

## *A Message from Fr. Jim*

Consider the following excerpt from Introduction to the Devout Life by St. Francis De Sales:

### **We Must First Begin by Purifying the Soul**

“The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning the vines has come, “says the Sacred Spouse. What other flowers do we have in our hearts except good desires? As soon they appear we must take a pruning knife in order to remove from our conscience all dead and worthless works. Before an alien girl was permitted to marry an Israelite she had to put aside her clothing as a captive, pare her nails, and shave off her hair. So also a soul that hopes for the honor of being made spouse of the Son of God must “put off the old man, and put on the new” by forsaking sin and removing and cutting away whatever obstructs union with God. For us the beginning of good health is to be purged of our sinful tendencies.

In a single instant St. Paul was cleansed with a complete purgation, and so too were St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Pelagia, and certain others. However such purgation is as miraculous and extraordinary in the order of grace as resurrection from the dead is in the order of nature and therefore we should not look for it. The usual purgation and healing, whether of body or of soul, takes place only little by little and by passing from one advance to another with difficulty and patience. Although the angels on Jacob’s ladder had wings, they did not fly but went up and down in order and step by step. The soul that rises from sin to devotion has been compared to the dawning day, which at its approach does not drive out the darkness instantaneously but only little by little. A slow cure, as the maxim says is always surest. Diseases of the soul as well as those of the body come posting on horseback but leave slowly and on foot.

In this enterprise we must have courage and patience. What a pity it is to see souls who perceive themselves still subject to many imperfections after striving to be devout for a while and then begin to be dissatisfied, disturbed, and discouraged and almost let their hearts give in to a temptation to give up everything and go back to their old way of life. On the other hand, are not those souls also in extreme danger who by an opposite temptation think themselves cleansed of every imperfection on the very first day of their purgation, regard themselves as perfect before they have scarcely begun, and try to fly without wings? They are in great peril of a relapse on being too soon out of the physician’s care. Do not get up before the light has come, says the prophet, but “rise after you have sat down.” He himself practiced this lesson; although already washed and cleansed, he asked to be washed and cleansed still more and more.

The work of purging the soul neither can nor should end except with our life itself. We must not be disturbed at our imperfections, since for us perfection consists in fighting against them. How can we fight against them unless we see them, or overcome them unless we face them? Our victory does not consist in being unconscious of them but in not consenting to them, and not to consent to them is to be displeased with them. To practice humility it is absolutely necessary for us at times to suffer wounds in this spiritual warfare, but we are never vanquished unless we lose our life or our courage. Imperfections and venial sins cannot deprive us of spiritual life; it is lost only mortal sin. Therefore it only remains for us not to lose courage. Save me, O Lord, from cowardice and discouragement, David says. Fortunately for us, in this war we are always victorious provided that we are willing to fight.