“How tenderly I loved her!”

To Jane de Chantal, on the death of Francis’s younger sister

My dear daughter,

Ah, well, is it not reasonable that the most holy will of God should be done, as much in the things we cherish as in others? But I must hasten to tell you that my good mother has drunk this chalice with an entirely Christian constancy, and her virtue, of which I had always a high opinion, has far exceeded my estimation.

On Sunday morning, she sent for my brother the Canon; and because she had seen him very sad, and all the other brothers as well, the night before, she began by saying to him, “I have dreamt all the night that my daughter Jane is dead. Tell me, I beseech you, is it not true?” My brother, who was awaiting my arrival to break it to her (for I was on my episcopal visitation), saw this good opening for presenting the chalice to her. “It is true, mother,” he said, and no more, for he had not strength to add anything. “God’s will be done,” said my good mother, and wept abundantly for some space; and then,
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calling her maid Nicole, she said, “I want to get up and go pray to God in the chapel for my poor daughter,” and immediately did what she said. Not a single word of impatience, not a look of disquiet; but blessings of God, and a thousand resignations in her will. Never did I see a calmer grief; such tears that it was a marvel, but all from simple tenderness of heart, without any sort of passion, even though it was her own dear child. Ah! Should I not then love this mother well?

Yesterday, All Saints’ Day, I was the grand confessor of the family, and with the most Holy Sacrament I scaled the heart of this mother against all sadness. For the rest, she thanks you infinitely for the care and maternal love which you have shown toward this deceased little one, with as much obligation to you as if God had preserved her by your means. My brothers say as much, who in truth have manifested extremely good dispositions in this affliction, especially our Boisy, whom I love the more for it.

I well know that you would gladly ask me, “And you, how did you bear yourself?” Yes, for you want to know how I am doing. Ah, my child, I am as human as I can be; my heart was grieved more than I should ever have thought. But the truth is that the pain to my mother and your pain have greatly increased mine; for I have feared for your heart, and my mother’s. But as for the rest, vive Jésus, I will always take the side of divine Providence: it does all well, and disposes all things for the best. What happiness for this dear child to have been “taken away, lest wickedness should alter her understanding,” and to have left this miry place before she had gotten soiled

77 Wisd. of Sol. 4:11.
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therein! We gather strawberries and cherries before apples and oranges, but it is because their season requires it. Let God gather what He has planted in His orchard: He takes everything in its season.

You may think, my dear daughter, how tenderly I loved this little child. I had brought her forth to her Savior, for I had baptized her with my own hand, some fourteen years ago. She was the first creature on whom I exercised my order of priesthood. I was her spiritual father, and fully promised myself one day to make out of her something good. And what made her all the more dear to me (and I speak the truth) was that she was yours.78

But still, my dear child, in the midst of my heart of flesh, which has had such keen feelings about this death, I perceive deep within a certain sweetness, tranquillity, and a certain gentle repose of my spirit in divine Providence, which spreads abroad in my heart a great contentment in its pains.

Here, then, are my feelings represented as far as I can. But you, what do you mean when you tell me that you found yourself on this occasion such as you were? Tell me, I beseech you: was not the needle of your compass always turning to its bright pole, to its holy star, to its God? Your heart — what has it been doing? Have you scandalized those who saw you in this matter and in this event? Now this, my dear child, tell me clearly; for, do you see, it was not right to offer either your own life or that of one of your other children in exchange for that of the departed one. No, my dear child, we must not only consent for God to strike us, but we must let it be in the place

78 Jane de Sales was living with St. Jane de Chantal at the time of her death.
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which He pleases. We must leave the choice to God, for it belongs to Him. David offered his life for that of his Absalom, but it was because Absalom died reprobate.\textsuperscript{79} In such cases we must beseech God, but in temporal loss — O my daughter, let God touch and strike whatever string of our lute He chooses; He will never make anything but a good harmony. Lord Jesus! Without reserve, without if, without but, without exception, without limitation, Your will be done, in father, in mother, in daughter, in all and everywhere! Ah! I do not say that we must not wish and pray for their preservation; but we must not say to God, “Leave this and take that”; my dear child, we must not say so. And we will not, will we? No, no; no, my child, by help of the grace of His divine goodness.

I seem to see you, my dear child, with your vigorous heart, which loves and wills powerfully. I congratulate it thereon: for what are these half-dead hearts good for? But it behooves us to make a particular exercise, once every week, of willing and loving the will of God more vigorously, (I go further) more tenderly, more amorously, than anything in the world; and this not only in bearable occurrences, but in the most unbearable. You will find more than I can describe in the little book of the Spiritual Combat, which I have so often recommended to you.

Ah, my child, to speak the truth, this lesson is sublime; but so also God, for whom we learn it, is the most sublime. You have, my child, four children; you have a father-in-law, a dear brother, and then again a spiritual father: all these are very dear to you, and rightly; for God wills it. Well, now, if God

\textsuperscript{79} 2 Kings 18:33 (RSV = 2 Sam. 18:33).
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took all this from you, would you not still have enough in having God? Is that not all, in your estimation? If we had nothing else but God, would it not be enough?

Alas! The Son of God, my dear Jesus, had scarce so much on the Cross, when, having given up and left all for love and obedience to His Father, He was as if left and given up by Him; and, as the torrent of His passion swept off His bark to desolation, hardly did He perceive the needle, which was not only turned toward, but inseparably joined with, His Father. Yes, He was one with His Father, but the inferior part knew and perceived nothing of it whatever: a trial which the divine goodness has made and will make in no other soul, for no other soul could bear it.

Well then, my child, if God takes everything from us, He will never take Himself from us, so long as we do not will it. But more; all our losses and our separations are but for this little moment. Oh truly, for so little a time as this, we ought to have patience.

I pour myself out, it seems to me, a little too much. But why? I follow my heart, which never feels it says too much with this dear daughter. I send you the family coat of arms to satisfy you. Since it pleases you to have the funeral services where this child rests in the body, I am willing; but without great pomp, beyond what Christian custom requires: what good is the rest?

You will afterward draw out a list of all these expenses, as well as those of her illness, and send it to me, for I wish it so; and meantime we shall beseech God here for this soul, and will properly do its little honors. We shall not send for its forty days’ remembrance; no, my child, so much ceremony is not
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becoming for a child who has had no rank in this world; it would get one laughed at. You know me: I love simplicity both in life and in death. I shall be very glad to know the name and the title of the church where she is. This is all I have to say on this subject. . . .

Your very affectionate servant,

Francis