

JANUARY 1

## Peter of Atroa (773–837)

### *✠Ministry under duress*

Ephesus is a popular archaeological site on the western coast of today's Turkey. The apostle Paul established a Christian congregation there on his first missionary journey, remaining there three years, ministering to first-generation Christians. About seven hundred years later, Peter of Atroa was born to Christian parents in the neighborhood of Ephesus.

Peter had natural spiritual interests, and at eighteen, he became a monk, and a few years later, an ordained priest. As he began a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a mystical vision turned him and his companion aside with the inspiration to build a monastery. A strong work resulted and Peter became the monastery's leader at the age of thirty-two. People sought him because of his reputation as a healer and because of his sensitive spirit.

The early ninth century was a difficult time for Christians in that part of the world. Persecution increased with each passing year, and Peter worked fervently to protect his monks from harm. He died on the first day of January, 837, in the chapel choir, while his brother monks sang around him.

JANUARY 2

## Basil the Great (329–79)

### *✠Clear thinking*

Popular heresy has always been a threat to basic Christian doctrine. It was rampant in the early centuries, and one attractively

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expressed teaching was Arianism. The controversy began in Alexandria, in about 320, as a dispute between Arius and his bishop. Arius thought that Christ was neither fully God nor fully human, but something in between. This idea was not acceptable to orthodox Christian doctrine, but the notion gained a considerable following. The Church prepared the Nicene Creed in an effort to correct such heresies.

Basil the Great lived during the height of the Arian controversy (239–379), and he had an important part in the process of resisting it. It is worth noting that Basil's father, mother, grandmother, one of his sisters, and two of his brothers are also officially recognized saints, pointing to a remarkable family life.

Basil worked against steady opposition and received little support from other leaders in the Church even as he was championing the Church's teaching. Libraries preserve many of his books and letters today. The members of his flock loved him because he was an outstanding pastor who often visited among them. He preached to large gatherings twice a day, took care of the poor, and had a hospital built. One of the greatest personalities in church history, Basil did a superlative and enduring work in one of the most difficult times the Church has ever faced.

JANUARY 3

**Genevieve** (ca. 422– ca. 500)

*Wholesome faith*

Genevieve was a little shepherd in fields near Paris when Germanus (May 28) saw her and envisioned her saintly future. He noticed her listening intently to his sermon preached in Nanterre, a small village about eight miles from Paris. He asked to meet the child and had a quiet conversation with her. When she expressed an interest in service to God, Germanus spoke to her parents, predicting that Genevieve would lead a holy life and bring many others to God. He met with her a second time the next morning, giving her a medal engraved with a cross as a reminder of her dedication to Christ.

## *Elizabeth Ann Seton*

Genevieve remained at home, growing up in a wholesome, prayerful environment. When her parents died, she moved into the city of Paris and lived with her godmother. She began to live a life dedicated to religious interests, and continued to do so for thirty years. Neighbors accused Genevieve of acting a part and being a hypocrite, considering her mystical experiences to be pretense and deceit. Their hostility grew to the point that they considered drowning her, but Germanus intervened and persuaded them to overcome their animosity.

In 451, when Attila the Hun overran Gaul, the residents of Paris panicked and made plans to flee for their lives. Genevieve urged them to trust God, telling them that Paris would be spared if they had faith. In fact, Attila turned away from Paris and attacked Orléans. Genevieve died in 512 at the age of eighty-nine. Many residents of modern Paris still have a high regard for her, and some are doing charitable works in her name.

JANUARY 4

## Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774–1821)

### *Oneness in Christ*

Elizabeth Ann Seton was the first person born in the United States to be recognized as a saint. She began life as an Episcopalian, growing up in New York's high society. She married the wealthy merchant William Magee Seton, when she was nineteen, and she mothered five children. After a decade of stable and happy marriage, William's business went into bankruptcy, and soon afterward, he died of tuberculosis.

Attracted to Catholicism for years, Elizabeth Ann converted in 1805. Most of her friends were not able to understand this change, and some of them even began to shun her. To support her children, she opened a school in Boston. Her school was independent of the Church, but she organized it in a manner similar to a religious community. Based on this experience, the archbishop asked Elizabeth Ann to open a Catholic girl's school in Baltimore, Maryland—the

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beginning of the parochial school system in America. She founded the Sisters of Charity in 1809 to oversee the work.

Elizabeth Ann died at Emmitsburg, Maryland, on January 4, 1821. In September, 1975, Pope Paul VI formally canonized her.

Near her death, Elizabeth Ann wrote a statement of faith that reads like poetry:

Link by link, the blessed chain

One Body in Christ—He the head we the members

One Spirit diffused thru' the Holy Ghost in us all

One Hope—Him in heaven and Eternity

One Faith—by his Word and his Church

One Baptism and participation of his sacraments

One God our dear Lord

One Father We his children—he above all through all and in all.

Who can resist, all self must be killed and destroyed by this artillery of love—one, one, one. Who could escape this bond of unity, peace, and love? O my soul, be fastened link by link, strong as death, iron, and Hell as says the sacred Word.

JANUARY 5

## Genoveva Torres Morales (1870–1956)

*Happiness is harmony with God*

Both of Genoveva's Spanish parents and four of her brothers and sisters had died by the time she was eight. Genoveva alone survived to care for their home and had the difficult task of rearing José, her younger brother. At ten, she began reading books on religious subjects, and concluded that happiness was to be found in doing God's will. She determined to practice this with her life.

When Genoveva was thirteen an infected leg became gangrenous and required amputation. Doctors removed her left leg in her home without the benefit of sufficient anesthesia. For the remainder of her life, Genoveva walked on crutches and coped with persistent pain.

At fifteen, she began nine years with the Sisters and other children at the Mercy Home run by the Carmelites of Charity. During this

## *John de Ribera*

time she became a proficient seamstress and deepened her devotional life. Commenting on her discovery of spiritual liberty during her years at the Mercy Home, Genoveva wrote, “I loved freedom of heart very much, and worked and am working to achieve it fully. It does the soul so much good that every effort is nothing compared with this free condition of the heart.”

In 1911, when Genoveva was 41, she accepted the assignment to begin a new kind of religious community—one intended for poor women who could not support themselves. She organized the first such community in Valencia. In time, she established other communities in scattered Spanish locations. Necessary administrative detail crowded in upon her personal prayer life and added spiritual distress to the physical pain that was her constant companion.

She had a reputation for kindness and openness to others. Her good humor was legendary, and she would even joke about her physical condition. “Even if I must suffer greatly, thanks be to God’s mercy,” she said, “I will not lack courage.”

Genoveva died on January 5, 1956.

JANUARY 6

## **John de Ribera (1532–1611)**

### *✧ The influence of circumstance*

John grew up in Seville, Spain, in a gracious environment of family and church. His father, Peter de Ribera, a devout Christian, was an important political figure. Educated at the University of Salamanca, John became an ordained priest at the age of twenty-five and remained at the university to teach theology.

Because his leadership abilities were extraordinary, he was appointed bishop, against his wishes, in 1562. After fulfilling that responsibility with distinction for six years, he became archbishop of Valencia. This difficult and fatiguing position he held for forty-two years. Unfortunately, John de Ribera shared a popular notion of his people that the Moors who lived in the excellent agricultural region of Valencia were “sponges who suck up Christian wealth.”

He agreed with the 1609 edict expelling them from Valencia. This action resulted in horribly brutal behavior and damaged the local economy. He died two years later in 1611. The Church made an unusual statement honoring the personal virtues of God's servant, but did not accept his political views.

JANUARY 7

## Raymund of Peñafort (ca. 1175–1275)

### *Organizing and codifying*

Raymund, a Spanish Dominican who held a doctorate in law, made a significant contribution to codifying church law. Born in Catalonia, he studied and taught in Barcelona. At the age of forty-seven he exchanged his academic career for life with the Dominicans, and soon after, Rome asked him to come and organize the decrees issued by the popes and church councils of the previous century. The five-volume result, *Decretals*, became the standard reference for church regulations until recent times.

At sixty, Raymund became archbishop of Aragon. He never enjoyed this position, and after two years, an illness led to his resignation. The next year the Dominicans chose Raymund to head their Order. He took his work seriously, faithfully visiting by walking to each Dominican community.

With Raymund's background in law, he decided to revise the Dominican Order's constitution, writing in a provision that the head of the Order could resign. When the Dominicans approved his new constitution, he immediately resigned from office at the modern retirement age of sixty-five.

But his life was not nearly complete. He lived approximately another thirty-five years. He used this time to teach, even guiding Thomas Aquinas (see January 28). Raymund of Peñafort devoted great effort in these remaining years to fighting heresy and trying to convert the Moors in Spain to Christianity. In 1256, he wrote his master-general that ten thousand Muslims had been converted and baptized under his leadership.

## *Thorfinn*

JANUARY 8

### **Thorfinn** (d. 1285)

#### *✠ Faithful in obscurity*

The Norwegian Thorfinn died at a Cistercian monastery in Belgium. During his life he did not attract much attention, and after he was buried, most people all but forgot him.

About fifty years later construction workers accidentally broke open his tomb. Instead of a disagreeable odor, there was a strong, pleasing scent. The abbot asked his monks about the man interred on the site and found one of them, the aged Walter de Muda, who remembered Thorfinn. Walter recalled that Thorfinn had impressed the community with his gentle, yet strong personality. De Muda had actually written a little poem praising Thorfinn that was entombed with him. Searchers found this poem on parchment, undeteriorated after five decades. The abbot took this as a sign that it was important to perpetuate the memory of Thorfinn, and asked Walter to write everything he could remember about him. All that we know about this saint today may be read in Walter's sketchy recollections and the tribute he paid him with his poem. He remembered Thorfinn as a kind, patient, generous man, whose gentle nature was combined with a strong moral character.

JANUARY 9

### **Julian and Basilissa** (fourth century)

#### *✠ Acts of charity*

Husband and wife, Julian and Basilissa turned their home into something of a hospital for the poor. In this facility, they provided a refuge for the helpless and the homeless, and as many as a thousand people came under their care.

Julian and Basilissa lived in fourth-century Egypt where their expression of personal Christian dedication resulted in many acts of charity and penance. We do not know many details of their lives, though it is certain Julian outlived his wife by many years. Both of them died as martyrs for their faith.

JANUARY 10

## Leonie Aviat (1844–1914)

### *✠ Sainly influence*

Leonie was born in Sézanne, France, in 1844. She developed spiritually at the Monastery of the Visitation in Troyes. The influence of Francis de Sales (January 24) permeated her experience there. With this preparation, she founded a congregation committed to Salesian spirituality and to the evangelization and education of young textile workers.

From France, Leonie's work spread to Italy, Mexico, and many other places worldwide. Inspired by Francis de Sales, she worked for the happiness of others and was faithful to her resolution "to forget myself entirely." She died in Perugia, Italy, on January 10, 1914.

JANUARY 11

## Thomas of Cori (1653–1729)

### *✠ A life of prayer*

Thomas, who became an orphan at fourteen, was left alone to take care of his sisters. He supported his family by herding sheep, and this gave him time to reflect on spiritual matters. When his sisters were married, Thomas became a Franciscan and was ordained a priest in 1683.

A commentator writes that Thomas of Cori was not so much a man who prayed as a man who became prayer. At the same time, Thomas admitted that even with his intense dedication to prayer he experienced spiritual dryness for about forty years.

Thomas devoted himself to visiting with others in various regions of Italy. He preached with lucidity, in a straightforward and persuasive style. While he attempted to live a thoroughly Franciscan life, he patiently and kindly encouraged others who were not as spiritually mature as himself. Personal humility characterized his demeanor.

## *Bernard of Corleone*

JANUARY 12

### **Bernard of Corleone (1605–67)**

#### *Change of life*

His parents, who tended a small vineyard in Sicily, named him Philip. While he received no formal education, he did learn to be a cobbler. After his father died, Philip made and repaired shoes to support himself and his mother.

During the seventeenth century, Spanish mercenaries occupied Sicily. Proficient in the use of swords, they taught young Philip the art of swordsmanship. He gained a reputation for being the best “blade” in Sicily. He used his sword to protect women and peasant neighbors from abuse by the soldiers. One incident provoked a duel in which Philip seriously wounded his opponent. Seeking sanctuary, he ran to a local church and hid there. In the quiet of that place, the young man reviewed his life and decided it was meaningless.

In December of 1631, at the age of twenty-seven, Philip joined the Franciscans in Caltanissetta, and received the religious name of Bernard. Not only did he change his name, but he radically changed his manner of living. Instead of reaching for his sword when provoked, he now responded with silence.

Bernard of Corleone turned his former violence toward others into merciless violence toward himself. Self-discipline became a central task for him as he advanced rapidly in a life of devotion to God.

In the manner of Francis of Assisi (October 4), he had a loving and healing relationship with animals. People brought their sick pets and farm animals to him with remarkable results. He practiced a ritual of praying the Lord’s Prayer over an animal and then leading it three times around a cross in front of his church. His life was in harmony with all of God’s creation.

Bernard of Corleone died in 1667 at the age of sixty-two, an uneducated cobbler and sword fighter who won his greatest duel—with himself.

JANUARY 13

## Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315–67)

### *Quiet studies*

After receiving a good education in rhetoric and philosophy, Hilary married and had a daughter. In 350, following lengthy and serious study, he became a Christian convert.

Leadership qualities quickly brought Hilary to positions of responsibility in the Church. By 353 he was a bishop, and for the remainder of his life he championed the cause of orthodox Christian doctrine that was challenged by the growing popularity of heresies. Augustine and Jerome expressed great respect for his clear thinking and persuasive abilities. He demonstrated a compassionate love for heretics while yet combating their heresy. Described as gentle and courteous, he was a friendly person whose writing on Christian doctrine remains engaging in our day.

Hilary died at the age of fifty-two.

JANUARY 14

## Sava of Serbia (1174–1237)

### *Guiding others*

Sava called himself an “unworthy, lazy monk.” An easy-going man, he never became heavy-handed with those under his oversight. His gentle guidance proved effective in the training of young monks. He invariably came down on the side of kindness and leniency.

Born in Bulgaria, the third son of Prince Stephen Nemanya (who won independence for the Serbs), Sava became a monk in 1191. Five years later, his princely father abdicated and joined him in his religious vocation. These two monks, father and son, founded a monastery at Mount Athos which became the center of Serbian culture.

Sava translated Scripture and other books into the Serbian language. The Mount Athos monastery, named Khilandari, still possesses some of his hand-written work.

JANUARY 15

## Arnold Janssen (1837–1909)

### ✎ *An idealistic dream*

Arnold Janssen grew up on his family farm in Germany. After studying mathematics, science, and philosophy, he attended seminary in Muenster. In 1861 he became an ordained priest and began to work as a schoolteacher.

Appointed director of the Apostleship of Prayer, Arnold began to mingle with Christians of other denominations. He traveled to many places, often walking. A growing interest in mission work led him to give up his teaching responsibilities and devote his full energy to promoting missions in Germany and beyond. He began a popular magazine, *The Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart*.

The civil government in Germany during the late nineteenth century began to restrict the Church. Anti-Catholic laws resulted in the imprisonment of bishops and the exile of priests. Arnold looked for ways to make the best of a bad situation. He proposed that some of the expelled priests could become missionaries, or at least they could help train them. His ideas received little support. People argued that he was too idealistic, and that Germany was not ready to begin such a grand project. Janssen responded, “The Lord challenges our faith to do something new, precisely when so many things are collapsing in the Church.”

Promoting his project in the *Little Messenger*, he began fundraising. German politics complicated his search for a house to use for the training of priests. He shopped for real estate across the Netherlands border, and bought property in Steyl. There the Church founded the Divine Word Missionaries in 1875. Four years later, the first two missionaries departed for China.

A steady flow of eager students came into Steyl. Improvements to the house required the labor of many volunteers who engaged in what they considered mission work. Janssen had not anticipated this enthusiastic blossoming of his idea. Women also arrived to work in the kitchen and later formed the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters. The first Sisters went to Argentina in 1895.

Arnold Janssen died at the house in Steyl at the age of seventy-one, on January 15, 1909. Today, more than six thousand Divine Word Missionaries work in sixty-five countries, and almost four thousand Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters serve in thirty-five countries. A farm boy's idealistic dream continues to bear a rich spiritual harvest.

JANUARY 16

## Honoratus of Arles (ca. 350–429)

### *Searching*

Honoratus was born in the fourth century to a Roman family working for their government in Gaul. As a young person, he abandoned pagan worship of idols and became a Christian. He moved with his brother Venantius, to Greece and attempted life as a religious hermit. Their circumstances were difficult, exposing them to physical hardships. Venantius became ill and died. Honoratus, also quite sick, returned home and established a monastery on one of the Mediterranean islands that bears his name today.

He became archbishop of Arles, assuming responsibilities that consumed the final three years of his life.

JANUARY 17

## Anthony of Egypt (ca. 251–356)

### *Surrendering everything*

Credit for the concept of monasticism goes to Anthony. He is considered the father of all monks. Growing up in a Christian home in Egypt, Anthony lost his parents early, inheriting a small fortune. When he reached the age of twenty Christ's words about selling what you have and giving it to the poor touched him profoundly. He determined to practice Christ's teaching literally. Once he had arranged for the care of his younger sister, he sought solitude in the

## *Christina Ciccarelli*

desert for prayer and meditation. His experiences during the next twenty years of his life parallel those of the temptation of Christ.

Many came to Anthony for spiritual direction and advice. The emperor Constantine wrote, requesting his prayers. Anthony set up a scattered group of cells that were the world's first suggestion of a monastery. He expected to become a martyr during the Roman persecution of Christians in 311, but did not, even though he went to Alexandria while openly wearing his identifying white tunic of sheepskin in order to encourage other Christians.

Living beyond one hundred years, Anthony actively opposed the Arian heresy (see the January 2 entry). The story of his life was influential in the conversion of Augustine (August 28).

JANUARY 18

## **Christina Ciccarelli** (sixteenth century)

### *✠Caring for the poor*

Christina was an Italian who became an Augustinian nun. While she stayed far from any public spotlight, her profound spirituality became well-known. She had great concern for the needs of the poor, working with other nuns to provide them with essentials. On January 18, 1543, the day of her death, the children of Aquila, where her convent was located, paraded in the streets mourning her death.

JANUARY 19

## **Canute IV, King of Denmark** (1043–86)

### *✠Meeting a challenge*

Canute became king of Denmark in 1081. Much of the Danish nation was at least nominally Christian because of the labor of English missionaries. Canute worked to strengthen the Church in his country by law and financial subsidies.

A series of political misjudgments, including an attempt to claim the crown of England, led to his downfall. The Danish people did

not support his taxing them for religious purposes and rebelled against him. An angry mob gathered outside the church where Canute was praying. As he knelt, receiving the holy Eucharist, someone threw a spear through a church window, striking and killing this king of Denmark.

JANUARY 20

## Sebastian of Rome (third century)

### *☩Suffering for Christ*

Impressive legends exist about Sebastian, but we know few details about the life of this famous Roman martyr. He lived in a time when it was dangerous to be a Christian. One legend contends that the Romans arrested him and threw him in prison, where two other Christian prisoners were ready to renounce their faith in order to save their lives. Sebastian's encouragement not only gave them strength, but reached the ears of others outside the prison bars, leading to additional conversions.

The legend of Sebastian's death is frightening. Romans, the story goes, tied him naked to a tree and used him as a target for archery practice. Many Renaissance paintings portray this incident. After he was left to die, a widow came to bury him, but she was astonished to discover that somehow breath was still in him. She took him home and tended to his wounds. After his recovery, she pleaded with him to escape the risks of living as a Christian in Rome. Instead, he went to Diocletian and demanded that he stop persecuting Christians. Shocked to discover that the young man had survived the target practice, Diocletian ordered the immediate execution of Sebastian. He was then clubbed to death.

JANUARY 21

## Agnes (ca. 292– ca. 305)

### ✠ *Sexual equality*

The story of Agnes, who died at the executioner's hand as a thirteen-year-old adolescent, reveals a courageous effort of a young woman to define herself as a human being in Christ, in spite of the crushing attempt of her culture to identify her strictly in terms of sex. Her stand against the prevailing attitudes of the society around her is a brave declaration of independence.

An extraordinarily beautiful child, Agnes was born to a wealthy Roman family. As she approached puberty, many men began to express an interest in her. She did not respond positively to their advances. She told them, "Jesus is my only husband. I am already promised to the Lord." One disappointed suitor denounced her as a Christian and she was brought before the governor. When an offer of lavish gifts did not change her mind, the governor put her in chains. Agnes refused to back down, even after being tortured. When pain did not work, the Romans tried humiliation. The Roman governor sent her to a house of prostitution where any man might have his way with her. Because she radiated such an aura of purity (*Agnes* is the Greek word for *pure* and is but a step away from *agnus*, which means *lamb*) no man would touch her. According to the ancient written record of her life, one man who dared to gaze lustfully at her naked body lost his eyesight. Exasperated men condemned her to die by the sword, a punishment she accepted as cheerfully "as others go to their wedding."

Agnes has been an extraordinarily popular saint through the centuries. Perhaps she is a corrective to the idea that men should have a dominant place in human society. She saw herself as a child of God while her cultural environment attempted to identify her strictly in terms of sex. Agnes refused to play by the rulebook of her time and place.

JANUARY 22

## Vincent Pallotti (1795–1850)

### *Inspired living*

The son of a Roman grocer, Vincent Pallotti was not the best student early in life. His teacher commented, “He is a little saint, but a bit thick-headed.” His studies improved, and he was ordained to the priesthood in 1817 at the age of twenty-three. With a doctorate in theology and philosophy, he became a college professor, but eventually devoted himself to pastoral work full-time. His personal diary records his spiritual insight:

*Not the intellect, but God.*

*Not the will, but God.*

*Not the soul, but God.*

*Not the goods of the world, but God.*

*Not riches, but God.*

*Not honors, but God.*

*Not distinction, but God.*

*Not dignities, but God.*

*Not advancement, but God.*

*God always and in everything.*

Ahead of his times in both activity and thought, Pallotti became a target of some major dirty tricks handed out by other clergy who were apparently jealous of him. Ultimately, though, some who had mercilessly attacked him became ardent admirers and supporters.

Vincent Pallotti wrote, “Holiness is simply to do God’s will, always and everywhere.” He provided education and practical instruction for many kinds of laborers and craftsmen, attempting to give them pride in the quality of their work. He would literally give another the shirt off his back. Once, he dressed as a woman in order to approach the bedside of a man who said he would shoot any priest who came near him.

One comment about him beautifully summarizes his fifty-five years of life. “He did all that he could. As for what he couldn’t do—well, he did that too.” He died in Rome on January 22, 1850.

## *John the Almsgiver*

JANUARY 23

### John the Almsgiver (d. ? 616)

#### *Generosity*

John was the son of a governor of the island of Cyprus. When death claimed all the other members of his family, John moved to Alexandria, Egypt, about the year 608. He became a patriarch. The Church in Egypt was splitting into factions, but his personal integrity and his careful approach to almsgiving gained the respect of everyone.

John lived a simple life, calling the poor his masters. He would give all he could to help them, even to the point of giving away his own bedding. He worked strenuously on behalf of the poor, demanding accurate weights and measures, distributing money at his disposal to hospitals and monasteries. He built poorhouses and maternity hospitals. He spent an astonishing amount on disaster relief and in rescuing captives. He gave a ship loaded with corn to a merchant who was ruined by a couple of shipwrecks. The merchant sold the corn at a good profit in famine-struck Britain and was back in business.

Like anyone who works for charity with the general public, John developed an eye for freeloaders. Some came to him in disguise, hoping he would not recognize that he had already given them handouts. They need not have bothered. John continued to help them generously. He would sit all day on a bench in front of the church every Wednesday and Friday in order to provide everyone with free and easy access to his attention. Generosity begets generosity, and others began to follow his example.

JANUARY 24

### Francis de Sales (1567–1622)

#### *Wholesome religion*

“Live, Jesus!” That is the often repeated motto of Francis de Sales. If ever there was a genuine example of a thoroughly Christian life that is within the grasp of everyone, we can find it in this bishop

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of Geneva. A few complained that he made sainthood too easily attainable.

Francis de Sales went to Geneva during troubled times. The Protestant reformation was sweeping across Switzerland at full speed. New Calvinists were making life difficult and dangerous for Catholics. Instead of pointing out the flaws in Protestant doctrine and attempting to suppress it, Francis de Sales understood the larger significance of the movement. A diplomat in the finest sense, he approached the Calvinists with love and gentleness. He established his home base a few miles away from Geneva in Annecy, France.

Francis had been born to wealthy parents in Savoy in 1567. They wanted him to be a lawyer and paid his way through college until he had earned a doctorate in law. There are many examples in history of parents who misguided remarkable children into the wrong profession. Francis de Sales said, "God does not want me to embrace the life for which my father destines me." He became a priest in 1593.

The life of Francis de Sales demonstrates the extraordinary value of a calm, gentle approach to difficult issues, combined with genuine spiritual depth. Sometimes, it may be necessary for Christians to be boldly combative, but the patient, loving pattern of Jesus himself results in remarkable success. Francis is a supreme example of applied Christianity. He truly "lived Jesus" as Christ lived in him.

Many sought Francis de Sales as their spiritual director. His correspondence with Madame de Chamoisy evolved into one of the most remarkable devotional books ever published on prayer and Christian living. *Introduction to the Devout Life* gives sane, understandable, and healthy spiritual advice that ordinary people who live and work in a secular world can effectively practice every day. His illustrations and metaphors are memorable. "When little bees are caught in a storm they take hold of small stones so they can keep their balance when they fly. Our firm resolution to stay with God is like stability to the soul amid the rolling waves of life."

One of the great spiritual relationships existed between Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal (December 12). Their combined efforts resulted in the foundation of the Order of the Visitation in 1610.

## *The Conversion of Paul*

Death came relatively early to Francis de Sales, but his fifty-six years have left a permanent mark on the Church. Through his writings and example, he continues to direct the formation of the human spirit.

JANUARY 25

### The Conversion of Paul (ca. 4 B.C.– ca.64)

#### *☞ Confronting Christ*

Saul of Tarsus was a dedicated, enthusiastic Jew with a passionate interest in fulfilling the requirements of complex and detailed Jewish religious Law. The intelligent young man made the distressing discovery that the harder he tried to behave correctly, the farther the ideal life receded from his grasp. He had his heart set on being a righteous person, but his goal was not attainable. He began to feel disillusionment, and doubted that he would ever please God by strict observance of the Law. There can be no doubt that he was a well-behaved person. Anyone would have called him “good.”

Many modern Christians do not realize they are as trapped in a system of attempting to win God’s favor by good works as was Saul of Tarsus. “Righteousness by the law” motivated Saul to persecute Christians. This is a complex and multifaceted issue. One element is probably his own dissatisfaction with the religion he had inherited. For whatever package of reasons, Saul became a serious threat to the young Christian Church. He was present when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned, and Saul approved the action.

The ninth chapter of the book of Acts relates the story of Saul’s conversion. He was on his way to Damascus with letters permitting him to arrest Christians and return them to Jerusalem for punishment. As he traveled, a bright light immobilized him as the risen Christ asked, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Blinded by the experience, Paul had to be led by the hand into Damascus. A Christian named Ananias then visited him at the Lord’s command, restored his sight, and baptized him. An astonishing change took place. Paul began to speak in public, giving the message that Jesus

is the Son of God. The transformation of Paul is one of the most significant moments in human history. Paul's spiritual insight into the meaning of the life and the crucifixion of Jesus gave substance and character to his writing on basic Christian doctrine.

JANUARY 26

## Paula (347-404)

### *Supporting role*

Paula began life in 347 as a member of the Roman aristocracy. She was a happily married mother until she became a widow at thirty-two. Another widow, Marcella, consoled Paula and led her into religious life. The famous Jerome (September 30) became Paula's friend and spiritual director. It was he who wrote her biography.

When Jerome traveled to the Holy Land in 385, Paula followed. She spent part of her fortune helping Jerome establish a monastery for men, a convent for women, and a guesthouse for pilgrims in Bethlehem. For the remainder of her life, Paula led the women's community and devoted time to assisting Jerome in his scholarly studies. Already proficient in Greek, she now began to learn Hebrew. Jerome's great Latin translation of the Bible from the original languages owes much credit to Paula's capable assistance.

Paula's death at the age of fifty-six on January 26, 404 prompted Jerome to write a touching letter to her daughter. "I cannot say enough to do justice to the virtues of the holy and venerable Paula. From a noble family, she was even nobler in holiness." Her grave is under the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.