

Preston, Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025

## Feast of St Francis de Sales

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

On this day, as we celebrate Saint Francis de Sales, the Church invites us to reflect on a saint who embodies the antidote to the hardening of the heart. A saint who, through his gentleness, total surrender to God, and love rooted in charity, shows us the path to a renewed heart fully alive in God.

### 1. The Tragedy of the Hardened Heart

The Old Testament resounds with God's lament: He calls, delivers, and guides, but His people often remain deaf and unresponsive. In the book of Ezekiel, God laments: "They have a heart of stone." And in Isaiah, we hear these sobering words: "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

This people is Israel, but it is also each of us. How often does God speak to us through His Word, the sacraments, or the events in our lives, and yet we resist? How often does our outward piety conceal a heart that is lukewarm, hardened, and insensitive to God's love and will?

Yet God never ceases to reach out. He delivers Israel from slavery in Egypt, but the people grumble in the desert. He sends His prophets, but they are often rejected. And still, God does not give up. In the book of Ezekiel, He promises: "I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

### 2. Saint Francis de Sales: A Divine Remedy

Saint Francis de Sales is for us a model and a remedy against this hardening of the heart. His life and teachings are a living response to God's call: "Give me your heart."

This holy bishop and Doctor of the Church teaches us total surrender to God's will. He says: "Nothing so tranquilizes the soul as complete surrender to the will of God." This is an essential lesson: a hardened heart is often a heart that refuses to yield, one that clings to its own plans and certainties. Francis de Sales invites us, instead, to simplicity and total docility.

His love of charity is at the center of everything. He wrote: "The heart speaks to the heart." And what kind of heart does he offer us? A heart that is both paternal and maternal. Through his gentleness and attentiveness, he reflects God's own love—a love tender like a father's, yet nurturing like a mother's.

### 3. A Call to Conversion

Brothers and sisters, on this feast day, let us allow ourselves to be challenged. If God were to ask us today: "Where is your heart?" what would we answer? Is our heart shackled by fears, anger, or selfishness? Or is it free, docile, and open to love?

The saint we honor today shows us the way:

- A docile heart, ready to listen and follow God's voice.
- A simple heart, free from unnecessary complications and false appearances.

- A heart on fire with charity, where love for God and neighbour is rightly ordered.

Let us put his teaching into practice. Let us abandon our resistance and hardness of heart. And let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of Saint Francis de Sales, to give us a new heart, a heart of flesh, capable of loving as He loves.

May this feast be an occasion for us to experience conversion and renewal. In Saint Francis de Sales, God shows us that a heart surrendered into His hands becomes a powerful instrument of His love. So let us open our hearts to His grace and allow ourselves to be transformed.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.