

St. Jane Frances de Chantal

The Church continues to present us with a line of great saints this week with St. Jane Frances de Chantal. The French noblewoman (1572 – 1641) lost her mother when she was just eighteen months old, which profoundly impacted her life. It is quite something how many saints lost at least one parent at such a young age! Without a natural mother at such a young age, Jane turned to the Blessed Virgin Mary as a spiritual mother.

Jane's father was deeply religious and made sure that she received an excellent education and was raised with great piety. When Jane was twenty years old, she married Baron Christopher de Rabutin. He was of noble rank. The two had a deeply affectionate, faith-filled marriage that lasted seven to nine years before he died from a hunting accident. She was 28 years old.

In their short marriage, they had six children. Three died in infancy. Jane had managed the estate well and had a great dedication to the poor. Before passing, Jane's husband survived for nine days and forgave the man. Jane, however, struggled to forgive the man. Even more challenging, Jane struggled with severe depression and spiritual dryness for four decades following her husband's death.

After years of asking God to help her to forgive, our Lord gave Jane the grace to overcome her anger and bitterness toward the man. She eventually served as godmother to one of the man's children after hearing a sermon on forgiveness by St. Francis de Sales.

Unfortunately, Jane's husband inherited a lot of debt with the estate, forcing Jane to move back in with her father-in-law who was cranky and treated her poorly. Jane endured it all with patience and gentleness.

Jane's spiritual director was St. Francis de Sales. The two shared one of history's most famous spiritual friendships. Before they ever met, Jane had a dream or a vision of a man in clerical attire whom God designated as her future spiritual guide. When she saw St. Francis de Sales preach, she immediately recognized him as the exact person from her vision.

Jane asked St. Francis de Sales to join a convent of nuns. He told her to wait. After three years of direction, Francis finally told her that he wanted her to found a religious order. They established the order of Visitation nuns.

The new religious order took its name after our Lady visiting her cousin Elizabeth during her time of pregnancy. The Visitation sisters became an active order helping people. Additionally, the order accepted women rejected by stricter traditional monastic orders. The Visitation Sisters are known for their gentleness, humility, deep prayer, and “living Jesus” in daily life.

After founding a religious order, Jane’s beloved confessor and spiritual director, St. Frances de Sales, died. Her son was also killed by a plague. Her son-in-law and daughter-in-law also died. Jane died at age 69 in 1641. At the time of her passing, she had founded 86 religious houses (monasteries) across France and Savoy.

St. Jane Francis de Chantal had a remarkable life! She is a good reminder that saints, too, experience lots of twists and turns in life. We could almost create a litany of her sufferings: lost her mother when she was 18 months old, a husband who was killed in a hunting accident (widowed at age 28), three children lost in infancy, struggled to forgive the man who shot her husband, wrestled with heavy debts and a cranky father-in-law, lost an adult son from a plague, lost a son-in-law and daughter-in-law, and finally, lost her spiritual mentor and dear friend St. Francis de Sales. My goodness, Jane experienced *extraordinary sufferings*!

And yet, she hung in there with our Lord who did *marvelous things* through her. Today, we thank God for a faithful wife, devoted mother, founder of a religious order, and faithful disciple of Christ who repeatedly responded to His grace. Regardless of what you have gone through or are going through, be assured that the Lord can do the same with you! ☺

~St. Jane Frances de Chantal, pray for us!