

# *Alter Christus*

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

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## *Needful Counsels Concerning Temptations*

**By Saint Francis of Sales**

[From the book *Introduction to the Devout Life*]

### **1) We must not trifle with the words of worldly wisdom**

Directly that your worldly friends perceive that you aim at leading a devout life, they will let loose endless shafts of mockery and misrepresentation upon you; the more malicious will attribute your change to hypocrisy, designing, or bigotry; they will affirm that the world

having looked coldly upon you, failing its favour you turn to God; while your friends will make a series of what, from their point of view, are prudent and charitable remonstrances. They will tell you that you are growing morbid; that you will lose your worldly credit, and will make yourself unacceptable to the world; they will prognosticate your premature old age, the ruin of your material prosperity; they will tell you that in the world you must live as the world does; that you can be saved

without all this fuss; and much more of the like nature.

All this is vain and foolish talk: these people have no real regard either for your bodily health or your material prosperity. *“If ye were of the world - the Saviour has said - the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”*

We have all seen men, and women too, pass the whole night, even several in succession, playing at chess or cards; and what can be a more dismal, unwholesome thing than that? But the world has not a word to say against it, and their friends are nowise troubled. But give up an hour to meditation, or get up rather earlier than usual to

prepare for Holy Communion, and they will send for the doctor to cure you of hypochondria or jaundice! People spend every night for a month dancing, and no one will complain of being the worse; but if they keep the one watch of Christmas Eve, we shall hear of endless colds and maladies the next day! Is it not as plain as possible that the world is an unjust judge; indulgent and kindly to its own children, harsh and uncharitable to the children of God?

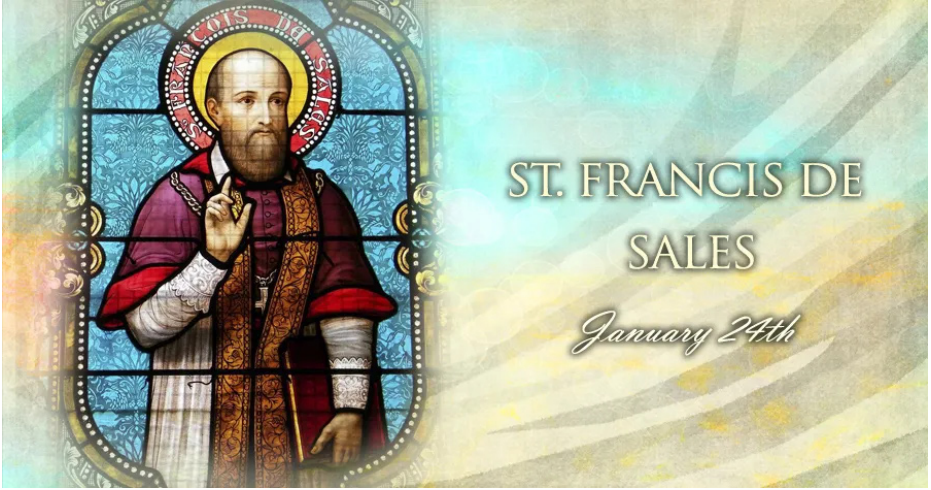
We cannot stand well with the world save by renouncing His approval. It is not possible to satisfy the world's unreasonable demands: *“John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say he hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and*

### **Author: Saint Francis of Sales**

Francis de Sales was born in France in 1567 to a noble family. His father sent him to the best schools, and when he was 20 he decided to become a priest. Despite his wealthy background, Francis always thought it was more important to serve God than to have money or power. His father tried to persuade him to marry, but Francis was instead ordained at the age of 26.

He quickly earned a reputation for being a kind and understanding man and an excellent speaker who attracted people to the Catholic faith. Many people in his diocese, which was partly in France and partly in Switzerland, followed the teachings of John Calvin, since at one time the Catholic faith had been outlawed in the region. Francis won many of them back. He taught religion to children and helped prepare men to be ordained priests. He wrote several books and helped St. Jane Francis de Chantal to found a religious order of women, the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, in 1610.

Francis died in 1622 and was canonized in 1664 by Pope Alexander VII. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1877. He is a patron of writers and journalists because he used his writing to teach people about the faith.



ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, the friend of publicans and sinners.” Even so, my child, if we give in to the world, and laugh, dance, and play as it does, it will affect to be scandalized; if we refuse to do so, it will accuse us of being hypocritical or morbid. If we adorn ourselves after its fashion, it will put some evil construction on what we do; if we go in plain attire, it will accuse us of meanness; our cheerfulness will be called dissipation; our mortification dulness; and ever casting its evil eye upon us, nothing we can do will please it. It exaggerates our failings, and publishes them abroad as sins; it represents our venial sins as mortal, and our sins of infirmity as malicious. S. Paul says that charity is kind, but the world is unkind; charity thinks no evil, but the world thinks evil of every one, and if it cannot find fault with our actions, it is sure at least to impute bad motives to them,- whether the sheep be black or white,

horned or no, the wolf will devour them if he can.

## 2) The need of a good courage

However much we may admire and crave for light, it is apt to dazzle our eyes when they have been long accustomed to darkness; and on first visiting a foreign country, we are sure to feel strange among its inhabitants, however kindly or courteous they may be. Even so, my child, your changed life may be attended with some inward discomfort, and you may feel some reaction of discouragement and weariness after you have taken a final farewell of the world and its follies. Should it be so, I pray you take it patiently, for it will not last, - it is merely the disturbance caused by novelty; and when it is gone by, you will abound in consolations. At first you may suffer somewhat under the loss what you enjoyed among your vain, frivolous

companions; but would you forfeit the eternal gifts of God for such things as these? The empty amusements which have engrossed you hitherto may rise up attractively before your imagination, and strive to win you back to rest in them; but are you bold enough to give up a blessed eternity for such deceitful snares? Believe me, if you will but persevere you will not fail to enjoy a

sweetness so real and satisfying, that you will be constrained to confess that the world has only gall to give as compared with this honey, and that one single day of devotion is worth more than a thousand years of worldly life.

But you see before you the mountain of Christian perfection, which is very high, and you exclaim in fearfulness that you can never ascend it. Be of good cheer, my child. When the young bees first begin to live they are mere grubs, unable to hover over flowers, or to fly to the mountains, or even to the little hills where they might gather honey; but they are fed for a time with the honey laid up by their predecessors, and by degrees the grubs put forth their wings and grow strong, until they fly abroad and gather their harvest from all the country round. Now we are yet but as grubs in devotion, unable to fly at will,

**St. Paul bore long time with temptations of the flesh, but so far from displeasing God thereby, He was glorified in them.**

and attain the desired aim of Christian perfection; but if we begin to take shape through our desires and resolutions, our

wings will gradually grow, and we may hope one day to become spiritual bees, able to fly. Meanwhile let us feed upon the honey left us in the teaching of so many holy men of old, praying God that He would grant us doves' wings, so that we may not only

fly during this life, but find an abiding resting-place in Eternity.

### **3) Of temptations, and the difference between experiencing them and consenting to them**

Picture to yourself a young princess beloved of her husband, to whom some evil wretch should send a messenger to tempt her to infidelity. First, the messenger would bring forth his propositions. Secondly, the princess would either accept or reject the overtures. Thirdly, she would consent to them or refuse them. Even so, when Satan, the world, and the flesh look upon a soul espoused to the Son of God, they set temptations and suggestions before that soul, whereby: 1) Sin is proposed to it. 2) Which proposals are either pleasing or displeasing to the soul. 3)

The soul either consents, or rejects them. In other words, the three downward steps of temptation, delectation, and consent. And although the three steps may not always be so clearly defined as in this illustration, they are to be plainly traced in all great and serious sins.

If we should undergo the temptation to every sin whatsoever during our whole life, that would not damage us in the Sight of God's Majesty, provided we took no pleasure in it, and did not consent to it; and that because in temptation we do not act, we only suffer, and inasmuch as we take no delight in it, we can be liable to no blame. St. Paul bore long time with temptations of the flesh, but so far from displeasing God thereby, He was glorified in them. The blessed Angela di Foligni underwent terrible carnal temptations, which move us to pity as we read of them. S.

Francis and S. Benedict both experienced grievous temptations, so that the one cast himself amid thorns, the other into the snow, to quench them, but so far from losing anything of God's Grace thereby, they greatly increased it.

Be then very courageous amid temptation, and never imagine yourself conquered so long as it is displeasing to you, ever bearing in mind the difference between experiencing and consenting to temptation.

It is this contest which S. Paul describes when he speaks of the "*law in my members, warring against the law of my mind,*" and of the "*flesh lusting against the spirit.*"

Believe me, if you will but persevere you will not fail to enjoy a sweetness so real and satisfying, that you will be constrained to confess that the world has only gall to give as compared with this honey, and that one single day of devotion is worth more than a thousand years of worldly life.

#### 4) Encouragement for the tempted soul

God never permits such grievous temptations and assaults to try any, save those souls whom He designs to lead on to His own living, highest love, but nevertheless it does not follow as a natural consequence that they are certain to attain thereto. Indeed, it has often happened that those who had been stedfast under violent assaults, failing to

correspond faithfully to Divine Grace, have yielded under the pressure of very trifling temptations. I would warn you of this, my child, so that, should you ever be tried by great temptations, you may know that God is showing special favour

to you, thereby proving that He means to exalt you in His Sight; but that at the same time you may ever be humble and full of holy fear, not overconfident in your power to resist lesser temptations because you have overcome those that were greater, unless by means of a most steadfast faithfulness to God.

Come what may in the shape of temptation, attended by whatsoever of delectation, - so long as your will refuses consent, not merely to the temptation itself, but also to the delectation, you need have no fear, - God is not offended. When any one has swooned away, and gives no sign of life, we put our hand to his heart, and if we find the slightest fluttering there, we conclude that he still lives, and that, with the help of stimulants and counter-irritants, we may restore consciousness and power. Even so, sometimes amid the violence of temptation the soul seems altogether to faint away, and to lose all spiritual life and action. But if you would be sure how it really is, put your hand on the heart. See whether heart and will yet have any spiritual motion; that is to say, whether they fulfil their own special duty in refusing consent to and acceptance of temptation and its gratification; for so long as the power to refuse exists within the soul, we may be sure that Love, the life of the soul, is there, and that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, is within, although, it may be, hidden; and that by means of steadfast perseverance in prayer,

and the Sacraments, and confidence in God, strength will be restored, and the soul will live with a full and joyous life.

### 5) Remedies for great occasions

So soon as you feel yourself anyway tempted, do as our little children when they see a wolf or a bear in the mountains. Forthwith they run to the protection of their father or mother, or at least cry out for help. Do you fly in like manner to God, claiming His compassion and succour, - it is the remedy taught us by our Lord Himself: "*Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*"

If, nevertheless, the temptation persists or increases, hasten in spirit to embrace the holy Cross, as though you beheld Jesus Christ Crucified actually present. Make firm protests against consenting, and ask His help thereto; and, so long as the temptation lasts, do you persist in making acts of non-consent. But while making these acts and these protests, do not fix your eyes on the temptation, - look solely on Our Lord, for if you dwell on the temptation, especially when it is strong, your courage may be shaken. Divert your mind with any right and healthy occupation, for if that takes possession and fills your thoughts, it will drive away temptation and evil imaginations.

One great remedy against all manner of temptation, great or small, is to open the heart and lay bare its suggestions,

likings, and dislikings, to your director; for, as you may observe, the first condition which the Evil One makes with a soul, when he wants to seduce it, is silence. Even as a bad man, seeking to seduce a woman, enjoins silence concerning himself to her father or husband, whereas God would always have us make known all His inspirations to our superiors and guides.

If, after all, the temptation still troubles and persecutes us, there is nothing to be done on our side save to persist in protesting that we will not consent; for just as no maiden can be married while she persists in saying No, so no soul, however oppressed, can be guilty while it says the same.

Do not argue with your Enemy, and give but one answer, - that with which Our Lord confounded him, *“Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”* Just as the pure wife would make no reply, and cast no glance on the foul seducer who strove to lead her astray, but would straightway fly from him to her husband’s side, not arguing, but cleaving to her lawful

lord in renewed fidelity; - so the devout soul when assailed by temptation should never trifle with it by answer or argument, but simply fly to the Side of Jesus Christ, its Bridegroom; renewing its pledges of unchanging devotion and faithfulness to Him.

### **6) How to strengthen the heart against temptation**

**If, nevertheless, the temptation persists or increases, hasten in spirit to embrace the holy Cross, as though you beheld Jesus Christ Crucified actually present. And, so long as the temptation lasts, do not fix your eyes on the temptation, - look solely on Our Lord**

Examine from time to time what are the dominant passions of your soul, and having ascertained this, mould your life, so that in thought, word and deed you may as far as possible counteract them. For instance, if you know that you are disposed to be vain, reflect often upon the emptiness of this earthly life, call to mind how burdensome all mere earthly vanities will be to the conscience at the hour of death, how unworthy of a generous heart, how puerile and childish, and the like. See that your words have no tendency to foster your vanity, and even though you may seem to be doing so but reluctantly, strive to despise it heartily, and to rank yourself in every way

among its enemies. Indeed, by dint of steady opposition to anything, we teach ourselves to hate even that which we began by liking. Do as many lowly, humble deeds as lie in your power, even if you perform them unwillingly at first; for by this means you will form a habit of humility, and you will weaken your vanity, so that when temptation arises, you will be less predisposed to yield, and stronger to resist. Or if you are given to avarice, think often of the folly of this sin, which makes us the slave of what was made only to serve us; remember how when we die we must leave all we possess to those who come after us, who may squander it, ruin their own souls by misusing it, and so forth. Speak against covetousness, commend the abhorrence in which it is held by the world; and constrain yourself to abundant almsgiving, as also

to not always using opportunities of accumulation. If you have a tendency to trifle with the affections, often call to mind what a dangerous amusement it is for yourself and others; how unworthy a thing it is to use the noblest feelings of the heart as a mere pastime; and how readily such trifling becomes mere levity. Let your conversation turn on purity and simplicity of heart, and strive to frame your actions accordingly, avoiding all that savours of affectation or flirting.

In a word, let your time of peace, - that is to say, the time when you are not beset by temptations to sin, - be used in cultivating the graces most opposed to your natural difficulties, and if opportunities for their exercise do not arise, go out of your way to seek them, and by so doing you will strengthen your heart against future temptations.



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