August 12th: Memorial of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, religious

Gospel text (*Mk* 3:31-35): The mother of Jesus and his brothers arrived at the house. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, “Your mother and your brothers and your sisters are outside asking for you.” But he said to them in reply, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”.

Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, religious (1572-1641)

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Today is the feast of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, and it is fitting that we hear Mark 3:31-35, because this saint possessed a disposition of soul very much like that of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whom she knew how to imitate. St. Francis de Sales was her spiritual director from 1604 onward, guiding her as a wife, a widow, and a religious sister. He formed her in humility, though she belonged to a noble family, and in obedience, though in the world she had been accustomed to giving orders.

Her acceptance of God’s will, in a spirit of obedience, gentleness, and humility, shaped the Order of the Visitation, which she founded with the help of the holy Bishop of Geneva. She wrote in her Rule: “Humility is the source of all the other virtues. Set no limits to humility, and make it the guiding principle of all your actions.” The Visitation drew its inspiration from the Gospel account of the Virgin Mary’s visit to her cousin St. Elizabeth, a model of active charity and humility. The Order fostered a balanced life of contemplation and action. Jane founded 87 monasteries during her lifetime, traveling tirelessly throughout France.

—St. Jane Frances de Chantal, canonized by Pope Clement XIII in 1767, is considered one of the great figures of seventeenth-century French Catholicism. Her life was a constant response to God’s call: as an exemplary wife and mother, as a widow devoted to serving others, and finally as the foundress of one of the most influential women’s religious congregations of her time.