

Praying with Images from St. Francis de Sales: March



March 1:

Our Lord takes care of us all the time like a good father or a good mother who allows their child to walk alone when he is on a soft, grassy meadow or a mossy carpet. Even if the child might fall, he will not be seriously hurt. But on rough and dangerous roads, he would be carried carefully in his parents' arms. We have often seen persons courageously enduring great assaults without being overcome by their enemies and, while remaining victorious, a little later being overcome in some light encounters. Why? Our Lord, seeing that they would not be greatly harmed in falling, allows them to walk alone, which he did not do when they were on the high points of great temptations from which God has drawn them by his all-powerful hand. (**Conf.** 6. 70)

March 2:

For our self-love, which never dies, will coat the pill so well that we will believe it is good for us. I mean that we will find that it is true that we have certain reasons which appear good to us. And then, with the approval of our own judgment and having the go-ahead of our self-love, there will no longer be anything to prevent us from regarding them as just, right and reasonable. (**Conf.** 7. 79)

March 3:

Those who are very gentle while there are no contradictions, and who have not acquired this virtue at sword's point, are apparently very exemplary and edifying. But if you put them to the test, you will see them stirred up and showing that their gentleness was not a strong and solid virtue but a virtue more imaginary than real. (**Conf.** 7. 82)

March 4:

Our Lord answered: "You do not know what spirit is in you," meaning: Don't you realize that we are no longer living in the time of Elijah which was characterized by a spirit of severity? Even though he was a very great servant of God and acted correctly in doing what he did, you will not act correctly by imitating him because I have not come to confound and punish, but to spread fragrant ointments and by their odor draw sinners to do penance and to follow me. (**Conf.** 9. 95)

March 5:

Chastity does not allow us to be satisfied with leaving behind the clay of the world but especially putting aside the clay of ourselves in renouncing all the earthly pleasures of our flesh. (**Conf.** 9. 97)

March 6:

In Jacob, we have an example of someone who is most admirable and well suited to show us how we ought to accommodate ourselves to those who are frail and weak and how we should put a check on our strength so as to be able to keep our pace even with theirs. . . . The good Jacob answered: "My lord and brother (he uses the word "lord" because he was his elder), it will not be possible, if you please, because I have my children with me and their little steps might try and test your patience. I must measure my steps according to theirs which, of course, is my duty to do. I do the same to my servants. Furthermore, my sheep have newborn lambs which take a longer time to move. The newborn lambs being so tender are unable to move quickly and so we must adapt ourselves to them. All of this would excessively delay you on the road." Look, I pray you, at the good-naturedness of this holy Patriarch. I loved him so much in the past and I shall love him all the more because of this act of loving kindness. He willingly accommodates his pace not only to his little children but also to his small newborn lambs. (**Conf.** 9. 99)

March 7:

With reference to our little bursts of fervor which we sometimes have that are fleeting and, generally speaking, come from our human nature, but which make us desire to receive communion, we must pay no attention to them anymore than seamen do to certain slight breezes that come at daybreak, produced by the mists that rise from the earth and do not last very long and stop as soon as they have risen and are dispersed. The captain of the ship who knows it well pays no heed to the breeze and does not unfurl the sails because of this breeze that arises from the earth. (**Conf.** 9. 100)

March 8:

When we are rowing, we must do it in time. Those who row on a lake are not beaten because of slightly sluggish rowing, but they are indeed if their beat is not in time. Likewise, we must try to teach and train the novices in the same way, all doing the same thing, so that they row together, and even if all of them do not do it with the greatest perfection we know they are doing it together. (**Conf.** 9. 101)

March 9:

We do not know how to love the commandments if we do not love the person who gives them. In the measure that we love and hold in high regard the Maker of the Law, so will we be exact in our observing it. Some are chained to the Law with chains of iron, while others are through chains of gold. I mean that people in the world who keep the commandments of God out of fear of being damned observe them through force and not through love. Religious and those who tend to the perfection of their spirit are joined by chains of gold, i.e., through love. They love the commandments and keep them lovingly. And to keep them better, they embrace the observance of the counsels. (**Conf.** 9. 103)

March 10:

This is why the Bridegroom in the Canticle of Canticles says that his spouse is like a dove that walks along a gently flowing stream whose waters are crystal clear. You know that the dove rests in assurance by those waters because she can see the shadows of birds of prey that she fears. Suddenly as she sees these shadows, she takes flight so that she is never taken by surprise. Likewise, the Heavenly Bridegroom would say, "So too is it with my Beloved, for while she flies away when faced with unfaithfulness to my commandments, she has no fear of falling into the hands of disobedience." (**Conf.** 9. 103)

March 11:

If I am with the sick, I act like the tender and loving nurse of a sick child, stroking its head so it might fall asleep. But when I am with the strong, I am like a giant so as to give them courage. (**Conf.** 9. 104)

March 12:

Bees are an example of what we are talking about, for some are used to taking care of and cleaning the hive. Others are always busy gathering honey. Those who live inside the hive do not eat less honey than those who have the job of picking at the flowers, and with good reason, because those who live inside, while hardly doing anything, prevent spiders from coming and obstructing the honeycomb from the bees who are busy gathering the honey. (**Conf.** 9. 104)

March 13:

What Sister can ever again excuse herself from going to Holy Communion because of her unworthiness, saying, "Oh, my God! How can I dare to receive Our Lord as often as the others do, since I am worthless? Oh, God! How can I dare to come to you in prayer?" Oh, such self-deception! Don't you see that Our Lord moves so simply into the arms of holy Simeon and leaves those of his most loving Mother who was most pure and without sin? (**Conf.** 9. 105)

March 14:

The glorious Saint Bernard says that the measure of loving God is to love God without measure and that in our love there must be no limits. Moreover, we must allow its branches to reach out as far as they can. Whatever is said about God ought to be understood likewise with reference to our neighbor, provided however, that the love of God always remains foremost and primary. (**Conf.**10. 111)

March 15:

The food on which too much salt is placed becomes distasteful because of its bitter taste, and so it is the same where too much sugar is used, because of its excessive sweetness. These same foods on which salt or sugar is placed in right amounts satisfy our taste-buds and our appetite: signs of affection that are given in the proper measure and with discretion become rewarding and agreeable to the person who receives them. (**Conf.** 10. 112)

March 16:

It is always very difficult to hit the bulls-eye of our target. It is certainly true that we all must have the intentions of piercing and hitting the center of a virtue which we ought to desire most dearly, be it humility, heartfelt love or others. But more especially, we must never lose courage when we do not attain the heart of the virtue nor must we be overwhelmed, provided that we hit the target, i.e., as close to the bulls-eye as we can. For the Saints themselves could not gain all the virtues perfectly. (**Conf.** 10. 112)

March 17:

But I must now say this: heartfelt love is joined to another virtue which is like a consequence of this love, namely a childlike confidence. Children, when they have a beautiful feather or something else that they think is pretty, are not able to rest until they have met up with their little friends to show them their feather and make them a part of their joy. And just as they want them to share their grief when they have a little sore on the tip of their finger or when they have been stung by a bee, they never stop telling everyone they meet so that someone might feel sorry for them and soothe their little wound. Now I do not want to say that you must be exactly like these children, but I do say this: this confidence ought to make the Sisters not so stingy in sharing their little satisfactions and small consolations with their Sisters and with little fear that their imperfections will be brought up. (**Conf.** 10. 115)

March 18:

All this trouble (anxiety about how others may see me) happens from the command of a certain confessor, spiritual father called self-love. (**Conf.** 11. 131)

March 19:

Saint Pachomius told him, "My son, it is better to live in obedience and to die everyday by living a life of continual mortification of self and one's passions than to suffer martyrdom in your imagination. Anyone who mortifies himself dies a martyr's death as far as needs be. (**Conf.** 12. 146)

March 20:

The wine of divine love cannot enter where the first Adam rules; we must destroy the "old man." (**Conf.** 13. 166)

March 21:

We cannot always walk so straight a line that we do not stumble or bend to either side of the extremes. We must be satisfied, provided that we straighten ourselves up as soon as possible. (**Conf.** 14. 177)

March 22:

But the value of our actions is not determined through consolations. We must not be so attached to our self-satisfaction, for this would be to be attached to the flowers and not to the fruit. (**Conf.** 14. 179)

March 23:

A child while she is young is in a state of such simplicity that she has no knowledge of anyone except her mother. She has only one love, which is for her mother, and in this love there is only one goal, which is her bosom. She wants nothing else. The Christian who enjoys perfect simplicity has only one love, only one goal, which is to rest on our heavenly Father's bosom and, once there, to be a loving child, resting there and leaving every care of self to her good Father, without ever troubling oneself about anything, except to dwell in this holy confidence. (**Conf.** 14. 179)

March 24:

The true virtue of prudence must be really practiced inasmuch as it is like a spiritual salt that gives taste and savor to all other virtues. (**Conf.** 14. 181)

March 25:

I would love more bearing a small cross of straw that is placed on my shoulders without my choice and not one like going out to chop a pile of wood in a forest, involving a lot of work, and carrying it back with difficulty. Truthfully, I believe I would be more pleasing to God with the cross of straw and not with the one that I might bear with more sweat and pain, because I might bear the latter with more satisfaction for my self-love, which is pleased by so many of its own devices and so little by allowing oneself to be led and directed in simplicity, which is what I want most for you. (**Conf.** 15. 199)

March 26:

Go and have confidence in God, for he has said (Is. 49. 15, 16): "How can a woman forget her child?" And so he will "never" forget us, for he "carries" us "engraved" on his heart and "in" his "hands." (**Conf.** 16. 204)

March 27:

And do not worry whether your work will be followed by the fruit that you expect from it, for it is not from you that the fruit will be asked, but only if you have tried faithfully to cultivate well these dry and barren lands. You will not be asked if you have reaped an abundant harvest but only if you took care to sow the seed well. (**Conf.** 16. 205)

March 28:

So the Divine Builder is delighted to build beautiful structures from very warped wood that appears to have no worth in earthly terms. . (**Conf.** 17. 218)

March 29:

The Sacraments are channels through which, in a manner of speaking, God comes to us, just as we through prayer cast ourselves into God, since prayer is nothing other than the raising of our minds to God. (**Conf.** 18. 238)

March 30:

Humility is a very necessary virtue so as to receive the abundant graces that flow through the channels of the sacraments; because waters are used to flowing more swiftly and with greater force when the channels are placed in sloping and low-lying places. (**Conf.** 18. 239)

March 31:

There are a few persons who know how to find the vein of true poverty which consists in desiring nothing but being content with what little God wants you to have. (**Conf.** 20. 256)

Reference:

Conf. - **Spiritual Conferences** (trans. by Rev. W. Ruhl. OSFS, Salesian Spirituality Center website: www.oblates.org/spirituality).