



De Sales

SPIRITUALITY SERVICES

"practical paths to holiness"



"Gentleness...a Forgotten Virtue?"

In a world in which the pace of life has become more frenetic and hectic, we seem to be a lot less patient and a lot more prone to anger with one another. Any wonder we have so many ways to describe this behavior? This person went "postal"; that person exhibited "road rage"; so-and-so had "a meltdown".

We really seem to have lost our sense—to say nothing of the practice— of gentleness. Jesus himself spoke of the importance of gentleness in Matthew's Gospel: "Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart."

Gentleness is not a very popular virtue—or value—these days. In some ways, we have ourselves to blame. Gentleness is often translated as "meek" which is perceived (and even defined in some places) as being spineless, weak, a pushover or a wimp. Small wonder that gentleness has fallen on hard times in our time!

Jesus is not calling us to weakness. No, in fact, he is calling us to a kind of strength and tenacity that can only result from 'taking up his yoke,' that is, embracing all the challenges that come each and every day to those who attempt to live a God-centered life.

Here, it seems to me, is the rub. We grow impatient and angry with others when we experience conflict, disappointment or difficulties with others because we expect that nothing—and no one—should interfere with our plans for life. Small wonder, therefore, when others' faults, sins and imperfections seem to conspire to stand in our way.

Sad to say, there is an ever deeper reality that we need to confront. Sometimes the person with whom we are ultimately angry and impatient is ourselves!

Why is gentleness such an important virtue? Simply because life is not perfect. Others aren't perfect. I'm not perfect. When we live our lives so intolerant of others'—and our own—imperfections, we look for and experience nothing but trouble.

What a burden!

St. Francis de Sales struggled with anger and impatience in his own life. He had a sense of urgency in his personal and professional endeavors that sorely tempted his practice of gentleness. Just as he learned that he could not force himself or others to grow in holiness, he also recognized that it was only when he was able to graciously embrace life's heartaches, disappoint-

ments, frustrations and failures that he could truly hope to work through and overcome them!

The paradox? Only when we can accept the burdens of life does life cease to be so burdensome. Before we can expect life to get better, we must first accept life as it is.

The practice of this virtue needs to start at home; we need to begin with ourselves. We need to accept the reality of our sins, our weaknesses, our faults and failings. We need to ask God for the grace to move through and beyond them without beating up on ourselves. Our energies are better used by cooperating with God's saving grace than by being in a constant state of frustration or rage.

Likewise, we need to be gentle toward one another, especially the people we know—and love—the most. In truth, these are the people whose faults and failings are most obvious to us. Therefore, it is all the more important that we acknowledge that they, too, are not perfect but rather are works—God's works—in progress.

Moving forward, let's drive, learn, live and love—*gently!*