

Saint Jane Frances De Chantal
(Jeanne Françoise Frémyot, Baroness de Chantal)
born 28 January 1572, Dijon, France
died 13 December 1641, Moulins, France

When Jane married the Baron de Chantal, she became the chatelaine* of his rich but chaotic estates. She soon set his household in order and their marriage was a happy one. Jane had just given birth to their fourth child when her husband was mortally wounded in a hunting accident. He lingered for nine days in horrible pain. It took Jane years to forgive the cousin who shot him.

She fell into a three-year depression. She could not understand why God had taken a man as good as her husband and in such a terrible way. When Jane sought help from a well-meaning priest, he gave her a harsh regimen that was unrealistic for the mother of four young children. Fortunately, Jane met Francis de Sales who guided her to look for answer. When Jane felt called to found a new religious order, neither as austere as the Carmelites nor as lax as some of the older congregations had become, Francis encouraged her. In 1614 Jane formed the Congregation of the Visitation of Holy Mary (Visitation Sisters). Their name commemorates the Blessed Mother's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, and they lived simply, dedicated to contemplation and prayer. They were enclosed, but not rigorously so, and they welcomed visits from those seeking advice and counsel. Francis had expected Jane to establish an activist community, serving the sick and the poor, but Jane held fast to her own idea. By the time Jane died, there were sixty-five Visitation convents in France, and she had visited them all. Her feast day is 18 August.

The Genius of Jane Frances de Chantal:

Jane advises us: *"Hold your eyes on God and leave the doing to him. That is all the doing you have to worry about."* She also recommended: *"Be content to remain an empty vessel, simply receiving whatever the holy charity of the Saviour may wish to pour in."*

Reflection:

"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Luke 1.45

*woman in charge of a large house

Gallick, Sarah, The Big Book of Woman Saints p. 233