



Memorial of St Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor of the Church



Date: Saturday, January 24, 2026 | **Season:** Ordinary Time before Easter | **Year:** A

First Reading: 2 Samuel 1:1–4, 11–12, 19, 23–27

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:2–3, 5–7 | **Response:** Psalm 80:4b

Gospel Acclamation: Acts 16:14b

Gospel Reading: Mark 3:20–21

Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Yesterday the Scriptures showed us David hiding in the darkness of a cave, holding Saul's life in his hands. He could have struck him down. He could have ended the long chase and settled everything with one clean blow. Instead, David stepped back. He spared Saul. He chose restraint over revenge, conscience over convenience. Today's reading begins the day after that mercy, and it shows us where such restraint leads. Not to triumph, but to tears.

This morning the word of God opens with loss rather than success. A man comes to David with torn clothes and dust on his head. His body tells the story before his mouth does. Saul is dead. Jonathan is dead. Israel has been defeated.

David could have felt relief. Saul had hunted him, threatened him, made his life unsafe for years. Saul stood between David and the future God had promised. Yet David does not celebrate. He does not rush for the crown. He tears his clothes. He weeps. He fasts. He mourns deeply, as if he has lost someone close to his own heart.

This tells us something important about David. He refuses to let bitterness decide how he responds. The mercy we saw yesterday in the cave now shows itself as grief today in the open. David remembers Saul not only as a danger, but as the Lord's anointed. He remembers the good Saul once did, the battles he fought, the way he led Israel. David sings a lament, not a victory song. How could the mighty have fallen. These are words of sorrow, not revenge.

Then David speaks of Jonathan, and his grief deepens. Jonathan had loved David with honesty and courage. He knew David would one day be king, and yet he did not cling to power. He stepped aside. He stayed faithful as a friend. David's words are simple and strong. Your love was wonderful. This is not about romance. It is about loyalty, trust, and sacrifice. Jonathan chose what was right, even when it cost him everything.

If we pray this reading slowly, as Ignatius teaches us, we can place ourselves beside David. We can hear his voice break. We can feel the weight of loss. We can notice something surprising. Grief does not harden David. It opens him. He mourns not only the one who loved him, but also the one who tried to destroy him. This is a heart trained by mercy.

The psalm gives words to this ache. Restore us, O God. Let your face shine, that we may be saved. It is the prayer of a people who feel scattered and worn down. It is also our prayer here. In Zimbabwe we know what it means to live with division, disappointment, and long waiting. We grieve broken systems, young people without work, families under strain, leaders who have failed and leaders who are gone. The temptation is to mock, to blame, to grow hard. The Scriptures offer another way. Tell the truth. Mourn honestly. Keep praying.

The Gospel then turns the light onto Jesus. He goes home, and there is no rest there. Crowds press in. He cannot even eat. And those closest to him say, He is out of his mind. They are embarrassed. They are afraid of what others will say. They cannot understand why he lives the way he does.

Jesus stands where David stood. Misunderstood. Judged. Faithful anyway. He refuses to soften the truth to protect his image. He stays close to the poor, the sick, and the rejected, even when it costs him peace at home.

This is where Saint Francis de Sales speaks clearly to our time. He lived in an age of sharp division, harsh words, and deep suspicion. Christians spoke past one another. Arguments were bitter. Positions were defended with anger rather than listening. It does not sound unfamiliar. Our own world, our Church, and even our communities are marked by polarisation, quick judgement, and loud certainty.

Francis chose another path. He believed that shouting never heals hearts. He spoke gently. He wrote patiently. He listened carefully. He used plain language so ordinary people could live close to God in daily life. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he taught that holiness is not for a few special people, but for everyone, in their own situation. He once said that a spoonful of honey attracts more flies than a barrel of vinegar. He meant that kindness opens doors that force never will.

Francis was mocked for this gentleness. Some thought him weak. He was not. He was deeply rooted in God. He trusted that love lasts longer than anger, and that patience can change what power cannot.

This is a word for us as Jesuits, and for the Church today. To follow Christ is not to win arguments. It is to remain faithful. It is to speak truth without cruelty. It is to stay rooted in mercy when the world rewards hardness.

The thread holding today together is simple. Love that is real does not need to win. It needs to remain faithful. David honours Saul's dignity. Jesus remains true to the Father's mercy. Francis de Sales chooses gentleness in a divided world. And as Ignatius teaches us, such love learns to look for the good in the other before judging or condemning.

As we come to the altar, all of this is gathered and made present again. David's fasting opens into our Eucharistic hunger. Jonathan's costly friendship points us to Christ who gives himself completely. Jesus' so-called madness reveals the quiet wisdom of the Cross. All of it meets us here, not as memory, but as living grace.

So we ask for this gift. To remember the good, even when we have been hurt. To choose mercy before revenge. To trust that gentle faithfulness is never wasted.

As we pray, let us carry these questions into our prayer and life this morning.

- Where am I being invited to let mercy shape my response, as David did?
- Whose dignity do I struggle to respect, especially when the past is painful?
- What would it look like this week to live the gentle courage of Saint Francis de Sales in a divided world?

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2026-01jan-24-ya-ot-02/>

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.