

Saint Francis de Sales

1567 - 1622

PARADISE

In the biography of Saint Francis de Sales there is an episode in which a farmer offered an example of how a Christian longs for Paradise. The saint was making a pastoral visit in his diocese when he learned that a gravely ill farmer wanted to see him to receive his blessing. He went immediately and found an elderly man near death but with great clarity of mind.

“Monseigneur,” the farmer said, “I thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to receive your blessing before I die.”

Then he asked to go to confession. His relatives withdrew to another room, leaving the bishop alone with the dying man.

After the confession he asked him, “Monseigneur, am I going to die?”

“My brother,” the saint replied, “the doctor could tell you better than I.”

“Monseigneur, I’m asking your opinion: am I going to die?”

“We all have to die, but we don’t know the exact moment. As for you, my brother, it’s not absolutely certain that your time has come. Others in greater danger have recovered.”

“Monseigneur, please don’t think that I’m asking you this question,” the good old man continued, “because I’m afraid of death; on the contrary, I fear that I’m not dying.”

The saint was very surprised by his words, which are possible only for

perfect souls or for those that are deeply discouraged.

“So, you aren’t sorry about dying?”

“Absolutely not, and if it hadn’t been God’s will that I reach this age, I would’ve departed from here a long time ago.”

“But tell me, what is the reason for your disgust with life? Is it hidden sufferings, loss of property, family troubles?”

“Nothing at all. I’m 70 years old and until now I’ve always enjoyed good health; I’ve had more than enough temporal goods; I can’t complain at all about my family.

“Then why, my brother, do you want to die?”

“Monseigneur,” the elderly man replied, “I’ve heard in sermons about the wonders of the life to come and of the boundless joys of Paradise, compared to which our present life seems like a prison...”

At this point the farmer started talking about the emptiness of earthly possessions and the immense happiness of Paradise with such fervor that the holy bishop was moved to tears. The saint then confirmed him in these sublime sentiments, had him make acts of abandonment to God’s will, and personally gave him the Anointing of the Sick. A short while later the virtuous man gently passed away and an expression of sweet serenity came



over his face as if the soul had left there the mark of heavenly blessedness as it departed from the body.

The *Roman Missal* recalls the saint in these words: “Bishop of Geneva, he was one of the great teachers of spirituality in recent centuries. He wrote *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Philothea) and other ascetical-mystical works in which he offers a way of holiness that is accessible to people of all social conditions, based entirely on the love of God, a compendium of all perfection (Theotimus). With Saint Jane Frémyot de Chantal, he founded the Order of the Visitation. By his gentleness and pastoral wisdom he was able to draw many Calvinists to the unity of the Church.”

