



# THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

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## Eucharistic Hospitality

by Jake DeMarais

*What a simplification of life it would be if we forced ourselves to see that everywhere we go is Christ, wearing out socks we have to darn, eating the food we have to cook, laughing with us, silent with us, sleeping with us.*

- Dorothy Day, *Room For Christ*

It was a cold, blustery, January day in Washington D.C., and I was sitting around a table in the basement of a church with a group of homeless men playing the card game, "Spades." About six blocks away, the inauguration of President Barack Obama was in full swing, and the streets were filled with food trucks, souvenir stands, and lots and lots of people! I was eighteen and had no idea what I was feeling. Why was I there? Why was I invited to play a game of cards with these men? Well the simple answer is that I was on a mission trip through my college's mission trip program.

The more complex answer might include that my privileges from the moment I was born were being pulled out in a variety of ways as I was invited, listened to, and shown what I would call "Eucharistic Hospitality" by people who I thought I was giving hospitality to. Although I was there to "help" and show "hospitality" to those men, they were the ones letting down their guard quicker "at table" with me. They were sharing their favorite card game, their snacks, their stories, and no doubt a

profound moment in this nation's history. Perhaps, not the bread and wine / Body and Blood of Christ one encounters in the Eucharist at Mass, but nevertheless, an experience of bringing who we all were to the table and being transformed by the stories, the food, and the actual event that was in full swing. A form of eucharist indeed! And now, fourteen years later, I am still unpacking the layers of that "feast." Eucharistic hospitality can take on many forms.

I share this experience as the U.S. Catholic Church continues on in the first year of the three year Eucharistic Revival Campaign. A challenge for us all to dive deeper individually and communally into the mystery of the Eucharist; to grow in our understanding and love for the gift Christ gives to us in his real, tangible presence in the Body and Blood. But, as a recent article in *America Magazine* written by Patrick Cullinan states, it is also most definitely about the action that follows and interacts with the "intellectual conversion" of the gift:



## The Attentive Hospitality of Mary

by Hope Zelmer

The days are growing longer and colder and greyer. A wet, heavy snow fell today, plopping off of tree branches like something much more unpleasant than the first measurable snow of the season. The sun is never quite strong enough now, and has that funny pale, wintry angle to it. If I weren't reminded by the weather and the lessening sunlight that Advent is approaching, my day job (a high school campus minister) would make sure I can't forget! Advent and Christmas are already significantly on my mind and in my daily work. And two questions have nestled their way into my mind to prod me as Advent approaches:

*How will Christ be born in me?*

*How will I make a home for Him in my life, and in my heart this Advent?*

I can claim no originality in asking these questions - Scripture, the Tradition, art, music, and literature galore all pose this question in a variety of ways to us! But my most recent inspiration came from reading Caryll Houselander's book *The Reed of God* for the first time during the season of Advent last year.

Inspired by Houselander's insights on Mary, I would like to reflect on how Mary makes a home for (and shows hospitality to) others in her life as she brings Christ into the world by reflecting on the key marvels of the Annunciation, the Visitation,

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## Letter from the Directors

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Dear Friends of Nativity House,

Advent is upon us. Each year as we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ it is important to reflect as the year comes to a close. This past year at Nativity House has been new, different and full of growth. Through the change and growth abundance has always been a theme.

Since our last publication of The Visitation we have completed a plentiful year in the CSA. Most importantly, we made some new friends with new members that joined the garden and deepened old friendships. The gardens were prolific this year: especially with popcorn, apples, and green beans. There was a new delectable bite that caused a flavor tizzy - the ground cherry. It makes a lovely savory jelly served on top of goat cheese.

We were honored this summer by two Eagle Scout projects. We have a new fire ring across from the pond that we are eager to christen thanks to Xavier Lillig and his team. We also have a new goat fence thanks to Ashton Plebanek and his team. Our orchard and garden are now much safer from the shenanigans of goat escapes. We recently gave permanent hospitality to some hens whose family was moving out of state which has bolstered our flock to 8. Quinn and Tookay will be soon added with the does for the winter season bringing hopes of kids in the spring.

Currently, we have 2 part-time staff. Krista joined the community in February. She has been a long time friend of Nativity House and we finally convinced her to join us in our work on a part-time basis. She brings a sweetness to the community. Jake joined as a part-time staff member in July. He and his family have been involved in our CSA for the last few summers. Jake brings a spunky joyfulness to the community. He is also very eager for farm chores.

August and September were very busy with Farm to Table preparations and celebrations and a flurry of guest mom applications. This year's Farm to Table was by far the most successful to date. While we have had many guest mom applications, we do still have two rooms available. Please offer your prayers for all of the women who are newly expecting, abortion vulnerable, and housing insecure. There is so much need.

We are looking forward to bringing the Nativity House Christmas Coffeehouse back! We will have our traditional art silent auction, cookies, hot cocoa bar, loteria and Christmas Trivia. We hope you will join us.

We have been blessed time and time again by your support. We continue to focus on fundraising and financial belt tightening. We are eager to welcome 2 new moms to Nativity House but we will require your continued support through prayers and donations to keep the hospitality flowing.

Peace & All Good,  
Venus & Justin Wozniak - Founders, Nativity House

## *About The Visitation*

This newspaper, The Visitation, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality, and theology. It is published four times a year by Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

[newspaper@nativity-house.org](mailto:newspaper@nativity-house.org)

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

## *About Nativity House*

Nativity House serves as a house of hospitality for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House and the greater community. Overall, we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

Nativity House is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us, please email Venus Wozniak at:

[venusad@nativity-house.org](mailto:venusad@nativity-house.org)

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Nativity House  
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We extend the sincerest thanks to all.



## *The Four Key Takeaways on St. Hildegard of Bingen, Doctor of the Church:*

- 1) *She was ahead of her time*
- 2) *She was an environmentalist*
- 3) *She was a polymath*
- 4) *She is humble*

## Roundtable Roundup

by Kayla Jacobs

On September 29, I was grateful to gather in fellowship at Nativity House for a potluck dinner and Roundtable discussion on the life and example of St. Hildegard of Bingen, Doctor of the Church. The event was co-sponsored by the Diocese of Joliet's Laudato Si' Ministries as part of their Season of Creation celebrations. The Season of Creation is a time of year when the Church celebrates and renews our commitment to caring for creation, beginning on September 1, the International Day of Prayer for Creation, and ending on October 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

Roundtable discussions are one of three steps of Peter Maurin's (co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement) program of social reconstruction, the other two steps being houses of hospitality and farm colonies, all "led by the laity,

working out the principles in the Popes' encyclicals on social justice." The goal of Roundtable discussions is to provide a space that fosters clarification of thought.

The evening began with sharing a delicious meal together. The Roundtable was after dinner. The discussion was led by Sue Garthwaite, author of the book *St. Hildegard: Ancient Insights for Modern Seekers*. Sue has a deep understanding and knowledge of St. Hildegard and her contributions to the Church and world at large.

This event was particularly meaningful to me, as it was the last event I coordinated for the Diocese of Joliet, a place I worked for 8 years. Additionally, for the past several years I have felt a closeness to St. Hildegard,

even though I still have a lot to learn about her. My first real introduction to her was a few years ago when I was living at the Nativity House. Something I became passionate about while working at the Nativity House CSA was the herb garden. I would spend hours tending to the plants, drying the herbs so we could use them as spices year round, and making home remedies. The community gave me the nickname "herb girl." During that time I learned about a book on natural remedies credited to St. Hildegard called *Physica*, with a whole section on herbs! From there, I was hooked!

Here are the key takeaways I got from the Roundtable:

***She was ahead of her time.*** St. Hildegard was really forward thinking. Many of the quotes and

details Sue shared with us about her life seemed like they could apply to the world today.

***She was an environmentalist.*** This goes along with the fact that she was ahead of her time. Even in medieval times there were environmental concerns, such as keeping the waterways and air clean and St. Hildegard had a great concern about caring for creation. Her concern stemmed from the fact that she viewed nature as an expression of God and a call to prayer saying, "Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars. Gaze at the beauty of the Earth's greenings. Now, think."

***She was a polymath.*** She was a: composer, a mystic, a herbalist, leader of her community, a spiritual director, an activist, a writer... she even invented her

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**The Attentive Hospitality of Mary** *continued from page 1*

and (of course!) the Nativity.

In these essential moments of salvation history, Mary can be our model and our guide to hospitality, whatever our own story, strengths, weaknesses, or character – because the Gospels tell us the essentials about Mary without painting a caricature of her or ever boxing her in.

**The Annunciation:** Luke’s Gospel doesn’t tell us everything that happened at the Annunciation; we don’t know the manner in which Gabriel appeared to Mary. We do not know what Mary was doing when Gabriel arrived, nor what Mary felt, how she looked, or her facial expressions that day. But Luke’s Gospel tells us the essentials: the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth. We know what Gabriel said, and we know what Mary said. Mary at first was troubled, and she pondered, and she questioned, and she listened to the proclamation. She said, “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.” And Gabriel departed.

In rereading this Gospel passage again, Mary’s attentive hospitality strikes me as our model. The 20th century French philosopher Simone Weil noted in a letter once that, “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.”

So Mary’s hospitality in the Annunciation comes from her attention and her attentiveness. She makes room for Gabriel’s message from the Lord by watching and listening keenly to

what is said. She practices hospitality as she receives the promise of the generations from her unexpected guest, freely saying yes to the Lord who has loved her into existence.

And yes - the “most highly favored lady’s” gracious hospitality makes possible a home for the Word now made flesh, hidden from everyone and (for now) known only to her. The Word who spoke the universe into existence has a mother, and he has His own home with her now.

**The Visitation:** It might be almost funny to consider Mary’s hospitality at the Visitation when in fact it is Elizabeth (and Zechariah) who receive Mary into their home at the Visitation. Elizabeth rejoices and recognizes Mary as the Mother of her Lord. Little John, of whom Jesus will say, “among those born of women, there was none mightier than he” leaps for joy!

But a spirit of hospitality abides in Mary’s heart in this moment and in the months spent with Elizabeth. Hospitality and generosity compelled Mary to seek out her older relatives, to bear the trials of traveling while pregnant herself, and to go both to tend to and learn from Elizabeth.

In his Christmas Angelus Address of 2012, Pope Benedict XVI noted the hospitality present through Mary and Elizabeth’s witness at the Visitation, saying, “The scene of the Visitation also expresses the beauty of hospitality. Where there is mutual acceptance, listening, and a space for others there is God, and the joy that comes from Him.”

And while Mary brought love and

attentive hospitality to the home of Elizabeth and Zachariah, with every moment of each day, she continued to give little Jesus a home, too:

*“Working, eating, sleeping, she was forming His body from hers. His flesh and blood. From her humanity she gave Him His humanity. Walking in the streets of Nazareth to do her shopping, to visit her friends, she set His feet on the path of Jerusalem. Washing, weaving, kneading, sweeping, her hands prepared His hands for the nails. Every beat of her heart gave Him His heart to love with, His heart to be broken by love. All her experience of the world about her was gathered to Christ growing in her.”*  
*(The Reed of God)*

In the Visitation, going about the tasks of loving her family and preparing for the enormous changes taking place in her own life, Mary shows us how to love others and be hospitable in the midst of a constantly changing world and our own particular circumstances. To love and embrace the person in front of us: that is the hospitality of Mary.

**The Nativity:** And now we arrive at the Nativity. It is impossible to imagine what Mary must have gone through and endured to bring Christ to birth away from home, away from family, with loving Joseph and few others (if anyone) there.

She cradles him to her chest, and helps the now tiny, newborn Prince of Peace to nurse, to sleep, to be warm. She meets his needs; for the God of the universe is now the one who hungers and is fed; who is thirsty and is given milk to

drink; who is naked and is wrapped in swaddling clothes by Mary. She places the longed-for and long-expected Jesus in the manger.

Mary does all this for Him... and then manages to welcome (in some fashion, the Gospels do not specify!) the shepherds who had heard the proclamation of the angels. What must she have felt in those hours after birth as she permitted the bedraggled, outcast shepherds to come to see Him?

And she did not place him in a palace nursery. She does not wrap him in the finest clothing. She gives Jesus her very self. Mary makes him comfortable with the resources she has. She lets others grow closer to her and close to Jesus, even unexpectedly.

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## The Attentive Hospitality of Mary

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If Mary could not give Jesus the finest and the best, I certainly cannot! I cannot give Him a saint; I can only give Him myself, as pitiful and unimpressive as that may be at times. But salvation history and the Tradition is pretty clear that is exactly what Jesus wants. Jesus wants a home in my heart and in my life, as it is right now.

He did not choose to be born into the palace of the Roman emperor, or even the palace of Herod. He asked to be born of Mary, placed into the tender fatherhood of Joseph, the bewildered welcome and seeking of the Shepherds, and the varied seeking and scorning of all those who would listen to him in the decades to come. That is what seemed fitting to Him, and who am I to tell Him he should have done differently?

“What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet what I can, I give him - give him my whole heart”

(Christina Rosetti, In the Bleak Midwinter)

May Mary our mother be our witness of attentive hospitality this Advent season. She welcomes Gabriel, the messenger of God, and Word made flesh first. She runs to, loves, is attentively present to, and willing to learn from her relative Elizabeth. As she goes about her life in those hidden months, she prepares to bear Christ into the world, and to make a home for Him and for others through the mystery of the Nativity.

This Advent, may Mary pray for us as we try to imitate the way she loved Jesus and brought him into the world. May He find a home in each of our hearts.

“So come to us. Abide with us. Our Lord, Emmanuel”

(O Little Town of Bethlehem).



*Hope Zelmer is a mom, wife, and campus minister at a local high school. She and her family became active members of the Nativity House CSA this past growing season.*

*Easy Essays:*

## The Duty of Hospitality

by Peter Maurin  
(1877-1949)

People who are in need and are not afraid to beg give to people not in need the occasion to do good for goodness' sake.

Modern society calls the beggar bum and panhandler and gives him the bum's rush. But the Greeks used to say that people in need are the ambassadors of the gods.

Although you may be called bums and panhandlers you are in fact the Ambassadors of God. As God's

Ambassadors you should be given food, clothing and shelter by those who are able to give it.

Mahometan teachers tell us that God commands hospitality, and hospitality is still practiced in Mahometan countries.

But the duty of hospitality is neither taught nor practiced in Christian countries.



## MAKING ROOM FOR CHRIST

### Conversations about Practical Hospitality

2023 holds exciting new endeavors. Nativity House will kick off the year with roundtable discussions about the practical implications of hospitality. We will explore creative ways to welcome the stranger as guest. We will gather friends, new and old, who hold sacred space - Christ Rooms - in their homes.

Maybe you have always wanted to offer radical hospitality. Maybe you already do. Maybe you are curious about the notion. If you would like to be a part of these conversations email Venus - [venus@nativity-house.org](mailto:venus@nativity-house.org). You can also keep tabs on these conversations on Facebook - @NativityHouseIL.

**St. Francis de Sales**

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would begin to come back to the Church. He continued this letter writing habit throughout his ministry as a means of giving spiritual direction in which he would generally address his letters to Philothea, or, “the one who loves God.” It is for this reason that St. Francis de Sales is recognized as the patron of writers and journalists.

Reflecting on St. Francis de Sales’ life and ministry, I can’t help but ponder upon his character of great patience, not only in his role as a Bishop ministering to people, but especially in his earlier years of discernment. How often do I lack patience in my own spiritual life and discernment? We live in a culture where the idea of instant gratification is so prevalent and whether we like to admit it or not, it can be very easy to let this practice fall into our relationship with God. Even those with a strong interior life of prayer can even still fall into the sense that we want everything to be revealed to us all at once. And while God surely is capable of giving us that grace, most times I find that He still has so much to reveal to our hearts in those periods of waiting. Those periods of waiting, no matter how long they are, can be very discouraging. We’ve all been there before and maybe are in the thick of it right now.

Brother Isaiah, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, has a song where he says “every good thing is born of a struggle.” And how true is that? We are called to “pray always without becoming weary” (Luke 18:1). I have to admit, in the midst of difficulties

and change, it is quite difficult for me to stay persistent with prayer; I know I am not alone in this struggle. So often when I feel this discouragement, I realize that I am fixating on following a certain structure of prayer or devotion and when I don’t do it the way I think I am supposed to, it gives way for shame and guilt to enter my heart. God doesn’t ask us to have the perfect prayer life. He just wants our hearts. When we don’t know how to pray, it is important to remember that the Lord delights in our showing up, in spite of, and especially in those times of desolation and despair.

St. Francis de Sales is quoted saying, “Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections, but instantly set about remedying them—every day begin the task anew.” Every day we have the choice and opportunity to invite God into every aspect of our day, to cultivate a mindfulness of His constant presence in our daily, often busy, lives; to lay our struggles down at the altar, trusting in His love and mercy, that in time these difficulties will bear fruit. I think this is how we can begin to live out the heart of St. Francis de Sales’ teaching. Perhaps we can turn towards his intercession in seasons of waiting or change, to grow in patience and to be ever mindful of the goodness God is working in our lives.

I leave you with these prayerful words of encouragement. St. Francis de Sales, pray for us!



*Be at peace. Do not look forward in fear to the changes in life; rather, look to them with full hope that as they arise, God, whose very own you are, will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will carry you in His arms.*

*Do not fear what may happen tomorrow; the same understanding Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day.*

*He will either shield you from suffering or will give you unfailing strength to bear it.*

*Be at peace, and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.*

-St. Francis de Sales



*Krista Starasinich is a part time staff member at Nativity House.*

## Eucharistic Hospitality

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Intimately connected with the intellectual conversion is the 'religious conversion,' which Father Lonergan describes as an 'other-worldly falling in love.' This conversion should bring Christians to 'a full and complete transformation of the whole of one's living and feeling.' The religious conversion compels Christians to act differently.

The Eucharistic Revival must lead us to this serving and loving in new, creative ways - to embodying "Eucharistic Hospitality" in our daily lives and experiences, not just while we sit in our churches or adoration chapels. How might we do this? Well, we certainly don't have to think too big. In fact, we need not look any further than whoever is right in front of us each and every "typical" day. Over the past several years, our family has been yearning to develop closer relationships with our immediate neighbors. There are young families like ours all over the place and yet we all seem to be "too busy" to get together. So finally, with a simple invitation made with free software online, we invited everyone who was around to come over to the driveway while we cooked up some hot dogs and burgers on a Friday night. Over twenty-five people stopped by at some point in the night; the over fifteen kids had a blast finding "goose eggs" filled with candy; and the parents/adults were able to make connections they didn't even know were right in the neighborhood!

Beginning with one's own neighborhood can most definitely be a starting point for building "Eucharistic Hospitality." And

then, from there we can lean on one another as a community to stretch that hospitality even wider - remembering that Christ is present in all, and it is a "privilege" to invite him in whoever he may be. Perhaps, after a few more neighborhood grill outs, there could be a neighborhood food/clothing drive for local food pantries/clothing banks; or an opportunity to make and deliver hot meals together for local houses of hospitality; or an opportunity to develop a new community garden where produce can both serve the neighborhood and the local food pantries.

Dorothy Day once wrote an article in *The Catholic Worker* entitled "Room for Christ." In it, she reminds us all that we are never too late to make room for Christ, to be hospitable to Christ, to show Eucharistic Hospitality:

"We do it by seeing Christ and serving Christ in friends and strangers, in everyone we come in contact with...All our life is bound up with other people...What a simplification of life it would be if we forced ourselves to see that everywhere we go is Christ, wearing out socks we have to darn, eating the food we have to cook, laughing with us, silent with us, sleeping with us."

Echoing back to my opening story in Washington D.C., "Eucharistic Hospitality" isn't something that happens only in our churches. It is precisely what happens when we open our doors to our houses; open spots at our dinner tables; open our ears to listen to stories; and open our hearts to embracing the person right in front of us. Starting with our own family, friends, neighborhoods, we build

a table for all and become that hospitality as community for all. Hopefully, we can all keep this in our minds and hearts as we journey forward reviving our love and understanding of the Eucharist. And then, take the next steps to challenge one another, as the many parts of the same Body of Christ, to continually "make room" for one more.



*Jake DeMarais is a part time staff member with Nativity House, stay at home dad, and piano teacher/accompanist - always seeking out the richness of community in all its forms. He lives in Lockport with his wife Stacy and their five kids.*

## Roundtable Roundup

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own language! And she seemed to be good at all of it! The inspiration I take from this is if you put your life in the hands of God then God will use you for the betterment of the World.

***She is humble.*** Even though she was recognized as an exceptional person, even during her own time, her primary focus was always her relationship with God. One of the most interesting facts I learned during Sue's presentation was that when Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI wanted to make her a Doctor of the Church, the Benedictines had to remind him that she actually wasn't even a canonized Saint yet. Her humility followed into Sainthood.

After the discussion we ended the evening with the Liturgy of the

Hours. During the Liturgy of the Hours we pray the magnificat, quoting the Virgin Mary saying, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord," a reality I feel deeply during evenings of community that the Roundtables provide.



*Kayla Jacobs is an active rock climber, peace activist, and environmental activist who loves spending her time finding small ways to make the world a just and loving place.*



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## St. Francis de Sales

Feast Day: January 24th

Patron of writers and journalists

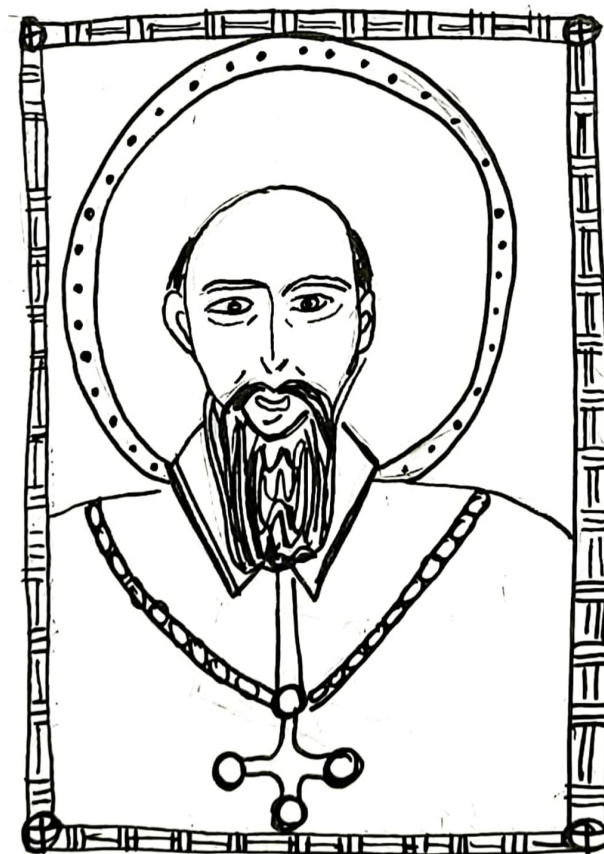
by Krista Starasinich

St. Francis de Sales was a Bishop and Doctor of the Church, known as the “Doctor Caritatis,” or, the “Doctor of Divine Love.” He has also often been styled, “The Gentleman Saint,” because of his patience and gentleness. Francis was born in France in 1567 to a noble family. He was a very intelligent and deliberate man and from a very young age desired to serve God. In fact, after a personal crisis and moment of conversion, he felt early on that he may be called to be a priest, but it would take him many years of discernment before entering his vocation. He even kept this from his family, knowing his father wanted him to enter a career in law and politics, and thus went on to attend the best schools to begin his education.

When he was a young man continuing his studies, Francis attended a theological discussion about predestination, convincing him of his damnation to hell. He lived during the time of the Protestant Reformation and was

surrounded by people, called Calvinists, who believed that God created some people for the sole purpose of sending them to hell. This thought sent him into much despair; it was so great that he became physically ill and even bedridden. Over time, with a lot of prayer, and especially through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom Francis consecrated himself to, he was released from his anxieties and doubt and was able to root himself in the belief that “God is love,” as John’s First Epistle attests. This led to greater discernment of his calling to the priesthood and after finishing his studies, receiving his doctorate in both law and theology, he was ordained in 1593.

Trust and belief in God’s goodness became the foundation of St. Francis de Sales’ teaching, often referred to as the Way of Divine Love, or the Devout Life. Many are familiar with his spiritual classic, “Introduction to the Devout Life,” where he



focuses on the necessity of holiness for the laity - the universal call to holiness in every vocation, something that wasn't commonly taught during his time. As a priest and eventually Bishop, Francis took to heart the need to evangelize and bring people back to the Catholic Faith; but he did not do so without his share of struggles. Many times while preaching, he was met with great opposition and people just didn't

want to listen. You could imagine the discouragement he must have felt, but even so, with patience and persistence, Francis did not give up. He had the idea to begin writing pamphlets to explain true Catholic doctrine and slipped them under doors in hopes of getting people’s attention. It worked, and thousands of people

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