



CLASSIC WISDOM COLLECTION

A Simple Life

WISDOM FROM

Jane Frances de Chantal

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Edited and with a Foreword by Kathryn Hermes, FSP


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Because Saint Jane Frances de Chantal freely quoted Scripture from memory in her conferences and letters, we have chosen not to change her Scripture references, and have merely reproduced the translation of the original French.

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I

Desire Only God

Saint Jane's advice to the Visitation Sisters at Nevers:

A soul abandoned completely to Divine Providence desires only God and is detached from all but him: there is no eventuality that can unsettle her. Nothing so strips the soul and gives it greater dependence on God than the practice of the maxim of our blessed Father, Francis de Sales: *Ask for nothing and refuse nothing.*

In answer to a question from one of her Daughters on how to make a good beginning in the spiritual life, Saint Jane says:

Distrust yourselves, despise yourselves; it is the only way of laying a good foundation. Nothing else is needed,

except to do so with complete trust in God. I think the reason why we see so little solid virtue is that people are not thoroughly instructed in this principle. There is so much speculation, so much account made of high ways of prayer, of transports, of things intangible, outside of and beyond the common way. Yet trust in God and distrust of self are what constitute holiness and true virtue. Humility is nothing else than the contempt and putting aside of self; it is the love of one's own effacement, miseries, abjection; the gentle bearing with; even the wishing sweetly, cheerfully, and lovingly that we should be held and treated for what we are.

But you say: How can a soul that is very imperfect and full of miseries have this generous confidence? Our blessed Father was fond of saying that the weaker he felt the more strength and confidence he had, inasmuch as he expected nothing from himself and placed all his trust in God. He was so glad when anyone fell into faults of frailty because he held it good for humbling the soul and showing the futility of trusting to self and the value of grace, of God's help. Indeed such souls should have great courage to take in hand their perfection, without being astonished or troubled in the least on seeing they are subject to so many faults and frailties.

Saint Jane's answer to a question about the counsel of Saint Francis de Sales, "Ask for nothing and refuse nothing":

We are not to ask for nor refuse those things that are purely indifferent, which only self-love would make us desire or refuse. Undoubtedly souls adopt an admirable practice who live prepared for whatever God wishes to do with them and in them, unconcerned about everything except to abide near him, to do and to suffer faithfully whatever his Providence puts in their way at each moment. However, others, instead of being attentive to God and their duty, think only about themselves and are caught between the desire of pursuing convenience and the fear of going against the counsel to ask for nothing and to refuse nothing. These I advise by all means to go ahead and ask humbly and simply and as soon as possible for what they think they require. The counsel to ask for nothing and to refuse nothing is assuredly a counsel of very high perfection. Our blessed Father has given it to us as an abridgment of the means of attaining this perfection, for it is nothing short of the practice of perfect renunciation and indifference.

— Excerpts from a conference given to the Sisters of the Visitation at Nevers, France, a conference given to the Sisters of the Visitation, and an undated letter written to an unknown recipient