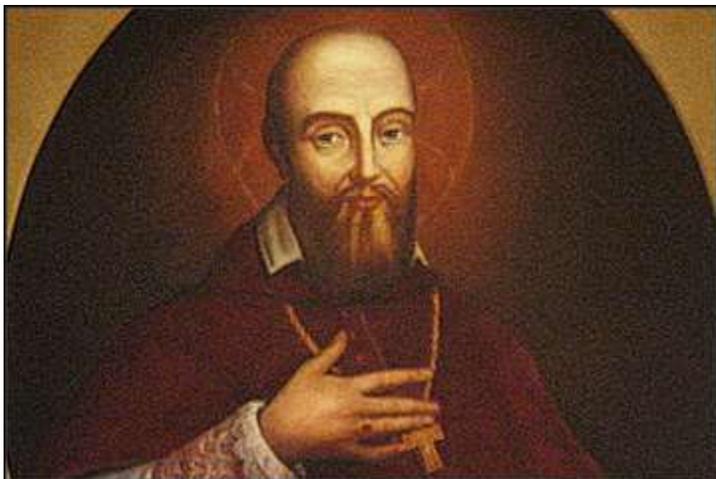


HERITAGE - ST. FRANCIS DE SALES BIOGRAPHY

Francis de Sales was born of a noble family on August 21, 1567, near Annecy in what is now France. As the eldest of thirteen children and heir to the family name, he was destined to a career in the service of the state. He studied in Annecy, in Paris, and finally in Padua where he took a doctorate in law to please his father and one in theology to please himself. He wanted to be a priest. His father wanted him to be a lawyer. With his mother's encouragement, Francis was ordained in 1593.



Although he became bishop of Geneva in 1602, his cathedral and residence were in Annecy because at that time Geneva was a stronghold of Calvinism. He spent his life in the service of the people of his diocese, particularly in preaching and giving spiritual direction. He wrote two classics of spiritual literature, and in 1610 with Jane Frances de Chantal founded a new religious congregation, the Sisters of the Visitation of Holy Mary. He died at the age of fifty-five in Lyons, France, on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, December 28, 1622.

For one of his most important works as a priest, and bishop, Francis de Sales chose to encourage people in every occupation and situation to the pursuit of what he

called "the devout life."

In addition to his personal ministry, he wrote many letters; over two thousand are extant. He organized his letters of spiritual direction into a book called *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, the first handbook on spirituality for the laity. He later published the *Treatise on the Love of God* which describes the development and growth of the love relationship between God and human beings.

During his lifetime, Francis touched the lives of thousands of people with his wise and loving counsels, and his writings have extended hope and consolation to countless others in the centuries since his death. Today he is still a sure guide for those who have discovered his gentle, sublime, yet realistic approach to God.

Francis teaches cheerfulness, optimism, and inspired common sense; his readers can experience something of that divine love and hope which are characteristic of this lovable saint. His words are tender and sincere, as if he were talking to a loved and long standing friend. His published books are quite long by today's standards, but his ideas are stated in sentences that were fairly short for his era. He drew images from all around him in real life as well as from books which taught the knowledge of his times. His shorter inspirational gems, even removed from their settings, retain their meaning and inspiration.

Francis emphasized the need for inner conversion; actions always follow the leadings of the heart. He acknowledged that busyness and a hectic lifestyle are normal for most people and are not themselves obstacles to a "devout life"; it is only necessary to seek God in each moment in order to find God.

http://www.visitationmonastery.org/visitation_francis_bio.html