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TRUST IN GOD PROVIDENCE, IN SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (4/8)

Let us enter the heart of Francis de Sales to grasp all its beauty and richness.

“Our faith in God depends on the image we have of God!” where faith means our relationship with Him.

Francis presents us with the God in whom he believes in his writings. He gives us his image of God, a God discovered as a Father who provides for and loves his children, and consequently the relationship Francis has with him is one of total and unlimited trust.

Let us enjoy these passages from his letters, in which he portrays the face of the Father who is Providence and cares for us.

“My beloved daughter, how much the Lord thinks of you and with how much love He looks upon you! Yes, He is thinking of you and not only of you, but even of the last hair on your head: it is a truth of faith that you absolutely must not doubt.”

“Let us serve God well and never say: What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Where will our sisters come from? It is up to the Master of the house to worry about these. It is up to the Mistress of our house to furnish it; and our houses belong to God and his holy Mother.”

In the Gospel Jesus invites us to translate this trust into living the present moment well, and Francis reiterates this in the following letter:

“Try to do well today, without thinking of tomorrow; tomorrow, then, try to do the same; and do not think about what you will do throughout the duration of your tenure, but carry out your duty day by day without giving thought to the future, because your heavenly Father, who looks after guiding you today, will also guide you tomorrow and after tomorrow, in proportion to the trust which, despite your weakness, you place in his Providence.”

“He has looked after you until today. Hold tightly to the hand of His Providence and He will assist you in all circumstances and, where you cannot walk, He will carry you. Think not what will happen to you tomorrow, for the same Father, who cares for you today will care for you tomorrow and always. What can a son fear in the arms of so great a father?”



And how is Francis' heart directed in this regard? In this excerpt from a letter we can contemplate his heart, which is like a chick under the protection of Providence: “May God to whom I belong dispose of me according to his good pleasure: it matters little where I should end this miserable remainder of my mortal days, as long as I can end them in his grace. Let us gently hide our littleness in that greatness and, like a chick under its mother's wings lives safe and warm, let us rest our hearts under the sweet and loving Providence of Our Lord.”

If Francis has this relationship of trust with God, he can offer good advice to the recipients of his letters, strengthened by his experience. Let us listen to some of them.

“Let us be faithful, humble, gently and lovingly resolved to continue on the path on which heavenly Providence has placed us.”

Mother Favre in Lyon feels the weight of her office, which was not to her liking. The secret to overcoming this state of mind?

“Cast your thoughts resolutely on the shoulders of our Lord and Saviour and He will carry you and strengthen you. Keep your eyes fixed on God’s will and His providence.”

Our trust in God, our conviction that we are in good hands is sometimes put to the test, especially when pain, illness, death knock on the door of our lives or those of people dear to us. Francis knows this and does not back down or become discouraged.

“Trusting in God in the sweetness and peace of prosperity is something almost everyone knows how to do; but abandoning oneself entirely to him amidst hurricanes and storms is characteristic of his children.”

“Small events offer occasions for the most humble mortifications and the best acts of abandonment in God. In the most painful events, one must profoundly adore divine Providence. One must die or love. I would like my heart to be torn out or, if it remains in me, to be left for this love alone.”

How many people pray to obtain this or some other grace from the Lord and, when it does not come or is late in coming, they become discouraged and their trust in Him falters. We have this splendid advice written to a woman in Paris, a few months before the saint’s death:

“God has hidden the time when he intends to satisfy you and the manner in which he will satisfy you in the secret of his Providence; and perhaps, he will satisfy you in an excellent manner not by satisfying you according to your designs, but according to his own.”

Francis revealed his plans to Jane Frances on Pentecost Sunday, 1607: to found a new institute with her and through her. Following this meeting came a letter indicating the spirit for continuing this journey, which would last another four years! “Keep your heart wide open and let it rest often in the arms of divine Providence. Courage, courage! Jesus is ours: may our hearts always be his.”

In the space of a few years, several bereavements were experienced by both Francis’ and Jane’s families.

Francis' youngest sister Jeanne died suddenly. Here is how saints experience such events:

"My dear daughter, in the midst of my heart of flesh, which feels so much sorrow at this death, I feel very sensibly a certain suavity, a tranquillity and a sweet repose of my spirit in divine Providence, which infuses my soul with a great joy even in sorrows."

At the beginning of 1610 there were two new bereavements: the sudden death of Charlotte, the baroness's youngest daughter, aged about ten, and the death of Francis' mother, Madame de Boisy.

"Must we not therefore, dearest Daughter, adore in all things the supreme Providence whose counsels are holy, good and most loving? Let us confess, my beloved Daughter, let us confess that God is good and that his mercy endures for eternity. I felt great sorrow at this separation, but I must also say that it was a peaceful sorrow, though a living one. I wept without spiritual bitterness."

And in illness?

After overcoming a very serious health crisis, Francis wrote this valuable testimony of how he experienced the illness:

"I am neither cured nor ill; but I think I will recover completely very soon. My dearest daughter, we must leave our life and all that we are to the pure disposition of divine Providence, because, in the end, we do not belong to ourselves, but to Him who, in order to make us His own, wanted to be all ours in such a loving way."

The best conclusion to this round-up of messages that Francis offers us through his letters seems to me to be the one that the Saint wrote in the *Introduction*. It is a masterpiece of freshness and joy.

"In all your affairs lean solely on God's Providence, by means of which alone your plans can succeed ...

"Imitate a little child, whom one sees holding tight with one hand to its father, while with the other it gathers strawberries or blackberries from the wayside hedge. Even so, while you gather and use this world's goods with one hand, always let the other be fast in your Heavenly Father's Hand, and look round from time to time to make sure that He is satisfied with what you are doing, at home or abroad.

"Beware of letting go, under the idea of making or receiving more—if He forsakes you, you will fall to the ground at the first step. When your ordinary work or business is not specially engrossing, let your heart be fixed more on God than on it;

and if the work be such as to require your undivided attention, then pause from time to time and look to God, even as navigators who make for the haven they would attain, by looking up at the heavens rather than down upon the deeps on which they sail. So doing, God will work with you, in you, and for you, and your work will be blessed.”

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