January 24th: Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Gospel text (*Mt* 11:25-30): At that time Jesus said in reply, “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

”Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart”

Fr. Jean GOTTIGNY
(Bruxelles, Belgium)

Today, on January 24th, we celebrate the liturgical memory of a man who was enamored of God and of his neighbors: St Francis de Sales (1567-1622), bishop of Geneva, whose seat, during the Reformation, was fixed at Annecy.

Christ recommends cultivating our humility and our benevolence: Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves (Mt 11:29) Two moral virtues to look for, when we are trying to find our place in the Sun at the expense of excluding others.

But do not be mistaken, gentleness has nothing to do with mawkishness. The former is the fruit of God's grace and of our personal conquest. Francis de Sales, who was of an impulsive nature, has become the paradigm of gentleness, at the expense of a daily struggle with himself. Undoubtedly speaking from his own experience, he writes in his Introduction to the Devout Life: “One can catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a hundred barrels of vinegar.” He had just joined the school of He Who presents himself as “meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29).

We are not to mistake being humble at heart with being shy. The former consists of being sincere, that is, of being humus, that rich soil where the trees God wants to plant, grow easily. “Our Lord so dearly loves the virtue of humility that He rushes at it wherever He sees it” affirms the bishop of Geneva. Humility means total surrender to the divine action as well as being totally available to our neighbors.