

The image is a composite of several elements. At the top, a painting depicts a woman in a red dress holding a young child. In the background, a large white castle with multiple towers and windows is visible. Below the castle, a cityscape with a prominent church spire is shown. In the bottom right corner, there is a portrait of a nun in a black habit with a white collar and a cross on her chest. In the bottom left corner, a woman is shown in profile, looking down at a book or document. The text 'St. Jane de Chantal' is overlaid in the center in a large, red, bold font.

# St. Jane de Chantal

## Cover Story

The cover is a pictorial story of the life of St. Jane de Chantal. The story takes form over what is imaginatively a French countryside. It begins with a portrait of Jane that was painted in 1592 when she was 20 years old. We view her in her role of mother, pictured near the Château of Bourbilly which was her home for a time and where she fed the poor in what would today be called a “soup kitchen.” Portrayed through classic art is Jane’s husband, Cristophe, who was shot in a hunting accident. This led to a period of tremendous grief for this young mother and to her struggle to forgive the man whose bullet was fatal. Finally, through a 1636 portrait, we see Jane as a Visitandine in the final chapter of her life. Her life as young woman, mother, widow, and nun blossoms into a completeness with which a woman of today can identify in any of her roles.

## Art Credits

Portrait (1592) — Jean-Francois Frémyot

Portrait (1636) — St. Jane de Chantal

Château of Bourbilly with bread line from  
depression picture

Charles I of England—Anthony Van Dyck

Storm over Toledo — El Greco

Magdalen with the Smoking Flame  
George de La Tour

*Sharing Prayerful  
Moments  
with  
St. Jane de Chantal*

*Wife, Mother, Widow  
and  
Foundress  
of the  
Visitation Order*

## *Acknowledgements*

Scriptural quotations have been taken from two sources: “Holy Bible; New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha,” Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1991, and “New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs; Contemporary English Version,” American Bible Society, N.Y., 1991.

Quotations from St. Jane Frances de Chantal have been taken from various sources including the Conferences of St. Jane de Chantal, “The Answers,” “The Spiritual Life, St. Jane Frances de Chantal,” “The Spirit of St. Jane Frances de Chantal as Shown by her Letters,” and many others which have long been out of print. Excerpts from “FRANCIS DE SALES, JANE DE CHANTAL: Letters of Spiritual Direction,” translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, VHM, copyright © 1988 by Peronne Marie Thibert, VHM, Wendy M. Wright, and Joseph F. Power, OSFS; used with permission of Paulist Press. [www.paulistpress.com](http://www.paulistpress.com)

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## **Live + Jesus**

### **FOREWORD**

The inspiration for this booklet on the spirituality of the foundress of the Visitation Order, St. Jane de Chantal, came during a Ministry Network Meeting in 1998. The members of the network believed that the life experiences, teachings and example of this holy woman could speak to women of the 21st century with clarity and inspiration.

Since our secondary schools are engaged in the education of young women, we saw in this booklet a tangible way to share the spiritual riches of a woman who found paths to sanctity as a young woman, wife, mother, widow and religious. This final product reflects the united efforts of our Visitation schools in St. Louis, Missouri; Mendota Heights, Minnesota; Wheeling, West Virginia, and Georgetown, Washington, DC.

We hope that those with whom we share this booklet- our students, our alumnae, our neighbors, our friends and the “moms” who come to our monasteries and schools- will treasure and live the spiritual legacy of this great woman of God.

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# **St. Jane de Chantal**

## **A Brief Introduction**

Jane Frances Frémyot de Chantal was born in 1572 in Dijon, France, the second child of a noble family. Her mother died when she was eighteen months old and she was reared by her father who gave her an extraordinary education for a young girl of her time. She was intelligent, strong-willed and full of faith in God. In 1592, she married the Baron Christophe de Rabutin-Chantal. Jane loved her husband deeply and theirs was a happy marriage, despite Christophe's occasional infidelities. He was very much involved in court life, loved hunting and had not the slightest interest in managing his household and estates. This task he gave into Jane's capable hands. She proved to be a skillful administrator, and by establishing certain economic principles, she was able to pay off Christophe's debts and make the place a profitable venture.

Jane and Christophe had four children: three daughters, Marie-Aimee, Françoise, and Charlotte, and one son, Celse-Benigne. She also reared and educated Christophe's illegitimate daughter, Claudine de Chantal. In 1601, tragedy struck. Christophe was accidentally shot and killed while hunting with a friend. Jane was devastated; her grief knew no bounds, and it was a long time before she could bring herself to forgive the person responsible for his death.

Following Christophe's death, Jane's father-in-law demanded that she make her home with him and take over the supervision of his estate. He threatened to disinherit her children unless she complied with his wishes. Once again, she set to work to bring order out of chaos and she was very successful.

Not only did she manage the property, but she reared her father-in-law's illegitimate children, suffered much from their mother, the titled housekeeper of the home. She also saw to the spiritual and physical needs of the poor of the area, and even set up a soup kitchen which she operated out of the castle.

In 1604, Jane was invited by her brother, the Archbishop of Bourges, to attend a series of Lenten sermons being given by the learned and charismatic new Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales. Jane and Francis were introduced to one another and immediately established a bond of friendship that was to produce a Gospel-based spirituality that would be a treasure to the Church for all ages.

Francis confided to Jane his desire to found a religious order that would be welcoming to women seeking a deep relationship with God, but who for one reason or another could not live with the physical rigors of traditional religious life. In 1610, they officially established the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. Like Francis, Jane was a good spiritual guide. She advised the nuns on their prayer life as well as the practicalities of living in community. After Francis' death in 1622, Jane continued the work, founding eighty-six houses of the Visitation by the time of her death in 1641. She was beatified in 1751 and canonized in 1767. The Church in the United States celebrates her feast on August 18.

# THE PRESENCE OF GOD

## Commentary

Both Jane and Francis had strong desires for a life of quiet contemplation and yet their positions of responsibility thrust them into the midst of intense activity. During her lifetime Jane founded or assisted in founding over eighty monasteries in France. She frequently had to leave the monastery to care for the temporal needs of her children. In addition, her reputation for sanctity led many to the convent parlor to seek spiritual direction from her, and she carried on a voluminous correspondence with the Visitation sisters as well as with many lay persons.

Jane's advice to the sisters shows us how she managed to keep her soul in peace before the presence of God, despite the many interruptions of her business affairs: "Since our Divine Savior dwells continually with us, as in his temple, let us faithfully abide with him and never leave him save to execute his commands and having done so, come back straightway to this holy and simple attention before him. I strongly recommend this practice to you because it is an admirable way of perfecting all our actions."

### Reflection questions:

1. In your round of daily duties, where do you most easily find the presence of God?
2. How does the practice of performing our actions purely for the love of God make us attentive to his presence, even if we are not conscious of it?
3. Why would Jane tell us that "to be in a hurry about what we do stifles the spirit of prayer and impedes that living in His presence which should be our aim?"
4. Reflect on how you spend a typical day. What will help you to accomplish "doing all things through love, nothing through constraint?"
5. How can you achieve some balance in your life?

# THE PRESENCE OF GOD

## Application

### SCRIPTURE

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence singing for joy. (Psalm 100:2)

Be silent in the presence of the Lord. (Zephania 1:2)

Now to God our Savior who enables you to stand in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, authority before all time now and forever. (Jude 24)

### JANE'S WORDS

To feel God's presence so intimately and powerfully, so that you are no longer aware of yourself is to have that little drop of water, self, dissolved in the ocean of divinity.

We must keep our hearts open and wait for the heavenly dew to fall, because the graces of prayer are not like water welling up from the earth, but more like water coming down from the heavens.

Let us keep our hearts and spirits centered in God! We will experience the union with God which the Divine Savior begged from his Father. Before his passion, Jesus prayed that the apostles and all those who believed in him would be one with him. Just as the Father was in him and he in the Father, so all would be united lovingly together in him.

# PRAYER

## Commentary

Throughout most of her religious life, Jane was tormented by temptations against the faith. Her prayer was frequently filled with dryness and rarely did she experience warm feelings of closeness to God. In spite of the fact that she hardly ever felt consolation in prayer, the good Lord seems to have guided Jane into the ways of a prayer of great simplicity. Perhaps it was her sufferings that enabled her to turn away from herself and cling to God in more simple ways. Today we call this “Centering Prayer.” Let us hear Jane speak for herself:

Those who are led by this path, she wrote, are obligated to a great purity of heart, humility, submission, and total dependence on God. They must simplify their spirit in every way, by bypassing reflections on the past, the present and the future. Instead of looking to what they are doing or will do, they must look to God, forgetting themselves as much as possible in all things in favor of this continual remembrance, uniting their spirits in his goodness in everything that happens to them.

The essence of prayer is not found in always being on our knees, but in keeping our wills closely united to God’s in all events. The soul which holds itself ready and open to yield itself obediently on any occasion, and which receives these occasions lovingly as sent from God, can do this even while sweeping the floor.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Compare and/or contrast “Centering Prayer” with Jane’s prayer, so replete with dryness and the seeming absence of God.
2. What does Jane mean by the need to simplify one’s spirit in order to look to God in prayer?
3. How does keeping our will united to God in all events qualify as prayer?

# **PRAYER**

## **Application**

### **SCRIPTURE**

Go and if he calls, you shall say, “Speak Lord for Thy servant is listening.” (Sam. I, 3:9)

Truly God has listened, he has given heed to the words of my prayer. (Psalm 66:19)

Whenever you pray, go into your room, shut the door and pray to your Father in secret. (Matt.6:6)

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Phil. 4:6)

### **JANE’S WORDS**

#### **Three Methods of Prayer**

The first consists in making use of our imagination, by representing the Divine Jesus in his cradle, in the arms of his Holy Mother and of the great Saint Joseph. We must represent the mystery very simply to ourselves.

The second way is to use considerations by representing to ourselves the virtues our Lord practiced, his humility, his patience, his meekness, and his charity towards his enemies. In these considerations, we will feel our will wholly moved in God and will produce strong affections from which we draw resolutions for the day.

The third way is to keep ourselves simply in God’s presence by looking at him with the eyes of faith in each mystery, conversing with him by words full of confidence. Then remain quietly in his presence, neither troubling nor disturbing yourself for any dryness which may befall you.

# RESTING IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

## Commentary

Jane's combination of humanness and holiness can help us strengthen our souls and grow in spirituality. The more we learn and read about her the more inspired we will be by her teachings. Jane's desire to dedicate her life completely to God as well as the fact that she did this while raising a family and managing her estates for her children's benefit, shows the character which makes her the ultimate role model for each of us. Faithfulness and confidence in God give us strength in our daily lives. They enable us to remember why we are on this earth and prompt us to think always of God's providential plans for us. This attitude keeps us on track. When we stumble and fall, it is faith and hope that help us get up again. Jane followed God's will without question. Faithfulness to God was most important to her because she was convinced that all things come from God. Her faith was the secret of her strength.

And these words of Francis were among the treasures found in Jane's Book of Rules which she always carried in her pocket:

Our Lord loves you, my dear Mother, he wants you to be all his; let no other arm now carry you, may his providence alone be your rest. Do not look elsewhere, let your spirit dwell in him alone...not in friendship, nor in the union God gave us, nor in your children, your own heart, your own soul or anything else whatever, for you have given all to God. And now, whatever you have to do, do it, not because you want to do it, but only because God wills it.

### Reflection questions:

1. How can we discern God's will for us?
2. Is your faith your strength?
3. Have you ever been helpless and weak before God?  
How have you grown because of this?

# RESTING IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

## Application

### SCRIPTURE

You are the Lord, You alone; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their hosts, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life and the hosts of heaven worship you. (Nehemiah 9:6)

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens and he rules over the whole creation. (Psalm 103:19)

Aren't two sparrows sold for only a penny? But your Father knows when any one of them falls to the ground. Even the hairs on your head are counted. Do not be afraid! You are worth much more than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)

### JANE'S WORDS

My dear Sister, God's plans for you are so wonderful! Even though his ways are painful in nature, I am sure you will experience them as sweeter than honey in the depths of your heart.

My dear Sisters, our self-sufficiency and capabilities are partial and weak if they are not sustained and guided by God who is the source of all the good we can ever accomplish.

Listen, my Daughters, to what the divine Master says to us: *Unless you become as little children you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.* O lesson of innocence, of simplicity, of openness, of good faith, of artlessness, of perfect submission, and trust. What do you say, Lord? *Unless we become as little children.* Do we weigh its import, its gravity?

# MAKING HOLINESS ATTRACTIVE

## Commentary

When first married, Jane arranged for Mass to be said before the hunt, her husband's favorite pastime. She had daily Mass offered at Bourbilly which she attended regularly and encouraged her servants to attend. When living with her father-in-law, she rose very early in the morning and rode horseback to Mass. She then managed to be back at the castle in time to have breakfast with him. She was very resourceful in order to be true to what was important to her. Jane took care of her devotions in a way that did not impose her will on others, but she made the good attractive to her children and the rest of the household. She did not manipulate others to do what she wanted, but she always found a way to take care of the things that were essential to nourish her faith. All was done in a gentle spirit and with a certain sense of humor.

Her husband was also expected to rise early for Mass. Once she told this story to the novices: "I remember how M. de Chantal used to like to sleep late in the morning; but I had to rise early in order to organize everything for the day. When it began to be late, I would go back to our bedroom and make some noise coming in so as to awaken him. Then I'd say there would be plenty of time for whatever he wanted to do that day after Mass had been said in the chapel. I'd begin to get impatient; I'd go and pull back the bed curtains and cry out, 'We're late! We should both be up. The chaplain is already vested and he's ready to begin Mass,' and if all that didn't wake him up, I'd take a lighted candle and hold it in front of his face and tease him until he was awake and on his feet."

### **Reflection questions:**

1. How can we make the good attractive to others?
2. Why is a sense of humor such a necessary and useful part of affection?
3. How can we discover ways to do the things that nourish our faith?
4. How do we fail to find ways to do the things that nourish our faith?

# MAKING HOLINESS ATTRACTIVE

## Application

### SCRIPTURE

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self... and to be renewed in the spirit, and to clothe yourselves with the new self created according to the likeness of God in true holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Pursue peace with everyone and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)

Join with me in suffering for the Gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace. (2 Timothy 1:8, 9)

### JANE'S WORDS

Run cheerfully and lovingly in the ways of God's good pleasure, my dear Sisters.

It is better to attract hearts by your modest Christian manner and by a spirit of gentle and gracious affability.

The strongest desire I have is to see you, my Sisters, earnest in doing your duty and in advancing toward holiness... The mother's love I bear you makes me long for your happiness and your spiritual profit.

# JOY-FILLED DEVOTION

## Commentary

While devotion to God was always Jane's and Francis' primary goal, they also recognized the necessity of working in the real world with real and fallible people. Therefore, they continually advised that devotion to God should look pleasant and appealing to others. They had little patience with a harsh asceticism that only served to put people off.

The spirit of the Visitation Order is one of joyful devotion in the service of others. Mary went in haste--often interpreted as going joyfully--into the hill country to minister to her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth's child leaped with joy when he heard the sound of Mary's greeting. In her direction of the Sisters of the Visitation, Jane followed the lead of Francis who at all times told her to make devotion lovable. It was his special gift and the following letter to a married woman outlines his teachings on the subject:

You should not only be devout and love devotion, but you should make it pleasing to others. And you will make it pleasing if you make it useful and acceptable. The sick will like your devotion if it enables them to be consoled; your family, if they find you are more attentive to their own particular needs, more sympathetic towards events that take place, less reproofing, and so on; your husband, if he sees that as your devotion increases you become more kindly with him and sweeter in the affection you bear him. In short, you must make devotion as attractive as possible.

### Reflection questions:

1. What are some of the ways that we can put people off with our devotional or religious practices?
2. How can we make our devotional practices attractive and pleasing to others?
3. How could this ideal be put into practice in our schools and homes?

# JOY-FILLED DEVOTION

## Application

### SCRIPTURE

Those who counsel peace have joy. (Proverbs 12:20)

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." (Luke 1:46)

Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (I Peter 1:8)

### JANE'S WORDS

This sister has to be led slowly and tenderly. You see, my dear, we have to cultivate in these young, delicate souls lots of vigor, cheerfulness, and joy, and thus bring them to want those things they would fear or dread if they were led in any other manner.

Keep minds expansive, joyous and generous. Make them feel confident of your good will; and though all may not advance with the alacrity you would like to see at this beginning, for the love of God, my dearest daughter, do not let any dissatisfaction or ennui be seen on your part, for that would dampen their courage, whereas to show content will raise it.

May God be blessed for the graces he confers upon you, which I see are great. You ought to correspond with them faithfully by following with a careful, loving attention your inward attraction, for this is the characteristic and special spirit of the daughters of the Visitation. Return then, my dear daughter, with humility and sweetness to this joyful state and remain there steadfastly and constantly, without ever allowing yourself to be diverted from it. For the spirit of God is tender and loving.

# LIVING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

## Commentary

Both Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales firmly believed and taught that holiness was cultivated by striving to live in the present moment. This means not only should we abandon ourselves to God's will but also we should give up our natural tendency to worry needlessly about the past and the future. It means that we should not worry about how much time we have to serve God, but to serve him well at each moment.

Living in the present moment means living each moment as an offering to God, accepting what he sends at the time, and lovingly meeting him in every event, person and situation that comes our way. As Francis said and Jane constantly preached by word and example: "At every event we should exclaim, Dominus est! It is the Lord; and we should feel each circumstance of our life as a special gift from him."

### Reflection questions:

1. How can we put this ideal of living in the present moment into practice?
2. What are some of the benefits of living in the present moment?
3. What can we learn about ourselves when we strive to live in the present moment?

# LIVING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

Oh, that today you would listen to his voice. (Psalm 95:7)

He said to them, why are you afraid? Have you no faith?  
(Mark 4:40)

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him,  
“Hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today.”  
(Luke 19:5)

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!  
(2 Corinthians 6:2)

### JANE’S WORDS

We must live in the present moment without forecast and care for ourselves.

We cannot always offer God great things, but at each moment we can offer him little things with great love.

Believe me, if in all simplicity you receive whatever is presented to you in food, clothing or other things, embracing all the contradictions that come your way, they will be as profitable, more profitable than the austerities you desire to practice.

Look to God, forget self and all else to please him.

# LOVE OF GOD'S WILL

## Commentary

Francis' description of a Sister of the Visitation as "the Will of God in her," surely applies first and foremost to Jane de Chantal. Her whole life could be called an image of love stretched out, surrendered, offered, accepting all in its embrace of the Will of God. The Church holds her up as a model in four walks of life: daughter, wife, mother, religious. When these various stages of her life are presented by her biographers we see Jane as a beautiful woman--radiant, loving, gentle, firm, good natured with a sense of humor; at times sad, even overcome with sorrow, but always abandoned to God's holy Will. Following the example of Jesus, her Savior, she saw it as her food, and it was ever the lesson she taught her daughters of the Visitation--day in and day out, this beloved Will was her life and her salvation.

She urged dependence on God and told the sisters it was the only method for reforming the soul. "We must really know ourselves," she said, "so that nothing must be looked for from us, but much indeed from God and his grace which he will give us without fail."

### **Reflection questions:**

1. Do lay persons need to practice this powerlessness and obedience as rigorously as religious? Why or why not?
2. In what ways is this idea of dependence on God at odds with values our culture places on independence? Does this make it easier or harder to be dependent on God?
3. How can embracing the will of God bring peace into your life, especially when facing difficulties and disappointments?

# LOVE OF GOD'S WILL

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

Teach me to do your will, because you are my God.  
(Psalm 143:10)

We remain silent except to say, "The Lord's will be done."  
(Acts 21:14)

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. (I Peter 4:1)

Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. (Matt 25:50)

Let it be done to me according to your will. (Luke 1:38)

Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done. (Luke 22:42)

### JANE'S WORDS:

If we keep ourselves in close union with God's Will, he will give us all needful light.

Simplicity does not philosophize on what others do or say. Never swerving from its search for God and his Will, it loyally shuts out the attention from other things and keeps it exclusively for him.

In everything good or ill that befalls us, see only the Will of God. Then whatsoever the event we shall always be tranquil because we shall have no love, no desire other than that of his adorable Will.

# ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING

## Commentary

Jane was no stranger to suffering, especially the suffering caused by the death of a loved one. Her mother died while Jane was a baby; her husband was killed in a hunting accident when she was very young and it happened just after the birth of her fourth child. Three of her children preceded her in death as did Francis and the two sisters who began the Visitation Order with her.

Her words of consolation to her daughter, Françoise, after the death of her husband, Jane's son-in-law, reveal the love and concern she had for her daughter at this time of great sorrow. As one who had borne a similar loss, her words reflect a keen understanding of the suffering Françoise was enduring.

I was deeply moved by your letter, my darling, which tells me how keenly you are suffering. Truly your sorrow is great, and, when looked at only in terms of this earthly life, it is overwhelming. But if you can look beyond the ordinary and shifting events of life and consider the infinite blessings and consolations of eternity you will find comfort in these reversals as well as joy in the assured destiny of him whom you mourn...

I beg Our Lord to help you find the rich treasure which his goodness has hidden at the very core of the pain that comes to you from his hand...Courage, my dear daughter! May you find strength in these thoughts.

### Reflection questions:

1. How did Jane's childhood and young widowhood prepare her for the trials of her later years?
2. Why was Jane able to acknowledge God's ways as painful to nature, and yet say with such assurance that "they were sweeter than honey" in the depths of the heart?

# ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING

## Application

### SCRIPTURE

If you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. (I Peter 2:20, 2)

As they left the country, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer for the sake of the name. (Acts 5:41)

It is written about the Son of Man that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt. (Mark 9:12)

### JANE'S WORDS:

The richness of our souls lies in their ability to suffer much in peace and love.

Let all your difficulties increase your courage and trust in the Lord.

How could any dishonor we receive compare to the indignities heaped upon our gentle Savior! How do our sufferings compare to his? Consider the incomparable pain Jesus endured in Gethsemane when he submitted his will to that of his Father for our salvation!... he was considered an ignorant nobody, the son of a carpenter. If we were to keep this in mind, how differently we would receive the contradictions, embarrassments, and even disgraces that come our way!

# JANE, WOMAN OF COMPASSION

## Commentary

During her marriage to Christophe, one of Jane's greatest joys was service to the poor and sick. She devoted herself to them at her husband's estates in Bourbilly and later at Monthelon, her father-in-law's estate. She saw it as one way to share her blessings with those less fortunate and she delighted in providing bread and soup personally to the poor persons who came to her door. Often some of them who had just received food from her would pretend to leave, go around the house and then take their place in line once again and ask for more. When challenged as to why she allowed these people to get away with such a thing, Jane replied, "What if God turned me away when I came back to him again and again with the same request?"

She was always the advocate for the servants and farmers who toiled in Christophe's fields. He was just but tended towards severity and this would prompt Jane to request a lighter sentence for the culprit. Her husband complained, "Maybe I am a little hasty, but you are too kind." Sometimes Christophe remained inflexible, so Jane would secretly visit and console the prisoners. Many nights she led some poor fellow out of the dark, damp dungeon to a room where she had prepared a comfortable bed for him. Then in the early hours of morning she took him back to his dungeon cell and later joined her unsuspecting husband for breakfast.

### Reflection questions:

1. What are some of the ways that we share our blessings with others?
2. Is there a connection between this kind of generosity and living in the present moment?
3. How do we respond to people who make repeated requests of us?

# JANE, WOMAN OF COMPASSION

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

Be mindful of Your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. (Psalm 5:6)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." (Lamentations 3:22-24)

For God says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (Romans 9:15)

As he went ashore, Jesus saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. (Mark 6:34)

### JANE'S WORDS:

O God, I am continually begging at the gate of thy mercy... Would I want to be turned away the second or third time?

A sister does something that is not commendable. Let it be and go to God; meanwhile let us take an honest look into ourselves and maybe we shall find worse things there.

There is nothing which so much brings down God's mercy upon us as our having recourse with humility to his goodness for all things.

# JANE, WOMAN OF COURAGE

## Commentary

Jane was a person of her time who sought holiness in the situations in which she found herself. She suffered valiantly and yet kept going. She wasn't afraid to be who she was: a woman of courage, who was faithful to the commitments that came with each stage of her life as wife, mother, friend, counselor and teacher.

In advising another sister, Jane quoted Francis: "We have to have strong, unshakable, long-winded courage when we undertake the good works committed to us by God and as long as we see his holy Will in them we must never grow slack. Should he wish us to cease trying, even if we have failed, we must let go, gently and peaceably."

When Archbishop Marquemont made his demands for a change in the structure of the Visitation Order, Jane was all for resisting, "Write to my Lord of Lyons in strong ink," she advised Francis. History tells us what happened. Francis knew that the spread of his Order depended on its acceptance by the King of France who relied heavily on such churchmen as Archbishop Marquemont to give approval for religious houses to be established in the country. He discerned that it would be better to acquiesce to the Archbishop's wishes--establish a regular Order approved by Rome, with solemn vows, and cloister. Jane, of course, followed suit and never uttered another word against the new situation. But we can wonder which required more courage of Jane--for her to have gone against the Archbishop's wishes or to yield her cherished plans and to accept such a radical change for the little congregation she loved so much.

### **Reflection questions:**

1. What are some of the little things that we can offer God in our everyday lives?
2. Why would God be especially pleased in our fulfilling and offering to him our everyday commitments?
3. What are some ways to keep this goal of offering every little thing to God uppermost in our minds?

# JANE, WOMAN OF COURAGE

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34)

When Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offering and sin offerings You have taken no pleasure. Then said I, "See, God, I have come to do your Will. O God, in the scroll of the book it is written of me." (Hebrews 10:5-7)

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him. (John 19:16-18)

### JANE'S WORDS:

Live joyously and courageously, my dear daughter, never doubting that Jesus Christ is entirely yours.

A generous heart does not know how to refuse anything to God. It demands nothing, placing all its confidence in his strength.

To gaze upon God while suffering with gentleness and submission is quite enough. Courageous feelings do not lie within our power, but courageous conduct does indeed lie within our power. This it is that God requires of you at the moment, while he holds you on the cross.

# JANE, LOVING MOTHER

## Commentary

Perhaps Jane as mother is the role with most appeal for us today. The charming pictures of her playing with her children, teaching them their lessons, sacrificing herself for them so that their grandfather would not squander their inheritance—all these incidents remind us that Jane was first and foremost a mother. Actually, it is a role she never really gave up. She remained a mother until the end of her life and her experience of motherhood enriched her and gave her a beauty of soul, a goodness, and an understanding of human nature which enhanced the gift she was to the Order of the Visitation.

As a busy Foundress, Jane still had time for her children's affairs. She arranged a marriage for her only surviving daughter, Françoise, with a gentleman that both mother and daughter thought was a perfect match. Jane had begun to despair about ever finding a suitable husband for Françoise who never hesitated to express her opinion and had rejected several possible suitors. Monsieur de Toulonjon was the ideal husband for Françoise and she loved him dearly, much to her mother's joy and relief.

Celse-Benigne was another matter. He was her first born and it is certain she saw traces of his father's features reflected in his face, and, surely, that made him doubly dear. He made certain that Jane de Chantal would be known to history as "the mother who stepped over her son." On the day she left for Annecy, Celse-Benigne threw himself across the doorway. Not quite knowing how to handle this obstacle, Jane stepped over her beloved son, then paused. The tears held under control throughout the ordeal began to flow. A priest rather heartlessly reproached her for her hesitation. She replied with calm dignity: "What do you expect, I am a mother." And in that quick defense, Jane de Chantal gave us her own self-description: I am a mother.

### **Reflection questions:**

1. Why can we say that Jane's experience as mother of four children gave her a very special kind of preparation for her task as Foundress of the Visitation Order?
2. How would the two vocations resemble one another?

# JANE, LOVING MOTHER

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

A capable wife who can find her? Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband too, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." (Proverbs 31:10, 28, 29)

For thus says the Lord: as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. (Isaiah 66:13)

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51)

### JANE'S WORDS:

And so, dearest Françoise, welcome very lovingly, as coming from the hand of God, these little ones that he gives you; take good care of them; cherish them tenderly, and bring them up in the fear of the Lord. Take my word for this, dearest. This is what you must do: serve God, let go of pride, live in harmony with the husband God has given you, take good care of your household; work at all this and from now on, try to live like a real mother."

Govern the community, not as a great lady and mistress, but as a mother.

Do your best to gain the hearts of your sisters by kindness. Treat with them freely, cordially, trustfully.

# JANE, FAITHFUL FRIEND

## Commentary

Love showed through all of Jane's letters. She loved her sisters with real affection and loved them enough to encourage them to spiritual heights. She cherished the friendships that existed between herself and the first sisters of the Visitation. Her letters to them were full of details of her interior life as well as those special confidences friends share with one another. The confidence she had in her sisters shines through every letter because of the tender loving way she dealt with all of them.

But the one, true, and important friendship of her life was the one she enjoyed with Francis de Sales. The Visitation Order was possible only because of the love and friendship that gave it birth--that between Francis and Jane. Theirs was a very human love, a genuine love that each one experienced while at the same time possessing the very deepest possible love of God. He was her confidant, her spiritual director, her father in every sense of the word, and because of her genuine love for him, Jane was able to reveal herself completely to him. She revered him as the special friend sent to her by God who would lead her to the pinnacle of divine love. Her complete confidence in him is expressed in the following letter:

There is a great desire in me to accomplish the Will of God, and for this reason I beg of you, once more, to teach me how to do it, for I have emotions which I cannot express, and a certain joy that tells me that this great God will lead me on and make me capable of his love, although I see the incapacity of my soul. Ask him to give me strength to do what he requires of me. I beg your holy blessing.

### Reflection questions:

1. Friendship was at the core of Jane's life. Her love for her friends was an outpouring of her love for God. Why were love of others and love of God so intertwined for Jane?
2. Jane's and Francis' relationship has been described as a spiritual friendship. Have you ever experienced a friendship like this?

# **JANE, FAITHFUL FRIEND**

## **Application**

### **SCRIPTURE:**

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. (I Samuel 18:1-3)

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (John 15:12-15)

### **JANE'S WORDS:**

I repeat with all my strength, dear Sisters, be kind to one another, respect one another's opinions, do not criticize, and I beg you, interpret everything positively.

Show to one another, my dear daughters, a goodness and childlike amiability, bearing with one another in charity, and never let the faults of the community astonish. Charity seeks no evil.

Lead those in your care with an understanding heart; removing from your heart and theirs any unhealthy spirit of constraint.

As regards love of neighbor, may we give according to the measure with which our Divine Master has given to us. Then we truly will love each person as ourselves. This saying is true, "Do to your neighbor only what you like done to you." Oh, how happy we would be if we were mindful of this in all our relationships with others.

# JANE, WOMAN OF SUPPLENESS

## Commentary

This image of God shaping the individual is present throughout Scripture: the image of God the potter and of us his clay, God forming and knowing us even in our mothers' wombs, the Psalmists crying to God to be shaped and reformed.

St. Jane de Chantal uses these images to help us understand God's work in our lives and to help us place ourselves in God's hands in a spirit of quiet resignation. The challenges she met in her life on many levels attest to her willingness to be molded and formed by the Spirit of God. She found strength and consolation in knowing that she belonged to God alone and thus could meet the losses of loved ones which she suffered so many times with equanimity and peace.

One day in speaking to the sisters, she referred to a favorite topic--the attitude of complete abandonment of all that concerns us into the hands of God:

May God make us strong in his holy love and soft and supple as a glove; may we be like a ball of warm beeswax in God's hands to be molded as he pleases; may we be fashioned like a piece of cloth that is cut out to make a garment; may we allow ourselves to be folded as we would fold a handkerchief.

### Reflection questions:

1. How has God shaped or molded you?
2. Are you open to God's work in your life?
3. Are there areas in your life in which you are resistant to God's shaping?
4. What are some useful images of shaping from Scripture and from our modern world?

# JANE, WOMAN OF SUPPLENESS

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

Then the word of God came to me; can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. (Jeremiah 18:5,6)

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8)

The precious children of Zion, worth their weight in gold--how they are reckoned as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands. (Lamentations 4:2)

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:13, 14)

### JANE'S WORDS:

God will take you in his arms, dear Sister, and lift you to the perfection of his love. Gaze on him simply and straightforwardly and let him do as he pleases.

My Sisters, the soul that is so happy to repose in God's hands by entire confidence is never shaken by anything. Everything turns out well for it. Everything that is according to God's mind pleases it. The soul that has fixed all its confidence in God never has need of anything because he in whom it confides, has such care of it, that he ever has his eye upon it, for its good.

A soul truly humble is not to lay claim to abasement nor elevation, but to remain in holy indifference, receiving from God's hand everything he may send it.

# JANE, WOMAN OF GENTLENESS

## Commentary

Gentleness in dealing with others is one of the hallmarks of Salesian Spirituality. It is a foundational virtue for Jane and Francis that allows Christians to interact with others in a spirit of kindness and patience. For Jane, gentleness and humility were inextricably bound together. Jesus' humble and gentle heart is our model in seeking to be responsive to God and our neighbor.

Jane constantly reminded the sisters, but especially superiors, of the importance of the virtue of gentleness both for the good of the community, its peace and happiness, as well as for the individual sister whose need for love, attention, and quiet support was to be honored in as gentle a manner as possible:

As for gentleness of heart, my dear daughters, this is a heart which does not resist anything and is not angry at anything done to it, that bears all, endures all, that is compassionate and full of affection for its neighbor and that does not have any bitterness in it. No, I am not talking at all about a heart of flesh, but a heart united with God's will in the superior part of the soul. Therefore, contradictions, persecutions, obstacles and difficulties which come to a truly gentle heart are immediately weakened as soon as they approach it.

### Reflection questions:

1. How does gentleness encourage others? How does it help us to be more patient and kind?
2. Why does curtness turn people off? Have you ever been dealt with curtly rather than with gentleness? What was your reaction?
3. Why is the virtue of gentleness so central to Jane?
4. How does gentleness weaken the contradictions, persecutions, obstacles and difficulties that it meets?

# JANE, WOMAN OF GENTLENESS

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt.11:29-30)

I, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away! (2 Corinthians 10:1)

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...and be thankful. (Colossians 3:12)

### JANE'S WORDS:

To be sure, experience has taught me, that nothing so wins souls as gentleness and cordiality. I beg you, dearest, follow this method, for it is the spirit of our blessed Father, Francis de Sales. Curtness in words or actions only hardens hearts and depresses them, whereas gentleness encourages them and makes them receptive.

You must be gentle and affable, loving your daughters with a wise maternal love—the true enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

If you wish to acquire the spirit of your vocation, you must avoid all over-eagerness. Do everything in a spirit of gentleness and fidelity, thinking of attaining your goal in God's time, not your own.

# JANE, WOMAN OF HUMILITY

## Commentary

“The Salesian Jesus, “ says Wendy Wright, “is perhaps best seen in a passage in Matthew’s gospel which presents the Lord as inviting all to come and learn from him for he is gentle and humble of heart.” For Jesus these are radical virtues capable of challenging the values of the world.

At their very first meeting, Francis gave Jane an opportunity to practice his favorite virtues of humility and obedience, and he did it with his typical good humor. They were sitting next to one another at dinner. “Madame,” he questioned her, “Do you plan to marry again?” “Oh, no, my Lord,” she hastened to reply. “Then,” said he, “Lower your flag.” She understood immediately, rose from the table and retired to her room where she removed all her jewelry.

Almost as soon as Francis became her spiritual director, he advised Jane to plant deep in her heart the virtue of humility, and he told her that guided by the Holy Spirit, he would help her in the task. She was so faithful to his instructions that certain friends of hers, noticing her modesty and holy bearing, suggested she had the capacity to attain to very high states of mystical prayer, and what’s more, they offered to teach her its intricacies. When she questioned Francis, he answered, “No, no, be content with spinning the threads of the little virtues of humility, gentleness, simplicity and others suitable to widows. He who tells you otherwise is deceiving you and is himself deceived.”

### Reflection questions:

1. Why is the virtue of humility so central for Jane?
2. What does Jane mean by interior humility and exterior humility?
3. Why does Jane believe that true humility is so rare and precious.

# JANE, WOMAN OF HUMILITY

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

It is better to be of a humble spirit among the poor than to divide the spoils with the proud. (Proverbs 16:19)

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted. (Matthew 23:11, 12)

### JANE'S WORDS:

The summit of perfect humility consists in absolute and entire dependence upon the will of God.

My sisters, how great a value humility is! It is the virtue loved best by our Lord Jesus Christ and his glorious mother. Humility attracts the eyes and heart of the Lord to us, but it must be a more interior than an exterior humility. He does not tell us to learn the latter from him but the former: "Learn from me," he tells us, "for I am gentle and humble of heart." Believe me, my dear daughters, to possess a grain of true humility is to possess a treasure and money that can buy heaven and the heart of God.

Let us speak of the humility of St. Augustine. It was his most excellent virtue. "If I am asked," says he, "the way to heaven, I shall answer you, it is humility; and if I am asked again by what road can we go to heaven, I shall still answer, by humility, by humility." What more humility than to have written down all his sins to publish them to the whole earth, that everyone might know in the ages to come that Augustine had been a great sinner. This was indeed to be dead to self-esteem so as to prize only what is eternal.

# JANE, WOMAN OF GREAT-HEARTEDNESS

## Commentary

Jane was authentically human; she shows a great deal of affection for her sisters in the many letters she wrote. Her presence warmed the community and inspired others to grow spiritually. She loved as few saints have loved and loved in a natural way, but much more she loved passionately. Think of the sorrow and unquenchable grief she suffered when her husband died. Think of the love she had for her father and her children. Think of the unique and respectful love for Francis and for carrying out his advice and direction. Finally, think of her love for God which was passionate and as strong as death.

For Jane de Chantal all love was summed up in the name of Jesus, and there was only one way to respond to the love found in that holy name—and that was to Live Jesus!—the very heart and soul of the Visitation, its reason for existence:

Since our Lord, in his goodness, has gathered our hearts into one, allow me, my dearest Sisters, to greet you all, as a community and individually, for this same Lord will not allow me to greet you in any other way. But what a greeting it is! The very one that our great and worthy Father Francis taught us: LIVE JESUS! Yes, my beloved Sisters and daughters, I say the words with intense delight: LIVE JESUS in our memory, in our will and in our actions!

### Reflection Questions

1. In our modern usage, charity usually refers to generosity. For Jane, charity was love. How are these two aspects of the word related?
2. Why is our total dependence on God necessary for us to have charity?
3. How can we better live the two-fold commandment: love of God and love of our neighbor?

# JANE, WOMAN OF GREAT-HEARTEDNESS

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned. (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30, 31)

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34, 35)

### JANE’S WORDS:

Ah, my dear Sisters, our beloved Visitation is a tiny kingdom of charity. If union and holy cherishing do not reign, it will soon be divided and consequently, laid waste, losing the luster which all the ingenuity of human effort could never regain. Let us therefore all pray that the Spirit of Love, uniter of hearts, grant us this close and living union with God by the total dependence of our will to his; and between us, a perfect cherishing and reciprocal union of heart and spirit.

We are called to have but one heart and one soul in God. We are called to a surpassing union with God and our neighbor--to a sublime perfection of love. St. Paul says: “He who loves God and his neighbor has fulfilled the whole law.” Hence springs mutual forbearance. Our Holy Founder tells us that in this kind support is contained the whole of Christian perfection.

# JANE, WOMAN OF SIMPLICITY

## Commentary

Simplicity was always a favorite virtue of Francis and Jane. In living a simple life with thoughts of God, we will express loyalty, embody charity and generosity, find ordinariness and humility, connect with others and never lose hope, which keeps us all going! As the founders were planning the beginning of this new religious institute, Francis encouraged Jane to approach life with greater simplicity.

Wield your distaff, not with loaded spindles which your fingers cannot handle, but with smaller ones that you can manage: humility, patience, gentleness, resignation, simplicity, charity to the sick, forbearance with difficult persons and similar imitations of the Lord which can be easily wound on your little spindle.

The way of simplicity was the attitude that Jane found, after faith and love, the best foundation for prayer. She told the sisters that God willed them to remain in a passive state at prayer, giving no thought to future difficulties or present circumstances. She suggested that they empty themselves of self and of all solicitude, all apprehension, and have only a simple regard, looking to God with unquestioning obedience and love.

### Reflection questions:

1. Many popular books have been written about simplifying our lives. How can we use this Salesian idea of simplicity to inform our lives?
2. What are the challenges to simplicity in your life?
3. How can simplicity help us develop the virtue of hope?
4. How is the idea of serving and pleasing God a freeing idea?

# JANE, WOMAN OF SIMPLICITY

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7)

Through your precepts I acquire understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:104, 105)

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and simple as doves. (Matthew 10:16)

Indeed this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. (2 Corinthians 1:12)

### JANE'S WORDS:

It is requisite to be very simple in all things, and to walk in good faith, without ever reflecting on what we are employed in, nor in what will be said or thought if we did so and so, or said so and so; but go on simply, and look only at God's good pleasure in everything and without ceasing. I make bold to promise you that, if you are very faithful to this simplicity, and ever seek God alone in whatever you do or suffer, in six months you will acquire peace of heart.

I find the almost universal attraction of the daughters of the Visitation is to a very simple presence of God by a complete surrendering of themselves to holy Providence. I need not have said "almost", for truly I see that all those who apply themselves from the beginning to prayer as they ought and who practice our little virtues end there.

# JANE, WOMAN OF PATIENT ENDURANCE

## Commentary

Jane's letters to those to whom she offered spiritual direction and to her own Visitation Sisters are replete with words of encouragement and exhortations to patience. She was convinced that we should do all things in God's time and not in our own hurried and impetuous spirit.

Having had to work hard to overcome those particular flaws in her own nature, Jane often recommended patience and tranquility of soul to the sisters, especially in their dealings with others whether their concerns dealt with important matters or only the trivialities of daily life. Following Francis' advice she would say they must have patience with everyone, but first of all with themselves.

### Reflection questions:

1. What does it mean to remain in tranquility?
2. Why is there happiness in moderation and evenness of temper?
3. What is your greatest problem where the practice of patience is concerned?
4. Can you think of ways to integrate patience into your busy life?

# JANE, WOMAN OF PATIENT ENDURANCE

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance. (Luke 8:15)

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. (Galatians 5:22)

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the patience of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 3:5)

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. (James 5:7,8)

### JANE'S WORDS:

It is a great happiness for souls when they know how to remain in tranquility, not only when they are without troubles and things that worry them, but especially when they are in the midst of these; and it is also a great happiness to be able to do things without hurry, without disquietude, with evenness of mind, with moderation, with gentleness.

Have only a pure, simple, peaceful longing to please God; as I have said before, this will lead you to act without such impetuosity and overeagerness, but with peace and gentleness. Your chief care ought to be to acquire this spirit; however, this care must be tender and loving, free of anxiety, even as you await results with unlimited patience and total dependence on the grace of God.

I have never heard of anyone who saw Francis de Sales lose his temper. One day I asked him to get just a little worked up about various setbacks we were having in connection with our Visitation monastery here, but all he said was: "Do you really want me to lose in a quarter of an hour the small bit of control I have acquired over the past twenty years?"

# JANE, WOMAN OF SUPPORTIVE LOVE

## Commentary

Jane knew how to love and how to love deeply. After God, her husband came first. No one could take the place reserved for him in her heart. Her children, for all their trouble and the sorrow they caused their mother, could always be sure of an open mind and a willing, supportive hand; in short, whatever they needed, she would attain for them if she possibly could.

Jane's love for Francis de Sales, while a very human and special kind of love, was founded as his was for her, on their love of God, a love that always requires death to self. Francis could count on her prayers, her understanding, her complete cooperation in all his designs for she was confident that he was guided by the Spirit of God in everything.

Finally, there was her relationship with the sisters of her Order, those "most dear daughters," she called them. While she was to them a superior and leader, the roles bestowed on her by the founder, she preferred a simpler title. She liked to speak of herself as their oldest sister, or servant of the Institute, the one who had known the father longer than the rest and that was the authority she depended on for the leadership she exerted. Jane loved the sisters joyously and warmly; never did she try to restrain her affection as we can see in her letters to them where she was very free with tender expressions, offers of help in every trial, advice from her heart, given generously and most lovingly.

### Reflection questions:

1. Why is winning hearts so helpful in leading and guiding others?
2. How can this be modeled by parents and teachers?
3. Why is a person who leads with loving, genuine care more effective than the anxious, bustling type who wants to get the job done?

# JANE, WOMAN OF SUPPORTIVE LOVE

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

By this everyone will know you are my disciple, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them, and reveal myself to them. (John 14:2)

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. (John 15:9)

### JANE'S WORDS:

I beg you, dear Sister, govern your community with great expansiveness of heart; give the sisters a holy liberty of spirit and banish from your mind and theirs a servile spirit of constraint. If a sister seems to lack confidence in you, don't for that reason show her the least coldness, but gain her trust through love and kindness. The more solicitous, open and supportive you are with the sisters, the more you will win their hearts.

The cordial love which we should bear our sisters is not a love of feeling; it is a heart-love, not the heart of flesh, but the heart of the will. Let the senses and all that is of nature turn and twist. Our affection or lack of it, our likes or dislikes, matter not at all, so long as our higher nature remains firm and unshaken in this love; so long as we are as ready to give proofs of it when feeling intense repugnance and aversion as when we are enjoying the delights of sensible affection.

God will be your guide in all things if you keep yourself humble and lowly in his presence, supporting your neighbor with the utmost gentleness. This is the chief, the great point. Aim earnestly at serenity in your own soul, be genial in your words and actions and in your manner of supporting your neighbor.

# JANE, WOMAN OF STEADFAST FAITH

## Commentary

Jane was surely the seventeenth century model for the valiant woman of Proverbs. Highly gifted with a deep thirst for knowing and loving God, she never gave up listening closely to what God wanted from her. She never lost faith in God to guide her, and never lost the belief that she, a woman who had given up all her wealth, all that the world holds dear in the way of family and support, could accomplish all that God asked of her.

We know from her own testimony that her prayer, arid, dry, unaffectionate as it was through most of her life, was founded on such a deep and unquestioning faith that this virtue alone sustained her and provided the “flame and fire which enlightened and kindled her instructions and her own life.”

### Reflection questions:

1. What does God wish for us?
2. What can we do when we don't want what God seems to wish for us?
3. What does it mean to have faith even amidst the dryness and aridity of prayer?

# JANE, WOMAN OF STEADFAST FAITH

## Application

### SCRIPTURE:

When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. (Matthew 8:10)

Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive. (Matthew 21:22)

The one who is righteous will live by faith. (Romans 1:17)

The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim), because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9,10)

### JANE'S WORDS:

Faith is the light of a new universe; it is the science of saints. In prayer more is accomplished by listening than by talking. Let us leave to God the decision as to what shall be said, without troubling ourselves to find a theme or subject in our own minds. God speaks to the heart.

You wish, perhaps, to know the foundation upon which we are to support our faith in God. Here you have it in three points: first, because he is all wise. Secondly, because he is all good. Thirdly, because he is all powerful.

Be assured, the soul that is so happy as to repose in God by entire faith is never shaken by anything. Everything turns out well for it. Everything that is according to God's mind pleases it. The soul that has fixed all its faith in God never has need of anything because he in whom it confides has such care of it that he ever has his eye upon it for its good.

## A Collection of Thoughts from Saint Jane de Chantal

- Peace of Heart: “Live joyously and serenely with whatever our Lord will do with you and for you.”
- Quiet Recollection: “We must keep our hearts open and wait for the heavenly dew to fall, because the graces of prayer are not like water welling up from the earth, but more like water coming down from the heavens.”
- Joyful Courage: “Live joyously and courageously, my dear daughter, never doubting that Jesus Christ is entirely yours.”
- Affability: “Run cheerfully and lovingly in the way of God’s good pleasure, my dear Sister.”
- Inner Freedom: “I desire for you a great and holy freedom of spirit that excludes constraint, scruples, and anxiety.”
- Lively Faith: “Oh! When will we savor the tenderness of the Divine Will in all events of our life, seeing in them only his good pleasure and his unchanging mysterious love?”
- Gentleness of Heart: “If you wish to acquire the spirit of the Visitation, you must avoid all overeagerness, doing all in a spirit of gentleness and fidelity, thinking of attaining your goal in God’s time, not your own.”
- Compassion: “Be extremely compassionate, loving, and patient with each person, especially with those who are troubled.”

- Presence of God: “To feel God’s presence so intimately and powerfully, so that you are no longer aware of yourself is to have that little drop of water, self, dissolve in the ocean of divinity.”
- Moderation: “Kindness, gentleness, and support, as well as generosity, do much for instilling moderation in our souls.”
- God’s Will: “Let us love this good pleasure of God, and see it alone in all that happens to us, embracing all lovingly.”
- Strength: “A generous heart does not know how to refuse anything to God. It demands nothing, placing all its confidence in his strength.”
- Prayer: “In prayer, you must be as a vessel open and exposed before God that he may distill into it his grace, drop by drop, as he wills. God will fill your soul with this divine water if you come before him often with lively faith.”
- Suppleness: “May God make us strong in his holy love and our souls soft and supple as a glove, or like a ball of warm beeswax in his hands, to be molded as he pleases.”
- Self-Emptying: “To be lost in God, dear Sister, is nothing else than to be absolutely and wholly resigned and given over to the care of his loving providence.”

## Suggested Readings

*Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal, Letters of Spiritual Direction.* Translated by Peronne Marie Thibert, VHM. Selected and introduced by Wendy M. Wright and Joseph E. Power, OSFS. Paulist Press, 1988.

*St. Jeanne de Chantal: Noble Lady, Holy Woman.* Andre Ravier, SJ. Ignatius Press, 1989.

*Wings to the Lord: St. Jane de Chantal.* Selections from Jane de Chantal on prayer. The Daughters of St. Paul, 1987.

*Madam de Chantal.* Elisabeth Stopp. The Newman Press, 1963.

*Hidden in God: Essays and Talks on St. Jane Frances de Chantal.* Elisabeth Stopp. Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press, 1999.

*Bond of Perfection: Jane de Chantal and Francis de Sales.* Wendy M. Wright. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985.

*Saint Jane Frances Fremyot de Chantal, Her Exhortations, Conferences and Instructions.* Translated from the Paris 1875 edition. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1928.

*The Spirit of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal as Shown in her Letters.* Translated by Sisters of The Visitation, Harrow-on-the-Hill. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922.

*The Spiritual Life: A Summary of the Instructions on the Virtues and on Prayer.* Compiled by The Sisters of the Visitation, Harrow-on-the-Hill. St. Louis, MO. B. Herder Book Co., 1928.

*St. Chantal and the Origin of The Visitation,* volumes 1 & 2. Msgr. Bougaud, Translated from the eleventh French Edition by a Visitandine. Benziger Bros. 1895.

*Answers of our Holy Mother St. Jane Frances Fremiot, Baroness de Chantal, on the Rules, Constitutions, and Book of Customs of the Institute.* Translated from the French edition, printed at Annecy in 1849.





