

## ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

1567-1622; CANONIZED IN 1665 BY POPE ALEXANDER VII; FEAST DAY: JANUARY 24

Born near Annecy in Savoy, Francis de Sales studied at the University of Paris for six years, followed by three years studying law at the University of Padua; he received his doctorate in 1591. While in Padua, he nearly died during a typhoid epidemic in 1590.

Francis felt called to the priesthood early in life, but hid his vocation from his father, who found a suitable young lady for him to marry and a position in the Senate of Savoy. When Francis turned them down in favor of becoming a priest, his relationship with his father was permanently ruptured.

Ordained in 1593, Francis became known for his preaching and his service to the sick and the poor. With his cousin Louis, he undertook a missionary effort to reconvert 60,000 Calvinists in the Chablais region. After four years, 40,000 had returned to the Catholic faith and Catholicism was again openly practiced in the region.



Francis' connection to the Oratory began on a trip to Rome in 1598, where he met Ven. Cesare Cardinal Baronius and Blessed Juvenal Ancina, who became a close friend. On this trip he was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Geneva after passing a theological exam administered by St. Robert Bellarmine.

In 1602, he established an Oratory at Thonon, and a few months later he succeeded as Bishop of Geneva. It was on business as bishop that he traveled to Dijon in 1604, where he met St. Jane Frances de Chantal. Their twenty-year relationship is among the most well known spiritual friendships in the history of the Church, and it resulted in the foundation of the Order of the Visitation.

Today, Francis is best known for his writings. His *Introduction to the Devout Life*, based on a collection of correspondence with a spiritual directee, became an immediate runaway bestseller that went through numerous printings and was translated into several languages during Francis' lifetime. He is also remembered for his *Treatise on the Love of God*, which he wrote between 1614 and 1616. Both works are still in print today.

Francis did not allow high blood pressure and heart problems to slow him down. He continued preaching regularly, writing twenty to thirty letters a day, and traveling (on another visit to Paris in 1618, he met St. Vincent de Paul) until December 1622, when he died of complications from a stroke.