serving God, for fear that, if you do not you may relapse into your former condition or rather into a worse one, to a lower level than that whereto we had attained.”

Like every good storyteller, St. Francis de Sales returns at the end to his beginning. He started this spiritual odyssey with an exhortation to consider our mortality and our final destinations and he ends with a heartfelt plea to do the

Christendom at War with Itself

December 28, 1622

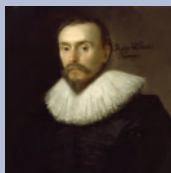
St. Francis dies in Lyons at fifty-six years of age.

1626

Pope Urban VIII solemnly dedicates the new Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, 1,300 years after the first basilica was consecrated by Pope Sylvester I.

1628

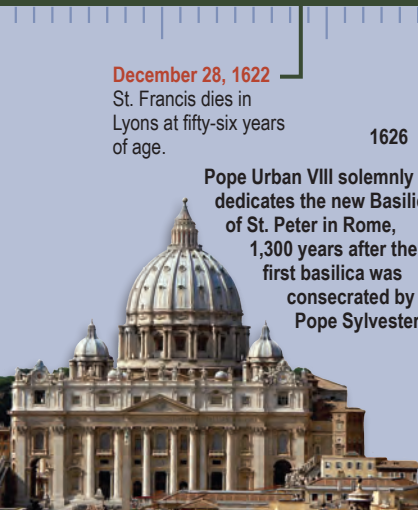
William Harvey publishes *An Anatomical Study of the Motion of the Heart and of the Blood in Animals*, describing how blood is pumped throughout the body by the heart, returning to the heart and recirculating.



1665—St. Francis de Sales canonized by Pope Alexander VII.

1877—St. Francis proclaimed Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX.

1923—Pope Pius XI proclaims St. Francis de Sales the patron of Catholic writers and journalists.



same as a way to constantly renew our devotion and determination to move further up and further in to God's love and goodness. So he writes on his final page, "Look up to heaven, and do not forsake it for earth; look down into Hell, and for the sake of the present moment do not plunge therein . . . if the trials of the devout life seem hard to you say with St. Francis of Assisi, 'How sweet the momentary trials and sorrows, for they lead to Heaven's never-ending joys.'"

The Simplicity of Sanctity

St. Francis de Sales's wisdom is practical, profound, and powerful, but it is also solid, sweet, and simple. St. Francis de Sales does not draw the reader on a path that is strangely supernatural or crazily charismatic. He doesn't lead us into the seventh heaven of

bliss or onto a mountaintop of mysticism. Instead he builds a solid and sure foundation, first in our realization of our need for God, then in our reliance on the Sacraments—the sources of grace in our lives. He then encourages us to work hard with God: to "do our best and let God do the rest."

In *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, St. Francis de Sales is realistic about the everyday battles we will face and reminds us that constant renewal and refreshment in the life of grace will finally bring us to perfection. The simplicity of his recommendations reminds us that everything that is most true is simple but not easy, and it is in choosing this path that will lead us at last to our heavenly home. ♦

DID YOU KNOW?

During the French Revolution, notorious for anti-Catholic vandalism, the reliquary containing St. Francis's heart was moved from Lyons in France to Venice, Italy, where it is still venerated today.

