

Meet one of the Saints

When we moved into Redacre we had to have a way of distinguishing one bedroom from another. Numbering them did not appeal so we decided to name them after Christians whose writings had influenced us. Our rooms were given the names of Fenelon, Andrew Murray, John Wesley, Amy Carmichael, Francis de Sales and so on. We won't give you the whole list! This was many years ago but recently some of us have returned to some of the books that encouraged us. It has been like meeting long lost friends.

This month we would like to share a little with you about St Francis de Sales that most gentle of saints remembered on his Feast Day by the Church of England, as well as the Roman Catholic Church. What is a Feast Day, some readers may be asking? It is a day in the year when we celebrate a birthday in heaven. Next year we will remember Sister Lynda's first birthday in heaven. For us that will be her Feast Day. Francis de Sales has been in heaven a little longer, although theologians tell us that time is a concept that is quite different in heaven. However we will leave it to the theologians to explain it.

Francis de Sales was born in 1567 in Thorens, in the Duchy of Savoy and died in 1622 in Lyon. Tempted to despair by the theological discussions of his day (sounds familiar) he met the Lord Jesus and was set free from his desolation in an instant. Thus began a remarkable life devoted to God. He became Bishop of Geneva living in Annecy.

As he visited parishes in his mountainous diocese, his goodness, patience and mildness became proverbial. His food was plain; he dressed with simplicity. His household was orderly and without luxury, or indeed what some would have seen as necessities for a Bishop. He lived simply in order to provide for the wants of the needy. We were greatly attracted to the life of this good Bishop and his writings. His best known work is, "The Devout Life" which is still available today.

Here is some of his wise teaching on peace. Peace is lost when we cease to be dependent on God. There is a cost, as much has to be left behind. Our self-sufficiency with which we are so familiar and find comforting, our "reassuring self-confidence, our abounding self-love" all have to be left behind. This will be painful.

Then the gentleness of St Francis de Sales shines through and he says kindly, if "we do our small bit faithfully, courageously, he (the Lord) will do the rest". His peace will come. What is our own small part? "Our peace will be found in the midst of warfare; our serenity will be bought at the price of surrender."¹



¹ Direct quotations taken from Set Your Heart Free; Francis de Sales - edited by John J Kirvan