What does a 13 year old fourth century Roman girl, martyred for keeping her promise to God to remain a virgin bride of Christ, have in common with St. Francis de Sales’ doctrine of Christian Humanism? Well, just about everything I can think of. Today we celebrate both a young saint and at the same time we honor the spirituality of a wonderful doctor-saint of the Church.

Francis de Sales was most certainly inspired by the determination and fidelity of St. Agnes, a mere child, yet a child called to holiness; a role model who in her short life answered the call as she interpreted it through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Her call to give witness to the faith involved the total giving of and giving up her life for the sake of her faith. Her witness was heroic, especially for such a young and tender child.

Obviously, not all of us are called to the exact holiness of Agnes, however according to Francis de Sales, we are all called to respond to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, to cultivate a relationship with Jesus Christ, whom we meet today in His Word and the Eucharist, and to do the will of the Father in heaven in order to make real the Kingdom or Reign of God on earth.

This challenge includes a kind of martyrdom to be suffered on our part, a dying to all that is not of the Kingdom of God, a dying to ourselves in order that Christ may fill us up with His
grace and Spirit. It may not be a physical death, once and done, but the martyrdom Jane de Chantal speaks of, a martyrdom of the heart, that is suffered throughout one’s life.

Each one of us is charged by our Baptism to discern the will of God according to our state in life. We best carry out this charge united to our Lord Jesus as he comes to us especially in the sacraments, particularly in the Eucharist. He is the bridegroom, a Holy Spouse, united with our hearts and minds, our very selves in the Eucharist. It is with Him that we best learn in humility who we are and what we are called by God to do in this world. It is through the assistance of the Holy Advocate, the Holy Spirit that we are enlightened as to our own particular version of holiness and how we are personally and uniquely to witness to our faith, to be martyrs for the Kingdom.

Age is not a requirement nor is status. As long as we pursue a life of humility toward oneself and gentleness toward our neighbor, in other words, to be willing to grow in self knowledge and to always do the right thing, we can be sure that God’s will for us will be made manifest.

May we be open to the call to holiness, to be our best selves, to live fully in the present moment, to give honor and glory to God, and be willing to suffer martyrdom for the sake of the Kingdom.

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