



Feast Day: August 12th

Finding Patience & Gentleness with St. Jane Frances de Chantal

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“The best practice of the virtue of patience in the spiritual life is bearing with oneself in failure and feebleness of will”
(St. Jane Frances de Chantal)

Many stories of St. Jane Frances de Chantal focus on her noble upbringing, her courage in the face of life's challenges, and her sensitivity. But few show the story of how she grew in gentleness and patience when her natural inclination was perfectionism, finding herself inflexible and stuck on achieving high standards. In *“The Heart of Perfection: How the Saints Taught Me To Trade My Dream of Perfect for God's,”* Colleen Carroll Campbell tells this story of Jane - the one that reveals Jane not as a distant saint but, rather, a holy friend, much like us in many ways. Jane was known to correct her children strictly, even for small mistakes; to demand high standards from her relatives and employees; and to adhere strictly to her devotional schedule, even if it meant neglecting the needs of others. But Jane's journey to God is one for all of us to learn from and remember.

St. Francis de Sales encouraged Jane to practice patience. He asked her to trade her harsh penances for the sacrifices that come to us in our daily life - those challenges and frustrations that offer us a choice to respond in love or in annoyance. He wanted her to respond to those challenges with gentleness. A fruit of the Holy Spirit, gentleness has to do with being tender in our disposition.

Who Was St. Jane Frances de Chantal?

St. Jane was a wife and mother as well as a nun and founder of a religious community. When she was only a baby, her mother died. She married Baron de Chantal at age of 21, and she had six children, three of whom died in infancy. Though she lived in a castle, she engaged in charities and reestablished the custom of attending daily Mass. When her husband was killed after seven years of marriage, she fell into deep sadness.

In 1604, at the age of 32, Jane met St. Francis de Sales, who served as her spiritual director. He asked her to defer her decision to become a nun, so she vowed to remain unmarried and follow her director's advice. In 1610, they founded the Visitation Order, dedicated to embracing the virtues of Mary as embodied in the Magnificat - her gentleness and humility. During her religious life, she endured great sufferings; many of the people closest to her died, including St. Francis de Sales, and a plague destroyed France. She also underwent many spiritual trials.

Practicing Gentleness Like St. Jane

Following St. Francis' advice, Jane practiced gentleness in seemingly ordinary ways, yet these simple ways freed her from her desires and inclinations toward control and inflexibility. First, she sang the Psalms. As songs of praise, the Psalms invite us into joy,

awe, and gratitude toward God. She also corrected with tenderness and substituted difficult penances with the opportunities for sacrifice that came through daily life. Finally, she remained patient while waiting to see changes in herself and others.

Leading Like a Mother

As the patron saint of mothers, widows, and wives, St. Jane Frances de Chantal encourages us to use our motherhood, including our spiritual motherhood, in every realm of our lives. In “Spiritual Motherhood: Every Woman’s Calling,” Alice von Hildebrand writes, “Spiritual motherhood is more important than biological motherhood ... You are called to motherhood right now ... Your task is to love those that are weak, unhappy, helpless, and unloved.”

One piece of advice from Jane stands out [...]. In her letters, a common theme emerges. She constantly advises others to pursue gentleness: “You should be continually helping them to advance, but do it gently, and bear with the little weaknesses which are in some.” When we “win by gentleness,” we make a holy turn toward God’s vision of perfection.

Our Lady of Tenderness, pray for us!

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