

The End of the Day

Retiring

There comes a time at the end of the day when we realize that there is no more left to be done...or, there is no more than we can do. There is only so much that we can accomplish on any given day, in any given hour, at any given moment. We are people with unlimited dreams who have, at the same time, a limited amount of time and energy with which to pursue those dreams.

Although destined for eternity, we are, on this earth, limited by time and space.

And so we tire. We get weary. We get to a point at the end of the day when we can do no more. We surrender to fatigue. We say “uncle” to our limitations, our age, our threshold for pain.

We’ve had enough.

And so we retire. We lay down our heads. We lay down our lives. We acknowledge our need for rest. We name our need to be reenergized. We thank God for all that we have managed to accomplish today – great, small – in the service of God and others.

We ask God to protect us throughout the night. We ask for a restful sleep that (God willing) we might arise tomorrow refreshed and renewed, ready to embrace the gift of another new day. We see in sleep a foreshadowing of our own death...and the promise of everlasting life!

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

A Simple Guide for Living Each Day in a Life-Giving Way

*A Contemporary Presentation of a
Spiritual Guide based upon an
Interpretation by Jerry Weiss*

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Introduction

In the spring of 1588 Francis de Sales (1567-1622) completed his study of liberal arts at Clermont College in Paris, and after successfully passing his examinations, he received the licentiate and master of arts degree. Shortly thereafter, he made his way to Padua, Italy, where he would spend the next three years of his life studying law and theology in the second oldest university town in Europe.

Francis was seriously concerned about continuing to cultivate and develop his spiritual life even as he pursued graduate studies at the university. This was especially challenging in Padua, a city that, among other things, had a reputation for being a pretty wild, tough and sometimes perilous place. In the interest of maintaining a healthy balance between things sacred and secular, Francis developed a simple, practical and down-to-earth program to help him to live *in* the world without being *of* the world in ways that employed both disciplined resolve and artful skill.

Francis called this rule of life that he developed for himself at Padua his “Spiritual Exercises,” a title no doubt strongly inspired by the influence of his Jesuit education and spiritual formation. He divided his rule of life into four areas of concern: (1) Preparing for the coming day; (2) Guidelines for living the day well; (3) The practice of spiritual recollection or repose; (4) Suggestions for conversation and social events.

Taking Nourishment

Meals

Meals are not simply an opportunity to feed our bodies. Meals can also provide a forum in which to nourish our relationships with others. Meals (however simple, quick or even hurried) can give us a chance to reconnect with the people who mean the most to us: family, friends, neighbors and colleagues.

Offer grace before and after meals. Be thankful for all the ways in which God nourishes you: with food, family, friends and fellowship. Seize the opportunity to celebrate life and to support others in their attempts to be the people God calls them to be. Just as Christ gave his very body and blood to us at table, so be willing to be food and drink for others.

Recreation

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy...or even worse.

Learn to play as hard as you work. In the midst of all your responsibilities at home and at work, make – and take – the time to renew yourself. Refresh yourself; get refreshed with others. Read a book; rent a movie, go out to dinner; take a walk; go on a picnic; take a drive through the country. Extend – and accept – opportunities to make new friendships and nurture long-standing ones. Celebrate the gift that is family, friendship and fellowship.

Living Today Well

Beginning a New Day

As soon as you awake (or, as soon as you are *aware* that you are awake), simply remind yourself that God is with you: in you, and around you. Thank God for having brought you safely through the night and giving you the gift of a new day. Realize that waking up (however easy or difficult) is a foreshadowing of your own resurrection.

Dressing

Ask God to cover you with the particular virtues or gifts that you will need for the day ahead. In addition, Francis recommends that we specifically ask to be covered with the cloak of innocence and the robe of love.

A Direction of Intention

Develop your own way – a word, a sentence, a thought, an image – that will help you to remain aware of God’s enduring presence in all the things that you will be about today: eating, drinking, driving, commuting, working, reading, speaking, listening and, hopefully, even relaxing. Ask for the grace and the strength to remain as centered and even-tempered as possible toward yourself and others in the midst of today’s successes, setbacks and everything else in between.

Preparing Your Day

Invocation

Simply ask God to assist you by praying these or similar sentiments:

Teach me your will, O God.

May your good spirit guide and keep me.

Help me to walk with you this day.

Foresight

Consider the day ahead. Think of the potential rough spots that the day may bring, asking for the grace to be especially self-aware, self-controlled and self-disciplined.

Plan of Action

Look at your calendar. Review your PDA. Consider how you can make time for yourself and for God even in the midst of all that you will be about today.

Resolve

Make a conscious decision to do your level best to follow God’s will today, especially as it may be revealed in the circumstances, people and events that come your way. Finally, place all your cares and concerns into God’s hands.

How is Your Heart?

An Examination of Conscience

Plan to examine your conscience twice a day: once around midday, and the other in the early evening.

Your midday examination should refer back to the resolutions you made during your preparation of the day (the virtues you pledged to practice, the tough spots or situations you anticipated, the responsibilities foreseen) as well as anything else that happened during the morning. Your early evening examination should likewise refer back to your preparation of the day and all that has happened since your midday examination.

A simple format for the examination would include the following questions:

- How is my heart toward God?
- How is my heart toward my neighbor?
- How is my heart toward myself?
- How is my heart toward what has happened today?

Conclude each examination of conscience by (1) gratefully giving thanks to God for the good that you may have accomplished through God's grace and through your efforts, and by (2) gently acknowledging any sins or failings that you committed to this point and humbly asking God to forgive you. In sum, ask for the courage you need to strengthen your resolve to live well the portion of the day that remains ahead.

Spiritual Directory

Francis de Sales would later apply the lessons that he personally learned from using his own "Spiritual Exercises" when he and St. Jane de Chantal founded the Visitation of Holy Mary in 1610, developing what is now known as the "Spiritual Directory." It was adapted two hundred and fifty years later for use by the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales and the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, the latter being a community of priests and brothers. This version is offered for use by people of any and every state and stage of life.

The goal of the Spiritual Directory is to assist us in developing the interior attitudes necessary to recognize the presence of God in all things, people and circumstances, attitudes that likewise assist us in our efforts to embody the humble, gentle love of neighbor so clearly demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ.

Regardless of our unique role in God's plan of salvation, the challenge that we collectively face is how to accept, internalize and pursue divine values even while deeply engaged in the demands, responsibilities, limitations and possibilities of the human experience. The Spiritual Directory helps us to see ourselves, others and the entire created order through the mind, heart and eyes of God, thus challenging us to treat ourselves and one another with profound respect and reverence, even in the midst of the give-and-take, the ups-and-downs of daily living.