



## St Francis de Sales

### More than a name



We look to Jesus in order to know God and how God is towards us. That's why Jesus could say 'Learn from me.' He asked us to learn especially that he is 'gentle and humble of heart.' (Mt 11:29). St Francis de Sales is one who learned and lived the gentle love of Christ to such an extent that those who knew him would say that if Jesus were to appear at any time, they would know him because he would be just like Francis.

Don Bosco saw in Francis someone to imitate, someone to model himself on for his life's work. Francis was for him much more than a 'patron saint'. In fact, when he was ordained priest he made this resolution: 'The love and gentleness of St Francis de Sales will guide me in everything'. Logically then, he felt compelled to say that anyone who wanted to share in his work for young people had to have 'the spirit of Francis de Sales'. They were to live the Gospel of Jesus as Francis did. What does that imply?

### Under God's tender love

For Francis, God is above all the God of my heart. He is father and mother to me: he carries me and nurtures me; his heart touches my heart and draws me gently into a covenant with Jesus, whose most tender love was shown when he died for me on the Cross.

My daily life is the ordinary place to find God. For Francis the 'present moment' is like an eighth sacrament, a sacred meeting-place with God. Nothing is more sure than his presence to me. 'As sure as the sun will rise tomorrow, so surely will he be there with me as he is today'.

I can have the deepest trust in God. 'If I have some heavy cross to bear', says Francis, 'he will either take it from me or give me the strength to carry it'. There is no need for any fear.

## **The gift of life**

My life, in all its humanness, is unique and beautiful - God's great gift to me. It's mine to live with joy and optimism. I really am in God's hands. I can find the inner strength to face whatever life throws at me. But I must be real about today and not dream idly of tomorrow. Softness and indulgence bring only sadness. There is joy, freedom and peace of heart to be found where love is genuine and without compromise. It's a journey to God that's possible for anyone.

Francis believed passionately in the radical goodness to be found in each one of us: a potential for good that's greater than any tendency to evil. This 'humanism' of Francis encourages me to believe in a full blossoming of my life, both natural and supernatural. This is the way of 'Salesian holiness'. He had no time for a 'gloom and doom' feel about life. 'Nourish yourself with joy' he would say. Preachers who taught otherwise were 'traitors of humanity'.

## **Fire in the heart**

Francis, like Jeremiah, had a prophet's heart that couldn't say 'No' to God. This strong, apostolic zeal coupled with gentle, pastoral love were the perfect model for Don Bosco's 'Salesians' who were to win the hearts of the young. Strength that is gentle; gentleness that is strong. Only kindness can win hearts: kindness that pays the price of unlimited availability, patience and self-denial.

## **Circle of Love**

Jesus came to reveal 'the loving-kindness of the heart of our God'. Francis and Don Bosco knew that all starts from him and all leads back to him. Love is the beginning, love is the end, love is the way.