



Step In!

**Salesian Bible Meditations
Volume 1: The Old Testament**

**Meditations Written by Tom Vresics
Meditative Artwork by Amy Vresics**

Dedicated to my loving wife Jan,
my amazing daughters Erin and Amy
and my supportive Salesian family throughout the world.

Why Salesian Lectio Divina?

It was 400 years ago that Saint Francis de Sales wrote the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. He wrote this book to help everyday people grow in holiness in ways thought to be restricted to only priests and religious in a monastery. The book's popularity grew because, in the words of Saint Francis de Sales, **"....the devotion which is true hinders nothing, but on the contrary it perfects everything; and that which runs counter to the rightful vocation of anyone is, you may be sure, a dubious devotion... everybody fulfils his special calling better when subject to the influence of devotion: -family duties are lighter, married love truer, service to our King more faithful, every kind of occupation more acceptable and better performed where that (*devotion*) is the guide."**¹ Therefore, true devotion makes us better people, and who does not want that?

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI encouraged the practice of Lectio divina in a pastoral letter marking the 40th anniversary of *Dei Verbum*. This prayer, once thought only to be appropriate for priests and religious, is now gaining popularity after Pope Benedict XVI recommended it for everyday modern Christians from all walks of life. Again, the words of Pope Benedict XVI say it best, **"If it (*Lectio Divina*) is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church ... a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry Lectio divina should be increasingly encouraged."**²

As part of the Year of Saint Paul, Bishop Michael Saltarelli of Wilmington echoed Pope Benedict XVI's call for Lectio Divina: **"This daily meditative prayer on the Sacred Scriptures engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire. This mobilization of our faculties deepens our convictions of faith, prompts the conversion of our hearts and strengthens our wills to follow Christ."**³

This book seeks to combine the spiritual insights of Saint Francis de Sales within the framework of Lectio Divina. The idea is to help you, as a Christian teen, to see yourself and your experience mirrored in the stories of the Bible. As you place yourself in these stories, it is hoped that you will gain a deeper appreciation of God's goodness present in everyday life. I also hope that as you spend time alone with God in prayer, you will discover how profound God's love is for you as an individual amid the real circumstances of your life.

God Be Praised!

Table of Contents

Lectio Divina #1 The Word of God	Pages 4-9
Lectio Divina #2 The Priestly Creation Story	Pages 10-15
Lectio Divina #3 The Call of Abraham	Pages 16-21
Lectio Divina #4 The Birth of Isaac	Pages 22-27
Lectio Divino #5 Joseph Sold into Slavery	Pages 28-33
Lectio Divina #6 The Call of Moses	Pages 34-39
Lectio Divina #7 Joshua Leads Israel	Pages 40-45
Color Images for Iconic Lectio	Pages 46-53
Lectio Divina #8 David and Goliath	Pages 54-59
Lectio Divina #9 Solomon Builds the Temple	Pages 60-65
Lectio Divina #10 Israel's Wisdom Literature	Pages 66-71
Lectio Divina #11 Jeremiah's Temple Sermon	Pages 72-77
Lectio Divina #12 Ezra Reads the Law	Pages 78-83
Lectio Divina #13 The Fiery Furnace	Pages 84-89
Lectio Divina #14 Micah and the Messiah	Pages 90-95
Appendix: <i>Read before your first meditation</i>	Pages 97-112
• The Life of Saint Francis de Sales	Page 96
• SFS Master of Imagination, Heart and Virtue	Page 105
• Practice Icon	Page 108
• Practice Lectio Divina Journal	Page 109
• Direction of Intention /Word Art Example	Page 110
• Notes/Bibliography/Personal Acknowledgements	Page 111

Israel's Wisdom Literature

Song of Songs 8:3-7



BEFORE WE BEGIN

Background Information

Do you like to eat? What is your favorite food? Maybe it is a cheese steak, lobster tail, burritos or moo-shu-pork. Have you ever wondered why God gave us the ability to experience all these different tastes? God could have created the world in such a way that we could get all the nutrition we need from tasteless water. Thank God for the variety of food we have as well as our taste buds and our sense of smell.

Do you like to sleep? God could have created humans in such a way that you would never need sleep. Think of all the extra homework teachers could assign if you did not need eight hours of sleep a night. Among other reasons God created sleep so that we might have rest and renewal from our daily toils and struggles as well as a chance to begin each day with a fresh start.

The writer of the Song of Songs had the same awareness of the goodness of the experience of human love. The writer of the Song of Songs wrote a poetic play using the courtship or dating customs of his day to illustrate the goodness of human love. Prior to the writing of this love poetry, the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all used the image of a marital relationship to highlight the exclusive nature of God's covenant with the people of Israel.

Salesian Concept

Saint Francis de Sales: the Doctor of Divine Love

The Song of Songs was Saint Francis' favorite book from the Old Testament. Saint Francis often refers to the Song of Songs when illustrating our soul's quest for union with God in the *Treatise on the Love of God*.¹⁹ In terms of our sexuality and chastity, Saint Francis highlights the goodness of sexual love, as the writer of the Song of Songs does, when it is truly grounded in the love of God.

In the *Introduction to the Devout Life* De Sales writes, "You who wish to marry, jealously keep your first love for your future spouse. It is deceitful to offer (your spouse) a used, worn out, adulterated heart instead of a new and sincere one."²⁰ As you meditate on the Song of Songs, think about how God designed human sexuality to bring us joy and happiness. Also pray that you are never deceived by the many cheap imitations of real marital love offered by our world today.

MEDITATION: A SALESIAN METHOD

1. Remote Preparation

- a. Throw off all your concerns from the school day. (*Relax*)
- b. Read Song of Songs 8:3-7.

The Bride: His left hand is under my head and his right arm embraces me. I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and hinds of the field, do not arouse, do not stir up love, before its own time.

The Daughters of Jerusalem: Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning upon her lover?

The Groom: Under the apple tree I awakened you; it was there that your mother conceived you, it was there that your parent conceived.

The Bride: Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm. For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion; its flames are a blazing fire. Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away. Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked.

2. Immediate Preparation

- a. Ask for a deeper awareness of God's presence.
- b. Ask for God's inspiration to pray sincerely.

3. Considerations (*Write down your insights about God's goodness.*)

Imagine you are among the townspeople observing the Bride and the Groom as they are being watched and teased by those nosey daughters of Jerusalem. Why is everyone so interested in the two lovers? Is it because there is no other entertainment, or is it because everyone is seeking to learn what true love is like? Why does the Bride beg those Daughters of Jerusalem not to stir up love before its time?

Notice the admiring way the Bride speaks of the Groom. Is it not because she knows that her love is only for the Groom and his love is only for her?

You hear the Groom fondly recall the first time he met his Bride under the apple tree. What ideas fill your mind as to the way love grows with time out of ordinary circumstances?

You hear the Bride ask her Groom to set her as a seal on his heart. What does this say about the exclusive nature of true marital love? How does this insight help you see that only a love committed to stand up to death and the flood of contrary emotions is worthy of marital love?

4. Affections (*Write a three sentence spontaneous, heartfelt prayer.*)

What are you feeling as these two souls express their true love for one another? How sincere is your wish to find someone to love with the true passion these two lovers share? What can you say to God to help you become an authentic, loving and lovable person, worthy of a true and passionate love that is stronger than death?

5. Resolution (*Write a resolution that describes what you will do and when.*)

What do you feel you should do in order to live this day well in light of your meditation? Write one concrete resolution that can help you become more loving and chaste in all your relationships.

6. TOP-Off (*Thanksgiving / Offering / Petition*)

- a. Give thanksgiving to God for this experience of calm.
- b. Offer to God your resolution of
- c. Ask God to give you the grace to accomplish this.

7. Word Art (*Draw an image with words to help you recall your prayer time.*)

Pick any word, phrase or image from this meditation that can help you remember your time with God today. This word and/or image should also help you gratefully fulfill your resolution to love your future spouse with a passionate love that is stronger than death.



1. Remote Preparation Check Box

2. Immediate Preparation Check Box

3. Considerations (*Write down your insights about God and this story.*)

4. Affections (*Write a three sentence spontaneous, heartfelt prayer.*)

5. Resolution (*Write a resolution that describes what you will do and when.*)

6. TOP-Off (*Thanksgiving / Offering / Petition*) **Check Box**

7. Word Art (*Draw an image with words to help you recall your prayer time.*)

Introduction to Iconic Lectio by Neil Kane

In the previous pages you have been practicing Lectio Divina or sacred reading of the Word. Now it's time to introduce the practice of Iconic Lectio or sacred reading of an icon or image.

In the Christian Churches of the East, where iconography began, one is said to “write,” not paint, a sacred icon. The idea that God communicates or reveals Himself through the Word made flesh, led to the creation of the icons. Therefore, we can now practice Iconic Lectio by discerning the meaning of an image or icon.

This book takes the sacred iconic tradition from the Byzantine or Eastern Church and alters it slightly to fit our modern times. We read the meaning of a visual logos or image by contemplating it. We experience and seek to understand the significance of colors in the drawing. While beholding the facial expressions of ancient biblical figures like Moses or David we can enter more deeply into their experience as well as the mood, the tone, the feeling of the icon.

The goal is to appreciate the icon rather than to intellectually dissect it. Iconic Lectio should use the senses, heart and the mind. While Lectio Divina uses the imagination to awaken our thoughts and feelings, Iconic Lectio uses our senses to enliven one's mind and heart.

Under each of the pictures you will find two questions to help you enter into the mood, tone and feeling of the icon as well as your own personal awareness of God's activity in your life. Do not feel limited by these questions, as the Holy Spirit may lead you to consider other aspects of the image for your own spiritual welfare. The goal is to come away from your prayerful experience with a new and profound sense of God's presence and love in your life that you can take with you. Therefore, in group discussions you can feel free to share your thoughts as long as you are viewing the same icon everyone else is. Each icon offers many different starting points for meditation. While it is important to keep to some traditional rules of faith, like the Trinity is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we do no service by painting God into a confining box based upon one's past experience.

Finally, you may wish to draw your own icons that serve as a reminder and marker of your spiritual growth. You do not need to be an artist to do this. See the Word Art example on page 110 for John 14:6 where Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

All Icons are doors to the Sacred.



1 Kings 8 Solomon Builds the Temple

What does this image of Solomon show about the nature of prayer?

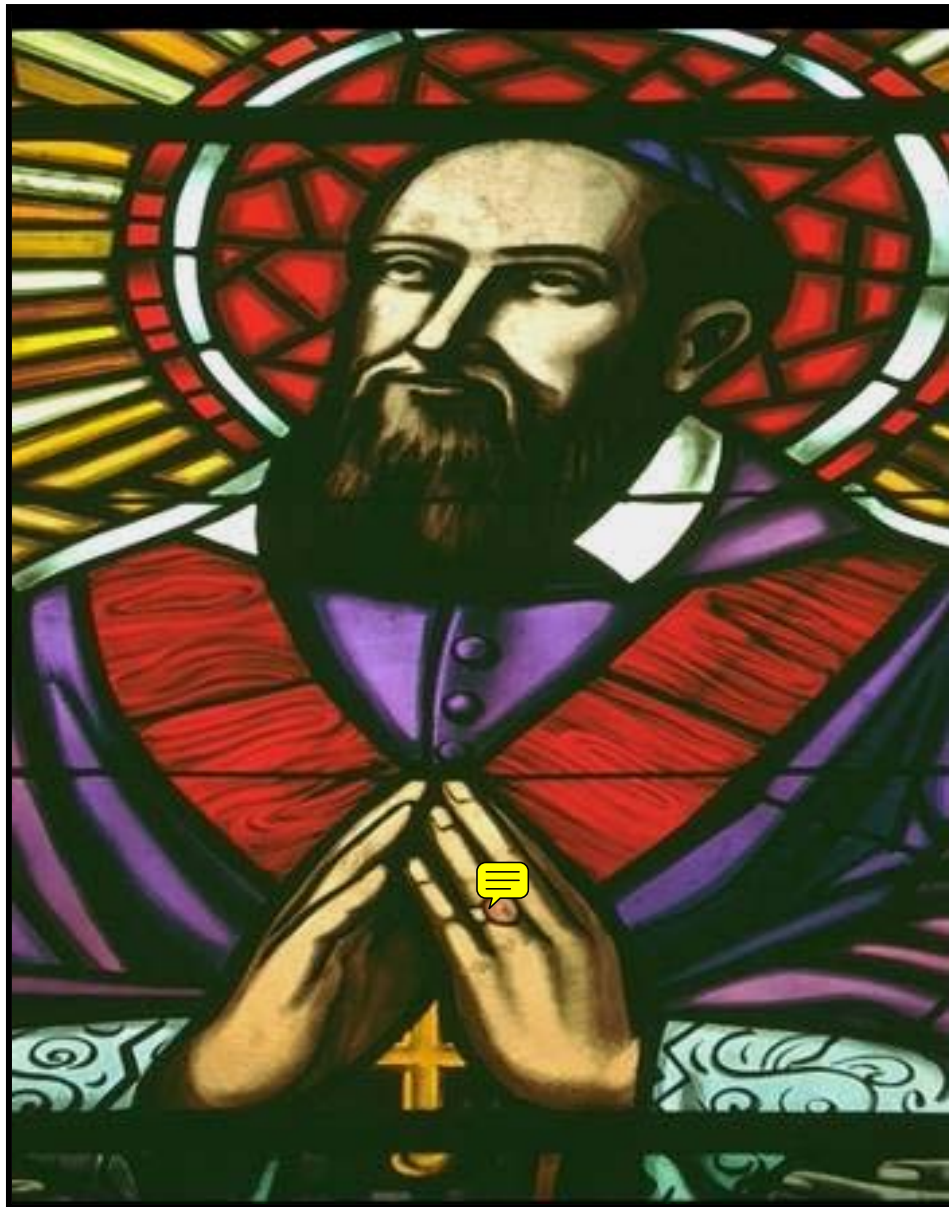
How often do you pray to God and for what do you pray?



Song of Songs 8:6

How does this image reflect the goodness of God's gift of human love?

Do your relationships with the opposite sex reflect this same image?



An Introduction to the Life of Saint Francis de Sales and Salesian Prayer and Spirituality

Based upon *Praying with Francis de Sales*
by Rev. Thomas F. Dailey, OSFS.

Stained glass window images courtesy of
Rev. Robert McGilvary, OSFS

The Birth and Times of Saint Francis de Sales

Saint Francis de Sales was born on August 21, 1567, in Annecy, France. During his life Annecy was part of the Duchy of Savoy. In Savoy, Francis grew up around the beauty of the French Alps and the peacefulness of Lake Annecy. The goodness of God's creation helped a young Saint Francis de Sales look for and see all the goodness around him and find God.

Francis grew up during the historical time of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The Renaissance was a time of a rebirth of learning due to the rediscovery of Greek and Roman literature

and philosophy, as well as ancient scientific and architectural wonders. The Renaissance was also marked by the discovery of the New World of the Americas and the invention of the printing press. These developments changed the way people saw the world and led people to question many of the most foundational aspects of life.

The Protestant Reformation was carried along by this spirit of change and in the growing self-awareness of nationalism. For the first time, people were seeking to identify themselves by their national origin rather than their religious identity. The idea of Christendom in the Middle Ages was now being replaced by nationalism. The idea of all Christians being united under the successors of Saint Peter in Rome, was now seen as German, Swiss, English and French speaking Christians being forced to obey a foreign Italian Pope.

Francis' parents sought to prepare him to become a leader in times filled with both promise and challenge. In order to live up to his potential, Francis was trained to practice true civility as a gentleman. Civility is the awareness and intention of being genuinely good to one another by relating to others in respectful, just, and loving ways.³⁰ In this section you will see how Saint Francis practiced this important skill and became known as the Gentleman Saint.



Identify icons of the Renaissance.

Application for Today

- 1) What major events in our recent history have shaped the spirit of our time the most?
- 2) In what areas of life do we most need civility today? Why?

Humanistic Education

Saint Francis was encouraged to grow in both love of God and love of learning. He was tutored by a Jesuit priest named Father Déage. His studies focused upon the French language, the classic stories from Greece and Rome, reasoning and debating skills, and religion. It is no wonder that Saint Francis would call knowledge the Eighth Sacrament.

Given all this knowledge and strengthened by God's love Saint Francis learned that we are all able to make a new and better world by living a life of true devotion.³¹ Devotion is true love of God. It leads us not only to do God's Will, but also to do it promptly, carefully and often. As a result, Saint Francis took to heart the lessons in prayer he received from Father Déage. Saint Francis learned how to use his imagination to feel the constant presence and love of God. He began to use prayer to become his very best at home and at school as well as to be his best socially, morally and athletically.

That's right. Saint Francis was also a skilled athlete. He mastered horseback riding and swordsmanship, which were the most prized athletic talents of his time. He even mastered the social dances of his day. With the proper balance of faith and reason, Francis not only succeeded at many different activities, but he also learned how to find God's presence in everything he was doing. It is with this goal in mind that Saint Francis de Sales would later teach people to say the Direction of Intention (see page 110). Saint Francis saw this prayer as a way to 1) remember God's presence, 2) offer God all the good that we may do and 3) accept any difficulties we might experience in life.



Young Francis prays the Memorare

Francis was not free of spiritual difficulties, even though he had a priest for a tutor. In Paris, he suffered a spiritual crisis after hearing lectures on Predestination, the false belief that some people are destined for hell. The lectures confused him so much that he questioned whether he would ever get into heaven. After praying the Memorare, Francis decided to depend solely upon God's great

Application for Today

- 1) What difficulties do young people face in their spiritual lives?
- 2) What advice would you give for any of the difficulties you mentioned above?

love no matter what happened in life.³¹

The Priest-Missionary

At the age of 26, Saint Francis de Sales returned home from the prestigious University of Padua in Italy. He earned a degree in Civil Law to remain faithful to his father's wishes to become a lawyer and to the Signified Will of God by keeping the Fourth Commandment, "Honor your father and mother." Yet, Francis also studied Church Law at Padua, and now as an adult, he announced his intention to become a priest. Francis was ordained on December 18, 1593. His first priestly assignment was to restore Catholicism in the Chablais region in Switzerland which was a stronghold of Calvinism. This was a very difficult and dangerous task. Francis faced threats on his life as well as the brutal elements of nature.

Francis engaged the people on their own terms and slowly but surely through gentleness and humility was able to lead them to reconsider their Calvinist beliefs. The secret



Francis de Sales travels to defend the Catholic faith in the Chablais region.

Application for Today

1) What aspects of Saint Francis' missionary style would be effective in today's pluralistic world?

2) Write an explanation of an aspect of Catholic faith under attack today that you believe Saint Francis would seek to defend.

of Francis' missionary success was his willingness to dialogue with everyone in a peaceful pursuit of truth that recognized the goodness of all people rather than the validity of every idea.

Francis wrote a series of apologetic pamphlets to start conversations with fallen away Catholics and to win them back to the practice of their Catholic faith. In these pamphlets Francis clearly made use of his legal training by setting forth logical arguments as to why Catholicism, and not Calvinism, was the true faith handed down from the Apostles. These pamphlets were later published in a book called the *Catholic Controversy*.³²

Salesian Imagination: Seek the Possibilities

Saint Francis de Sales saw the goodness of God and its reflection in all creation as the starting point for all theology. In fact, Saint Francis de Sales used over 33,000 images in his writings to help people better understand and appreciate the beauty of their Catholic faith.

At a young age Francis was introduced to the use of imagination in prayer through his tutor, Father Déage. However, Francis would later develop these imaginative techniques in a new way. The main focus of Salesian meditation is to use the power of our imagination to discover the constant presence of God in our lives.⁴⁰

In the Salesian tradition imagination is not fantasy but seeing what is often overlooked and not taken advantage of in life. Imagination in this sense is like people who think outside the box for a solution or people who can recognize the presence of goodness in themselves and others where pessimistic people fail.

In the next few pages and throughout the rest of this book you will be led through imaginative meditative exercises. Place yourself in these stories with God and consider His goodness in them so that you may see God's activity more clearly in your present life experience. This prayerful exercise is called *Lectio Divina*. It is an ancient form of Christian prayer that Pope Benedict XVI and many bishops of the United States are now promoting. See page 2 for direct quotes from the Pope and Bishops.



Saint Francis de Sales encourages us to imagine Christ's great love for all.

Application for Today

- 1) Compare Francis' use of imagination to athletes or public speakers who use visualization techniques to succeed.
- 2) What areas of your spiritual life could benefit from these helpful imaginative visualization methods?

Salesian Prayer: Union of Hearts

In our scientific age we know that the heart pumps blood and oxygen throughout our bodies, but at the same time we all recognize the heart as the imaginative physical symbol for a person's soul and spirit.

It was the humble and gentle heart of Jesus in Matthew 11:25-32 that Saint Francis de Sales chose for his primary image of Jesus.

It should be no surprise that the heart is seen as the central location for our spiritual journey towards God and that Salesian Spirituality views prayer as a “union of hearts”; that is, our heart with the Sacred Heart of Jesus.



The Salesian image of prayer is a union of hearts, our heart linked with the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In Matthew 6:21 Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” Saint Francis taught that if we truly love God; then we will not only seek out God's presence in the world (Complacence), but we will also seek to make God's goodness known and praised throughout the world (Benevolence).⁴¹ Later you will be asked to write your own spontaneous prayers to express how your love and affection for God have grown based upon your insights from your meditations.

The Treatise on the Love of God Book V. Chapter 9.

Benevolence Makes Us Call All Creatures To The Praise Of God.

“The heart that is taken and pressed with a desire of praising the divine goodness more than it is able, after many endeavors goes oftentimes out of itself, to invite all creatures to help it in its design Complacency draws the Divine sweetness into our hearts, which so ardently fills itself there with that it is overcharged. But the love of benevolence makes our heart pass out of itself and exhale itself in all kinds of holy praises.”

Application for Today

- 1) Read Matthew 6: 19-24. How do the affections of one's heart either draw us closer to God or lead us farther from God?

Salesian Virtue: The Sign of True Prayer

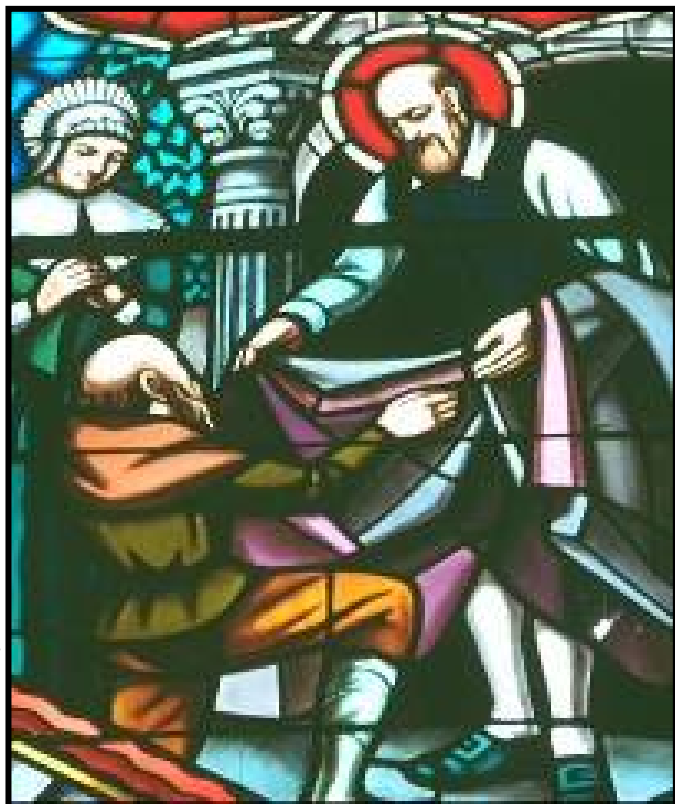
People often think that our prayers end when we make the Sign of the Cross. In the Salesian Tradition our prayer should transform our hearts to desire to act in concrete and loving acts that help our neighbor experience the love of God we have just experienced in our prayer. Saint Francis de Sales does not want us to be people who only imagine ourselves doing good in prayer, but people who do what is good promptly, actively, and diligently.

In order to help us avoid forgetting to do the good we planned in prayer Saint Francis urges us to make an examination of conscience each day to give ourselves the chance to fulfill any missed opportunity to do good. In our lives we may not always have the chance to do great deeds, but these prayerful exercises can help us “do ordinary tasks extraordinarily well” and to “Live each day well!”

Saint Francis says the best way to accomplish this is to practice the “Little Virtues” of gentleness, humility, integrity and temperance. If we act with these virtues, then we will actually become more like Jesus, which is the goal of Christian prayer. This will let us know that we are actually listening to God rather than just talking to ourselves.⁴²

Likewise, in the next page and through the rest of this book you will be asked to make real, measurable and concrete resolutions so some concrete good comes out of your prayer with God.

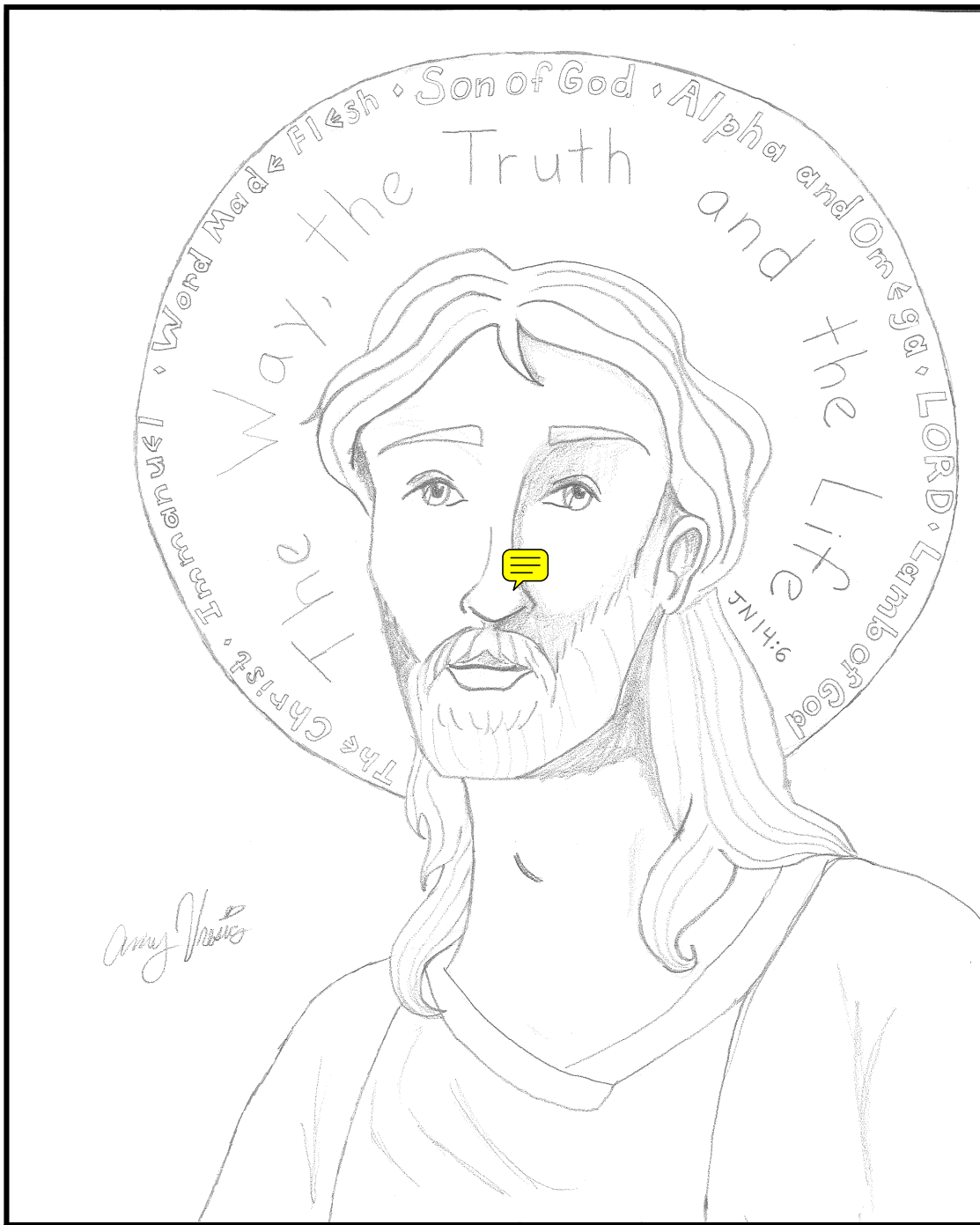
These resolutions should be specific as to time, manner and place such as: Tomorrow after dinner (*time*) I will thoroughly (*manner*) clean the kitchen (*place*) and do the dishes for my mom.



Saint Francis de Sales directly helping the poor with gentleness and humility.

Application for Today

- 1) Read Matthew 7: 21-25. Why is it important for Christians to move beyond beliefs into loving actions?



While coloring this icon of Jesus, use your imagination to see God's presence with you amidst your busy school day. Dwell upon good thoughts about God's love for you. Enjoy this moment free from normal school work.

Write a brief prayer in response to the state of your heart at the moment.

Write your resolution to practice virtue more promptly, diligently and often.


Considerations (*Write down one insight about God's goodness.*)

Affections (*Write a three sentence heartfelt, spontaneous prayer.*)

Resolution (*Write a resolution that describes what you will do and when.*)

Word Art: (*Doodle a meaningful phrase from your prayer. See the example on page 110*)

The Direction of Intention

My God, give me the grace to perform this action with You and through love for You. In advance, I offer to You all the good that I may do and accept all the difficulty I may meet therein.  Amen.

Word Art Example: "I am the way, the truth and the life." John 14:6

Fill in with color pencils or pens if you wish.

