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PROPHECY AND HOPE, NOW AND EVERYWHERE

A reflection prior to the coming Domestic Assemblies

The Company is about to enter into the special time known as “Assemblies time.” It will be a year and a half of looking back over the ground already covered, in order to practise discernment and to plan for the future from a standpoint of calm realism but also with hope founded on the One who directs, governs and sustains this world and therefore the Church and the Company. In preparation for the Domestic Assemblies, I would like to put before you a reflection on the theme that you will have in mind during these days of intensive preparation, a reflection that will offer guidelines for local communities. What is the underlying significance of this theme? Why speak about prophecy and hope? What does living in prophetic mode demand of local communities?

PROPHECY IN THE COMPANY AND IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Company is prophetic for several reasons. First of all, the prophetic nature of the People of God has its source in baptism. The Company shares this prophetic character and that is why the Constitutions link the vocation of a Daughter of Charity to her baptism.¹ And if we refer back to Saint Vincent, we find that he told the first Sisters that if they remained faithful to their Rules they would be good Christians and *“I would not be saying anything more if I were to say that you would be good religious. Why do people join religious Orders, if not to become good Christian men and women?”*²

I would like to devote more time to the other reason which I will be dealing with in more detail later on: the Company is prophetic because that is the nature of consecrated life. We can say, then, that the Company shares in the prophetic nature of consecrated life, in as much as it is a branch of this tree. This is the comparison used by John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata*, 4c and 5a. Another statement in *Vita Consecrata* which adds to what we have just said, is that each branch of this tree must preserve its special identity and be faithful to its specific charism if it is to fulfil its prophetic mission. In this way the Church and the world will be enriched by the fruits of each branch.³ Keeping to this apostolic exhortation and bearing in mind the teachings of Sacred Scripture, we can ask ourselves what characteristics give rise to prophecy in the consecrated life and consequently in the Company? Similarly, the local communities will have prophetic power in the measure that they are built on this threefold structure:

***EXPERIENCE OF GOD AND THE POOR**

Experiencing God means much more than having a theoretical knowledge of him. It means perceiving his living and active presence in our lives and in the world.

¹ Cf. C.7a

² IX 132, Conference of 14th June 1643

³ Cf. VC 19d, 36a, 38b, 81a

“True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history.”⁴ There is no way that local communities can be prophetic if they do not passionately seek God and his Kingdom; for the Daughter of Charity this specifically means poor people. This is exactly what we find stated in the Constitutions: *“Given to God..... for the service of the poor”*.⁵ *Vita Consecrata* develops the same idea: *“Consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity.....To carry out this service appropriately, consecrated persons must have a profound experience of God.”*⁶ In Sacred Scripture the prophet is someone chosen and designated for the task by God, following a personal encounter with Him. It is this experience of God that gives rise to the prophet’s vocation and mission. *“You have seduced me, Yahweh, and I have let myself be seduced”* exclaims the prophet Jeremiah (Jr 20, 7), *“Here I am, send me,”* says Isaiah, (Is 6,8). From this encounter with the Absolute and then identifying with God’s plan, the prophet sees and judges events and people, and stands before them to give witness to what he has seen and heard.

***Coherence of life.** If people’s words do not reflect the way that they live then these words are of little value. *Vita Consecrata* tells us *“Prophecy derives a particularly persuasive power from **consistency between proclamation and life.** Consecrated persons will be faithful to their mission in the Church and the world, if they can renew themselves constantly in the light of the word of God. Thus will they be able to enrich the other faithful with the charismatic gifts they have received and, in turn, let themselves be challenged by the prophetic stimulus which comes from other sectors of the Church.”*⁷ The Lord commanded the prophet Ezechiel to swallow the words he had to proclaim (cf Ez 2, 7 3-11). This image could not be more striking. So the prophet’s message has to be rooted in the way he lives his own life, it has to become his own flesh and blood if it is not to be a *“sounding brass”* or a *“tinkling cymbal”* as Saint Paul says. To sum up, the prophet courageously proclaims God’s message by what he says, what he does and the way he lives. A prophetic community has to make sure that there is no contradiction between its convictions, life style, works, witness and specific form of service. If this coherence does not exist the power of the witness they offer will be considerably reduced and community life will be a burden for everyone.

***ABILITY TO DISCERN**

*“Consecrated persons.....must be aware of the challenges of their time, understanding the profound theological meaning of these challenges through a discernment made with the help of the Spirit. In fact, it is often through historical events that we discern God’s hidden call to work according to his plan by active and effective involvement in the events of our time.”*⁸ That is to say, the prophet has to be able to interpret events from a Gospel standpoint. Saint Vincent was a real master of this art. The Second Vatican Council made a strong appeal to the whole Church to read the *“signs of the times.”* Persons in the prophetic consecrated life cannot do otherwise than read the positive and negative signs if they want to find out what God is asking of them today. The local community that wishes to live in prophetic mode will have to practise community discernment. Then they will know that they are doing God’s will. This spiritual practice will invigorate the community and foster its unity of life.

⁴ VC 84b

⁵ C.16

⁶ VC 73a

⁷ VC 85b

⁸ VC 73a

Knowing that one has been chosen, having a passion for God and for the poor, practising discernment and understanding events as part of God's plan, being a living and eloquent witness to the message one proclaims and being prepared to seal it with one's blood....this is a summary of the characteristics of a prophet as understood by Sacred Scripture and by the Church. And *Vita Consecrata* gives us this excellent summary of the prophet's vocation-mission: "*Prophets feel in their hearts a burning desire for the holiness of God and, having heard his word in the dialogue of prayer, they proclaim that word with their lives, with their lips and with their actions, becoming people who speak for God against evil and sin. Prophetic witness requires the constant and passionate search for God's will, for self-giving, for unfailing communion in the Church, for the practice of spiritual discernment and love of the truth. It is also expressed through the denunciation of all that is contrary to the divine will and through the exploration of new ways to apply the Gospel in history, in expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom.*"⁹

The prophetic nature of the Company is obviously dependent on the prophetic quality of the local communities: if these are geared towards prophecy then the whole Company will be prophetic to a high degree, but if the local communities prefer routine and inertia, the Company will wallow in mediocrity. In the matter of prophecy, we should not expect miracles but everything has to follow a relentless logic. So the key to the matter is to be found in the local communities even more than at Provincial level. This reflection helps us to appreciate more the importance of engaging well in the Domestic Assemblies in order to give a strong prophetic boost to the Company which will generate new life.

How will we know in practice whether the Company is prophetic? To the degree in which it lives out the principles listed in *Vita Consecrata*. And also, whether it is faithful to its specific charism which can be summed up as commitment to serving the poor, as members of authentic communities for mission, in an attitude of humility, simplicity and charity, in chastity, poverty and obedience. The second chapter of the Constitutions presents all these prophetic features.¹⁰ In other words, the Company will be prophetic in the measure that it lives out its Constitutions. We can say that the Constitutions of 2004 have come a bit nearer to bringing your vocation a bit closer to the charism of the Founders and the reality of our world today. Bringing these two things together has made your Constitutions more prophetic, provided that this book is duly assimilated by the Sisters and the communities, even if, as Ezechiel says in the passage quoted above, it is hard to digest.

There is no doubt that prophecy will keep the Company alert and open to discovering and assimilating the values found in different cultures and among poor people. But we can also say that, in the name of this same prophecy, the Company should offer the world and the Church its own particular culture, which can be described as concern for the interests of the poor and collaboration with institutions that work to foster these. Or to put it another way, in the name of prophecy the Company has to continue to give witness that people can find happiness by risking their lives for Jesus and giving themselves to God in the service of the poor because, in gospel terms, this leads to the fullness of life (cf. Lk 9, 23-24). Prophecy impels the Company to be radically faithful to the values of its charism. As a result, its prophetic witness will offer a counter-cultural contribution or, as *Vita Consecrata* says in relation to consecrated life in general, "*a spiritual therapy for humanity.*"¹¹ Nobody should be surprised if the Company or some communities are criticised for bearing

⁹ VC 84b

¹⁰ Cf. C.7-15

¹¹ VC 87

this witness. In Scripture and in the history of the Church, the prophets have not always been accepted.¹² We have all known and admired Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Everybody recognised her as a prophet of solidarity with the poorest of the poor and this led people to admire her and collaborate with her work. Well, her prophecy was also hotly disputed by many others when, for example, she rejected abortion or divorce. The explanation is simple; her prophecy went against certain cultural trends of our times.

PROPHECY AND HOPE

I am not forgetting that this first reflection on the watchword for the Assemblies is addressed to the local communities. Taking our reflection a step further we now come to a dual phrase whose two elements seem to be contradictory, at least at first glance. In fact, these two terms are perfectly compatible and we would go so far as to say that prophecy that does not engender hope can scarcely be considered genuine prophecy. In Scripture, all the prophets brought the people a message of hope, even though at times they used harsh language. John the Baptist called his contemporaries a "*Brood of vipers!*" (Lk 3, 7). But he did this in order to give them a jolt and help them to recognise the Saviour. All the prophets contributed to raising the hopes of the Chosen People, including Jeremiah, whose lot it was to live and prophesy in the midst of contradictions and persecutions. We see this in his "short biography" "*The Lamentations of Jeremiah.*" This prophet could be the icon of hopeful prophecy that local communities and the entire Company are called to exercise.

As we know, the theme of the Assembly is presented in the form of a logo-icon. So there is not just the wording but also the image and together they form a perfectly balanced unity. When we look at this ensemble we are being gently invited to look within it, our attention drawn by three lines (two of them faintly marked) which most certainly point us towards the future. The Company sees this future as one that brings hope. The person who looks ahead does so because they hope to find something positive. And so that there should be no doubt about the matter, the Company has chosen the word "hope." The three lines that are obviously slanted upwards resemble the gesture of someone who refuses to be worn down by the weight of difficulties or problems. I think that in all cultures a sign pointing upwards signifies life, enthusiasm, expectation and hope. On the other hand, a sign pointing downwards is synonymous with death, inertia and depression. So the logo is asking us to look to the future with hope although this future is not traced out or uncovered. Perhaps this is what the faint line and the one that is barely visible are meant to suggest. The message seems clear; we have to look towards the future, not in a dejected way but with hope, in order to discover what God is asking of the local communities, the Provinces and the whole Company. This means discovering and tracing out the path for the future, and this will be the work of the various Assemblies. Of course this reflection and discernment should not be carried out from some Utopian standpoint but from the reality of our world today (represented by the globe) and the specific identity of the Daughter of Charity or the Constitutions (represented in the Company seal).

Saint Peter tells us to "*give the reason for our hope*" (1Pe 3, 15). This is good advice, especially if we keep in mind that our world doesn't operate on the basis of too much hope. Well, we will find it hard to communicate hope to others if we are not sensitive to positive signs and signs of God in our world. I will not refer to these here because that is not what this reflection is about, but to the signs of hope that can be

¹² Cf. VC 85a

seen in the Company. These may be small signs but they are very real ones. We can take, for example, the multiplicity of works for the poorest of the poor in the Third World, and the many forward-looking works serving new forms of poverty in the most developed countries. Thousands and thousands of Daughters of Charity dedicate their lives every day to giving hope to the poor people who benefit from these works. Saint Vincent compared the first Sisters engaged in the works to martyrs.¹³ Sometimes these are small ventures but they respond to real needs and the work is carried out by creative and courageous Sisters who are elderly. The last meeting of French-speaking Councils confirmed this.

Other signs of hope: closer connections and collaboration with lay people whether these belong to the Vincentian Family or not; forthcoming beatifications, the first of which will be that of Sister Lindalva; small groups of missionary Sisters who are continually receiving training at the International Mission Centre in Paris. With regard to vocations, it is true that in Europe and North America there has been a serious crisis but it is equally true that vocations are now flourishing in Asia and in Africa. We can say that the geography of vocations has changed though we have to recognise, too, that the total number of vocations is lower than in previous times. All in all, it is a hopeful sign that there are a fair number of Seminaries with many new vocations and these are emerging most particularly in the most needy countries.

It was Paul VI who declared that “*prophets of doom*” are no good to the Church or to society. The Company asks the Daughters of Charity and the local communities to be prophets of hope. We know that historically the Company came into existence as an example of hope in a climate of despair and abandonment of the poor and the marginalised. And throughout history, there has been no other reason for its continued existence. What can communities today do to be signs of hope? Some years ago, four journalists interviewed Brother Roger at Taizé and asked him about the World Youth Meeting which was taking place in Vienna. They asked him, “*Who can bring hope to young people today?*” Brother Roger replied, “*The poor, contemplatives, and people who understand solidarity.*” You can see that this answer corresponds perfectly with the three dimensions of the life of a Daughter of Charity. A Daughter of Charity, then, who lives in accordance with her vocation, becomes a living gospel parable. Exactly the same can be said about local communities.

NOW AND EVERYWHERE

These two adverbs mean that prophecy and hope have to find concrete expression in the here and now. It is not enough to have fine thoughts on the subject but we have to see how communities can lead a life that is truly prophetic. The “now” of the equation brings us down to earth and the question we might ask relating to this could be, “*how should local communities be living if they are taking seriously the words ‘prophecy and hope?’* or what implications might the Assemblies theme have for them?” We offer some guidelines:

***BE CAREFUL ABOUT LIFE STYLE.** The Constitutions state that this should be “*sober and simple.*” And this same article spells out what this sobriety means when it says that the Sisters, “*are satisfied with spending what is necessary for their apostolic works and for their life as servants.*”¹⁴ The final document of the last General Assembly was also along these lines.¹⁵ The criterion for life style

¹³ Cf. Coste IX, conference of 25th December 1648 on love of one’s vocation

¹⁴ C.30 b

¹⁵ Cf *Inter-Assemblies Action Lines* 2003-2009, p. 9

should, therefore be “*whatever is necessary.*” In theory nobody would dispute this. The problem lies in the different ways (sometimes very different ways) of interpreting what “necessary” means in practice. Why does this happen? The consumerist attitude which permeates all things can easily creep into communities. And what is more worrying, without the members of the community being too much aware of it. The Domestic Assemblies will be a good time for thinking about this matter and, if necessary, drawing up strategies for not falling into the trap of consumerism. For example, there is no better way of responding to consumerism than by learning the art of being content with little, especially the “little” of the community. We can discover and learn great wisdom from this.

A community caught up in the turmoil of consumerism cannot even in jest be called prophetic. It cannot transmit any values. It has lost what J.B. Metz called “*shock therapy*” to challenge people. If communities wish to be prophetic in our times they have to find other ways of acting in opposition to consumerism.

***Take risks.** This is also referred to in *Vita Consecrata* № 85, which speaks of “*audacious*” prophecy. In their turn, the *Action Lines* of the last General Assembly call on us to find answers to the great challenges facing humanity.¹⁶ Naturally, this search involves certain risks. On the cover of the *Action Lines* the word “audacity” also appears, this time with reference to ardour for Jesus Christ and the poor.

Audacity is one of the characteristics of a prophet. If a community is dominated by fear of all sorts of misfortune, by caution more than anything else, by having all loose ends tied up and well tied up, by people looking for protection by seeing that their backs are well covered, then it is very difficult for prophecy to have a hold. Taking risks or living audaciously does not in any way mean living in a continual state of worry or disarray. This has nothing to do with prophecy. But it is audacious to genuinely trust in the One we say we trust in, to think up new responses to continuing forms of poverty or to new ones, to seriously think about our personal and community life to see what we have to redirect in the name of prophecy and hope. The creativity to which Saint Vincent is calling us and which he himself practised so admirably, is not far from what we have just been talking about.

Of course, the capacity for being audacious will depend on the age, the number of Sisters and the vitality of the community. But it is not the only parameter to be borne in mind. We all know Daughters of Charity who, in spite of their age, are full of life and creativity. They are always seeking to adapt existing works to new social demands in order to respond to these more effectively; and if necessary they are prepared to begin a new work. Prophecy given by older people is more likely to be evangelical prophecy because it is based more on experience and realism and so more free from dreams and personal projects that can operate at an earlier age.

One consequence of the audacious prophecy to which the Company is being called during this time of grace, is the capacity to have an open mind, heart, and house as well as being available and willing to give time. Shutting oneself away may bring tranquillity but it cannot give rise to prophecy. Openness of mind so that we can understand the weak and the socially excluded. Openness of heart so that we can discreetly and tactfully accompany others. Open house so that we can give a warm, human welcome to people. Availability so that we can collaborate in works directed by other people. Giving time, so that we can set up life-giving contacts. To be an open person one does not need impressive diplomas or extraordinary strategies. It is enough to have a heart, to be sensitive, to love one’s vocation and to have a positive outlook.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.7

***Prophecy as a community.** Not just making personal and individual responses. Traditional formation emphasised the personal angle. However, *“it is not good to reach the goal first and on one’s own, but to reach it in due time and with many others”* as the Spanish writer Antonio Machado advised many years ago. Today things are fairly easy to understand: community prophecy has much more power and credibility than individual prophecy which can be subject to a thousand and one temptations and dangers. The words of John Paul II addressed to the General Assembly of 1985 shed light on what we have just been saying: the Pope declared, *“If individual witness is of value, community witness extends evangelical witness to an extraordinary degree and has a much greater impact.”*

Of course, community prophecy does not take away from personal witness, but is something in its own right. That is why Saint Vincent considered it an essential element in the Company. The question is how can the community become a prophetic message? We make bold to offer some suggestions. For example, how can a community be prophetic in the ordinary events of everyday life? That is to say, with regard to the food they eat and the clothes they wear, how they work and serve others, how they travel, how they attend to their personal formation, how they talk to others, this is where the face of prophecy is revealed. Because it is not a question of coming down from the mountain and thundering in the name of God, but in showing, by what one does, that it is possible to live as sisters and in justice, in the way God wants. It is true that sometimes prophecy demands weighty declarations to be made in the social media. But this is not everyday prophecy and neither is it the most efficacious testimony. There can be no doubt that prophecy is best expressed in everyday language because the most ordinary actions of an exemplary sisterly life are a criticism of the aggressive, individualist and ambitious society which marginalises great numbers of the dispossessed, and at the same time this prophecy calls for justice and reconciliation. With this in mind *Vita Consecrata* invites communities of consecrated life to *“promote a spirituality of communion.”*¹⁷ Fraternal life in itself contributes to the evangelisation of the world insofar as it shows the humanising effect of the Gospel.¹⁸

Another suggestion is concerned with solidarity because, in fact, a community that corresponds to the prophetic aspects of its milieu and, as far as this is possible, practises solidarity with poor and excluded people in its vicinity, will certainly be a prophetic community. Practising discernment as a community is something that will be of great help to communities in their efforts to be prophetic. Indeed, a community that regularly practises discernment will not remain at the stage of merely providing aid but will move on to working at tackling the root causes of the poverty affecting so many needy people. Discernment will also lead the community to maximise its potential by trying to collaborate with other lay people and organisations that have the same aim, as proposed in Statute 9.

“EVERYWHERE”

The Assemblies theme is open-ended, stimulating, dynamic and universal. The globe and the word “everywhere” lead us to think of the Company’s universality. It is universal, not simply because it is present in the 5 continents and in a great number of countries, but also because it has a universal mission,¹⁹ and knows itself to be

¹⁷ VC 51

¹⁸ Cf. VC 45

¹⁹ Cf. C.1a

international.²⁰ The Domestic Assemblies must not lose sight of this dimension of the Company although they will, after reflection, be focusing on their own local communities and their social surroundings. The fourth Action Line from the 2003 General Assembly can help communities to remember this: *“We will share mutually our human and material resources on all levels and witness to communion, solidarity and the internationality of the Company.”*²¹

CONCLUSION

The Domestic Assembly is more than just a community meeting to discuss a particular topic, important though this may be, or to prepare postulates and propositions for the Provincial Assembly, or to elect delegates. All this has to be done but the Domestic Assembly has a much wider aim; it is a time for conversion on a deep level. On the question of Assemblies the Constitutions make specific reference to this conversion when they use the two words “evaluate” and “promote.”²² Evaluating the ground covered since the last Assembly and fidelity to the charism through the commitments it undertakes. If this attitude of conversion is lacking the Domestic Assemblies (and the same can be said for the Provincial and the General Assemblies) is reduced to a mere formality that is unsatisfactory because people cannot see the point of it. This reflection shows how important it is for the Sisters to have the necessary dispositions for a genuine conversion. There can be no doubt that the Assemblies are one of the most effective means the Company has at its disposal, to ensure its renewal. But of course this will prove useless if it does not have everyone’s support and collaboration.

After mentioning the direction taken by the last General Assembly, we can now indicate the specific climate that should characterise the Domestic Assembly if this is to achieve its aim. Or, to put it another way, what special dispositions should the Sisters bring to the Domestic Assembly if it is to be an authentic means of renewing and revitalising the charism? The first and most important one is that of participating actively and responsibly in the Assembly as the Constitutions so strongly urge us to do.²³ If there is no participation then we cannot call them Assemblies.

Taking part in discussions on the topics suggested reinforces the bonds of community living, encourages a sense of belonging, widens the horizons of the common mission and, of course, makes for a deeper level of discernment because the Spirit can manifest Himself through everyone who takes an active part in the Domestic Assembly. I think it is important to stress this participation because it is not just Superiors but all the Sisters who are responsible for the Company being faithful to its spirit and its special objective within the Church. It is the Assemblies that bring each Sister face to face with the Vincentian heritage they have the duty to safeguard, to make fruitful and to inculcate; always bearing in mind the different social conditions in which the communities find themselves.

The Domestic Assembly presents different ways of participating actively and directly. The Sister Servant, as President of the Assembly, has a very important part to play in this.²⁴ We have to overcome any prejudices that prevent us from listening attentively and objectively to others. In fact, prejudices prevent us from seriously acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit in each Sister. So before the

²⁰ Cf. C 6: St. 13b

²¹ Cf. *Inter-Assemblies Action Lines 2003-2009*, p.9

²² C. 84a

²³ Cf. C.63

²⁴ Cf. C.85; St. 69

Assembly takes place we should rid ourselves of prejudices that have become fixed ideas and have the generosity of spirit to see others in a new light and be kindly disposed to them. This is evangelical virtue at the highest level. Active and responsible participation also demands from us a constructive attitude. Systematic, destructive and bitter criticism deals a serious blow to the community and kills the Domestic Assembly stone dead. Obviously, it is a good thing to be critical of one's own failings and also to criticise the shortcomings of others but only when this criticism is constructive. Criticism is good and necessary for making things work well but the aim of such criticism as well as the time and manner of making it must be appropriate.

We might end with a word about freedom of speech: every Sister, from the Sister Servant to the youngest Sister, should be able to express her ideas freely. Otherwise there would be no discernment. Perhaps the following recommendations of Saint Vincent to the first Sisters may prove useful: *“My Sisters, you should know that in these little Assemblies you should speak in the sight of God, you should pay great attention to what is said there so that you can give a mature opinion on matters and not simply repeat what others have said; this could easily happen when one listens to what a Sister has said and agrees with it. One might simply say, ‘I think that what was said could be done for the reasons she gave.’ And again, ‘I thought such and such a thing for such and such a reason’; because, remember this, Sisters, where it is a question of God’s glory we must in no way be bound by human respect although of course we should not contradict people but simply give our opinion when Superiors ask us to.”*²⁵

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND COMMUNITY SHARING

- What can you, personally, and your local community contribute to the Assembly theme, *“Prophecy and hope, now and everywhere”*?
- How do you feel about the coming Domestic Assembly: - hopeful, not very enthusiastic, eager to participate? If your attitude is a negative one, what can you do to change it and make it more in line with what is involved in taking part in a Domestic Assembly?
- We can say that the Assembly is a “Kairos from God” and a time of grace but it requires the collaboration of each Sister. Which personal dispositions do you consider most important and decisive if the Domestic Assembly is to achieve its goals.

Father Javier ALVAREZ
Director General

²⁵ Coste XIII p. 674

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

Hospitality (contd)

III- Welcome as portrayed in the gospel

In our reflection today I would like to focus our attention on two incidents related in the Gospels, incidents in which Our Lord accepts hospitality and offers it to others. Yesterday I spoke in rather general terms about hospitality, so today we will look at two episodes in Our Lord's life that centre on hospitality received and hospitality offered. Both are recorded by St. Luke. His gospel, I like to think, has a special appeal for us who are members of the Vincentian Family.

I once heard someone ask the question, "If you went into a church and wanted to receive the sacrament of reconciliation – and there were four confessors in their confessionals, and these confessors happened to be the four evangelists, which of them would you go to? There is no accounting for different tastes and temperaments, and no doubt each of us might feel attracted to one more than to another. Comparisons, they say, are odious, and in selecting one of them we would still be happy to have all four evangelists available. Were you a Saint John of the Cross you might gravitate towards John the Evangelist, as the deepest of the theologians among them. I somehow imagine that as a member of the Vincentian Family, interested in the service of the poor, you might, like me, make your way to St. Luke's confessional. Indeed, I recall that in one of Father Maloney's books he has devoted several pages to the theology of St. Luke's gospel.

Many centuries ago, St. Jerome described St. Luke as the "*scribe of the gentleness of Christ.*" He is the evangelist who seems to bring out most clearly the feature of gentleness in Our Lord's character. It was a trait that St. Vincent greatly admired in the character of St. Francis de Sales. St. Luke is the evangelist who was greatly impressed and touched by the compassion of Christ. He is the evangelist who highlights Our Lord's compassion for the poor. Poor people are given a very prominent place in the pages of his gospel. If he were here today he might remind us of the important contribution women made in helping Our Lord with his ministry of proclaiming the Good News to the poor. And of course we are greatly indebted to St. Luke for introducing us, in the opening pages of his gospel, to "Mary, a virgin espoused to a man named Joseph, of the house of David." On reflection, we realise how much we owe to St. Luke for our meditations on the Mysteries of the Rosary.

In the 10th chapter of his gospel, we find Our Lord enjoying the hospitality of Martha and Mary in their home. It is a very human situation. To begin with, Jesus was so human that he needed rest and relaxation with his friends, and he clearly found it in this home in Bethany. It was to this home that he repaired most often during the final week of his life when the dark clouds of suffering and death were gathering in his mind. In the incident recorded by the evangelist, the reactions of the two sisters of the house ring so humanly true. Mary, the deeply contemplative person, prefers "being" to "doing", while Martha is active and practical. One can almost feel the heat of tension rising between the two sisters as Martha becomes more and more impatient with Mary's inactivity. I could be wrong, but perhaps there

was a slight element of jealousy here. Jealousy can put on several layers of cosmetics to conceal ugly wrinkles.

This episode has yet another human feature. Have you noticed that when Martha's annoyance comes to a head, she makes for Mary but does not address her sister directly: *"Lord, are you not concerned that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me."* (Lk 10, 40-41). That was rather thoughtless on Martha's part, wasn't it? Our Lord had come as a guest and she was drawing him into the question of how the house should be managed and how the two sisters should share the household tasks. When we are annoyed or impatient we often say things that we later regret. Do I detect a little barb in Martha's remark? She seems to be saying to Our Lord, "are you not concerned? He could be so concerned about others and now when he comes to the house of his friends he seems unconcerned about Martha's single-handed efforts in the kitchen and all the work she has to do! Poor Martha! Perhaps fatigue or tiredness had affected her usual reaction to visiting friends.

And how did Jesus react? We immediately feel the atmosphere change as Our Lord pours the oil of gentleness on these troubled waters. It would have been so easy and natural to retort to Martha: "Look, why are you attacking me? I don't give the orders in this house." But no. There are jars of healing balm in the way Our Lord said to her, *"Martha, Martha."* One can almost feel the tensions and the impatience being drained out of Martha by his gentleness and understanding. Not anger, but a lot of love, understanding, and appreciation of her service underpin Our Lord's reply to her. With calmness and serenity restored, all three presumably reclined at table and thankfully enjoyed the good things Martha had prepared for the meal.

Our Lord graciously accepted the hospitality offered by the family at Bethany. There is an art in receiving, just as there is an art in giving. We are very much aware of the importance of giving. Our formation as children and later in the community, teaches us to give, to be generous. We foster the art of giving. The art of receiving is also important and it needs to be cultivated. Many of us, particularly men, like to be independent of other people at all times. While it is a good thing to be independent, this can sometimes mask a want of humility. Graciously accepting something from another person can mean giving up my own will and this is closely linked to the virtue of humility. Genuine humility is a condition for incarnating the love of Christ at all times. We cannot really love a person – poor or wealthy, from a position of superiority. As St. Vincent observed: *"Let us work at the virtue of humility because the more humble a person is, the more charitable will they be towards their neighbour. Paradise for communities consists in the practice of charity. Charity is the soul of all the virtues, humility attracts and safeguards them. There are some companies that are as lowly as valleys which draw down on them all the moisture from the mountains; when we empty ourselves God will fill us with himself because he cannot tolerate a void..."* (Abelly, volume 1, chapter 22, p. 93).

Pope Benedict expressed a similar thought to that of St. Vincent when he said during his homily at Midnight Mass: *"God is so great that he is able to make himself small. God is so powerful that he can make himself vulnerable and come to meet us like a defenceless child, so that we can love him. God is so good that he can renounce his divine splendour and come down to the stable so that we can find him there and so that his goodness may touch us, be communicated to us, and continue to operate through us."* This is the blueprint for every Vincentian vocation.

I often think it is rather a pity that the vocations of Martha and Mary have been cast as opposing roles, as if one excluded the other; Mary representing the

contemplative vocation and Martha the active vocation. The truth is that there is a contemplative dimension to the active vocation just as there is an active dimension to the contemplative.

In the fourth chapter of St. John's gospel we have a striking picture of Our Lord as a guest, so to speak, of a Samaritan woman. The Samaritan woman is his hostess. It is the woman who can provide Our Lord with water to quench his thirst. It seems that the Samaritan woman is thirsty too, but at a deeper level than she realises. So, in this fourth chapter of St. John we witness the coming together of Christ's thirst and the thirst of this anonymous woman.

All prayer is the experience of human thirst meeting the divine thirst. Of course God's thirst for us is much more intense than our thirst for him. It was in the midst of terrible sufferings that Our Lord cried out from the Cross "*I thirst*". And that was, according to the saints, much more than physical thirst. It was a loving cry from his heart pleading for our hearts' response. When we pray, not only is his thirst more intense than ours, but it comes from a heart that is infinitely wise as well as loving. God knows our human hearts and understands our thirst. When I pray I am telling the Lord about my thirst when I bring before him my needs and my sorrow and regret for present and past failures. In prayer I am satisfying my thirst to adore my Creator and to give him thanks for his unfailing love and kindness.

God's thirst for my heart is utterly pure. This thirst springs from pure love, for "*God is love*" (1Jn.4,8). This is not always true of my thirst. We can imagine a child at the seaside being consumed by thirst. If it runs to the seawater immediately to drink it, the child will know from the very first mouthful that this is water that doesn't satisfy thirst. I am no longer a child and I should know better but in my prayer I often go for seawater, so to speak. Knowing my thirst, God in his love for me, will see to it that only the living water of his pure love will be given to me. The Spirit of Jesus living within us – who prays within us in words that cannot be expressed – gradually purifies and refines all our desires. Let us present our desires, our thirst, to Our Lord. Let us make them known to him with childlike simplicity. Then, when they have been purified and transformed by God's desire for our happiness, we will be refreshed by that living water that springs up into eternal life: "*O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting. My body pines for you like a dry, weary land without water,*" (Ps 62, 2).

What I have been offering you is a thought from St. Augustine. The words are quoted in the new catechism in the section on prayer: "*Whether we realise it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.*" (cf. St. Augustine, sermon 56, PL 40, 56- Catechism | 2560)

To return to the house in Bethany. Our Lord is a guest there. He is receiving hospitality from the family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. It is important that, in complete confidence, we should make known our needs to our Father in Heaven. We are encouraged to do this, being convinced, as St. Thomas Aquinas was, that prayer is expressing our desires to our Father in Heaven so that he may grant them.

But could it be, however, that at times we talk too much during prayer? We all know how boring it can be in any conversation between two people, if one person monopolises the conversation. I sometimes ask myself if I am not talking too much to God, telling him my ideas and my needs. God may perhaps find it difficult to slip in a word to me. God is a good listener. Am I?

We ask in order to receive. Perhaps I put too much emphasis on the first of the two verbs in Our Lord's injunction, "*Ask and you will be given.*" "*Ask and you will receive.*" I would do well to dwell a little more on the word "receive." Often when we pray for someone, or pray for ourselves, we are asking that our hearts be prepared to receive what God wants us to have. It could be that our hearts, and the hearts of people we pray for, are not open to receive God's favours. That is why I say it is good to reflect often on the word "receive" in the phrase "*Ask and you will receive.*" When our prayers are not answered in the way we want, it could be that the Lord's "Hour" has not yet come.

Pope Benedict reminded us of this in his Midnight Mass homily. Allow me to quote his words. "*It would be better to ask the question, who are the people that God loves and why does he love them? Does God have favourites? Does he just love certain people and abandon others to themselves? The Gospel answers these questions by presenting some people who were much loved by God. These persons are Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Zachary, Simeon, Anna, etc. But there are also two other groups of people; the shepherds, and the wise men from the east who are called the Magi kings. Let us pause to think this night about the shepherds. What sort of men were they? In their own locality the shepherds were looked down on by others; they were regarded as untrustworthy and in courts of law they were not acceptable as witnesses. But in reality, who were these men? They were certainly not great saints, if by this we understand people of heroic virtue. Their lives were not closed in on themselves; their hearts were open. In some profound way they were waiting for his coming. Their vigilance was availability, they were ready to listen; their waiting was a light that would show them the way. This is what interests God. God loves all people because they are all his creatures. But some people have closed their hearts to him; his love cannot reach them. They think they have no need of God and they do not want him. There are other people who may be morally impoverished and sinners but at least this causes them suffering. They are waiting for God. They know that they have need of his goodness even if they cannot put this need into words. Their hearts are open as they wait for the light of God to enter in, and with it, his peace.*"

So when we pray for people, or for ourselves, we are asking Our Lord to open our hearts to receive him, along with the gifts with which he wishes to enrich us. Ultimately, prayer is a matter of the heart. "A pure heart create for me, O God." (Ps 50). This was David's plea in his prayer of sorrow which takes up a large part of Psalm 50. Hospitality, whether offered or received, is also a matter of the heart. Let us learn, then, to be humble guests of God and of each other. May we also be good hosts. We will reflect on this in our next meditation.

IV BECOMING GOOD HOSTS

The human resources Our Lord had at hand to offer hospitality to others were meagre enough. Of course the word hospitality immediately conjures up in our minds food and lodging. On reflection, however, we realise that hospitality, as I explained earlier, is a much broader and more comprehensive term. As Jesus himself said, he had nowhere to lay his head. His life style was that of an itinerant preacher. Three of the evangelists comment on the fact that a group of women had followed Our Lord from Galilee and had provided for his material needs out of their own resources. Desiring to live a life of poverty, Jesus had schooled himself to accept humbly and graciously the services offered him by others, starting with Mary his mother and Joseph his foster father.

“Do not neglect hospitality.” The final actions of Our Lord’s life were gestures of hospitality. Entrusting his mother, Mary, to John, was a gesture of hospitality as was his entrusting his beloved disciple to Mary, and through him entrusting each one of us to her care. The repentant thief, in the last moments of his life, experienced the hospitality of Christ. Speaking to him from the Cross, Jesus said, *“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”* (Lk 22, 43). Even in the most painful moments of his life, Jesus did not forget hospitality.

The greatest manifestation of Christ’s hospitality is shown in the celebration of that farewell meal in the Upper Room, less than 24 hours before he surrendered himself in a final expression of loving obedience to his Father’s will.

There is something touchingly human and tender about Our Lord’s decision to leave us the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Mass in the form of a meal. A good meal can work wonders in a family or community. At Jubilee celebrations we have a festive meal. It helps to heal old wounds and to reduce tensions among members of a community or family. A confrere of mine once told me that he thought one of the best animators in his community was a bottle of good wine. When we are gathered round a festive table we try to forget our differences and to rejoice. Jubilees and birthdays can be moments of reconciliation and a fuller acceptance of others in the community.

It is indeed a pity that the great mystery of our faith, the Mass, should be seen by many people as a moral obligation, especially when Sunday comes round. It is also a little sad when one hears young people today say that Mass is boring.

With regard to young people, it is sometimes said that we older people do not speak their language. That may be true. What, we might ask, is God’s language? My life is a preparation for learning and developing my skill in speaking God’s language which is *agape*. *“In the eventide of life, you will be judged on your love,”* wrote St. John of the Cross. The most important truth that God has revealed to us about himself is to be found in three words in the writings of St. John: *“God is love.”* (1Jn 4,8). He doesn’t write, “God **has** love” but “God **is** love.”

True love always costs. Can a man really love his wife, or a woman really love her husband, can parents really love their children, without that love being expressed in sacrifice? Even if they do not use the word “sacrifice” true love always involves cost. If, as we believe, God loves us, then costly love or sacrifice is at the heart of his love for us: *“God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* (Jn 3, 16). God did not simply have loving feelings for us. His love **gave** and continues to **give**. Such is the nature of love. Beneath the appearances of bread and wine, the risen Christ is speaking the language of love. Listen to the words telling of the institution of the Eucharist, *“This is my body **given** for you...This is the chalice of my blood **poured out** for you.”* The love of Jesus is a love that costs.

The entire life of Jesus speaks the language of a love that cost: his ministry of healing, teaching, consoling, and serving others was a continual outpouring of energy that he found costly. Today, and every day, he invites every member of his body, the Church, to place in the chalice at the Offertory of the Mass, their sufferings, their joys, their hopes, and their energies dedicated to the service of the poor. If I am not speaking that language of love outside Mass time, then I will not be in harmony with the music of the symphony that we know as the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass. The heart and centre of every celebration of the Eucharist is the living and constantly renewed offering Our Lord made of himself on Calvary.

One of the moving and very pleasing moments in the film, "The Passion of Christ" comes right at the time when Christ is being treated with great violence – there is a sudden flashback for a few moments to the tranquillity of the Upper Room. The crucifixion scene, with Jesus writhing in agony, is interwoven with moments of peace from the Last Supper. What Jesus had unreservedly surrendered on Calvary, his body and blood in sacrifice, he had already given to his disciples as bread and wine in the Passover meal. Then he asked the disciples to do the same in his memory until he would come again. Another flashback lasting three or four seconds in the film, shows us Christ, in the midst of the violence he is suffering, referring to the supremacy of love, something he called for in those who claimed to be his disciples. Both are just momentary flashbacks but they are very apt reminders of the truth that every celebration of the Eucharist is a re-enactment of Christ's offering on the Cross, which he made with love and in which we now participate. When the late Holy Father, Pope John Paul II saw Mel Gibson's film, he simply said; "That's just the way it was."

"Don't forget hospitality." No, Jesus Christ does not forget hospitality; *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever."* (Heb 13, 8). The Eucharist is an eternal covenant. Our Risen Christ invites us to experience his hospitality day after day in the Eucharist. No need of ours is too great to be placed on the paten. It is the celebration of the Eucharist which, in the words of the 4th Eucharistic Prayer, *"brings salvation to the whole world"*, whether the world recognises this or not. I love the conviction held by an Italian Capuchin who was crippled and a hunchback. This priest seems to have been able to do nothing else for his community but sit in a confessional all day and to celebrate his daily Mass. It was the only ministry that St. Leopold could exercise. He used to say there was nothing too great to ask for at Mass, given the greatness of who and what was being offered. Fr. Leopold died in 1942 and the Pope canonised him about twenty years ago.

Every day the priest celebrating the Eucharist says to us, *"Let us proclaim the mystery of faith"*. The mystery of faith is that our crucified and risen Lord is both host and victim in the celebration of the Eucharist.

After we have experienced God's hospitality in the celebration of the Eucharist, our loving Saviour asks us to show hospitality to everyone we meet during the day. After experiencing God's hospitality in the invitation given to us by Our Lord at the end of Mass, *"Go in the peace of Christ"* or, as the English version has it, *"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord"*, we are asked, in these words, to receive, as welcoming hosts, the "whole Christ." The divine host has received us as his guests. Now we are the hosts to receive everyone we meet after celebrating the Eucharist. At times this can prove difficult because Our Lord presents himself in different guises, some of these attractive and others repellent. We have to welcome everyone especially the poor, but also people who may not be poor, because as the Jesuit poet, Hopkins, wrote, *"Christ shines in 10,000 places and is beautiful in the eyes of people who are not his disciples."* The difficulty of accepting "the total Christ" at all times is well expressed in the prose poem which will end our reflection.

The trouble with manifestations

*Jesus came into my room and stood there
I was bored to death and
I had work to do.
I wouldn't have minded if he had been crippled or something;
I can handle cripples.
But he just stood there, so pleased with himself and his damned guitar.*

*I didn't ask him to sit down; he would have stayed there all day.
Let's be honest: at that moment I felt myself torn apart, crucified,
Unable to do anything for God, let alone anyone else.
So after a while I ended up saying, 'Well, what's the matter? What do you
want?*

*He began to laugh in a stupid way and said,
'I was just passing through and thought I would say hello.'
"Great!" I said, mockingly.
He said hello and took himself off.
When he had gone I was so mad with myself I couldn't even listen to the radio.
I went and got some coffee.
The trouble with Christ is that he always comes at the wrong time.*

Jean Heureux (a former Jesuit)

*"Don't forget hospitality....Show hospitality to one another without complaining"
without secretly wishing you didn't have to do this!"*

Father Richard McCullen, CM

VISIT BY SUPERIORS

**Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General
and Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General**

**Province of St. Louis (USA)
12th-18th November 2006**

On November 12th 2006, Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, and Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General, arrived in St. Louis for their visit to the Province.

On the following day, Sister Evelyne visited several ministries of our Sisters in **SAINT LOUIS:**

Cardinal Ritter Preparatory School, a diocesan school attended mostly by African-American pupils.

Guardian Angel Settlement and Hosea House, social services agencies that provide clothing, food and a variety of services for families in need.

De Sales Child Day Care Centre for poor children which provides care in a developmental environment.

That afternoon, Sister Evelyne met the Sisters in two of the local Community residences in the locality and in the evening, 52 Daughters from the St. Louis area who had gathered at the Provincial House. In her talk to the Sisters, Sister Evelyne stressed that *"we must be totally clothed with the spirit of the Company today. If we are humble, simple and loving we will be able to express our spirit in the new and prophetic ways that our times and our cultures demand of us."*

On Tuesday, November 14th Sister Evelyne and Sister Margaret visited:

- The Sarah Community, a three-storey continuing care facility on the campus of De Paul Health Centre. The Sarah Community is a collaborative ministry sponsored by the Daughters of Charity and four other religious communities. Sister Evelyne told the senior Sisters that their mission is to be a “house of prayer.”

The offices of the Ascension Health Organisation, a national healthcare collaborative ministry sponsored by four Provinces of the Daughters of Charity and two Congregations of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The administrators spoke of their vision for the future and their commitment to be, for the United States, a viable and credible ministry in the Church which is already known for its commitment to poor and vulnerable communities.

Afterwards, the visitors went to **TEXAS**, where 39 sisters gathered in San Antonio to welcome them. The festivities included a Eucharistic celebration and a special meal with the lively Mariachi music and Mexican food that are typical of that area. The Sisters were particularly moved by Sister Evelyne’s remark at the end of their sharing, , “You obviously love the Company very much.”

While they were in Texas, Sister Evelyne and Sister Margaret visited:

Two Community Health and Social Services Centres run by the Ascension Health Organisation. The Sisters working at the Centres run health advisory courses, provide health care services in a nearby parish, counsel children and adults and share the charism with others through in-service events and retreats.

Two local communities where the Sisters work enthusiastically with prisoners as educators and pastoral care workers in local prisons and detention centres.

On November 15th, Sister Evelyne and Sister Margaret flew to New Orleans, **LOUISIANA**, They met the 13 Sisters who live in this city which was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. They saw miles and miles of empty houses and on the outskirts of the city hundreds of temporary homes provided by the government. They visited the neighbourhoods in the worst affected areas where the Sisters are serving in

Schools, social services, and health care in a collaborative clinic housed in trailers,

The Daughters of Charity’s Health Clinic and Catholic Charities which have relocated their services to a remodelled church in the 9th ward that suffered severe damage.

Our Lady of Wisdom Health Centre.

After meeting the Staff in these different works, Sister Evelyne was deeply moved by their courage and that of the Sisters in face of so many difficulties to be overcome.

The State of **Arkansas** was the last area visited. After meeting the three Sisters who work in Little Rock and those serving with Catholic Charities to help the thousands of evacuees from New Orleans who have relocated to Arkansas, Sister Evelyne and Sister Margaret went to St. Peter’s School in Pine Bluff and then to Gould where they learned about the various ministries in this rural location and at St. Elizabeth’s Health Centre. In an interview with *Arkansas Catholic* , Sister Evelyne

said that her visit to Arkansas confirmed for her the importance of working together for those who are most deprived.

On Saturday, November 18th, after Mass in the Provincial House with the Provincial Director and the Council, Sister Evelyne and Sister Margaret left St. Louis to return to the Motherhouse in Paris.

This opportunity to share with Sister Evelyne our life of service and our efforts to bring the Vincentian charism to this central part of the United States as well as having her unreserved support for our many and varied ministries, was a truly privileged time for our Province. We are very grateful for her visit.

Sister Marie-Therese SEDGWICK
Daughter of Charity

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of China

FIRST ASIAN MEETING ON MIGRATION

The Asian Meeting on Migration for the Daughters of Charity held in Taiwan from April 21st – 28th, 2007 was the first such meeting at continental level since the first International Meeting on Migration in Paris, France from September 5th-20th, 2005. With its theme “**Called to Build together a World without Frontiers**” the week long session at Hsinchu Pastoral Centre brought together 52 participants from nine countries in Asia: Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. The idea for the meeting was initially proposed and approved by the Asian Visitatrices during their group meeting in the course of the Visitatrices’ Encounter in 2005.

The session opened with the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Most Rev. John B. Li, Bishop of Hsinchu. In his homily the Bishop stressed the challenge facing us to do more in responding to the continually worsening situation of migrants throughout the world, but especially in Asia. Sr. Emma Lee, Visitatrice of the Chinese Province, welcomed the participants and observers from the various Provinces in Asia. The participants included eight Visitatrices, Sisters working with migrants, some Provincial Directors, lay partners, other Vincentian priests and Sisters interested in the migrant ministry. The meeting was organised by a team made up of Sr. Julma Neo, General Councillor, Sr. Maria Teresa Mueda, Visitatrice of the Philippine Province, who facilitates our Asian meetings, Sr. Emma Lee, Visitatrice of the Chinese Province and Sr. Bertha Dolangon, both from the host Province.

The meeting lasted for a week using the methodology SEE-JUDGE-ACT which has been consistently used in our Asian meetings for the past few years.

SEE

Through the sharing offered by several resource persons and a day’s visit to six different Centres helping migrants, the reality of the migrant situation as a very complex phenomenon, concerning mostly women, was clearly seen. Five resource persons – lay, religious and a deacon- were invited to inform the group about the situation in their countries with regard to migration: for example, the absence, in most

countries of government legislation to protect migrants, Church response to migration, etc. The resource persons came from both migrant-sending countries-Indonesia and the Philippines- and migrant-receiving countries – Taiwan, Japan, South Korea. All are currently working either with Migrant Centres or with a Justice and Peace Commission. From their talks, it was clear to the participants that the inter-relationship among the political, legal, social, cultural, economic, environmental, and religious dimensions of migration, call for a holistic view of this phenomenon and an integral response to it.

The causes of migration are both structural and personal. Poverty is both a cause and an effect of migration. In many cases, migration has only compounded the problems of migrants because of flagrant exploitation, violation of human rights and human dignity, deadly diseases and moral degradation, that have reduced hundreds of millions of migrants (currently estimated around 190 million) to being mere “beasts of burden,” “modern slaves,” and “sex objects.” Stories of the inhumanity of middle men, employers, and even governments shared during the sessions and heard from the migrants themselves, left no heart unmoved among the participants. These indignities exist in countries, either sending or receiving migrants, where there are no laws to protect the well-being and the human rights of these people.

Some very enlightening talks given by Fr. Fabio Baggio, Director of the International Centre for Migration in the Philippines, helped the participants to “see” at a deeper level, the reality of migration in Asia: its causes and its challenges, particularly for the Church and for religious.

JUDGE

Fr. Fabio’s talk on the “*Challenges of Migration for Religious in Asia*” and a power point presentation by Sr. Julma on the “*Service of the Poor Today*”, led the participants to reflect more deeply on all they had seen and heard about migration in the light of faith and the Vincentian charism. Ministry among migrants is a very rich context for accomplishing the mission of the Asian Church to engage in a triple dialogue at the same time: dialogue with the poor, with other religions and with cultures. The call to live the Vincentian charism as outlined in the Action Lines drawn up after the 2003 General Assembly, was given greater emphasis. Three images that spoke volumes to those engaged in migrant ministry came alive during the meeting: “*Journeying with a People*” as an Exodus to the Promised Land, “*The Father’s Dream*” of a World Without Frontiers as an expression of His Kingdom, and “*Journey of Faith*” with Jesus, walking on the rough seas of migration, saying, “Fear Not!”

ACT

A panel of seven Daughters of Charity working with migrants in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines was invited to share the responses of their Provinces to migration. These responses guided the participants as they reflected on their own responses to migration.

In different ways, the Sisters who work with migrants shared that they were evangelised by the courage and strength of the migrants. Their faith has been deepened, as well as their sense of the internationality of the Community, while the need to revise present ministries in the face of new challenges has become more urgent.

The challenges of work with migrants demand from the Sisters- personally and communally- courage, maturity, formation, sharing of resources, simplicity of lifestyle, sustainability of services, owning of the migrant ministry as a community mission, and a faith vision.

The responses to these challenges take the form of a range of services, from simple presence, welcome, assistance, from acting as cultural mediators to professional interventions, advocacy and empowerment of the migrants themselves. The specific means of doing this are equally varied: through education, networking and special projects, such as savings and economic investments for the future.

Creativity on the personal, local, Provincial and inter-Provincial levels in the Vincentian Family and working in collaboration with others in the ministry to migrants which is based on a faith vision, can and must build a world without frontiers. .

The session ended with a Eucharistic celebration to thank God for the grace of a very successful meeting. The experience of this meeting has made very real to us the words of *Erga Migrantes* no. 84: "*Migration problems represent ... a challenge for their charisms.*" Indeed, for us Daughters of Charity, ministry among migrants makes very real the words on the seal of the Company: "*The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us*" to go beyond what is ... to build a world without frontiers.

Sr. Teresa Mabasa and Sr. Violeta Cecilio
Participants

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Cali (Colombia)

Revitalising within the Province
the Sisters' fidelity, and vocation ministry

With a view to revitalising vocation ministry, Sister Maria Lia Giraldo, the Visitatrice, with her Council, presented a plan to the Province: to help each Sister to become aware once more of her initial call to follow Christ, in order to be better able to communicate this to young people who ask questions about their vocation. This project was very well received and the entire Province set out on this work of personal and community renewal in the light of the Spirit.

Numerous activities were scheduled:

- Outlines for monthly celebrations that could be shared with the parish,
- Times of Marian prayer in order to learn from Mary, the first consecrated woman,
- Vincentian reflections on the love of our vocation,
- Prayer guides: thanksgiving for our vocation, prayer for vocations, prayer for those who are sick,
- More intensive formation for Sisters under 10 years vocation,
- Reflection and group work on vocation during annual retreats in order to help each Sister regain her first fervour, etc.

The Sisters on the Commission for Vocation Ministry visited the local communities and invited them to:

- Intensify their community life in specific ways,
- Find ways of presenting vocation material to the general public and update this periodically,
- Have Mass and Holy Hour devotions with young people on the first Thursday of the month,
- Organise gatherings for the families of aspirants and postulants with Sisters' families,
- Give talks on vocations in secondary schools or in regions where there are no religious communities,
- Participate in diocesan meetings about vocations and even take part in religious programmes on the radio.

As time went by, vocation ministry began to have a more important place in the hearts of the Sisters and the local communities. Each month, guidelines are sent out for personal reflection and sharing. The proceeds from community efforts to practise self-denial are distributed to poor persons

We also asked ourselves the question: why are we appreciated for our work but not for our consecrated life? Does that mean that people admire us without wanting to imitate us? That called to mind for us the importance of returning to the essential: following Christ and allowing ourselves to be clothed in his Spirit and not judge our fidelity by our apostolic results. This reminder helped us to be more aware that fidelity is an ongoing process of growth in our spiritual life and not in ways of acting that are linked to the past.

This year of reflection on vocation has been a year of grace for the Province, reminding us of the need for greater consistency in our being and our acting. Our life of prayer has been intensified, recognising the action of God in our life, in the life of the Company and in that of poor persons. We understand better how we are sources of support for one another along this journey of growth while respecting our differences. We would like to continue developing this vocations ministry in a dynamic way by planning new projects in collaboration with the Vincentian family, sustaining enthusiasm in the local communities, visiting the places where there are no Sisters, gathering with young people and their families, and seriously accompanying groups of young people, helping them commit themselves to the service of poor persons. This year, we have the joy of having 7 postulants and 13 young Sisters in the Seminary.

“Since Our Lord is the author of this work, you must often entreat Him to fill the persons who enter the Company with the Spirit He wants all of you to have, so that, by this means, you may continue the good that has been started.” (Coste X, p.95)

Sister Lucia GOMEZ OVIEDO
Correspondent for the Echoes

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Cali (Colombia)

A personal development programme for the Provincial House staff

In response to what Constitution 10 calls us to do, we reflected on a development programme that could be carried out with the Provincial House employees, in the same manner as those that we organise for poor people in our different services.

This work of development of the whole person has already been going on for over ten years. We decided it would be a good idea to put it in writing so as to ensure that it continues. Today, the group, which has been enlarged to include employees of other houses in Cali, numbers 58 persons. Some of them experience poverty from time to time, and others live in a real state of poverty.

In order to bring them together, we needed to learn how to reach out beyond our own world so that we could understand their situation from the inside, discover the values they live out in their work and their families and find out in what areas they needed further instruction, in religion, etc.

A team of Sisters met to reflect on the creation of a programme containing various activities for developing the abilities of each of the employees.

- Thanks to this human development project, everyone gained some knowledge; some were able to become involved in secondary or professional studies.

- A programme of house building and home improvements was organised.

- A pastoral plan was drawn up for people to learn about the gospels, share human and gospel values as experienced by Christ and learn how to develop a prayer life, especially one based on life experiences. This pastoral programme allowed many people to have a real encounter with Christ who accompanies them, gives meaning to their lives, and invites them to be witnesses of the love of the Father who is so close to them. Many people became aware of their dignity in God's eyes and God's call to greater love in their personal and family life.

Each year, we note the progress achieved by many employees on a human as well as a Christian level. Some of them pray regularly, participate in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and become involved in solidarity activities. Recently, they have taken the initiative to write to all the other employees in the nearby houses in our Province, encouraging them to join our staff in improving their skills in reading and writing and be introduced, if they wished, to a greater understanding of God. We continue this journey with them, grateful for all that they give to us by what they say and the way they live.

Sister Lucia GOMEZ
Correspondant for the Echoes

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Slovakia

Serving people who are homeless

Since 1999, we, the Daughters of Charity in Kosice, a city in the eastern part of Slovakia, have been involved in serving homeless people. We began by serving hot soup from the door of our house. With the number of homeless persons continually increasing, we decided to speak to the mayor, who made a place available to us close to our community. We sought ways of better serving these vulnerable people, but this was beyond our power.

In April 2005, the mayor asked us to stop offering this service so as to avoid groups of homeless people gathering together and causing so-called disorder. This decision saddened us, especially as we had always been very careful to leave everything in good order. We were hoping to find other locations where the clients would be able to shower and receive clothes and care. The approach of winter really worried us. We intensified our prayers, abandoning ourselves to Divine Providence, as Saint Vincent always recommended.

On November 9th 2005, the anniversary of the beatification of Sister Rosalie Rendu, the municipality asked us to start distributing soup again and agreed to give some financial help for this. Even though the building we had used earlier was not available, we were happy to set the project up in the courtyard of our house. We are certain that Sister Rosalie helped us.

In January 2006 the cold was so intense that the city decided to open an emergency shelter for homeless persons: a house where they could sleep and spend the day. Curious to see how this was functioning, we went there one evening. What a surprise! There was only one homeless person inside and one guard. Our friends on the streets were afraid of the police and preferred to sleep in the streets or in the railway station where they were continually chased away. We decided to go and find them and try to convince them to sleep in the beds in the emergency shelter. Finally, there were 23 in the shelter. The guard began to panic as the numbers increased. We offered to help him, and realising that the homeless people trusted us, he accepted our help.

Next day, the municipality asked us to work there full-time: to prepare breakfast, spend the morning with these people, take them to the hospital, do the cleaning, provide clothes and care when needed. This lasted until April... At the end of winter this establishment was turned into a night shelter.

In the meantime, we went to meetings with the municipality and were pleased to note the changes that had taken place. They now had a better understanding of the situation of homeless people and the reasons why they became alcoholic and antisocial. At present, they are seeking solutions to the problem so that these people can recover their dignity. We had gained the confidence of the municipal authorities and were now able to collaborate with them.

In Spring 2006, the emergency shelter was closed. We went back to doing this work from our house until the municipality offered us, **in early December**, an establishment with 100 bed capacity!

So, during the winter, more than 100 people have found shelter and have had soup prepared by the Sisters in our house. People who are ill are allowed to remain in the shelter during the day and benefit from a midday meal. All have access to showers, care, and underclothing. The process of getting documentation for those

who need it is underway. Those suffering from serious illnesses have been admitted to hospital. No one dies of the cold anymore or suffers from parasites or infections. They are all offered accompaniment to help them become independent and to rediscover their dignity.

This social service is appreciated by the citizens of our city. Homeless persons no longer remain inside the railway station and the doctors are able to send us their patients who are homeless.

At the end of **March 2007**, this emergency shelter closed its section of beds; it will reopen them at the beginning of next winter. However, we continue to distribute soup and clothing, as well as providing personal hygiene facilities and medical care.

On May 7th, 2007, the municipality awarded the Daughters of Charity the "Social Work Prize".

Community of Kosice
Sisters of Slovakia

THE POOR SPEAK TO US

Province of Central Africa

The righteous, even though they die young, will be at rest (Wisdom 4,7)

Adeline, a little saint

Adeline is a young girl who recently died in the hospital in Nemba, leaving behind an unforgettable testimony for all who knew her.

Adeline's mother, who was a very devout woman, was HIV positive and she transmitted the virus to her newborn baby. When Adeline was 3 years old, her father was accused of taking part in genocide, was imprisoned and died some years later. Her widowed and sick mother showed great courage but soon afterwards she died. Her child was sent to live with an aunt and she would spend the rest of her life here waiting for her final hour. Like her mother, she became ill and accepted her sufferings bravely. Before she died she was moved to hospital on several occasions in the course of 4 months. During the times she was in hospital she helped us a lot in ministering to the sick without ever leaving her bed.

This 14-year-old child was so small that she looked like an 8-year-old, but from the advice she gave to others, her faith in God and her devotion to Holy Communion and the Blessed Virgin Mary, she seemed to us to be a great evangeliser. She was always ready to pray, and to hear Mass and she invited those around her to do the same and especially to prepare properly before Mass so as to make a good Communion. She encouraged them to have devotion to the Blessed Virgin and she taught them to say the rosary and to make novenas.

She suffered a lot and always had a high temperature. Whenever we asked her how she was, she replied with a big smile, "*I am fine.*" If anyone looked surprised at this answer, Adeline would go on to say, "*Yes, I am fine because I have got used to suffering. Besides, I'm not the only person who is suffering; there are so many others like me and some of them have even more to suffer.*"

Two days before she died, she said to the social worker, *“Please telephone my aunt because it is time for me to go.”* When the aunt arrived, Adeline asked her to pray with her and then said, *“Jesus is ready to take me to live with Him! When the angels come they will find me ready because I have been preparing myself for a long time.”* She asked her aunt to send for the priest. After her confession she said to her aunt, *“Now I am going but no one can come with me to where I am going, I am going there on my own.”*

A few minutes before she died she opened her eyes and was astonished to find all her friends standing round her. With an expression on her face that was almost joyful, she said to them, *“It is good that you are here now; let’s start to say the rosary.”* When she couldn’t continue, she added, *“Stay here, everyone, and pray for me because I can’t pray anymore.”* Adeline made us think and she left a wonderful memory in the hearts of all who knew her. She died as she had lived. Thank you, Adeline, for your testimony.

The Daughters of Charity of NEMBA

Province of Belgium

The voice of a detainee

Here are the words of a detainee who had spent time in prison and who has made great progress since then. The prison chaplain invited him to share his experience of living in a correction centre.

My name is Michel. At present I am in T. prison. Life in prison is a difficult struggle. In this situation, detainees have a great need to be listened to and supported. To my great regret, no one in my family comes to visit me. Fortunately, we can count on the chaplains and the volunteers. They are a precious help to us in preparing for our freedom and reinsertion into society. Their impartiality and availability is what I admire most about them. Inside these walls, we need people who find the strength to support us through their prayer and their commitment. You help to make up for those who constantly reproach us for the wrong that we have committed. Don’t we all carry within us some element of wrongdoing? Those who judge and condemn are not 100% innocent...

In prison, there is a sort of “group code” that determines whether or not someone is accepted. Certain people in the prison demand that everyone behave in a certain way... their way. Those who do not conform are rejected, excluded and deprived of their dignity. For God it’s completely different. God accepts us as we are, with our good and our bad sides. We are all created in God’s image and called by our name. That is what we sense when we have contact with you, the chaplains, Sisters and laypeople. In our harsh desert, on this dry land, with no exit, where we risk sinking into oblivion, we need you very much.

Since I opened my heart to Jesus, I have got to know several chaplains with whom I have had valuable contacts on various occasions. At the beginning, they were just chaplains for me, priests, deacons, Sisters, volunteers... but over time, strong bonds have formed between us. I swear that I have been through hell, and the only people who listened to me and guided me were the chaplains. They are the only

ones with whom I dare to feel at ease. Above all, they released something in me that helped me to trust and feel safe. I can tell my story to them with complete trust, without being afraid of being judged. It is so important for someone who needs to confide in someone. I knew that they would maintain confidentiality. I am not the only one who has had this experience...

All the chaplains that I have known have supported me in the forming my personality and in building up my faith. They have all been a sign of Jesus' presence in my life. Through them, Jesus comes to meet us. They have become my friends for life; without them, I would never have managed to become who I am now. They have helped me to remain strong enough to be healed of my drug addiction. They are my second family, my spiritual family. I also thank God for the graces that He has given me, because God is the source of my healing.

So my dear friends in faith, I would like to encourage you to persevere in your service as chaplains. We really need you because your presence and your support are vitally important to us. In the name of all the detainees who think the way that I do, I want to thank you. You are shining stars in the midst of a dark night, and if the stars vanish, all hope is lost. Thank you.

MICHEL

Excerpt from a Provincial Newsletter n° 197 (January-March 2007)

SOURCES AND UPDATES

Some important maxims of Monsieur Vincent in his conferences on the Rules of the Daughters of Charity

- *Do you think, my Daughter, that a Daughter of Charity who remembers what was said at conferences finds any benefit in doing this?*

- *Yes, Father, because it will help her on various occasions, and moreover, her neighbour will be edified.*

This is one of the dialogues we can read in the conference given on 1st May 1648. Our first Sisters clearly understood the importance of Monsieur Vincent's teaching and some of them collected in a simple notebook of that time, various "important maxims"

We can see in these pages, our Sisters' diligence in preserving the written word but also, and more especially, their perseverance in faithfully collecting the words of the Founder, and their desire to pass on the torch so that the work which had just started might continue and the spirit of the little Company, the spirit of the Gospel, might be preserved.

The document that follows is meant to let you share our admiration for this. On the left page you will see a copy of the manuscript and on the corresponding opposite page you will have the exact reference and the transcription, in modern French, from volumes IX and X of Coste.

In later editions of the Echo, you will find other similar pages: may these encourage you to reread the conferences of Saint Vincent.

PHOTO

***Important maxims presented by
Monsieur Vincent in the
Conferences on the Rules of the Daughters of Charity***

From the conference given on 1st July 1634 (Coste IX, 1)
Explanation of the Rules

It is almost impossible for a person who is exteriorly immodest to be truly modest interiorly.

People who have been chosen to do the same sort of things ought to be united in everything.

Rich people may become poor, because of accidents that often happen, but people who are resolved to depend entirely on Providence will never be poor.

From the conference given on 15th June 1643 (Coste IX, 113)

Conversing with God for half an hour, oh! how easy that is, and what a happiness...There is no less happiness and profit in listening to God than there is in speaking to Him.

PHOTO

Why do people join religious Orders, if not to become good Christian men and women?

From the conference given on 21st January 1645 (Coste IX, 215)

Oh! Blessed are those souls who give themselves to the service of God for the sake of purity!

If any of you were to love singularity she would no longer be a Daughter of Charity but a daughter of pride.

Never be with a poor person without giving him some instruction.

From the conference given on 1st August 1655 (Coste X, 93)
On the observance of Rule.

(God) bestows a great gift on a Sister to whom He has given the grace to see that she keeps the rules of rising, retiring to rest.....

(God) only speaks to you when you are silent, for the words of God do not mingle with the words and tumult of men.

PHOTO

From the conference of 22nd January 1648 (Coste IX, 366)
On the good use of admonitions

God always justifies those who do not seek to justify themselves.

What do you think murmuring in a community really is? It is a plague that spoils everything. To have one who complains and another who listens to her complaints is quite enough to ruin everything. It is the mother of divisions.

From the conference of 15th March, 1648 (Coste IX)

Admonitions reveal to us what self-love has hidden. If we take them well, we shall find that this practice will lead us, step by step, to a high degree of perfection.

From the conference of 22nd October 1646 (Coste IX, 279)
On concealing and excusing faults

Confession is necessary but it is subordinate (to charity). Charity comes first and if charity were to be harmed by Confession, then leave Confession, for it is only the handmaid of charity,

God's cloister, a great personage has said, is charity; it is there He takes His pleasure, there He takes up His dwelling, there He finds His palace of delight, there is the place of His sojourn in which He is well pleased.

PHOTO

If there were no Sisters to listen to slander, no Sisters would slander.

From the conference of 19th August 1646
On meekness and the practice of mutual respect

The source of respect is esteem, and esteem is formed in the heart, and from respect springs gentleness.

From the conference of 19th July 1640 (Coste IX, 18)

On the vocation of the Daughter of Charity

You may do all the good you like, but if you do not do it well, it will profit you nothing.

Mortify your senses and you will soon find yourselves entirely different creatures with a great facility for doing good.

From the conference of 2nd August 1640 (Coste IX, 26)

O my Daughters, have a real love for this holy exercise of prayer and go to it with the greatest care, for it is the seedbed of devotion.

Sister Therese-Marie CHEVALIER
Archives office

SPECIAL CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF MOTHER GUILLEMIN

Mother Suzanne Guillemin

1906 – 1968

Daughter of Charity – Daughter of the Church
Superioress General of the Company

III – THE GENERALATE

***“It is not up to the stone to choose its place,
but up to the master who has chosen it...”***

Introduction

On February 11th, 1962, Father Slattery, Superior General, sent the letter of convocation to the Visitatrices of the Provinces, *“According to the directives of your Constitutions, it is the Visitatrices who choose her replacement and elect or re-elect, if need be, the six Councillors for the new Superioress General, her Assistant taken from among the Councillors and the Treasurer General. Therefore, my very dear Sisters, I convoke you for the Assembly which will undertake these various elections. It will take place on June 11th 1962 at your Mother House, 140 rue du Bac, Paris (7th) and will open at 9:00 in the morning.”* He specifies: *“The task that awaits those newly elected to office is a very delicate one. They must carefully maintain the spirit proper to your Community, all the while, knowing how to accept adaptations and changes that are timely or even necessary. It is not sufficient, however, to protect and maintain the heritage received; it is necessary to enrich it...”*

Father asked the houses to say the *Veni Creator Spiritus* every day in order to prepare for this very important event, and to recite the following invocations: O Mary conceived without sin... Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, pray for us.

In order to understand this text well, we have to look back 40 years. The Company had lived out for more than three centuries of history the teachings of Saint Vincent. The revision of Canon Law in 1917 marked the beginning of the renewal required by the Church.

The Motherhouse prepared itself. At the time, the retreat room kept its straight, narrow benches, the podium was pushed back several metres and the lighting was improved. The Pieta on the altar was replaced by the Virgin with the Globe! It is in this place that the Visitatrices gathered together in retreat.

ELECTIONS

After this prayerful interlude, on Monday after Pentecost, the Sister voters gathered in the conference room. A long platform was placed in the centre of the room and here sat the Superior General and the Director General, an empty chair next to them for the newly elected, then the Secretary General and the two scrutineers. The General Council and the Sister Visitatrices, in order of vocation age, sat in front of the presider's table.

The Superior General reminded them of the reason for this meeting. *"These elections, as you know, are the reason for your Assembly. This, in fact is neither constitutive nor legislative... the only role assigned to your Assembly is the election of a Superioress General, as well as the election or confirmation of the offices of her Councillors, an Assistant General and a Treasurer General."* After listing some conditions for a valid election, five minutes of silent prayer preceded the choice of those who would have the heavy responsibility of guiding the destiny of the Company.

The afternoon of this 11th June, 1962 began with the **election of the Superioress General.**

The new Most Honoured Mother was **Sister Suzanne Guillemin**. She was not a member of the Assembly. Her thoughts are expressed in a few words: *"...They are inspired by the certainty of being simply the instrument of God's action and of the guidance of the Blessed Virgin, only Mother and true Superioress General of the Company."*

The following day saw the election of the Sister Councillors. The results were as follows:

Sister Rohou, Visitatrice of Chili, for the French language, and as Assistant General,

Sister Vimez, third Directress of the Seminary in Madrid, Councillor for the Spanish language

Sister Poletti, secretary of works and Provincial Councillor in Turin, for the Italian language,

Sister Roarke, re-elected Councillor for the English language,

Sister Rocha, Sister Servant of the College of the Immaculate Conception in Brazil, Councillor for the Portuguese language,

Sister Wiedenhofer, re-elected Councillor for the German language,
Sister Bourraux, re-elected Secretary General.

Father General closed this election Assembly by thanking at length Mother Lepicard for her years of service in the Company and urging the Sisters to great

openness and docility. The large minutes book was signed by members of the Assembly.

The bell in Saint Mary's courtyard then called the entire Community to the chapel to sing the Magnificat and Te Deum.

MEETING OF THE VISITATRICES

The day after the elections, the Visitatrices gathered in work groups to study general problems concerning spiritual, apostolic and missionary life. Most Honoured Father and Father Director were present at all the discussions. After listening to the Sisters, Mother Guillemin gave an explanatory synthesis to guide future decisions made in the General Council of the Company. Suggestions and proposals were calmly discussed before the final decision was made.

Without going into detail, Mother Guillemin would be assisted in her work by the Council. In a letter dated July 2nd, Pope John XXIII reminded women religious that he was counting on them. Mother Guillemin also recommended us to pray that the decisions made would contribute to a true renewal in living out our vocation.

AFTER THE ELECTIONS

KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROVINCES

At that time, the Company was established in the five parts of the world. The entire Company was distributed among about 4000 establishments and 65 countries. There was little news from the Church of silence, in which there were 3000 Sisters at the time of the division and dispersion.

For Mother Guillemin, knowledge gained from maps and figures was not enough. She wanted to see the situation for herself, beginning with the Sisters suffering hardship. A fortnight after her election, she left for **Algeria**, a country that had just proclaimed its independence. The poverty there was immense and the Sisters remained in the midst of it.

In July, she began visits to the Provinces of Italy: Turin, Rome, and Naples. She spoke from her heart in the discussions with the Sisters: *"The Community is not simply a House, a Province, a region or a country, but since it is spread all over the world, it is in a position to participate in the life of the Church in a more intimate, specific, definite and, one could even say, more perfect, manner..."*

The visits stopped. The Holy Father, John XXIII, received Mother Guillemin in an audience. The account of this audience will follow in the chapter on visits.

Mother Guillemin continued the visits in Italy: Sardinia and the Province of Sienna would have the joy of seeing and listening to her.

LIFE CONTINUES

October 11th was the opening day of Vatican Council II. Most Honoured Father Slattery participated. Mother Guillemin contributed an article for the Echo of the Mother House, **"With the Church in Council."** Several lines show clearly how important the event was for the Company: *"...which added its name in the humble position of the Daughters of Charity, servants of the sick poor. With all the other*

members of the Church, it is called to devote itself entirely to the work of the Council and to participate in whatever concerns this great revision of Church life, this magnificent apostolic reflection.”

The visits were resumed: **Spain**, where she visited the Provincial Houses. The entire year of 1963 would see the completion of a programme of study: **Japan, Vietnam, Belgium, Madagascar, Portugal, and USA**, not to mention short visits to **Greece**, some ports in **Turkey**, the **Holy Land** and the **Philippines**.

All these journeys were different, especially the one to Vietnam. Everywhere in the country there was danger. The Visitatrice, however, accompanied Mother Guillemin in areas of combat. It is important to mention an almost miraculous event.

“One day, when leaving Man Giang pass, the first vehicle, which was responsible for detecting danger, passed through without incident. The second one, however, met with a burst of machine gun fire. Mother was sitting to the right of Sister Esnol, who was driving. More gun fire penetrated the car, damaging the headlights and flattening the left front tyre. A bullet aimed directly at Mother was blocked by a **sack of bread which was to be given to the poor**. Mother Guillemin, like Sister Esnol, did not lose her calm, and the trip continued as well as it could, but more calmly with the troops who accompanied them.” On the plane back to Europe, Mother Guillemin reflected on this service of poor persons in its many forms and with its risks.

AUDIENCE WITH JOHN XXIII

During her visits in Italy, Mother Guillemin had the joy of a private audience, about which she herself gave the following account:

“The audience was not at all like an administrative meeting. The impression that I can share is one of the personal sanctity of the Holy Father. All that he said, all that he expressed revealed that. The interview was completely spiritual, marked with fatherly kindness. After I had asked for prayers to keep the Little Company in a state of poverty and to intensify its love for the poor, the Holy Father told me that on this very night, he had been thinking a lot about the poor...Simplicity, poverty, joy, all are bound together and that is the best way to live in a spirit of faith. As I asked him about the direction of the Community, his lively response was: “Mine is aboedentia et pax (obedience and peace)...poverty opens the door to joy. One must be joyful!”

JOYS

In this same year, **1963**, Mother Guillemin had the joy of witnessing the merger of the Congregation of the **Little Sister of Mary Immaculate and the Company of the Daughters of Charity in Madagascar**: forty-eight Malagasy Sisters became Daughters of Charity. Mother Guillemin herself had the joy of giving them the habit and heard them renew their vows. Among them, four were given the Holy Rules and their patent as Sister Servant.

The Congregation of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate began in 1934. In 1962, it consisted of five Little Sisters in the Seminary, 34 Sisters living in the houses of the Daughters of Charity in Madagascar, thirteen in autonomous houses (Tsihombé in the diocese of Fort-Dauphin, Ankarana and Tangainony in the diocese of Farafangana).

The Little Sisters made six months of Postulancy, two years of Seminary and made their first vows after five years of probatiom, renewing them each year on the feast of the Assumption.

It was Sister Auffray, Assistant Provincial, who undertook the direction of their Seminary. Two Little Sisters participated in the Council, over which the Bishop of Fort-Dauphin presided with the assistance of Sister Visitatrice and Sister Auffray.

The Company of the Daughters of Charity took responsibility for all the expenses of formation and support of the Little Sisters, who were all native-born.

Since the community shared the same objective of serving poor persons, and often lived under the same roof, although in different local Communities, one can understand that they wished to merge fully with the Company.

His Excellency, Bishop Fresnel, Bishop of Fort-Dauphin and Superior of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate, with the consent of the Council of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, requested from the Sacred Congregation of "Propaganda Fide," authorisation to merge the diocesan community of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. On December 18th 1962, he obtained the "Nihil obstat" of the said Sacred Congregation, but with two conditions:

- 1 - That all the Malagasy Sisters be duly questioned, and in perfect freedom state their agreement to enter the Daughters of Charity;
- 2 - That the Little Sisters be entirely on the same level as the Daughters of Charity, with the same rights and duties.

After consultation which clarified the future of the Little Sisters in our Community, each one freely, enthusiastically and with no regrets, accepted her integration into the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and signed a personal attestation.

At the time of her journey to Madagascar, our Most Honoured Mother had the joy of seeing them enter totally into the Little Company on September 17th, as noted in the Echoes.

In 1964, the two Provinces of Salzburg and Graz had the joy of receiving Mother Guillemin for the **merger of Marienschwestern in Austria with the Company of the Daughters of Charity.**

The file in the Province of Salzburg explains the origin and development of this Community since 1891 under the initiative of Mother Léopoldine de Brandis. The first name, "Krankenjungfrauen," became "Marienschwestern von der Wundertätigen Medaille" after vows were made for the first time in 1925. It was on November 26th, 1926 that these Sisters received the holy habit from the hands of Mother Guillemin and on November 27th that they made their vows for the first time.

Mother Guillemin posed for a photo wearing the old habit and again in the new one with the 29 Sisters, Sister Wiedenhofer, General Councillor for the German language and Sister Winmer, Visitatrice of the Province of Salzburg.

With Mother Guillemin present, the same ceremony took place in Graz.

On October 11th, 1964, Mother Guillemin returned to Spain for the installation of the eight Visitatrices of the new Provinces of this country, which were established by decree of the Sacred Congregation of Religious on November 9th, 1963.

Several other Provinces and Vice-Provinces would be erected during her generalate: **Philippines, India, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Congo, Bolivia, Mozambique, Venezuela and Australia.**

AT THE MOTHER HOUSE

From the time of her appointment as head of the Company, Mother Guillemin gave of herself without counting the cost. The few lines that follow give some insight into the way she saw her service of the Little Company:

“When I look at my work, I see myself caught between two desires. First, the urgent need to know all the countries, all the Provinces, all the Daughters...I would never want to be at rue du Bac, but to always be away, seeing all the Provinces, one after the other, and placing them in my mind, heart and thoughts so as to know them better and therefore be better able to work for them.

I have a second temptation that corresponds to a second need. When I think about everything that needs to be done everywhere, I tell myself that it is a more urgent and greater need never to leave rue du Bac, but to be constantly in prayer, thought, reflection, searching to find what the Good God wants. My great desire at this time would be never to move, but to always remain at rue du Bac.

So, I try to reconcile the two things, and I have taken the resolution to travel some part of the time and to remain in prayer and work the other part...”

THE WORK OF MODERNISATION

Mother Guillemin reorganised and regrouped many services: The Secretariat, and Economat were given individual offices and functional furniture; the linen rooms were on the same floor as the habit office; the pharmacy moved closer to the infirmary. It was replaced by the Missions. The parlour and the reception area were brought up to date and other important works were undertaken: kitchen, bedrooms for the elderly Sisters, bathrooms, parlours in the Mission courtyard. The retreat room was renovated to accommodate simultaneous translation. All the floors of the Seminary were made as good as new with classrooms, dormitories with cubicles and living rooms. The garden itself changed its appearance with its garages instead of the farmyard. A playing field for the Seminary sisters was built next to the “ronde.”

There were other works; in Rome, at l'Hay and Fain-les-Moutiers. Restoration of the house of St. Catherine took place at this same time.

MODIFICATIONS MADE TO CERTAIN COMMUNITY CUSTOMS

In a circular dated October 11th, 1962, Most Honored Father informed each of the houses in the Company that at the end of the previous General Assembly, certain Community customs had been called into question. Mother Guillemin gave the reasons: *“If the General Council has decided to modify certain customs, it is not, in any way, meant as a desire to ease either the constraints of religious life or the austerity of community life. The spirit driving these changes has been, above all, a spirit of improvement: to sift the superfluity out of our customs so as to rediscover in*

them their original purity or deepest meaning and to adapt certain customs to the current thinking of the Church.” She quoted three examples: kneeling before the Sister Servant, a custom that has never been written down. She specifies, however, “that one is required is to kneel before the Sister Servant when she is exercising her authority in the religious realm, and in asking pardon.”

Two other modifications are explained: the manner in which we go to Holy Communion – not in order of vocation, the Superior at the head, but each one goes freely, without any specific order.

The second modification concerns a custom that we held dear: the “plongeon” was to be replaced by a simple inclination of the head. This was not a way of diminishing cordiality or respect. It was about changing the way we express these, not changing the spirit.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT DECISION

It did not escape Mother Guillemin that the way the world was changing would cause tensions at the heart of religious life. For the Company, she did not hesitate to prepare people’s minds for an external change that would be necessary – that of the traditional habit. The problem of uniformity had been resolved with tact and gentleness. It was Most Honoured Father, as Superior of the Company, who would announce that the change had been under discussion since 1960. On January 8th, 1964, a circular was sent to all the houses saying: *“Fully aware of the humble attachment you have for your traditional habit, we understand what a sacrifice it will be for you to change it. We are fully confident, however, in the supernatural spirit of the Sisters in this matter, and are certain that, animated always with the spirit of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, they will see the will of God manifested by the voice of Rome and that of Superiors.”*

The date for the change was September 20th 1964. At the Mother House, a day of retreat fortified hearts to “make this offering joyfully as members of the Church.” The Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious highlighted this offering in other words: “This change is not only an event in your Community, this change is an event in the Church. It is an event for all religious congregations. This is a great example that you are giving to everyone.”

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

On October 11th, the first day of Vatican Council II, a hymn to the Virgin Mary was sung by the Daughters of Charity at the end of night prayer. Three months later, in January 1963, new arrangements concerning the prayers of the Community were adopted:

- In September, it was recommended that Lauds be said in the morning. This was the first step towards closer union with the universal prayer of the Church.

After meditations on the liturgical cycle, there were new meditations containing some points of reflection on the spirituality of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

A new way of preparing for meditation was introduced.

Mother Guillemin added to this return to our roots, the instructions she gave either at retreats, in the Echo of the Mother House, or in the “supplements” for Sister Servants.

Beginning in 1965, plans were drawn up and studied for a chapel to be built in the basement under the Seminary for the Sisters of the Mother House. On May 8th, 1966, Most Honoured Father came to bless the new chapel dedicated to Saint Joseph. The stones that were stripped formed simple arches and small windows gave it the appearance of a cathedral. In the centre was the altar, a simple table of green marble. The first Mass was celebrated immediately after the blessing of the chapel.

It is clear that this chapter on spiritual life deserves more extensive coverage in view of the fact that during this generalate, two historical and religious periods can be noted: the time before the Council and the time after the Council, with the *aggiornamento* that affected the Company. Mother Guillemin, with her prophetic vision, was ready serenely and enthusiastically to live through both these periods.

**AN OUTSTANDING EVENT: LA MOSTRA DELLA CHIESA
November 18th – December 9th, 1962**

Several months after her election, Mother Guillemin was informed by the Committee of Superiors General that Pope John XXIII wanted an exhibition on the Church, in response to their concern to promote vocations.

The idea was quick to take shape. In the space of three months an exhibition on this scale had to be mounted in recognition of the work of the Council. The Company responded immediately to demonstrate its participation and that of the Priests of the Mission.

All the Provinces contributed to this and sent very beautiful photos... “a real deluge,” said Mother Guillemin, laughing. It was she herself who chose what would be suitable for the plan she had in mind because plan there was!

The main focus was Christ. A big image of Christ was going to be surrounded by the Founders and their mottos in Latin: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me, Caritas Christi urget nos.*

PHOTO

Striking display boards illustrated the principal works: Seminaries, missions, spiritual support for the Ladies of Charity, Louise de Marillac groups. All these were illustrated by maxims of the Founders, translated into Italian. Here and there, the display boards presented the most beautiful texts of Saint Vincent about reflection and action, leading us back to the essence of our vocation: contemplation, the service of Christ in the poor.

Two ideas are fittingly expressed:

-The place of the Vincentian vocation in the life of the Church, and a reference to the Council are presented in this beautiful text of St. Vincent: *“The Church is the kingdom of God, which inspires good leadership in those whom he has appointed to govern. His Holy Spirit presides over Councils, and from Him comes the light that is spread throughout all the earth.”*

PHOTO

The Virgin Mary cannot be omitted from this stand in the exhibition and it is Saint Louise de Marillac who signs the profession of faith embracing Mary as Queen of the world. The Virgin of the Globe was chosen to represent Mary in this important and universal venue.

Many visitors came to the exhibition: representatives from religious orders, seminaries, Catholic schools on vacation, and on Thursdays and Sundays, bishops and cardinals from the Council.

PHOTO

What a surprise it was for a Salesian bishop from Tierra del Fuego, who, standing before a photograph of a Sister on a sled in the snow, said, *“That is Sister Carrère. She is one of mine; I am her bishop.”* This same photograph is still on display in a cabinet in the Archives of the Mother House.

The Congregation of the Mission honoured the exhibition with the presence of Most Honoured Father and his Assistants, not to mention the Vincentian bishops.

The stand itself was a response to the express wishes of His Holiness John XXIII. The exhibition was a tribute to the Ecumenical Vatican Council II. Its goal was to bring to the attention of visitors the question of vocations; there was perpetual adoration in the exhibition chapel, for the success of the Council and for priestly and religious vocations.

The different organisations wanted to show the true face of the Church: a praying Church, a pilgrimage to the foundations of the Church, the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, vocations. Religious families expressed their ideals in various ways and large organisations also had their place.

In conclusion, here is a little reflection from the driver who every day brought the Sisters who served at la Mostra. He kindly said: *“Our stand is the most beautiful after the one by the Propagation of the Faith. I heard others say the same thing. Since I don’t wear the cornette, I can listen to what they are saying...”*

THE BUSINESS ASSEMBLY: MAY 4th – JUNE 5th 1965 ROME AND PARIS

On September 24th 1964 Mother Guillemin was one of the eight religious elected to participate in the Second Vatican Council as auditors. The norms were published in l’Osservatore Romano that day. This document from Rome is important if we are to understand the correspondence between Mother Guillemin and the Visitatrices.

The Assembly had its preliminary activities. On October 21st 1964, a letter addressed to the Visitatrices in the Company marked the beginning of these: *“It is from Rome, where by the extraordinary grace of God and an unprecedented privilege in the Church, I am attending the third session of Vatican Council II, that I am sending you the first part of the preparatory work of the STUDY DAYS FOR VISITATRICES that will take place in May 1965. It is also at Rome that I reflected at length on these pages that will help prepare hearts and minds for the **work** that the Community, following the example the Church, must undertake ...”*

The main feature of the work we were asked to do concerned VALUES. Mother Guillemin explained: “...we cannot, as it were, dream about any renewal whatsoever without having determined the great and fundamental values to which we have committed our lives...”

The method of reflection was indicated in separate guidelines to be discussed as a community during the months of October, November and December: human values, Christian and religious values, particular values of our vocation, current values. Added to this sheet was a reflection for the Sister Servants dealing with formation of Sisters.

To facilitate the work of reflection, Mother Guillemin added a directive from the Pope after meeting the heads of different orders:

- We have to be careful that the authentic concept of religious life, as it has always been in the Church, is not obscured.
- According to the example and teaching of Jesus Christ, this state is the perfect way of life because it strives to foster the growth of charity and bring it to perfection.
- The Church has great need today of the public and social witness give by religious life, and the footnote adds the directives given to our first Sisters by our holy Founders.

Other questionnaires followed:

- The revision of customs, addressed to the Visitatrices, Councillors and Seminary Directresses.
- The formation of Sisters: a thick file studied by the Visitatrice, the Provincial Director who had to send a personal reply to the Director General, the Seminary Directress and the Sisters of Office.

ROME MAY 4th 1965: OPENING SESSION

When they arrived in the Assembly room, each participant found in her place the file containing the work programme and, among other things, a simple, yet inspirational, leaflet:

*“What a marvel! God chooses and brings together young women
from various places and provinces to unite them and join them together
in order to show people in so many places
the love he has for them and the care his Providence takes of them,
to assist them in them in their needs and to have God recognised in this way.”*
(Conference of September 1659 to the Sisters sent to Narbonne and Cahors)

Mother Guillemin welcomed them at Maria Immacolata:

“May God be praised for having watched over you all the way to your arrival here. May God bless you for having given over to God your work and your concerns in order to respond in obedience, and work to make the Company more beautiful.”

Father Slattery gave the address at the opening session and it would be good to study the full text of it. He recalled the outline topics that were suggested for study: religious vocation, formation, and customs, and the dispositions we should bring to this work so as to make it as fruitful as possible.

There is, however, one paragraph, **that reflects the thinking of that era**, which would be helpful to present in its entirety: *“You do not constitute a legislative assembly. Decisions will be made by major Superiors in light of the reflections of the members of this Assembly, and they will benefit from the suggestions you have*

submitted, allowing you a certain freedom in their application. The central authority of a Company as large as yours, dispersed over the five parts of the world, must necessarily count on the experience and wisdom of its representatives, even for matters of importance...

Father concluded with words of encouragement: *“Let us also show generosity. Let us not immediately approve simple solutions for everything, or modify our customs in order to enjoy a more comfortable life, or minimise sacrifices that nature finds hard.”*

The following day, Mother Guillemin gave an introductory talk to the work. In order to understand today “how it was in the beginning,” it is a good idea to give a few lines to stating the nature and goals of this Assembly.

The Assembly took place from May 4th to June 5th 1965, partly in Rome and partly in Paris. It was composed of the General Council of the Company, sixty Visitatrices and a certain number of delegates and secretaries representing the Provinces of the five parts of the world. Those unable to respond to the call of Superiors were several Provinces of the Silent Church: China, Romania, two Provinces of Poland, Cracow and Warsaw. The Visitatrice of Hungary was represented by a Sister Delegate and in spite of the hardships of their mission, Vietnam, Congo and Santo Domingo participated in the work of the Assembly.

THE GOAL OF THE ASSEMBLY

This Assembly did not include elections. It was convoked as an extraordinary assembly in order to respond to the injunctions of Sovereign Pontiffs inviting Religious congregations to undertake the work of renewal. Preparation of the work was undertaken and guided by the light of the encyclical of Paul VI, with the deep conviction that the most humble members of the Church, among these, the Company, are responsible for carrying out the work of renewal and preparing for dialogue with the world, something that the Holy Father desires for the whole Church.

Two needs were strongly felt by the majority of Provinces: adaptation of structures and methods of formation of the sisters according to the calls of our times and the directives of the Church; revision of the outdated and outmoded customs of the Company that were not adapted to the conditions of religious and apostolic life today.

INTRODUCING THE WORK

From the very first day, Mother Guillemin placed before the Visitatrices their serious responsibilities and presented the work on a spiritual plane.

*“This Assembly, convoked by the Superior General, who exercises power over the Company, in the name of the Church, is put before you as a **religious reality**, corporately constituted in the eyes of God and in submission to its hierarchical leader, who is its responsible guardian, within the limits set by the Constitutions, of the life and spirit of the Company of the Daughters of Charity...*

...each one of you here present is legitimately appointed for the government of a Province. You, therefore, have received the responsibility for guiding it in the service of God and the Church, maintaining fidelity to the Gospel according to the example and teaching of the Founders...

...none of you, not even the most recently appointed, can legitimately consider yourself free from the obligation to actively participate in the work of the Assembly, and therefore, deny the responsibility that you have...

...together before God, we assume responsibility for keeping the Company on the path of holiness, and making it a docile instrument in his hands, ready to respond to his designs in fidelity to its vocation in the Church..."

After these strong words, Mother Guillemin presented the subjects to be studied: the need to revise customs, the obligation to adapt our methods of formation, the strongly felt need to take a position, a common position, with regard to trends in public opinion that affect the world and lastly, obedience to the Church, which, after ten years, does not cease exhorting religious congregations to courageously enter the path of "aggiornamento." Mother Guillemin adds:

"Let us say very clearly that evolution is not revolution, that renovation is not innovation. It is not about making the past a tabula rasa so as to build everything new...The work for which God has called us from all parts of the world is none other than the work of our conversion, the conversion of the Company of the Daughters of Charity."

The work method was in accordance with the doctrinal and spiritual nature of this encounter, and the busy days began.

An "extra-curricular" programme enlivened our time here: a visit to the excavation site at St. Peter's, Mass in the catacombs, guided tours of the great basilicas, Rome illuminated by night and a pilgrimage to Assisi.

Fraternal life was not forgotten. Saint Martha's in the Vatican provided a meal at the Provincial House and invited the Assembly members to an evening gathering and dinner. These times of community life highlighted the union of minds and hearts

The great joy of our stay here was the audience with the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI

Father Slattery drew conclusions from these work days and he arranged our next meeting in Paris for May 23rd.

PARIS: MAY 23rd- JUNE 5th 1965

There was still work to be done on administration:

- Administration of a Province
- The Provincial Council and its relationships within the Community
- Relationship between the Visitatrice and the Council
- Relationship between the Province and the General Council
- Administration of temporal goods

The retreat was held between the Ascension and Pentecost. Mother Guillemin addressed the Sisters each day of the retreat to help them enter more deeply into the thinking of the Church. The final resolutions of this time of grace were confided to the Blessed Virgin at Chartres, in remembrance of the time when Saint Louise confided the Little Company to her powerful protection.

On the following day the Visitatrices began to disperse. If Brother Ricardien had been present, he would have spontaneously recited this verse by Péguy:

*Queen of the seas and of the oceans,
You will watch over us when we are on the open sea.
Today we are just setting out on our journey!*

(To be continued)

Sister Claire HERRMANN
Archives Service

I gazed on
my crucified Saviour.

I looked at him with love.
I placed him in my heart,
and my heart discovered that
Humility was Jesus;
Obedience was Jesus;
Mortification was Jesus;
Suffering was Jesus;
Everything that my nature resisted,
was Jesus.

Then
a transformation took place and
Everything became divine for me...

Father Félix

