

November-December 2008

Spiritual life

Synod of Bishops in Rome: “*The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church*”
(October 5th -26th 2008)

Intervention by Sister Evelyne Franc, Auditrice at the Synod, 14th October 2008
Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General

Letter of 7th November 2008
Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General

Advent letter 2008
Father Gregory Gay, Superior General

Guidelines for the monthly day of reflection and prayer
“Serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps 99, 2)
Father Javier Alvarez, Director General

Homily given at Mass on 27th November 2008 by Bishop Jean-Michel Di Falco,
Bishop of Gap and Embrun, in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal.

Present day challenges

Mission in Kazakhstan: “The apostolate of presence.”
Province of Chelmno
The Sisters on mission in Kazakhstan

Mission in Balta, Ukraine
Province of Cracow
The Sisters on mission at Balta

News from the Provinces

Nominations

Designation of Visitatrices and nomination of Provincial Directors

Visit by Superiors

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, and Sister Wivine Kisu, General
Councillor: Visit to Tanzania
The Sisters of Masanga

History of the Company

In St. Vincent’s time..... and in our own day
St Vincent’s faith
I – St Vincent, a believer
II- St. Vincent, someone who inspires and renews faith
Father Morin, CM

Letter written by Saint Bernadette Soubirous to a Daughter of Charity,
Teresa Tortoriello, (Extract from “Informazione Vincenziana”)

Index

SISTER EVELYNE FRANC, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Synod of Bishops in Rome
“The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church”
 (October 5th -26th 2008)

Intervention by Sister Evelyne Franc,
 auditrice at the Synod of Bishops,
 Rome, 14th October 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Synod of Bishops, a permanent institution in the Catholic Church and created by Pope Paul VI, held its 12th Ordinary General Assembly in Rome from October 5th – 26th 2008. Convoked by Benedict XVI, the Synod had for its theme “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.” The Catholic Church wanted to assess the situation of the Second Vatican Council’s decision made just over 40 years ago that gave all the faithful direct access to the actual text of the Bible.

This 12th General Assembly brought together 253 Synod Fathers (bishops and experts from all over the world), 41 other experts and 37 auditors. Among those invited were 25 women, including 6 experts and 12 auditrices, one of whom was Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity.

PHOTO

This Synod was prepared in two stages:

- A preliminary document, providing an overview of the issues relating to the theme and questions arising from them, was sent by the General Secretariat of the Synod to all the dioceses and religious orders for them to respond in writing.

- This consultation led to the second step: the *Instrumentum laboris*, a synthesis of the responses to the worldwide consultation. This broad inventory served as a basis for the actual Assembly meetings.

The conference part of this 12th Ordinary Assembly lasted for three weeks and included input from individual speakers and work in language groups that led to propositions which were voted on and then transmitted to the Pope. During the second week, Sister Evelyne was invited to give a presentation to the Synod of Bishops...In her intervention, *“The Word of God, Poor people, Young People, and the Miraculous Medal”* Sister Evelyne spoke about the Word of God in the service of poor persons

but also in youth ministry and in popular piety. She emphasised that this Word is a source of energy for communities, leading them to translate the Word into action through listening to others, serving those who are poor and accompanying the young. Sister Evelyne concluded by presenting the role of the Medal as a means of evangelisation, placing it in the context of the message communicated through the apparitions to Catherine Laboure in 1830.

INTERVENTION OF SISTER EVELYNE FRANC AT THE SYNOD

Most Holy Father, Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Fathers and Sisters, Dear Friends, May I begin by expressing to you my joy in participating in this Synod. It is a great grace to be here, and I am also grateful for the opportunity to address you today.

I offer you two reflections that have come from my study of the *Instrumentum laboris*:

- The Word of God at the heart of our lives.
- Proclaiming the Word through our service of persons who are poor.

1. The Word of God at the heart of our lives (*Instrumentum laboris* no. 24, 38, 52)

I will quote two lines from Saint Vincent, two ideas that seem to be contradictory but which in fact are complementary:

“Meditation is so excellent that we can never make it too much.” (Coste, IX, page 325) *“Leave God for God.”* (Ibid X, page 3)

Number 52, which speaks of the service given by consecrated persons, refers back to the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, no. 94: *“Meditation on God's word... gives rise to fervour in contemplation and the ardour of apostolic activity.”*

It is important, also, to juxtapose this with no. 7 of the Instruction “The Service of Authority and Obedience” from the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life: *“The loving daily encounter with the Word shows one how to discover the way to life and the way through which God wishes to free his children, nourishes one's spiritual instincts for the things which are pleasing to God, conveys the sense and the taste for his will, gives peace and joy for staying faithful”.*

PHOTO

This Word, which has called and gathered us together, is the presence and action of God in us. “The Word of God transforms the lives of those who approach God in faith” (*Instrumentum laboris* n° 24). Through this Word we live, and with it we deepen our total gift of self to God for the service of Christ in persons who are poor. We are at the school of Mary and we hope that, like her, we will be able *to move in and out of the Word of God with ease* (cf. *Deus Caritas est*, n° 41).

The Word awakens us every morning and accompanies us throughout the day, in the liturgy of the Hours, the Eucharist, times of prayer and service. It is at the same time sweet as honey and bitter as gall; it comforts and disturbs us, calls us to go forth and takes us away from what is familiar.

Sharing the Word (*Lectio divina*) reanimates our apostolic commitment; it is a unifying factor and a path to forgiveness, reconciliation and discernment. This sharing, well rooted in the Word of God, gives support to each member's spiritual life and strengthens community life. It is even more necessary today when, on the five continents, the Sisters whose hearts and lives are in close proximity with those who are poor, are at times confronted by extremely difficult situations. Sharing the Word strengthens their sense of belonging to Christ and connects them with the community that has sent them, and the mission of the Church.

All this requires good initial and ongoing formation, as is reiterated in the *Instrumentum laboris*. Young people who knock on our door come with an eagerness to know the Word and an open-minded spirit, but also, quite frequently, great gaps in their understanding of basic doctrine. *Formation aims at preparing the Sisters to respond anew to the constant calls of God, to instil in them faith convictions founded on the experience of God, prayer, and sound biblical and doctrinal knowledge, which nourish their love of the Church and their sense of participation in its mission* (cf. *Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity*). This formation is complemented by careful spiritual accompaniment, based on the Word of God.

2. Proclaiming the Word through our service of persons who are poor. (*Instrumentum Laboris* no. 36, 39, 43, 44)

“It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbour does not love Him.” (Coste XII, page 583, 1963 ed.)

Our service has for its goal to make the Lord known to those who are poor, to proclaim the Gospel to them, explicitly wherever possible, but always through the witness of our lives.

It is important that corporal and spiritual service be united, that the work of promotion of the whole person be linked with the work of evangelisation. *Deus Caritas Est*, n° 30 speaks of the ***fruitful link between evangelisation and works of charity***, as does I.L. n° 39.

The Word moves us to service not only in order to fight material hunger and poverty but it also moves us to work for a more just world where all are respected, and it moves us to denounce injustice. A dual reading of the Word is required: we need to read the life of the poor person in the light of Scripture and to read Scripture from the viewpoint of those who are poor. These people are a sacrament of Christ among us and they evangelise us.

In conclusion, I will mention two ideas about proclaiming the Word in pastoral ministry with young people, and how to relate it to popular piety.

Young people from all five continents are enthusiastically responding to the challenges placed before them during World Youth Day: *“You are salt for the earth... You are light for the world.”* (Mt 5:13-14) in Toronto, *“We have come to do him homage”* (Mt 2:2) in Cologne, *“You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you, and then you will be my witnesses”* (Ac 1:8) in Sydney. Young people have expectations of us with regard to these challenges, and are ready to respond to them when we walk with them along the way, living this Word and knowing how to explain it to them.

Number 36 of the Instrumentum laboris mentions popular piety. Let us take as an example: the Miraculous Medal. Offered to so many persons throughout the world, it can serve as a humble instrument of catechesis, a summary of the history of salvation, a way of proclaiming the Word of God.

Mary, the Eucharistic woman, our model of the spiritual life, wholeheartedly received this Word and shares it with us completely.

Sister Evelyne Franc
Superioress General
Auditrice at the Synod of Bishops

SISTER EVELYNE FRANC, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of 7th November 2008

Dear Sisters,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us!

On my return from Rome and before setting out on my visit with Sister Margaret Barrett to Kenya and afterwards with Sister Julma Neo through Asia, from continental China to Vietnam by way of Taiwan, I am pleased to share with you some of our news via this Community newsletter.

The current violence plaguing eastern Congo near the border of Rwanda has dramatic consequences on civilian populations. Our Sisters are principally located in the equatorial regions and in Kinshasa, far west of the fighting among the rebels, the government army and the UN forces. Nevertheless, as you can well imagine, the Sisters are deeply affected by the struggles within the country which cause generalised instability. In addition, some of our Sisters come originally from the combat zones and fear for the safety of their families. Providentially, some supplies for these suffering families have been able to reach them, thanks to the Province of Central Africa. We are all united in prayer for peace in Congo.

Sister Grace Moolan, the Visitatrice of North India, recently notified me that the troubles in the state of Orissa (where we have 23 local communities) are subsiding. As you know, this was brought on by the death of a Hindu radical on August 23rd.

Christians were blamed for his death and this marked the beginning of these persecutions. The month of September was terrible for them, as many Christians were killed, robbed of their possessions, and had their homes set on fire. In October, the government began to intervene and the police provided protection for the Christians by housing them in camps. By the grace of God, the protection of the Blessed Virgin and the prayers of the Sisters in India and the worldwide Company, our Sisters were spared. They never left their communities – and often spent nights in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. They are actively present in the camps providing food, caring for the “refugees” and having classes for the children; in fact, two of these camps have been set up close to our houses. The faith, courage and availability of our Sisters in India and in so many other Provinces, in the face of such tragic events, are to be recorded in the book of life of the Company.

The three weeks that I spent in Rome on the occasion of the Synod on the Word of God cannot be easily summed up in a few lines, and I will have other opportunities to come back to them. I will simply mention certain aspects that touched me: the almost continual presence of the Holy Father, his attentive listening and sensitive proximity to all the participants, the seriousness and simplicity of the debates and the pastoral focus of the interventions. One of the issues raised was about knowing how to encourage reading the Word of God so as to promote spiritual growth in believers both personally and in community, and to enable them to continually become more credible witnesses to the infectious love of Christian Revelation. The work that we did in the language groups was also a great grace. My group was made up of French-speaking bishops from dioceses in Brazil, Chad, Canada, Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, the Holy Land, Iran, Congo, Rwanda, Haiti, Mauritius, Vietnam, Belgium and France. In this group, we prayed, shared on Gospel passages, and freely exchanged ideas in order to present propositions. Finally, I would like to highlight the joy of meeting so many bishops who are grateful to have the Daughters of Charity in their diocese. I will quickly mention the bishops of Astana (Kazakhstan), Matanzas (Cuba) and Machala (Ecuador) among many others, without forgetting the bishop of Nouna in Burkina Faso where the Sisters of Nigeria and North Africa will begin a new mission in 2009.

I conclude this collection of news items by quoting the Final Message of the Synod: “The Christian [the Daughter of Charity] has the mission to announce this divine word of hope, by sharing with the poor and the suffering, through the witness of faith in the kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, of love and peace, through loving closeness that neither judges nor condemns, but sustains, illuminates, comforts and forgives, following the words of Christ: ‘Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest’ (Mt 11:28).” (Message 13)

Happy Feasts of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Catherine Labouré and the Anniversary of the Foundation of our Company.

With my prayers and affection,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

FATHER GREGORY GAY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Advent 2008

To all the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

“And there was no room for them.” These words, taken from Luke’s gospel, chapter 2 verse 7, and well known to all of us; are proclaimed at the Midnight Mass of Christmas. This Advent, my brothers and sisters, I would ask us to reflect on this concept of no room left for them, no room left for others, no room. They are left out, uncared for, rejected. Jesus himself was born into that situation and he experienced it throughout the whole of his life, even at the end, being completely rejected, condemned to die a criminal’s death on a cross.

Jesus, especially in Luke’s gospel, shows his solidarity with those who are rejected and marginalised. The lepers were those marginalised people of his day, excluded, abused, often mocked. The season of Advent, my brothers and sisters, gives us an opportunity to reflect seriously on who we are as disciples of Jesus Christ. We are called to follow Jesus, but not at a distance, nor in his shadow. We are called to walk on his heels; in other words, so closely that we ourselves experience the spirit that motivated him to do the Father’s will.

My Christmas story for this Advent deals with an attempt to reach out to those who are forgotten, those who are considered of no account, those for whom there was no room. Working as a formator in the mission in Panama, I would, as superior of the house, give the Panamanian confrere the opportunity to be with his family during the days of Christmas since the students were away as well. I would assume the pastoral responsibilities that we had – three to four Masses during the special days throughout the week of Christmas. To be honest, I felt the absence of my community, both seminarians and my fellow formator. I felt the loneliness.

Over a number of years I would gather together during Christmas certain people. One in particular was a prisoner who was serving a sentence for drug trafficking but because of good behaviour was given permission to spend the weekends with us doing pastoral oriented work. Then there was the young jockey who had been forced to abandon his homeland and family for being heavily involved in some illegal operations of a radical movement in his country. There was a young lady who lived in the interior of the country of Panama, but because of her job was not free to travel to be with her family.

With this group, and with others, we would gather on Christmas Eve, first going to Eucharist together, then returning to the house and preparing a meal that we would share with others including the street people who “lived” in our

neighbourhood. Afterwards we sang songs and they danced and had a good time celebrating the joy of Christ being born in our lives.

My brothers and sisters, as we prepare to receive Christ more fully into our lives, I ask you to consider what place you give to those for whom there is no room. I have been particularly struck, overwhelmed to say the least, during several of my most recent visits to the Vincentian Family throughout the world, by those dealing with the precise issue of the marginalised and outcast. The first experience was in Madagascar. There is a tribe that has been outcast from society for more than 500 years. They are those whom the rest of the society regard, as one of our missionaries told me, as dogs. And it was precisely one of our French confreres who showed his solidarity with these outcasts by living in their midst, sharing their lives, and eating their meals. As the story was told, he then said to them, "Look, I too am a dog." Today the Vincentian Family, and particularly another French confrere of the mission in Madagascar, is working with the children of the outcasts in order for them to be integrated into society little by little. It is a difficult task to achieve. No one wants to talk about those who are left out. No one wants to know that a problem exists.

In my experience in Congo I learned a great deal about the outcast tribe there, the pygmy tribe, a people who only live for others. They make themselves slaves. That is how they think of themselves. They live on the periphery of the villages; they keep a distance from the rest of the people. When eye contact is made, they lower their heads.

Recently I read the thesis summary of one of our Nigerian confreres, who wrote about the outcast tribe, the Osu, in his country. The discrimination made against them by other people of their own country is unbelievable. It has made me want to think and reflect: it is not just in certain countries that such discrimination occurs. In all our societies there are those who are outcasts, those who are marginalised, those it is considered taboo to relate to. In other words, it is those for whom there is no room.

The different types of discrimination, the rejection shown to others, can be understood as a form of racism. Racism in itself is a form of fear, fear of the unknown, fear of those who are different from oneself. Racism consists of deliberate practices as well as spontaneous processes, all a consequence of negative attitudes toward other social groups.

From early childhood all of us form prejudices. Prejudices are conditioned by our culture and can only be transformed when our consciences are formed. We need to come to know others, putting our fears aside. Often people are treated inhumanely, with cruelty or degradation, simply because they are different.

These are the major difficulties many immigrants throughout the world are experiencing. Recently I read a report concerning the discrimination that immigrants experience in Libya, or the discrimination that the Filipinos experience in many of their host countries. This type of racism or discrimination often legitimises modern forms of slavery and exploitation often involving violence. We need to recognise that racism in itself is more than simply a feeling of racial superiority. Rather it is a structural system of social, political and economic domination. As Christians we

believe in the universality of God's love. We cannot allow or tolerate such forms of exclusion and discrimination.

I hope and pray that this Advent may help us to deepen our commitment as followers of Jesus Christ, evangelising and serving the poor, particularly those who are neglected, those who are left out, the marginalised. Hopefully, in one way or another, we can share their loneliness, their exclusion, their being considered inferior to others. And conscious of our solidarity with them, together we may be able to live the true meaning of Christmas and feel more fully united with Him who was born into a world that had no room for Him.

Today Christ continues to be born into that situation and we are called to follow in his footsteps, close upon his heels, making ourselves one with the forgotten, the abandoned, the lonely, the outcast, the excluded. In my most recent visit to a refugee camp in Thailand, the young people there pleaded with me, a plea that I think is addressed to all of us: "pray for us Father, do not forget us or abandon us as others have done". This question of people for whom there is no room, my brothers and sisters, is of the utmost importance, so much so that I will continue to reflect on this throughout the year, particularly in my Lenten conference in preparation for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the universal Prince of Peace.

May Mary, the mother of God and our mother, gently guide us as we seek to conform our lives to the life of her Son "*...and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*" (Lk 2: 7)

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

FATHER J. ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Guidelines for the monthly day of prayer and reflection

"Serve the Lord with gladness"
(Ps 99,2)

Saint Paul tells us that joy and gladness are fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf Gal 5,22). However, we need to keep begging the Holy Spirit to grant us these precious gifts which are so necessary for evangelisation and service today. This treasure does not come to us automatically; we have to search for it. Joy and happiness will only become a reality as a consequence of our willed actions. So joy is both gift and a task to be performed, something we pray for and at the same time strive after, it is gift and yet it involves effort on our part. All this at the same time.

In 1621, during a retreat at Soissons, Vincent made up his mind to change his temperament. He was worried because at times he could be somewhat terse and unapproachable. He himself tells us, “I begged the Lord to grant me a gentle and kindly disposition.”¹ He earnestly entrusted this desire to the Lord. We know from his biographers that as well as praying for this grace he made serious efforts to cultivate his spiritual life. Abelly tells us that this made Vincent one of the most affable men of his times.

We all know how deeply Saint Vincent was concerned about human suffering, about the ignorance of simple, country folk, about famine and about the wars that spread to all the towns and cities of France in the XVIIth century. Yet he never ceased to advise those who followed the same vocational path as he did, to be good-humoured and joyful. For example, he told the missionaries, “*During recreation, and in other everyday matters, we should aim at not letting good humour get out of control, mixing the useful with the agreeable. In this way we give good example to all.*”² He constantly urged Saint Louise to “*honour the joy of Our Lord and of His holy Mother.*”³ And the more she was overwhelmed by feelings of sadness due to personal and family circumstances, the more strongly and more frequently did Saint Vincent urge her to be joyful.

Saint Vincent soon discovered that joy is not only an important response to life’s circumstances but it is also a distinguishing mark of the service that the Daughters of Charity are called to give. In the first Rules for the Confraternity of Charity at Chatillon-les Dombes, in 1617, we can see that this was his thinking. “*She who is on duty that day, after taking from the funds whatever is necessary to provide food for the poor, will prepare the food and take it to these poor people, and on her arrival she will greet them joyfully and charitably.*”⁴ He would repeat this recommendation in later versions of the Rules.

JOY, DELIGHT, HAPPINESS..

There must be some shade of difference between joy, delight, happiness and personal fulfilment. Perhaps joy is a more interior quality and delight is more outgoing. Happiness may refer to a person’s general well-being, that balance in people’s lives that makes them at peace, allows them to have positive relationships with others and be respected and esteemed by all. Personal fulfilment has much to do with finding life meaningful, dedication, and the work one is doing. If a person’s work fits in with their concerns, their ideals and objectives then it will lead to personal fulfilment but if these conditions are not met it won’t do this.

We are not concerned here with defining precisely the boundaries between different concepts allied to joy. We will use this word to encapsulate all these concepts because this is not an exercise in studying words but a means of reflecting on something that could add to the quality of our lives and of our works. If we are not

¹ L.ABELLY, *Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul*, I.III, Chapter 12 Paris 1664

² *Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission*, VIII, n0 7

³ I, 346, Letter to Saint Louise

⁴ X, 578, Saint Vincent, The Ladies’ Charity Confraternity of Chatillon-les-Dombes, November and December 1617

living out our vocation and our service joyfully we would do well to ask ourselves why and to see if there is not some great discrepancy in our lives. Because, there is in fact, deep and all-embracing joy to be found in fulfilling the demands of our vocation. These can be the source of great joy for us, as we will see later on. Happiness and a life of sacrifice are not contradictory concepts. A mother does not cease to be happy because her child requires her to make great sacrifices; she is happy to make these sacrifices. A machine cannot function for long without being oiled; a person cannot live without joy.

We might begin by saying that joy and delight have little to do with hollow laughter or with celebrations that lead to consumerism and give passing pleasure. It is not to be confused with money or popularity, as is often the case in social life. It is not something external but springs up from within the person because it is not so much a cause, but an effect, of something deeper. Of course events can contribute to our happiness, but joy is not to be found in the events themselves but rather in the person. In fact, two people may react very differently to the same event. Joy and delight spring from an inner capacity to see life as a wonderful gift from God. The happy person is able to admire and enjoy the thousands of small gifts that life freely offers as if these were being seen for the first time; the freshness of the morning air, flowers in springtime, birdsong, a sunset, cool water, conversation with dear ones. For such persons the bright side of life is not buried under the clouds of this world though these certainly exist. They know how to see good things, and more particularly, bad things, as relative. If we add to this the gift of that other life which is promised to us, and which we can begin to live here and now, then we have even greater and stronger reasons to be joyful because they are founded on God himself. We have a striking example of this in Saint Paul. In the midst of persecutions, floggings, imprisonment, ill-treatment and life-threatening situations, he has no hesitation in declaring himself a happy man. He gives us the reason for this: *“With God on our side, who can be against us?.....I am certain of this, neither death nor life, no angel, no created thing can ever come between us and the love of God”* (Rm 8, 35-39).

People who are joyful and happy have an open and positive disposition. They have the inner strength to be able to see failures, snubs and problems as relative because they understand that all these things are part of life and it often happens that what we see as negative is in fact a spur to help us make progress. It is impossible to be happy if we do not cultivate ideals, if we do not project our life beyond the narrow limits of our own personality.

THE CHRISTIAN BASIS OF JOY

We need to look to Scripture for this. I don't know whether I'm exaggerating but it seems to me that one of the feelings that is furthest away from the spirit of the Bible is sadness. The Bible opens with an account of Creation. Everything takes place before God's eyes and He puts his seal of authenticity on everything with words that are repeated like a refrain, *“and He saw that it was very good.”* There is not a shadow of deceit or bitterness. Everything is light, everything is positive, until sin makes its appearance.

On many occasions the prophets use the image of a wedding feast to help us understand what salvation is like for God's chosen people (cf Ho 1-3, Ezk 16). Saint Matthew asks the question, "*Surely the bridegroom's attendants would never think of mourning as long as the bridegroom is still with them?*" (Mt 9, 15). We think not. The Psalms reflect every human emotion but when these prayers relate directly to God the predominant sentiments are those of trust, petition, joy and happiness, and admiration for His presence close to us: "*I trust in God and have no fear*" "*What can man do to me?*" "*Lord, I take refuge in you, I will never be disappointed*", "*I rejoiced when I heard them say, let us go to God's house.*" "*The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want...*" When we make all these positive sentiments our own as we daily recite the psalms or read Sacred Scripture, then we are building on a rock and this will inevitably give rise to feelings of serenity, peace, security and, of course, the joy of knowing that our life is founded on God. However, for this to happen we need to pray the psalms in a meaningful, active and conscious way, not as mere routine or automatically. Our prayer has to be a genuine transformation from the spoken psalm to the lived psalm. Of course this implies effort, an act of will, preparation and asking God to fill us with feelings of trust in Him. It is difficult to understand how anyone could pray the psalms every day and yet lead a life full of fear and mistrust.

Jesus of Nazareth said that he was sent by the Father "*to bring the Good News to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives*" (cf Lk 4, 18). The Gospels tell us that Jesus experienced moments of great joy: St. Luke says, "*It was then, that filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, he said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children.'*" What was the source of his joy and delight? Jesus is very conscious of the bonds between himself and the Father. He knows that he can trust Him and that everything is meaningful when faith lights up his life. This is why he experiences this outburst of joy and happiness.

Not just his life, but also the core message of his teaching is about life, love and the joy of knowing that we are children of a loving Father who is tender and welcoming. Jesus came that we might "*have life, and have it to the full*" (cf Jn 10, 10). In the Beatitudes Jesus points out the way to true happiness. The parables reflect the joy of being surrounded by the mystery of God; for example, the hidden treasure (cf Mt 13, 44), the shepherd finding the sheep that was lost (cf. Lk 15, 4-7), the father who welcomes back the Prodigal Son (cf. Lk 15, 11-32), the transformation that took place in the life of Zaccheus (cf Lk 19). It is impossible to keep feeling sad when we have listened at a deep level to these words of Jesus, "*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy be complete.*" (Jn 15, 11).

Encountering Jesus in the Gospels is one of the greatest sources of joy and peace for the Christian. I would like, here, to bring to your minds the scene, for example, of Peter walking on the waters of the lake in Gennesaret as he made his way towards Jesus (cf. Mt 14, 24-33). At the beginning everything went well but when Peter began to feel the force of the wind he began to sink until the Lord took him by the hand. What happened? Simply this, while Peter was walking on the waters all went well as long as his eyes were fixed on Jesus. But things turned out badly when he began to look at the waves. This is what can happen to us: if we concentrate only on problems, difficulties, and dangers, we can easily be sucked into the whirlpool of anxiety,

pessimism and sadness. This passage from the Gospel invites us to gaze at Jesus. This is a great source of serenity, confidence and joy. It does not mean that we live our lives disregarding problems, threats and hard facts, but that in spite of all these we trust in Jesus of the Gospels *“If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour”* (Ps 126, 1) However, if He does build it, then the labourers can enjoy a breathing space.

Christian joy is founded principally on the Resurrection of the Lord. This (ever new) Good News gives us a new outlook on the world, hope can flourish in what humanly speaking are painful situations such as illness or death. In the Resurrection we find the answer to the major questions facing humankind. Saint Paul never tires of referring to it in his letters and to point out its consequences for our lives (cf. Col 3, 1-4; I Cor 5, 6-8). At the end of his life, when he is in prison, he writes these words to Christians as though leaving them his most precious legacy, *“I want you to be happy; I repeat, what I want is your happiness”* (Ph 4,4). This is the wonder of the Christian faith, to be able to live calmly and with serenity amid the failures and storms of life and to remain deeply joyful while experiencing trials. This is the most wonderful result of knowing God as a loving Father and understanding that Christ’s resurrection is for us, too,

WE NEED JOY

We need joy just as we need the sun that gives us light or the air that we breathe. A permanent state of sadness makes life unbearable, days become monotonous and render a person colour-blind and unable to see the different shades of colour and the beauty of nature in every square inch of the planet. Joy makes a person more aware, it sharpens their sense of sight and smell and opens the doors of the soul. Sadness puts our senses to sleep in a sort of lethargy that is the forerunner of death. How can we live our Vincentian vocation in a deeply spiritual way if we lack joy? Can we be witnesses to the Good News of the Gospel if we look sad and have a heavy heart? What can we do to make sure that the service of the poor will always be a source of joy for us?

It is difficult to evangelise either by word or by service if people do not see in the evangeliser the joy that comes from God. As Gilbert Cesbron says, joy is the best proof that the Christian can offer that God exists. This must surely be the reason why Saint Vincent repeatedly told the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity that more than anything else they should witness to joy; *“If the poor do not find us approachable they will keep away and not dare to approach us, thinking that we are too severe or too high and mighty for them. But when we treat them in a warm and kindly way they will have a different opinion of us and will be more likely to benefit from the good we wish to do them.”*⁵ And he recommended the Daughters of Charity to *“serve the poor joyously, wholeheartedly, steadfastly and lovingly.”*⁶ We have already mentioned how Saint Vincent continually advised Saint Louise to be joyful in spite of her temperament, the many works she was engaged in and the problems she had to face. It might be said that this was one of the most important aspects of the spiritual direction he offered her.

⁵ XI, 756-757: Extract from a conference given to the missionaries on affability

⁶ IX, 534; Conference of Saint Vincent to the Daughters of Charity, 9th February 1653

If Saint Vincent were to write to us today it is almost certain that he would emphasise friendliness, affability and good relations with the poor, and tell us that the basis of all these is joy. He might even suggest joy as a new particular virtue of our vocation. In our days, poor people, like everyone else, are very sensitive to the way we treat them. It takes time to build up a relationship but it only takes a minute to destroy it. If the poor do not see that the Daughters of Charity are joyful and content at having given their lives to the Lord, then they will feel that they are being served but they will not feel evangelised. Constitution 9 states, “*The Daughters of Charity give joyful testimony to Jesus Christ.*” It is difficult to find any other way of witnessing to Christ apart from generous and gratuitous joy.

We need to have happy communities that are able to be parables of the Kingdom in the midst of our world which is marked by the tensions of ownership and keeping up appearances, a world characterised by all kinds of violence and fear. There will always be some people who will be ready to let themselves be challenged by this parabolic language which in a simple way leads others to the Gospel. We find in the Constitutions some references to community joyfulness, for example, CC 29, 33, 59 and Statute 19. It is just not possible to undertake any vocational ministry if communities are not joyful in their dedication to those who are poor. Young people today need more than words; they need proof of the Vincentian charism in all its fullness. This is pointed out in Constitution 59.

I have always been struck by Saint Vincent’s efforts to overcome his temperament, as mentioned earlier. Saint Louise also made progress in living in serenity, interior peace and joy. These actions by our founders can speak to us today of the importance of living joyfully our service of the poor. And if Saint Vincent and Saint Louise could make progress in this matter, why can’t we? I have sometimes heard people speak about “*the asceticism of enthusiasm*”, meaning by this that it is possible to acquire the habit of being joyful and if we think this is important we will need to persevere in our efforts. Prayer, the spiritual life, believing in a living God who has gifted us with a beautiful vocation, serving the poor in a responsible way, all necessarily lead to a very meaningful life. And the deeper our prayer life, our faith in God, and our awareness that our lives are dedicated to the service of the poor, the more joy we will feel because we will be able to see more clearly the wonderful side of life. To all these ways of becoming joyful and happy, we can add the reflection given in the second point where we dealt with the Christian basis of joy.

Let us now mention some other things that can help us to live joyfully. When all is said and done, God created everything for human beings to use and for their well-being. I have always thought it wise to learn the art of appreciating simple things in life so as to feel uplifted. For example, a landscape, going for a walk, the morning air, the evening sun, the perfume of a rose, the appetising aroma of a simple meal, relaxed conversation, the feeling of being alive, hearing a song, the marvels of the communications media, the wonder of being able to hear, to see, to understand, to taste, to feel, to breathe, etc. These are things we do every day and so we run the risk of doing them in a routine and automatic way. Focusing our attention on simple, everyday things can help us to see the beauty and harmony of their different characteristics.

This brings me to think of the elderly, sick and disabled Sisters. They, too, of course, can live joyful and happy lives. There is nothing to stop them following the paths that lead to joy; the path of trusting in God, of deep prayer, and the knowledge that they are doing God's will. Sufferings and disabilities can be transformed by prayer into an encounter with God. Everything depends on a Sister's attitude. Accepting disabilities with serenity and not being masochistically wrapped up in their sufferings will be the best way of imitating Christ on the Cross and will then make their lives meaningful. God will change their suffering into love and we know that it is love alone that can save the world. So from a wheelchair, from being confined to bed or from the difficulty of getting along on crutches, Sisters can do something for humanity, they can do a lot for other people, for the poor. This is a way of combining joy and suffering, two realities that seem contradictory and yet they can exist side by side. Saint Vincent expressed this in a letter to Sister Anne Hardemont: *"Yes, Sister, our happiness lies in the Cross, and Our Lord willed to enter His glory only through the difficult things He endured. He is leading you along the path of the saints, please do not be surprised at this but be patient, allow Him to act and tell Him that you want His will and not yours to be done."*⁷ There can be no doubt that a person can be joyful even when prostrated by suffering, in sickness and in old age. Many Daughters of Charity have proved that it is possible to combine suffering with joy. I remember, for example, Sister Josefa, who for many years was bedridden but her smile never left her face. Enjoying little things, a smile, a kind word, a prayer, a visit, a song, a moment of peace.....will always be important ways of saying thank you to the Lord for life itself and for all its gifts us with each day.

FOR PRAYER AND PERSONAL REFLECTION AND FOR COMMUNITY SHARING

* Psalm 23: *"The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want."* Try to make your own the sentiments of trust and peace expressed in the psalm.

* Reflect deeply on your own experience. What gives you joy and what makes you sad? How can you make Saint Paul's words a reality, "be happy in the Lord, again I say be happy?"

* *"And so, Sisters, you ought to give yourselves to God to practise this virtue and show cordiality to everybody; but especially to your Sisters and to the poor. There are some who have the holy custom of never meeting others save with a gay and smiling countenance, and who, by a few cordial words, show the joy they feel when they see them. Now, my Daughters, I would like you to give yourselves to God to enter into this practice, which is taught by your Rule and which God asks of you."* (Conference given by Saint Vincent to the Daughters of Charity, 2nd June, 1658). What are your reflections on this quotation from Saint Vincent? What does it suggest we do?

Fr. Javier Alvarez
Director General

⁷ VII, 202 Letter from Saint Vincent to Sister Anne Hardemont, 10th August 1658

MANY THANKS

A big thank you for all your good wishes for my feast day, Christmas and New Year. Thank you for all these expressions of your consideration and thoughtfulness. I am not able to answer them individually and can only thank you all in a general way through this little note in the "Echoes". Some of you have asked me to pray for particular intentions. I would like you to know that I have brought all these before the Lord. I would also like to thank you for praying for me. I am sure that this spiritual exchange is a blessing for all of us and something that is pleasing to God.

I always appreciate the religious sentiments and those of a more general nature that these Christmas cards express even if they make use of standardised conventional phrases! God, in becoming human, is the source of all the good sentiments in our world even if we have to say that they are part of our consumer society which offends human dignity because it reinforces inequality.

May God bless you at this Christmas season of love. May God grant you the grace to recognise the beauty and grandeur of your vocation. I hope you will be happy throughout 2009, serving the Lord in the person of the poor as Saint Vincent has taught us to do!

Father Javier Alvarez
Director General

BISHOP J.M. DI FALCO

Homily for the Eucharistic Celebration of 27th November 2008 in the Chapel of "Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal"

"It's *not* fair! It's *never* fair! It's really too unfair!" This is how Calimero, that famous comic strip character from the 1970s, the little black chick that had the misfortune of getting lost in the midst of a flock of yellow chicks, described his situation

“It’s really too unfair!” This kind of thought can cross our minds when we see all the talents, gifts, beauty and intelligence that our neighbours seem to possess and we seem to lack.

“It’s really too unfair!” At times we may cry out these words to God in a spontaneous reaction of protest, when we are faced with losing our job, illness, disability, suffering or death.

“It’s really too unfair!” We might shout at God in reference to Mary. For here is a woman, our sister in humanity, whom God preserved from original sin while doing nothing of the sort for the rest of us. Mary is led, in splendid attire, towards the king, while we only have a place in the procession...or even worse, perhaps we are no more than the sorry crowd at the palace door...

“It’s really too unfair!”...

If God favours to such an extent certain children more than others, shouldn’t we want more from God?

How can we understand this mystery of God’s free choice? How can we understand that in fact God commits no injustice in freely distributing graces?

The only way we can enter into this mystery is through love. It is all about love. Only those who love can understand the depths of this mystery of God’s favour. Only those who are saints see no injustice in the choices God makes and the way God makes those choices. For rather than constantly judging God, they listen to God instead, and beneath these apparent injustices, they seek the love that God is manifesting.

Let us take Therese of Lisieux, for example. Here is what she said: *“I often asked myself why God had preferences, why all souls did not receive an equal measure of grace. [...] Our Lord has deigned to explain this mystery to me. Jesus set the book of nature before me and I saw that all the flowers he has created are lovely. The splendour of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not rob the little violet of its scent nor the daisy of its simple charm. I realised that if every tiny flower wanted to be a rose, spring would lose its loveliness and there would be no wildflowers to make the meadows bright. It is just the same in the world of souls - which is the garden of Jesus. He has created the great saints who are like the lilies and the roses, but he has also created much lesser saints and they must be content to be the daisies or the violets which delight his eyes whenever he makes them bow down at his feet. Perfection consists in doing his will, in being that which he wants us to be”*.

Let us recognise that this in itself is a great step to take. We are all different and we should rejoice in this fact! We are invited to avoid constantly comparing ourselves with others and instead to rejoice at who we are in God’s eyes and for one another. *“You are the joy and the honour of our race, Virgin Mary,”* we sang today. Perfection consists simply in being what God wants us to be. *“Do whatever he tells you,”* Mary says to us. We are simply to do what he tells us to do.

“Yes, that’s fine, but what is really too unfair,” says our Calimero, who is not easily convinced, “is that for certain saints, it was all very easy, while for me?... Look

at Therese, it was not too difficult for her to avoid being a serious sinner. She herself recognised this. Did she not say: ‘No merit, then, is due to me for not having given myself up to love of creatures since I was only preserved from this by the Mercy of God.’”

What should be our response to Calimero? Perhaps what is important is not whether we are a little sinner or a big sinner, or no sinner at all like Mary, but that we recognise first of all our basic poverty. We don’t need to have committed many sins to recognise this. Therese was deeply aware of it. And when her confessor said to her: “*Thank the good Lord for all that he has done for you, for if he were to abandon you, you would become a little devil instead of being a little angel,*” she responded: “*Oh, I have no difficulty in believing that, for I recognise how weak and imperfect I am.*”

Let us open our eyes and our hearts. We are all weak and imperfect. And capable of even worse things! Yes, even worse things. Are there not certain moments when we could be capable of the most violent acts, or when we feel we could be pushed over the edge if circumstances drove us to it? Father Bro, a Dominican, tells the story of the shock he experienced on hearing the words of his novice master in 1945, at the time when Europe discovered all the atrocities of the concentration and extermination camps. “*My brothers,*” his novice master declared, “*if you do not understand that you also are capable of doing what these torturers did, you have not understood anything.*”

God’s grace is not a concept that is beyond our understanding. We grasp something of its meaning when we recognise our fragility and weakness, when we recognise that, without the grace that comes from God, we could become inhuman monsters. We need to recognise that without God, we could have fallen very low. We also need to recognise that whoever we are, God has given over to us, through his Son, Jesus Christ, not a little, not just a bit, not a great deal, but *everything!* He has given everything to us! And it is through the merits of his Son’s cross that Mary was preserved from original sin, not by her own merits. If there is any equality among all of us, it is clearly in the fact that we owe *everything* to Jesus. Mary, in her attentiveness to grace, knows this. Mary Magdalene, in her grace of repentance knows it, too.

Whenever we enter this chapel, whenever we pray to the Immaculate Virgin in the words *O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you,*” in our heart there is no sense of any injustice committed against us, no cry of protest coming from our lips. On the contrary, we are at peace with God and with ourselves. And we go back out into the crowds of Paris in peace with our brothers and sisters. We are full of gratitude and thanksgiving. Why is that? It is because we come here as we are, without any masks or false pretences, but in the very truth of our being. We know very well that Mary Immaculate who carried in her womb God incarnate, is the same woman who suffered at the foot of the Cross. We know that all grace confided to us is accompanied by a response asked of us, a response which Mary clearly gave with her “fiat”. We know that every grace received from God is transformed with our consent into grace for others, and that Mary keeps none of it for herself but shares everything with us. Isn’t this the meaning behind the rays of light streaming down on the world from her open hands?

Here is what Catherine Laboure had to say about this part of her apparition of 27th November 1830, the anniversary that we are celebrating today: *“At that moment when I was contemplating her, the Blessed Virgin lowered her gaze on me. I heard a voice saying these words: ‘This globe that you see represents the entire world, France in particular and each person in particular.’ I don’t know how to describe what I experienced and what I saw, the beauty and the radiance, such beautiful rays of light... ‘These rays of light are a symbol of the graces that I pour out on all who ask for them.’ ... and she made me understand how pleasing it is to pray to the Blessed Virgin and how generous she is towards those who pray to her. What graces she grants to those who ask them of her, what a joy it is for her to grant those graces... At this moment, I do not know what state I was in but I rejoiced... I do not know...An oval shaped picture formed around the Blessed Virgin with these words written in golden letters at the top of the picture: ‘O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.’ Then a voice said to me: ‘Have a medal struck on this model. All those who wear this medal around their neck will receive great graces. Graces will be abundant for all those who wear the medal with confidence.’”*

Ask and we shall receive. God is not like some parents, who are demanding but not loving, or loving without making demands. God is both very indulgent and very demanding. God knows what is best for us and knows how to use every circumstance. God knows what to give to one and what to refuse another in order for us to grow in love and holiness. God generously grants many graces through Mary, often not in the way we might expect them but in the way that is most beneficial for us.

No matter who we are, no matter where we are from, regardless of what we have done or said or thought, no matter what evil we notice within us, no matter what trials we undergo, we should not be afraid to turn to Mary, who wants to show us how much we are loved. Let us be like infants who are carried in her arms.

None so deaf as those that will not hear; none so blind as those who will not see. Let us ask for the grace to recognise the terrible power that controls our freedom and darkens our spirit. Let us see that in the end everything is grace, that everything can be experienced or interpreted as grace, that nothing is “too unjust” in the light of God.

Bishop Jean-Michel di FALCO LEANDRI
Bishop of Gap and Embrun

TODAY’S CHALLENGES

Province of Chelmno

Mission in Kazakhstan

“The ministry of presence”

A BIT OF HISTORY

Kazakhstan, a region of vast steppes, has been inhabited for many centuries by nomadic populations. At the beginning of modern times, the population has been mainly made up of Turkish nomads – the Kazakhs – who hunt and breed livestock. The social traditions of this culture are based on a clan structure that remains to this day.

Declared a Soviet Republic at the beginning of the Revolution of October 1917, Kazakhstan was incorporated into the Soviet Union at the time of its creation. Kazakhstan was the place for many deportations (and evacuations from war), in particular during and just after World War II.

In 1990, Kazakhstan declared its independence. Since then, a significant rebirth of religion has taken place. Many mosques have been established, and churches have also been built. Religion tends to fill the ideological void left by the disappearance of communist dogma.

In 1997, the capital of Kazakhstan was transferred to Akmola, renamed Astana. With only 15 million inhabitants, Kazakhstan has one of the lowest population densities of any country in the world.

SETTING UP OUR WORKS

Kazakhstan – a country bathed in the blood of martyrs as a result of political repression, is a mosaic of nationalities (approximately 130) and religious denominations: 47% Muslim (Sunnite Islam), 44% Orthodox Christians and 1.8% Catholic.

In the year 2000, at the request of Bishop Tomasz Peta of Astana, the first three Daughters of Charity began to serve poor persons in this country. Today, three local communities are implanted in the diocese of Astana: one in Szortandy (in 2000), a second in Nowokubanka (in 2003), and the third in Astana (in 2007).

We are 9 Sisters serving the poor, seeking out those who are most in need. In addition to taking care of these people in the three cities just mentioned, we are also trying to extend our services into the more remote villages within a 250 km radius. Several of these villages were formerly work camps. Some can only be accessed in late spring, summer and early autumn because the roads in the steppe become completely impassable when the mud or snow make it difficult to move from place to place, thus preventing us from visiting the people. Despite these obstacles, the people continually call us and ask: *“when are you coming to see us?”* These requests are related to spiritual needs (preparation for Sacraments) and material needs (food and humanitarian aid).

The people are kind to us. In spite of so many years of persecution, they are very sincerely searching for God or returning to God after many years. They seek through God a sense of peace for their hearts that have been so deprived after years of hard work, often without pay, very difficult living conditions, illnesses, alcoholism in one or several members of the family, a lack of meaning in life, lack of hope for the future, etc. Many young people want to end their life; others are victims of conflicts that end in death.

We can give numerous examples. As Daughters of Charity, we strive to bring hope to the people. We cannot help everyone, but we can pray for them all.

In 2007, we began our service in Astana, the capital of the country, on the outskirts of the city in the poorest neighbourhood. This is where the first Catholic parish was established in 1979. Many forms of misery and despair are found in this neighbourhood, where there are no roads, no running water, no plumbing. In addition there are chronic problems of alcoholism, malnutrition and children living in the streets. In this part of the city, the homes are built from a mixture of materials: straw, interspersed with wood from old railroad tracks, clay bricks, etc. Houses usually consist of two rooms: a kitchen and a bedroom. They are surrounded by high fences that shield the inhabitants from the rude stares of other people and give an impression of privacy. Most of the citizens are unemployed, suffer from generations of alcoholism, and are powerless in the face of the current political system. After many years of being raised under a communist regime, the people are not prepared to deal with current issues and are often exploited as a cheap labour force.

In the autumn of 2007, we moved into this poor neighbourhood. However, the people did not accept us and were aloof and unfriendly. Most of our neighbours were Muslim (Tartars, Ingouches, Kazakhs and Hungarian Gypsies). There were also some Orthodox Christians but few who practised their faith. Walking through the muddy streets, we met many tattered and dirty children who needed attention and affection. Little by little, thanks to them, we were able to make contact with their families.

SOME TESTIMONIES OF OUR SERVICE

We currently bring together these children of various nationalities and religious denominations. Despite their differences, the children get along well together in their daily life. In spending time with them on a regular basis, we play with them and sing together, but we also introduce them to the basics of hygiene and teach them to pray. Each day, we do craft activities with them and discover how much they are in need of recognition and praise. Our daily presence in their lives is bringing about a sense of trust, and little by little they can dare to share their worries with us.

It was in this way that Igor shared a great sorrow he held in his heart: his dad had been assassinated. Ira was worried about his 19 year old brother who was now in prison: he was the one who had killed Igor's father.

Late one evening several mothers came to us for help: Tania, age 13, had just been raped in the presence of her parents who were drunk. The women pleaded: "Help us, give us your advice."

Thanks to the children, we have built up relationships with several families who are living in very difficult circumstances.

One day, **Lalita** came running up to us saying: "My grandmother has burnt her foot, she's in a lot of pain; have you anything that can help her?" We gave her what she needed and she recovered. News of this quickly spread.

Since then, the adults tell us about others who are in need. This was how we went to the home of **Aleksander**, the grandfather of Eryk who had just met us. Several days before this, he had burnt his hand, and now the wound was infected. We advised him to go to the hospital, but he refused. We kept on insisting, but in vain. When his condition worsened, his family finally took him to the hospital but it was too late. His limb had to be amputated. We visited Aleksander in the hospital, and after he was released, we wanted to continue to visit him at home. However, his daughter and her husband, both of whom are alcoholics, shut the door in our faces, blaming us for their father's condition. We confided our suffering to Mary Immaculate, asking her assistance. Not long afterwards, we found Lena the daughter seriously ill in hospital. When she saw us she began to cry, but then smiled and said: *"At last, some faces I recognise."* After visiting her, she said to us: *"I'm so glad you came; I feel so much better."* After extensive care, Lena was able to leave the hospital, but her husband did not come to fetch her. We brought her to her poor house. Her husband was drunk and he shouted: *"Why did you bring her here? I don't want to take care of her, I don't have the energy, I already have the grandfather to look after!"* Lena stayed. The following day, we returned there to visit our patients, and this time the husband welcomed us. We thank the Lord for this, for little by little, these people have become our friends.

In the same way, we have been able to accompany other persons who now open their hearts and their homes to us. We often hear the words: *"Come and visit us, too."*

The story of **Natasza**, aged 32, is very touching. She lives in the poorest part of the neighbourhood where there is neither running water nor plumbing. She has to get water from a well. Born in this country where it was forbidden to talk about God, her parents nonetheless had her baptised in the Orthodox Church, but no one ever taught her to pray. At the age of 17, she became pregnant. Her boyfriend, aged 20, left her. Living with her mother, Natasza gave birth to a baby girl. Natasza's mother had gone through a detoxification programme and was able to care for the baby while Natasza began to work in an office. After three years of not being able to adjust to working with a computer, Natasza lost her job and was unemployed for a year and a half. Her mother began to drink again and they lost all their income. After some time, Natasza found another job as a ticket collector on buses, but unfortunately, she also had started to drink... Her daughter was growing up in a very difficult family setting. Winters in Kazakhstan are very severe (-40°C, -50°C). Many people die from the cold and others become disabled since amputation is the only method used to treat chilblains. Those who suffer most from these cold winters are persons who abuse alcohol. When Natasza was 29, she took into her home a friend who was seriously ill and who died not long afterwards. Natasza in turn became ill and was hospitalised. After several weeks in the hospital, she was sent home without any hope of recovering. She was paralysed on the right side, could no longer speak, and her fingers and toes on her left side had been amputated because of chilblains. She was in a state of total despair. During this time, her daughter, aged 11, was taking part in our meetings. One day, she said to her mother: *"I'm going to church to pray for you."* That same day, we went to visit Natasza, and since that day, we have been visiting her daily. Little by little, we have encouraged her in her rehabilitation and have begun to pray with her. One day, she managed to sit up in a chair, then to take a few steps; however, she was still unable to speak. We brought her to a hospital for medical

examinations and treatment. Afterwards, we obtained a disability pension for her. One day, at her suggestion, we brought her to church, where she attended Mass for the first time. This was in 2006. When it was time to say the Our Father, we heard her halting efforts to say a few words of this prayer. Since that time, she began to recover her speech. Now, each Sunday Eucharist brings peace to her heart. One day, she expressed her desire to receive Jesus. After a time of preparation, she celebrated her First Communion on May 1st, 2008 at Mass, in the presence of her daughter and her mother. Natasza said: "I am full of joy!" Her outlook on life has changed and she has become easier to relate to. Patience and understanding are developing between Natasza and her mother. From that time onward, they have been praying the rosary together and thanking God for the many gifts they have received. Natasza has also made the decision to read the Gospel and meditate on it every day.

And now, here is **Wiera's** story

An alcoholic for 20 years, Wiera lives on the streets, as she has lost everything: her home, her children who have been placed in an orphanage... Her hands and feet are damaged by chilblains, and she is just a shadow of herself. One day, she came to visit us. We took care of her, bathing her and changing her clothes, giving special attention to her swollen hands and feet. We gave her something to eat and then took her to the hospital for a much needed surgical intervention. Two of her toes had to be amputated. Our presence helped facilitate contact between the medical personnel and Wiera. One week later, she was released from the hospital, but found herself back on the street. We know that winters are harsh. She was willing to come and stay with us and we offered her a bit of work to do. Since then, she helps us in our garden, which makes her feel useful and appreciated. Her life with us has continued to change: she no longer drinks; she has taken up her journey of faith once more and has resumed contact with her daughter. Currently, we are helping her with the administrative procedures necessary for her to regain her family rights and her autonomy.

For several months, **Saszka**, a 6 year old boy, wandered the streets of our neighbourhood. He would often come to us looking for something to eat, some clothes and toys. His mother drinks heavily and leaves him on his own. Sometimes we take him in for the night. Other times, passers by see him sleeping in the bushes. For some time now we have been asking the authorities for help for Saszka.

Our mission often involves accompanying persons with serious problems. This is the case with **Nina**, aged 14. Suffering the effects of alcoholism in her family, she attempted suicide through an overdose of medication. When the ambulance arrived, Nina was in a coma. Father Stanislaw baptised her because her condition was critical. Each day, her very worried mother would go to visit her in the hospital, praying as she could and promising to stop drinking. After 10 days in a coma, Nina regained consciousness. Now, her mother no longer drinks and is taking care of her daughter. However, this mother and her family need a great deal of ongoing support. Nina needs food and a supportive setting to regain her strength. This family's situation, though, is made more difficult because of all the alcoholism in this locality.

CONCLUSION

When we began our mission, the Catholic and Orthodox families gradually came to us for help. The Kazakh families, on the other hand, who are mostly Muslim, preferred to solve their problems themselves. Nevertheless, we remain attentive to the needs of the families, regardless of their religious faith, and we respect their decisions. Later, the authorities in the country asked the Catholic Church in Szortandy to take responsibility for the care of persons with disabilities and to provide ongoing support for them. The same request was made to the Orthodox, Muslims and persons of good will. For us, this request is an opportunity to gain access to persons living in poverty and the many people in our region who have disabilities.

The authorities have also set up an “Association for aid to people with disabilities.” It requires a great deal of humility on our part to learn ways of collaborating with the laity for the good of persons with disabilities.

Up to now, we have been communicating in Russian, but this request from the national authorities means we have to learn the Kazakh language in order to communicate with the Kazakh and Mongolian families. In the Centre for National Language Studies, we have been welcomed with much kindness, and this gives us an opportunity to witness to our faith. We want to be “prophets of hope” in the midst of the people of Kazakhstan. We believe that the Lord goes before us in the hearts and lives of the people to whom He sends us. “Blessed be God! We praise God for this gift of being present among people who are poor.”

The Sisters on mission in Kazakhstan

TODAY’S CHALLENGES

Province of Cracow

Mission in Balta, Ukraine

INTRODUCTION

Ukraine is a European country east of Poland. The two principal religions in this country are Orthodox Christianity and Eastern rite Catholicism. Muslim Ukrainians represent approximately 5% of the population. Orthodox Christianity is the most commonly practised religion (77%)

Balta is a small city in the Odessa region in the south-western part of Ukraine. It is located 183 km northwest of Odessa.

THE MISSION IN BALTA

Background

On 27th October 2007, at the request of Bishop Bronisław Biernacki of the diocese of Odessa (Simferopolsk), the Daughters of Charity began to serve in Balta and the surrounding areas in Ukraine. Balta has a population of about 20,000. There are two Churches there, one Orthodox and the other Catholic, as well as 16 “houses of prayer,” most of which belong to various religious sects.

The eastern part of Ukraine is marked by great material and spiritual poverty, a legacy of its communist past. We try to respond to the various forms of poverty we discover, and to serve those who are poor regardless of their circumstances or religion.

The most urgent problem is that of children coming from families with problems (alcoholism, divorce, etc.) Left on their own in the streets, without any means of support, they often lack basic needs and face dangers from alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, stealing and so forth. Fortunately these children enter into relationship with us quite readily and share with us the “secrets” of their lives. We strive to gain their trust and to provide them security and affection. We never forget their need for nourishment: we must always have something hot ready for them to eat. Artiom likes to say: *“Tilki u Sester można napytysja horjaczoho czaju!”* which means, *“The Sisters house is the only place where we have hot tea to drink!”*

A story of two young boys

Wadim, aged 11 and Stasik, aged 12, present us with a special challenge: they are addicted to drugs. One day, they had the courage to show us the place where they hide and take their drugs. What a shock we had when they brought us there! It was a little “shack” among the building ruins of an old kolkhoz (collective farm from the Soviet Union) where they had already been living for three weeks. Stasik explained that before this they had met either in stairwells or in the sewer system. They collected scrap iron to earn a little money to pay for their drugs and food.

Stasik could not rely on his family: his mother had abandoned him, and his father, with a longstanding addiction to drugs, was living on the streets. There was a process underway to take away his mother’s parental rights.

PHOTO

Wadim has parents, but he ran away from home because he felt rejected by his father.

After gaining their trust, we were able to begin to respond to their needs: a bath, delousing, clean clothes, someone to talk to, activities to do. Whenever Stasik or Wadim come to visit us, we welcome them, regardless of our projects and schedules.

One day, Wadim secretly took us to meet his mother and left us with her so that we could get to know her and talk to her. He hid himself so as not to risk being seen. Later, he came to our house to hear about our conversation with his mother and her reaction. Three days after this meeting, Wadim was willing to return to his home,

and the following day he went back to school. As for Stasik, he was given a temporary place to stay in the presbytery and the priests helped to arrange for him to go back to school.

From the time we first met Wadim and Stasik, we have tried to make arrangements with an organisation that cares for minors coming from families in difficulty. However, this organisation can offer no assistance in the case of these two boys. Even though they want to leave behind their bad habits in favour of a normal life, they have not been able to overcome their addiction to drugs.

In spite of his efforts, Stasik went back to drugs and in September 2008 was placed in a Centre in Odessa for children with addictions. Wadim, on the other hand, is with his family. His mother has accepted him back home, and offers him the support and understanding he needs. He also remains in ongoing contact with us. During school holidays, he participated in a special programme of reflection and prayer. This has given us great joy.

CONCLUSION

We are currently in the process of renovating our house in order to build a residence for children on the ground floor. We look to the future with much hope, believing that these improved housing facilities will allow us to better serve children living on the streets.

We also count on the generosity of others to support us materially and to pray that our service may one day bear fruit.

The Sisters on mission in Balta

NOMINATIONS

Designation of Visitatrices And nomination of Provincial Directors

PROVINCE OF MOZAMBIQUE: Sister Ester Lucas JOSE MARIA was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Therezinha MADUREIRA GONCALVES, 18th June 2008.

PROVINCE OF SANTO DOMINGO: Sister Servia Tulia GARCIA MARTINEZ was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Isaura MARTINEZ ENCARNACION, 2nd July 2008.

PROVINCE OF SLOVENIA: Sister Bernarda TRCEK was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Barbara SELIH, 16th July 2008.

PROVINCE OF CONGO-CONGO: Sister Angèle MBULA was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Suzanne ILOKO, 29th August 2008.

PROVINCE OF NEAR EAST: Sister Vincent ALLOUAN was redesignated Visitatrice for three years 29th August 2008.

PROVINCE OF SIENNA: Sister Luisa FARRI was redesignated Visitatrice for three years, 17th September 2008.

PROVINCE OF GRANADA: Sister Maria Luisa SERRANO HENARES was redesignated Visitatrice for three years, 1st October 2008.

PROVINCE OF INDONESIA: Sister Victoria SISWATI was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Anna SOEPRATIWI, 19th November 2008

* * * * *

PROVINCE OF FORTALEZA: Father Francisco José OLIVEIRA DOS SANTOS was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 31st July 2008.

PROVINCE OF ETHIOPIA: Father Girmay ABRAHA was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 5th August 2008.

PROVINCE OF RIO DE JANEIRO: Father Paulo Eustaquio VENUTO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 4th September 2008.

PROVINCE OF BELO HORIZONTE: Father Onésio GONCALVES MOREIRA was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 4th September 2008.

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AMERICA: Father Anibal CORNEJO AMORES was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 4th September 2008.

PROVINCE OF CALI: Father Ricardo QUERUBIN MARIN was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 4th September 2008.

PROVINCE OF CONGO-CONGO: Father Désiré MOKOLO MOLANGA was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 5th November 2008.

PROVINCE OF HAITI: Father Marion PONCETTE was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 24th November 2008

PROVINCE OF MOZAMBIQUE: Father Eli CHAVEZ DOS SANTOS was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a period of three years, 6th December 2008

VISIT FROM SUPERIORS

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General
and Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor

Visit to Tanzania

Background

In 2004, following a request by Bishop Justin Samba for Daughters of Charity for the Diocese of Musoma, Tanzania, Sr. Aster Zewdie, Visitatrice for Ethiopia, and another Sister from the Province of Ethiopia went to make an initial evaluation of a possible implantation. They were shown different missions and in the end, Masanga was chosen as an appropriate village for the new missionary endeavour: it was isolated, arid, lacked basic commodities, the people were in need of the Sisters, and up to that time no other community had agreed to go there.

In 2005 Sr. Aster returned to visit the Bishop and the mission of Masanga along with Sr. Wivine, General Councillor for the African Provinces, and two Sisters from the Province of Congo. One of the special features of this mission is that it is inter-African Province in character. Congo and Madagascar were asked to be generous and send missionaries; Congo was asked to accept Masanga as one of its local communities. These Provinces were formerly French-speaking colonies and the Sisters to be sent had to learn English first and then Kiswahili and once involved in the work of the vineyard, would learn the tribal language of Kikuria.

In July 2006 the three new missionaries arrived with Sr. Wivine to officially bring them to their new mission. Hundreds of villagers dressed in their tribal costume for such occasions, waited for the Sisters to arrive and greeted them with dance and song. After a very animated Eucharistic celebration we were escorted to our new home- where we found the essentials: 4 beds, 4 tables and chairs, 4 kerosene lamps, all prepared for our arrival. And we learned that the people of Masanga would continue to share what they could with us (cups, plates, small bars of soap, spoons)

Again, we were very touched by the villagers' sense of sharing and their love for the Sisters. When we have learned English we will start to study Kiswahili for three months.

In December 2006 we returned to Masanga to begin our mission and to take responsibility for the dispensary, the nursery, and the pastoral-social development activities of the parish. Just as our house had only the bare essentials, so it was with the works. It was a challenge to our creative inventiveness and our confidence in Divine Providence. The sudden death of Bishop Samba in August 2006 was a great loss for us.

At Christmas Sr. Suzanne, the Visitatrice of our Province and Fr. Stanny, the Provincial Director, arrived with Sr. Evelyn Candalaria, who acted as translator. During that visit we were established as "Immaculate Mary" House. During the visit they made an inventory of the needs of the house and also the works. The Massanga house was attached to the Congo Province (this Province comprises the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo often called Congo Brazzaville). On

the practical side, with technical help from Fr. Stanny, we were provided with solar panels that provided light for the chapel and met other needs.

In February 2007 Sr. Wivine and Sr. Madeleine Haovasoana, Visitatrice of Madagascar, arrived for a visit. Seeing at first hand the circumstances of our mission, Sr. Madeleine promised to send new Sisters as soon as possible. In February 2008, 2 Malagasy Sisters went to study English in Nairobi, Kenya, and lived with our Sisters there before coming to us.

In October 2007 the 3 “pioneer Sisters” had the joy of welcoming a new member of the community who came from the Congo to share our mission. As we said during our Domestic Assembly, we are trying to be attentive to the Spirit of God working in his people of Masanga. We thank God for the warm and simple welcome given us by these generous people. A short time after we arrived, we went to visit some families and an elderly mother began to bless the Lord and to tell us of the prophecy made by her husband who died several years ago. He said “ Sipirina Sibora, you will see that our district will become religious one day and a big church will be built and missionaries will come to live among us. And that is exactly what has come to pass. What a grace, Lord, to welcome You into my house!” She then brought out a jug of water and some leaves from the tree and asked us to bless her house. This trust shown us by the people encourages us, challenges us and moves us to respond with love and great joy.

In July 2008 the two Malagasy Sisters joined us in Masanga.

With the help of Sr. Evelyne and the General Council, and the support of many different Provinces, I.P.S. and generous friends, the mission at Masanga is beginning to develop. But we also see the negative aspects of their culture: the people’s fears, harmful taboos and tribal customs, witchcraft and certain practices like polygamy, female genital mutilation.... We are trying to introduce devotion to Mary Immaculate and the Association of the Miraculous Medal. Every Sunday the parish is invited to pray the Rosary, the Novena and attend benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. We count on the prayers of our Sisters throughout the world and we believe in Jesus' power to save.

VISIT FROM SUPERIORS

In August 2008 our little mission of Masanga was visited by our Superiors: Sr. Evelyne, Sr. Wivine, and the Visitatrices of Congo and Madagascar. In spite of a long and difficult journey and the precarious state of our house the Visitatrices did not complain but, on the contrary, were very impressed by the warm welcome given by the villagers who expressed their joy in accordance with their own customs and folk lore.

On the first day the Sisters visited St. Catherine Laboure Nursery School where 152 children who had been well prepared and were dressed in their Sunday best, were proud to greet the visitors in English and in French. The parents were also anxious to see the visitors and to offer them all kinds of gifts, fruits, grains, soap, clothing.... It was their opportunity to express their thanks for all that had been done for the children and the village.

After the visit to the nursery school, our visitors went to Mary, Mother of Hope, Dispensary. As they walked towards the building they were greeted by the many mothers who were on their way to “clinic” taking their babies to be weighed and to get their vaccines, etc. They were very happy to welcome the visitors. The Sisters then visited all the wards of the dispensary and met the patients and the care staff.

Next day the Sisters visited the Formation Centre where the people learn domestic skills and languages. Sister Evelyne particularly admired the needlework produced by these men and women and she encouraged them to work for better living conditions for their families. When there was a break in the schedule, Sister Evelyne met each Sister individually.

In the afternoon the Visitors were greeted by the aspirants and the members of the Miraculous Medal Association. Then they paid a visit to the priests of the parish who have given so much support to the Sisters since they came here. It was an opportunity for the visitors now to present some gifts, an altar cloth for the church and miraculous medals as an aid to evangelisation. It was only when the Sisters came here that the priests learned about the Miraculous Medal.

The following day we visited our new Bishop, Michael Msonganzila in Musoma to discuss the Sisters' contract with the diocese, our charism, our integration in the diocese and in the Union for Religious in Tanzania. After a lively sharing of ideas we all had tea in the Bishop's dining room, as is the custom in Tanzania. “Karibu! Karibu chai!” Welcome, welcome to tea! Hospitality is a deeply rooted tradition in Tanzania that resembles our Christian virtue and is always lived out in daily relationships characterised by simplicity and harmony. Good relationships are more important than anything else and sharing a little food together is a way of strengthening bonds between people.

Before returning home to Masanga we visited the tomb of Julius Nyrere, former President of Tanzania whose cause has been presented for beatification. At Butiama his family's village, we visited the Museum and prayed at his tomb that the virtues of peace, justice and solidarity that he lived out and taught would be lived by all our world leaders, especially those of the African continent.

As is the Tanzanian custom, on the eve of the departure of our visitors, we had the typical family celebration with dancing and songs, sharing each other's company for the last time.

Strengthened by the grace of Sister Evelyne's visit, we, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate House, thank God for giving us this encouragement in our mission and, as is customary here, we say “Karibu tena!” (Come back and see us again!) “Asante sana!”

The Sisters of Masanga

IN SAINT VINCENT'S TIME.....AND TODAY

The faith of Saint Vincent

I have been asked to speak on the topic: **How to renew faith today**. In this title, one word immediately attracted my attention: the word: TODAY

I am often asked to give talks or lead discussions with the Daughter of Charity, and I often find this famous word in many of the topics suggested to me! My reaction becomes stronger each time that this happens.

First of all, I remind myself that I am dealing with real daughters of Saint Vincent, immersed in the society and Church of their times, who well know that the most valuable life stories, the most compelling examples, the most urgent messages, are nothing more than dreams and nostalgia unless an effort is made to translate them and live them out in today's world. This first reaction always leads me to reflect that the key issue is to seek to understand how Vincent de Paul would adapt himself to our current situation.

The second reaction concerns me personally. I find myself in the presence of Daughters of Charity involved in a variety of commitments. One day, I am with a group of Sisters in hospital ministry; the next week the Sisters come from the field of education; another group are Sisters from foreign countries, missionaries, etc.

This situation shows your versatility, which is in keeping with the origins of Vincentian foundations. However, I find myself humble and adequate in the face of the concrete situation, the pastoral and social experience of Sisters involved in this diversity of specialisations.

I believe, then, that interpreting Saint Vincent in TODAY'S WORLD must come about through a common seeking. On my part, by attempting to share what I have read and reread about Saint Vincent... and on your part, by bringing what you experience in your specific commitments each day. You obviously have the same idea since the program includes times for personal reflection as well as group work.

I would like to give two talks on **Renewing faith**:

The first: SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, A BELIEVER.

The second: SAINT VINCENT, SOMEONE WHO AWAKENED AND RENEWED PEOPLE'S FAITH

I. SAINT VINCENT: A BELIEVER.

When approaching any topic related to Saint Vincent, it is always best to go back to the experience and the life process of the Founder. Vincent de Paul, by his personality and his formation, was someone who continually placed great importance on the events and experiences of life. This is even a principal characteristic of his spirituality. Let us first go back to Vincent's development and his journey towards faith.

Family background and childhood played an important part in Vincent de Paul's life, as it does for all of us. He was born into a poor, county family with deep and traditional Christian roots. Most of his early Christian formation would certainly have come from his parents, especially his mother, his relatives and his locality.

We know hardly anything about life in the parish of Pouy at that time but it is very likely that, apart from Mass on Sundays, parish activity would have been the same as in all the small rural parishes in that region, that is, practically non-existent. In particular, there were probably no organised catechism classes for children. We know that catechization was **an innovation** and one of the great contributions that Saint Vincent made to the Church in France, precisely because everywhere he went he was quick to see that this was not well done, if indeed it was done at all.

Up to the age of 14, then, the young Vincent would have received Christian education solely from his family and his surroundings. Nevertheless, this education had a deep and long-lasting effect on his faith. Due to time constraints that prevent a longer development of the idea, allow me to call your attention to a particular aspect of Vincent de Paul's faith, one that is more important than is usually thought. Vincent had a rural faith, meaning one that was largely guided by the idea of Providence, a faith that was greatly nourished by the gospel (especially in its rural aspects: the parables, for example), a simple faith "*that wasn't dissected,*" as Vincent would say. His faith was practical and concrete, influenced more by life than by intellectual considerations. If you have time, explore these ideas, for I can only mention them today.

To sum up, Vincent de Paul's faith was first of all awakened and formed by his family and social setting, which had a profound and lasting impact on this faith.

After this came nine years of study, from 1595 to 1604; these were also significant years. At the school in Dax, catechism was certainly taught, even more so since at that time there was little distinction between religious and secular studies: students learned to read and recite using prayer books, and they studied Sacred History and the lives of the Saints.

During the years spent at the University of Toulouse, Vincent was able to undertake serious theological studies, such as were taught at that time. Our student left the University with a Baccalaureate diploma, which would have qualified him to become a teacher. Let us take note of Vincent de Paul's level of formation and culture, which greatly surpassed that of most of the clergy of his day. It is true that he called himself: "*a poor fourth grade student*". This is true Gascon humility! which really means... a little humility and a lot of Gascon!

So much emphasis has been placed on Vincent de Paul's practical and concrete intelligence that at times we have almost made him an early Curé of Ars... It is appropriate, however, to recall that Saint Vincent completed very advanced levels of study. And we can believe that these studies were effective in helping to give structure to his faith, even if they do not seem to have led him to modify his original life plans.

In the course of his studies, Vincent passed through the various stages towards priestly ordination: tonsure on December 20, 1596, sub-diaconate and diaconate in 1598, priesthood on September 23, 1600. These experiences certainly had an influence on the faith journey of Vincent de Paul. One day he wrote: *"... if I had known what it was when I had the temerity to enter it--as I have come to know **since then**--I would have preferred to till the soil than to commit myself to such a formidable state of life. I have said this more than a hundred times to poor country people when, to encourage them to live contentedly as upright persons, I told them I considered them fortunate in their situation. Indeed, the older I get, the more convinced I am of this because day by day I discover how far removed I am from the state of perfection **in which I should be living.**"* (Coste V, 569) At the very least, we could say that in 1600, this young student in Toulouse was not yet aware of the true nature of the sacrament and the mission that he was receiving.

After his studies in Toulouse came a period of travelling; a rather turbulent time, so much so that it is sometimes difficult to keep up with our travelling Vincent, in hurried pursuit of the famous retirement he had in mind.

At the end of 1608, we meet up with him in Paris. Here he became involved with the distribution of alms for the court of Marguerite de Valois, and experienced his first time of suffering: he was unjustly accused of stealing. Much later, M. Vincent would call to mind this painful incident, and in telling the story to the missionaries, he concluded with: *"You see, God sometimes wants to test people, and that's why He allows things like this to happen."* (Coste XI, 305)

It seems clear that Vincent began at that time to reflect seriously; at the same time he made the acquaintance of Father de Berulle, the founder of the Oratorians. Berulle was an impressive, austere and profound spiritual master, and Vincent placed himself under his direction.

Berulle had a great influence on the development and maturation of Vincent de Paul's faith, even though several years later, the disciple would choose to distance himself from his mentor. Vincent's faith was stirred in relation to two significant points: **Christ** and **priesthood**. In fact, Berulle and the entire French school of spirituality insisted strongly on a faith that was re-centred on Jesus Christ on the one hand, and on the other hand, the dignity of the priestly state. It is easy to imagine that this theological and essentially spiritual reorientation, occurred at the right moment. It was in this way that Vincent de Paul was launched into the extraordinary experience of Clichy.

He had been a priest for twelve years at that point and this was practically his first real pastoral experience. This was an extraordinary time: *"I had such good people, who were so obedient in doing what I asked of them that, when I told them*

they should come to confession on the first Sunday of the month, they didn't fail to do it. They came to confession, and I saw from day to day the progress these souls were making. That gave me so much consolation, and I was so pleased with it, that I used to say to myself, 'Mon Dieu! how happy you are to have such good people!' And I would add, 'I don't think the Pope himself is as happy as a Pastor in the midst of such good-hearted people.' And one day Cardinal de Retz asked me, 'Eh bien! Monsieur, how are you?' I said to him, 'Your Eminence, I can't tell you how happy I am.' 'Why?' he asked. 'Because I have such good people, so obedient to all that I tell them that it seems to me that neither the Holy Father nor you, Eminence, are as happy as I am.'" (Coste IX, 507-508)

This note of happiness was very significant in M. Vincent's spiritual journey. Here we sense a priest who was re-focused and who had found a more balanced outlook in the midst of a community of people, and his faith was re-awakened by coming into contact with their simple faith.

Nevertheless, Vincent had not yet abandoned his plans for an honest retirement. After sixteen months in Clichy, he became the tutor in the de Gondi family. It was like night and day. Certainly, this was undeniably a promotion, but after such a fulfilling parish ministry, there came a certain gilded idleness. An engaging, warm and direct contact with this good people was replaced by the ultra refinement of an influential family, and most especially, by the demanding presence of Madame de Gondi, who was certainly generous, but also very scrupulous. It is understandable that little by little Vincent felt debilitated and stifled in such a setting.

This was the time he experienced a terrible crisis that touched the very essence of his faith. Abelly, Saint Vincent's first biographer, has left us some details about this trial, and we know, too, that Vincent even reached the point of not being able to articulate "I believe in God". Later he would speak of an experience which we can take to be largely autobiographical: "This teaches us, in passing, how dangerous it is to remain idle, either in body or in mind, for just as the land, no matter how fertile it may be, if allowed to lie fallow, it immediately produces thistles and thorns, so our soul cannot remain idle very long without experiencing certain passions or temptations that lead it to do evil." (Coste XI, 27) We can be sure that Vincent de Paul was in something of this state at the dawn of the famous year of 1617. This was the year... (we can call it, as Vincent himself suggested), the year of conversion.

We are not going to think back to the very well-known events of Gannes-Folleville and Chatillon-les-Dombes. Simply a few remarks as we skim through history.

The testimonies that we have about these two events and what followed them, allow us to follow quite closely the psychological and spiritual itinerary during this major step in the story of Vincent de Paul's faith.

In Gannes, after hearing the confession of an old man, Vincent seemed to be shocked and caught unawares, like someone who has passed through a long night. He needed to be awakened, to be shaken out of himself... And it was this experience that would trigger the change. In fact, whenever Vincent called to mind the event of

Gannes-Folleville, he always gave the first and most important place to Madame de Gondi, and we can be sure that this was not done just out of humility.

It was Madame de Gondi who had stressed the importance of this event and pointed out its significance. It was she who, true to her scrupulous nature, saw that this was not an isolated event and dramatised the situation: “Ah, Monsieur! What’s this?...What have we just heard? No doubt it’s the same for most of these poor people. If this man, who is considered an upright man, was in a state of damnation, what will it be like for others who live worse lives? Ah, M. Vincent! How many souls are being lost! How can this be remedied?” (Coste XI, 3) Again, she was the one who urged Vincent to preach the next day, even going so far as to suggest the subject for his homily. She was also the one who asked M. Vincent to continue the experience from village to village. We can be sure that this pressure by Madame de Gondi was what brought about Vincent de Paul’s response. The texts confirm this and we can easily understand the psychological reasons for it. Let us keep in mind that Vincent had just passed through a time of crisis.

And so the next day Vincent preached, and we all know about the simple and widespread response of the good souls of Folleville which meant that Vincent had to call on the Jesuit Fathers from Amiens to respond to the unexpected number of penitents. After the providential and decisive pressure exercised by Madame de Gondi, here we see the lively and stirring testimony of these good people. Without romanticising the situation, we can imagine that on the evening of January 25th, 1617, Vincent de Paul would have, at the very least, found once again a bit of the joy that he had experienced at Clichy: “*the happiness of a Pastor in the midst of such good-hearted people*” (Coste IX, 507)

In the days and months to come, Vincent would repeat the experience of Folleville in other towns, and this no doubt caused him to undertake a profound revision of life. Could he continue to be tutor in this rich family after the experiences that he had had? At the end of July, he left the de Gondi household. A letter from Monsieur de Gondi, known by Abelly, shows the shock caused by Vincent’s flight: “I am extremely astonished that he had said nothing of his resolution!” He fled, which is both proof of a decision and the sign of a sense of fragility, a certain mistrust of self. Father de Berulle was an accomplice, since he was the one who had suggested that Vincent go to Chatillon.

Three weeks later, the second event would take place. In this new setting, we can measure the progress that had taken place since January 25th. There was no longer a woman who took the initiative; Vincent acted on his own and without hesitation: clearly this time he was in tune with Providence.

Notice that once again the good people played a key role, in the way they welcomed the invitation of their new pastor and by their generous spontaneity. The very same evening of August 20th, 1617, Vincent drew lessons from the event, and reflected once again, we can be sure, on the happiness of a pastor in the midst of his people.

So, the time that passed from January 24th to August 20th 1617 was certainly a key period in the story of M. Vincent’s faith.

After this, his progress continued. It can be said, however, that from 1617 forward, the spiritual features of Vincent de Paul had been drawn and the traits that would distinguish his faith were set into place. We can reduce these characteristics of Saint Vincent's faith into the following four: Christ, the Gospel, the Church, and the Event.

1 - CHRIST first of all

I have already mentioned Vincent's meeting Father de Berulle and the re-centring of faith on Jesus Christ as one of the principal ideas of the French School of Spirituality. We have a general understanding of the programmes and methods of university study at that time, and we can say that most likely during his stay in Toulouse, Vincent's faith was not deeply "Christo-centric" as we would say today.

During formation sessions, I sometimes respectfully tease Father de Berulle, the author of the "Life of Jesus in his mother's womb". This does not prevent me from readily recognising that he and the other masters of the French School provided an inestimable service to Vincent de Paul and, in turn, to us.

Since the end of the Middle Ages, faith, particularly the faith of the common people, could not be separated from countless practices, devotions, beliefs and even superstitions of every sort. In this implausible collection that was considered faith, it was often the case that dogma, morals and worship were presented and accepted without recourse to any hierarchy of values or the least structural setup. As you know, Protestantism was simply a reaction that can be considered quite normal in the face of this.

In the middle of the 16th century the Council of Trent clearly and energetically redefined everything concerning the proposition of faith. However, the Council and its decisions were not recognised until later in France by the States General in 1614, 51 years after the actual Council, and it was a long time before they were put into force.

The merit of the French School of Spirituality was in that it recentred faith on the mystery of the Son of God. With regard to this key point, Vincent de Paul was a remarkably conscientious student of the French School. "Remember, Monsieur," he wrote to one of his confreres, "we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ." (Coste I, 276)

This passage, which really has all the cadences of a hymn, may appear rather simple. In four or five lines, M. Vincent repeats the name of Jesus Christ eight times. This seems to me to be a true reflection of the place that Jesus Christ had in the faith of Vincent de Paul.

He had finally found this simple and lively faith, a faith "that wasn't dissected apart." From that point on everything was organised from the principle that our life

must be a continuation of Christ's life and lived in imitation of him. These two themes recur repeatedly in the thinking and actions of Saint Vincent.

Even though Vincent showed himself to be a brilliant and enthusiastic student of the French School, he would go much farther. The School presented a solid theological doctrine, but it was a bit ethereal and generalised. It is necessary to read, for example, "Elevations to Jesus on the principal states and mysteries" by de Berulle to be aware of this. The Elevations are truly very elevated! "And all the while," Vincent would say, "the poor people are dying of hunger and are damned."

Vincent de Paul's faith in Jesus Christ was definitively marked by the events of 1617. The Christ who revealed himself at Gannes-Folleville and then at Chatillon was the Christ who was sent by God to evangelise and serve poor persons. As Vincent constantly repeated: "Our inheritance, Gentlemen and my Brothers, is the poor, the poor; He has sent me to evangelise the poor. What happiness, Gentlemen, what happiness! To do that for which Our Lord came from Heaven to earth, and by means of which we too shall go from earth to Heaven, to continue the work of God Who shunned cities and went to the country places to seek out the poor. That is what our rules are concerned with, to help the poor, our lords and masters." (Coste XII, 415-416, 1963 ed.)

In this way, Vincent de Paul related all the incontestable riches of de Berulle teaching and that of the other great spiritual masters, to poor persons, God's little ones. The centre of his faith was JESUS CHRIST sent to evangelise poor persons. Here we clearly find the fundamental characteristic of Saint Vincent's faith: attachment to Jesus Christ...Jesus Christ sent to those who are poor! This will be shown as we move on to the second characteristic of Vincent's faith.

2. THE GOSPEL

According to ABELLY, one of M. Vincent's confrere's said: "The Gospel was his book and his mirror in which he gazed on every occasion; and whenever he encountered any doubt as to how he should do something... he would immediately consider in what way Our Lord behaved in a similar situation, or what he had said in that regard, or what was the significance of his maxims."

For Vincent de Paul, the Gospel was in fact the book of faith par excellence, the book that permitted him to find directly, and especially in a very simple way, the thinking and the will of Jesus Christ. Of course, this was not such an original attitude, for this approach to the Gospel should be that of every Christian. As a way of nurturing his faith, however, Vincent had his own way of approaching the Gospel. This was his key, or rather his keys for reading. When he entered into the Gospel, he always entered by two doors: Luke 4:18 and Matthew 25:31.

Luke 4:18 is a text that I have often quoted. It is the passage in the Gospel where JESUS, at the beginning his public ministry, applies the words of the prophet Isaiah to himself: "The Lord has sent me to proclaim the good news to the poor." For Vincent de Paul, this text was the underlying explanation of the entire Gospel. When we read Vincentian texts, we have the distinct impression that each time that Vincent approached the Gospel, he considered that what was said and written had come from

Jesus Christ, the One sent to those who are poor. This means that his reading of the Gospel was not that of exegetes or theologians or de Berulle. It was the perspective of a missionary who never ceases to think of poor persons and who interprets each Gospel passage in terms of proclaiming it to those who are poor. I can assure you that if you compare the Vincentian Gospel approach with that of other spiritual masters (the French School, Saint Ignatius, Saint Francis de Sales), you will quickly notice that Saint Vincent's selective reading had this specific orientation.

The second key reading, Matthew 25:31, serves only to accentuate this aspect of Saint Vincent's faith. It evokes the final judgment to be carried out by Christ: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was ill or in prison and you visited me; I was a stranger and you welcomed me." This is the foundational Gospel text for you as Daughters of Charity. It is your own key reading while Luke 4:18 is more that of the Congregation of the Mission. You see that M. Vincent has thought of everything.

I don't want to dwell at length on this. We still have two other important characteristics of Saint Vincent's faith to consider. Allow me, however, to insist once more on this Vincentian reading of the Gospel, for it was very significant for Saint Vincent's faith. Today, dieticians often say: Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are. This statement certainly has some truth in it, especially if we consider it while juxtaposing our consumer societies with under-developed nations! But in terms of faith, we can easily understand that what nourishes us is a decisive factor psychologically, sociologically and spiritually. And it is very true that, knowing how constantly M. Vincent read the Gospel each day and meditated on it so that he was abundantly nourished by it, we can easily grasp the sort of man he was.

3. THE CHURCH

We need to remember this process that we have just looked at, and especially the first seventeen years of priesthood as Vincent experienced them. During these seventeen years, he only had three periods of happiness in a parish: Clichy, Folleville and Chatillon. And in each of these cases, this joy came to him through the good people of the parish. In terms of Church, Vincent had first of all the fourteen years of experience at Pouy, a traditional notion of a Church that was most likely somewhat remote. But from 1595 onward, he regarded it, certainly as a supernatural reality, but foremost as a hierarchical organisation. At this time, he was thinking of his advancement. (Cf. the trip to Bordeaux in 1604!)

At Clichy, Vincent began to experience a more profound reality: the reality of the people of God. We have seen how Folleville and Chatillon led him to significantly deepen this experience. Of course, the hierarchical dimension of the Church continued to be most important for him, and only God knows if Vincent became aware of it later. He no longer considered the hierarchy as a way of describing Church, however, but rather as a means of serving the people of God, at the very heart of the people of God, and serving, by preference, the poorest among them.

As in several other domains, Vincent de Paul's ecclesiology, that is, his vision of the Church, was amazingly modern, even coming close to some of the texts of the Second Vatican Council. So as not to prolong discussion, I will call attention only to two examples of this. The first, found in Coste XI, pages 28-31, is the account of the

conversion of a heretic. This incident took place in 1620. M. Vincent, having returned to the de Gondi estates since 1617, preached one mission after another in the villages on the de Gondi land. He was at one point in Marchais, in the Aisne region, where he was preparing a mission that was set to be preached the following year. Here, a Protestant was shouting out that the Church in Rome was certainly not the Church founded by Jesus Christ for the reason, and he was right in saying so, that it did not encourage the evangelisation of poor people. It is easy to understand that this argument would have touched a nerve in Vincent, for he was forever dreaming of this very idea.

When Vincent went the following year to preach the Mission there, the Protestant attended it and was converted, after having seen for himself that this was truly an evangelisation of poor people.

What was most significant about the event was the conclusion that M. Vincent drew from it: “Oh! What a happiness for our Missioners,” added Saint Vincent after this story, “to confirm the guidance of the Holy Spirit on His Church by working, as we do, at the instruction and sanctification of poor persons!” (Coste XI, 30) This is a passage for our consideration and meditation if we want to understand Vincent de Paul’s idea of Church: the evangelisation of those who are poor is a sign of the Church’s authenticity.

The second incident that I would like to mention is a sermon by Bossuet, a sermon that is generally recognised as being largely inspired by Vincent de Paul, when he was 79 years old. This sermon, delivered before the Royal Court, was entitled: On the eminent dignity of the poor. I will simply quote a passage from it that conveys very well, through the words of BOSSUET, Saint Vincent’s deep thinking and his ideas on the Church: “The Church of Jesus Christ is truly the city of the poor. I am not afraid to say that those who are rich, owing to their riches, are only admitted out of tolerance. Come then, those of you who are rich, the doors of the Church are open to you, but they are open in preference to those who are poor and on condition of serving them. It is out of love for his children that God allows the foreigner to enter...Those who are rich are the foreigners, but the service of poor persons gives the rich their citizenship...Rich people of every century, take all the superior titles you wish; you may bear them in the world. In the Church of Jesus Christ, however, you are merely the servants of those who are poor...”

Saint Vincent’s faith was the faith of the Church, the City of poor persons and Servant of poor persons, as Vatican II reminds us. The Tuesday Conferences, the seminaries, and the activities of M. Vincent during the ten years that he was on the Council of Conscience, had as their primary goals the naming of bishops, the formation of priest and laity, to enable them to make the Church more and more the city of poor persons.

4. EVENTS

This was the final aspect of Vincent’s faith, and in describing this, it is important to return to his experience and his life journey. His personality, influenced by his rural and Gascon roots, led him to become a down-to earth and even pragmatic

person. It was principally his spiritual experiences which led him to consider events as bearing a message and as a form of presence of Jesus Christ.

This was especially the case for Gannes-Folleville and Chatillon. In both of these incidents, he said himself that he was certain that he had encountered God. He would say on many occasions: “It was not me...it was God.” In this way, all events, especially those related to poor persons, became for Vincent messages and signs of faith.

This occurred for example in Marchais, where Vincent spontaneously decoded the message and came to a conclusion. I could give you countless examples: meeting Louise de Marillac, Marguerite Naseau, the bishop of Beauvais (for the Ordinands), or again the establishment of the work for the foundlings, the events that unfolded in Madagascar or Poland, etc. In all these circumstances, Vincent read the event as well as the Gospel, and just as the Gospel clarified and nourished his faith, so too did the event. This is another very modern aspect of Saint Vincent’s faith.

Since Vatican II, we often speak of the signs of the times. Without ever using those terms, Vincent de Paul was a master reader of them.

It is appropriate to take time here to look at the repetitions of prayer that are found in volumes XI and XII of Coste. These repetitions of prayer, a practice invented by M. Vincent, allow us, among other benefits, to enter into M. Vincent’s prayer. This was obviously a very significant part of his faith life. This prayer, moreover, comes across as an intimate dialogue, in a public place in which the world is fully present. It was a dialogue with Jesus Christ who was continually present, but in a place that was constantly infiltrated by the Mission in Poland or the plague in Genoa or the desperate situation in Madagascar or the poor people throughout the world. M. Vincent, with Christ and with the community, recalled the events and sought to understand them and to find the providential lesson they carried, in order to better live this message out. Without any doubt it is in these repetitions of prayer that we can find the clearest illustration of the importance that Saint Vincent’s faith placed on events.

I will now be brief and conclude my talk... We have looked at Vincent de Paul the believer through the course of his life journey, the essential characteristics and pillars of HIS FAITH: Jesus Christ, the Gospel, the Church and Events. Perhaps what is most impressive in all of that, when all is said and done, is the simplicity and unity of this faith. Everything in fact seems to be consistent; it is very dynamic in the strongest sense of the word: it demands action and commitment. Contemplation of JESUS CHRIST is contemplation of the One sent to those who are poor. So it is a contemplation that must focus us irresistibly on poor persons. We enter THE GOSPEL through the two Vincentian doors, and when we pass through them we are once again sent to those who are poor. THE CHURCH is the city of poor persons. Finally, THE EVENT is Poland and all of Poland, Madagascar and all of Madagascar. Today, it is the daily encounters with so many poor persons.

To sum up, the best way to define the faith of Saint Vincent seems to be with the famous words “leave God for God”, the perpetual movement between Jesus Christ and the poor person. It is certainly the fundamental experience of faith that Saint Vincent proposes for us.

II. AWAKENING AND RENEWING PEOPLE'S FAITH

In actual fact, this fascinating subject was everything to Saint Vincent. It encapsulated practically everything he did, for even if the charitable and social aspects of his actions and his countless undertakings at times are given greater emphasis, his primary goal was always to proclaim the good news to poor persons. Everything he founded or undertook was for evangelisation. Also, this topic we are discussing is almost inexhaustible. I ask you to forgive me for presenting only general outlines, together with some ideas for study and reflection.

Although we will not be reviewing the whole of Saint Vincent's spiritual journey, let us at least recall that the two determining events of 1617 were precisely situations in which Vincent de Paul is shown to be an instrument in awakening and renewing faith, and most importantly, he became aware of this himself. In both these events, his proclamation of the gospel called for a response from those around him, a response that was directly connected to an event in life, to life itself.

Seen from this perspective, M. Vincent's conversion seems rather like the call of the prophets in the Old Testament, or like the vocation of the apostles in the New Testament. "From now on you will be fishers of people" JESUS said to Simon Peter... "From now on, you will be a missionary, in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, evangeliser of those who are poor..." This is what Vincent heard and progressively understood from January 25th to August 20th 1617. The MISSION of Vincent de Paul, then, was clearly to reawaken and renew people's faith. So how did he carry out this mission?

First of all, we must remember that Vincent de Paul lived in a christian time and a Christian civilization. The problems of unbelief and atheism were almost non-existent. This means that we have to do some serious mental and pastoral gymnastics in order to transpose and translate into today's reality what Vincent experienced and carried out in a world very different from our own.

Two major issues were at play in the Church: the first was Protestantism (the wars of religion had barely ended!) and the second was ignorance among most believers. M. Vincent blamed the priests severely for this ignorance: "Yes, Lord, we are the ones who have provoked your anger: yes, it is the clerics and those who aspire to the ecclesiastical state; it is the sub-deacons and deacons, the priests, we who are priests, who have created this desolation in the Church!"

With regard to Protestantism, let us notice that the pastoral attitude of M. Vincent was clearly more open and more ecumenical than that of many of his contemporaries. (cf. Coste II, 494, VIII, 209 et XI, 28-31) But we do not have time to address this issue today.

In any case, the missionary activities of M. Vincent were addressed for the most part to believers, or more precisely, to baptized and well-disposed people, and that was the case up to the day he sent his missionaries overseas, to North Africa, then to Madagascar. His mission was to awaken and renew faith especially among poor

people, who were baptised but ignorant of the essential truths of their faith. How did Vincent do it? Let us focus on four means, which I will list in no particular order of importance: preaching, catechesis, service and witness.

I. PREACHING

Perhaps this is not the method that interests you the most. In this regard, you are more the beneficiaries...in the process of becoming, I am sure, outstanding church-goers! You understand clearly, however, that it is impossible to talk about Saint Vincent's role in awakening and renewing faith without taking into account his preaching. As you know, it was precisely by means of his preaching that in 1617, Vincent de Paul first manifested his ability to awaken and renew people's faith.

There can be no doubt that Vincent de Paul must have been a very gifted speaker. The success (the word he used himself in *Coste XI*, p. 4) of the interventions in Folleville and Chatillon are proof of it. If you want to have at least some idea of his talent, you can read, and if possible, reread aloud, any given passage from his conferences. For example, we read in *Coste XII*, 612 (1963 ed.): "But what sort of men will they be who will strive to turn us away from those good words we have begun? They will be free-thinkers, free-thinkers, free-thinkers, who ask after nothing but pleasure and amusement; who, provided they have a good dinner, do not trouble their heads about anything else." Or in *Coste XII*, 238-241, which has an echo of La Bruyère, who was popular at the time: "Ah, Good God! There have been persons in the Company who, because they were not set to study after leaving the seminary, as they expected, have murmured, have made such complaints and commotion that it is deplorable. But, Gentlemen, but, my Brothers, have you not come here to do the Will of God and not your own, to obey, not to study? Well, then, you shall study no longer. This child of your intellect keeps you attached; this disorderly affection holds you captive. Go, learn to be free and indifferent. Let this be your lesson. Others have a desire to become priests before the time; others the desire to preach, to engage in controversy, to be employed, to go here and there. Few there are who have not their well-beloved Isaac. But they must give him up. For we must empty our heart of all other love but that of God, and of all other desires but those of obedience." And again, in *Coste XIII b*, 423-424: "Well then, Ladies, compassion and charity have led you to adopt these little creatures as your own children; you have been their mothers according to grace since the time their mothers according to nature abandoned them. See now whether you, too, want to abandon them. Stop being their mothers to be their judges at present; their life and death are in your hands. I'm going to take the vote; it's time to pass sentence on them and to find out whether you are no longer willing to have pity on them. If you continue to take charitable care of them, they will live; if, on the contrary, you abandon them, they will most certainly perish and die; experience does not allow you to doubt that."

In a conference on preaching addressed to the missionaries, we find perhaps the clearest evidence of M. Vincent's own excellent preaching style. (*Coste XI*, 237-260) This is an impassioned conference on several accounts, with extraordinary moments of drama. It is very lengthy, and one amusing detail is that we see M. Vincent battling with the clock at Saint-Lazare, shocked at how quickly time was passing. He had just barely introduced his second point when the clock struck: "What's that? The clock is striking three quarters past the hour. Please bear with me a little longer, Messieurs,

wretch that I am. So then, let's say something on the third point; let's see what means we can use to adopt such a useful method." (Coste XI, 250-251) However, when talking about preaching, he was unstoppable as long as he had some experience to share or very lively stories to tell. So here we see him, in his distinctive way, enumerating and illustrating the means of preaching well, or more precisely, how to preach as a missionary, and from time to time, adding some words of apology and apparent contrition: "Ah, I'm a wretched man who doesn't know how to keep things short; bear with me, Messieurs! Would to God that we might all have one same heart, closely united in observing this divine method!" (Coste XI, 253) And he continued...and he was only at the fourth means when this annoying clock struck once more: "Here's a fourth means, after which I'm going to stop: it's to ask God fervently and often for it; it's a gift of God so we have to ask for it.... Ah, it's striking quarter after! O Sauveur! I've finished, I've finished...." (Coste XI, 256) He had concluded so well that he still continued for five more pages full of advice and recommendations!

We know that Vincent de Paul brought about a revolution in preaching for the Church. In his time, there was either very little preaching (this was the case in the countryside, which explains the ignorance of those poor people) or the sermons were extended works of literature, and more often secular than Christian. In the conference that we have just mentioned, M. Vincent, with irresistible, witty eloquence, ridiculed these ways of preaching: "this preaching *Caeli caelorum!* It goes right over their heads.... All those beautiful, studied speeches ordinarily touch only the inferior part of us. Perhaps they cause fear by shouting in I don't know what kind of a tone; they heat up the blood and stir up desires, but ... everything else soon fades, soon fades, and the preaching remains useless." Then M. Vincent concluded: "So, long live simplicity!" (Coste XI, 259)

This in fact is where he is revolutionary: preaching well and simply, in the way of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, insisting on two points: the Gospel and life. We are to preach only the Gospel and nothing else, doing so as Jesus Christ did: "God is with the simple and humble, He assists them, He blesses their labours, He blesses their undertakings. What! are we to believe that God will help a person who is trying to destroy himself? What! that He will help a man destroy himself, as those do who preach otherwise than humbly and simply, who preach themselves... O my Brothers, O my dear Brothers, if you only know what an evil thing it is to preach otherwise than Our Lord Jesus Christ preached when He was on earth, as the Apostles preached, and as many of God's servants still preach today, you would be horrified!" (Coste XII, 431, 1963 ed.)

Preach the GOSPEL, and certainly not oneself! M. Vincent very harshly reproached those who used sermons as a way of conveying their own ideas. (We would say today: their opinions, their choices.) "So you go into the pulpit, not to preach God but yourselves, and—what a crime this is!—to use something as holy as the word of God to nurture and stir up your own vanity! O Sauveur! *Divin Sauveur!*" (Coste XI, 252)

The Word of God, and nothing but the Word of God! Once again, however, it was important to take care to make a connection between this eternal Word and REAL LIFE, the concrete life of the people. This is what M. Vincent called

“descending into the particular”, meaning to concrete examples and circumstances of life. This is what Vincent did himself at Folleville and Chatillon. When we go through the conferences of Saint Vincent, especially those addressed to the Daughters of Charity (cf. Coste IX and X), this constant concern to connect with real life is obvious. This was certainly the manner in which M. Vincent felt at ease, a way that made his preaching effective and stimulating.

I will not say any more about this means that Saint Vincent used to awaken and renew faith in his day. It seemed appropriate, though, not to overlook it.

2. CATECHESIS

The second special means that Vincent de Paul used was catechesis, a term that has been used until not long ago. He was even more innovative in this domain than in the area of preaching. In his missionary experience, he quickly realised that CATECHISM was a far better means of awakening and renewing faith than preaching. Moreover, in planning parish missions, he increasingly made catechism classes a priority. In his opinion, each day of the mission was to include two times of catechism: brief catechism during the day for the children, and more extensive catechism in the evening for the adults. M. Vincent took the occasion to harshly call the missionaries to task when they cancelled the evening catechism and replaced it with a sermon: “I have been deeply saddened,” he wrote to a priest of the Mission, “by the fact that, instead of giving the regular catechism instruction in the evening, you have given sermons during your mission. This should not be done ... because the people have greater need of this catechetical instruction and derive greater profit from it.” (Coste VI, 400)

Why this obvious preference for catechism over preaching? Certainly because the dialogue form of catechism meant that a greater sense of simplicity was called for and it ensured this.

With catechism, the questions from the listeners and the responses to them would mean that the Missionary, the Daughter of Charity or the layperson would have to continually remain at the level of the ordinary people. To express this concern, M. Vincent had a lovely phrase that he often used: “adapt oneself to the poor people.” And this is how the practice of catechesis was introduced and established in every place where the Missionaries, the Daughters of Charity or the Confraternities went. No one can deny that M. Vincent developed an extraordinary network of catechesis in the Church in his day through this method.

As we know, the teaching of catechesis was one of the major responsibilities of the Daughters of Charity. As early as 1634, when your Company was not yet one year old, M. Vincent wrote to Louise de Marillac: “*Mon Dieu! how I wish your Sisters would make an effort to learn to read and that they might really know the catechism you are teaching!*” (Coste I, 305)

Towards the end of his life, M. Vincent continued to have this concern and conviction even more than ever. To have an idea of this you only have to take a look at the conference of March 16th, 1659: “Now, the means of making you capable of instructing the poor well is to have catechism among yourselves. Therefore, you have

to practise this as far as possible and observe this procedure from now on. So, let one Sister ask the questions and another give the answers, and let that be done in presence of the Superioress; if she's not there, the Sister who presides in her place will inform her of how things went." (Coste X, 502)

Louise de Marillac intervened by suggesting: "*Father, it seems to me that it is necessary... for the senior Sisters to take the trouble to teach the catechism to the Sisters given them.*" to which M. Vincent was in agreement. A Sister explained, however, that in her service, it was very difficult to find time for that. M. Vincent, who always considered the service of poor persons to be the most pressing need, has the following response, which speaks volumes about the importance he saw in catechesis of poor persons and the necessary formation of the Sisters for this catechesis: "*Sister, until now, we haven't; but from now on you'll have to tell those poor persons not to come until the hour you'll give them. In that way you'll have enough time.*" (...to learn to teach catechism!) The SISTER insisted: "Father, it's very difficult to fix a certain hour for them because not only the sick come here but others as well, such as the physician and the person who writes down the names of the poor." And M. Vincent responded: "You see, Sister, Holy Scripture states that well-regulated charity begins with oneself, and the soul must be preferred to the body. Now, the Daughters of Charity must teach poor persons the things necessary for their salvation; therefore, the Sisters themselves have to be instructed first before being able to teach others." (Coste X, 502-503)

When we understand Vincent de Paul and the priority he gave to the urgent needs of poor persons, this response speaks volumes and allows us to more clearly realise the eminent place he gave to catechesis of poor persons in the vocation of the Daughters of Charity.

In reawakening and renewing faith, catechesis clearly ranks ahead of preaching. Among the various catechetical methods, M. Vincent gives a privileged place to what can be called informal or spontaneous catechesis. He recalled M. Vincent to the "I well know, however, what was done at the beginning of the Company," the Missionaries in the conference of November 17th 1656 on the duty of catechising poor people. He continued: "and that it was exact about the practice of letting no opportunity pass to instruct a poor person, which the men did if they saw that the person needed it; priests, seminarians, and our Coadjutor Brothers all did this, as they came and went. If they met some poor person—a boy or some good man—they'd speak to him to see if he knew the Mysteries necessary for salvation; and if they noted that he didn't, they'd teach them to him. I don't know if we're still as careful today to observe this holy practice; I'm talking about the men who go into the rural areas and stay at inns along the way. If that's the case, fine! They should thank God for it and ask Him for perseverance for the same Company; if not—and if there has been any relaxation in this—they should ask for the grace to correct themselves." (Coste XI, 343)

In similar fashion, M. Vincent reminded the Daughters of Charity on numerous occasions of what he called "a good word," which meant speaking about Jesus Christ in a way adapted to the situation on hand. This was Vincent de Paul's preferred way of awakening and renewing faith, because he realised that it caught hold of a person in his or her concrete reality. In this same conference, he called to mind the example of Our Lord in this matter: "He went to sit on that stone that was near the well, and, once

He was there, began to instruct that woman by asking her for some water. ‘Woman, give me some water,’ He said to her.” (Coste XI, 344) And in very concrete terms, as usual, M. Vincent suggested to the Missionaries: “So, he [the Brother] can ask one, then the other, ‘Eh bien! How are your horses getting along? How’s this? How’s that? How are you doing?’ beginning in this way with something similar, and then moving on to our plan. The Brothers in the garden, the shoemaker’s shop, or the tailor’s workshop can do likewise, and the same for the others so that there’ll be no one here in this house who’s not sufficiently instructed in all the things necessary to be saved. Sometimes they can talk with them about how to make a good confession and the conditions for confession, sometimes about some other topic they may find helpful and necessary.” (Coste XI, 344) This means that one begins with real life situations, as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman, in order to reach the point of proclaiming the Word of God.

Let us remember that Vincent de Paul lived in Christian times, and the possibility of encountering an atheist was highly unlikely. In reading some of the recommendations of M. Vincent and studying his methods of evangelisation, we could be tempted to think from today’s perspective that his way was a bit hasty, perhaps even a bit exaggerated with regard to the dignity of the human person and freedom of conscience. It’s true that it could appear that way, but when I venture into our world today, I wonder if this respect for the person or freedom of conscience that we talk about is not often used as a pretence, a smoke screen that we easily use to hide our timidity and a certain faintheartedness. With all respect to freedom of conscience, and taking into account the fact that we are overrun and surrounded by unbelief and atheism, I believe that our most insidious and habitual sin today, in terms of awakening and renewing faith, is timidity and lack of courage. Even if it seems to be a bit anachronistic to us, it would be very interesting for us today to read and meditate on all that M. Vincent said about “the good word.” This way of proclaiming the Gospel can be introduced naturally into a conversation or a meeting, in the way that Jesus Christ approached the Samaritan woman...

3. THE SERVICE OF POOR PERSONS

This third means is without a doubt more important than either preaching or catechesis! In fact, one aspect of Vincent de Paul’s spirituality and action that is not emphasised enough is that he considered service to be the most excellent form of evangelisation, a privileged means of awakening and renewing faith. I will present this topic using two fundamental texts.

The first is addressed to the priests and brothers of the Congregation of the Mission. In order to really understand how revolutionary this approach was, it is important to recall the notion of priesthood held by the most renowned spiritual masters of the time. According to them, the priest had to be a specialist in spiritual matters, a man of God concerned only with salvation. Here, however, is what M. Vincent said to his priests on December 6th 1658: “...if there are any among us who think they are in the Congregation of the Mission to preach the Gospel to the poor but not to comfort them, to supply their spiritual but not their temporal wants, I reply that we ought to assist them have them assisted in every way, by ourselves and by others, if we wish to hear those consoling words of the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead : ‘Come, beloved of my Father ; possess the kingdom that has been prepared for

you, because I was hungry, and you gave me to eat ; I was naked and you clothed me, sick, and you visited me.’ To do this is to preach the Gospel by words and by works, it is to do so most perfectly and it is also what Our Lord did, and what those who represent Him on earth, in office and in character, such as priests, should do.” (Coste XII, 608, 1963 ed.) For Vincent de Paul, a priest who confined himself to the spiritual, and who considered himself only slightly or not at all concerned with the temporal realities experienced by poor persons, had no place in the Congregation of the Mission.

The second text seems to me to be even more forceful and more demanding. It, too, is addressed to the Missionaries: “...the Son of God might be asked: ‘Why have you come upon earth ? To evangelise the poor. That is the order of your Father; why then do you form priests? Why do you give them power to consecrate, to bind and to loose, etc.?’ It may be said that, by coming to evangelise the poor, we do not mean to come merely for their salvation, but also for accomplishing the predictions of the prophets and the figures of the Old law and for the purpose of giving effect to the Gospel.” (Coste XII, 605, 1963 ed.) For M. Vincent, accomplishing what was predicted and prefigured in the foundational text of Isaiah, meant proclaiming deliverance to captives, and giving freedom to the oppressed. For him, an evangelisation that went no further than a verbal proclamation of the Word of God was trickery. Evangelisation has to go as far as to put the gospel into practice and to be committed to giving poor and oppressed persons the place in society that the gospel gives them. With this idea of evangelisation, we can see that direct and concrete service of poor persons was for M. Vincent a privileged way of proclaiming the gospel and awakening and renewing faith.

We find this conviction very clearly expressed in both the regulations of the first Confraternities of Charity (Coste XIII b, 1-107) and the conferences to the Daughters of Charity (Coste, volumes IX-X). Serving sick people and poor persons in general was for M. Vincent a form of preaching. Poor persons were preached to through the welcome and care they received, and so were those who saw “the care that you take of them.” We should keep this in mind when we read and meditate on the ritual established by M. Vincent for going to serve a sick person. (Coste XIII b, 14)

It is easy to understand that Vincent, knowing the practices and the lifestyle of the poor people of his day, wanted to make the service of the poor a challenge and a way of promoting the welfare of poor persons. This is a key to reading what I am suggesting to you. It is something to reflect on as you read what Saint Vincent had to say about the way a Daughter of Charity should act in the service of poor persons. You will certainly notice the tiny details that will become ever more meaningful. It is clear that through respectful and attentive service of poor persons, Vincent de Paul wanted to awaken their faith and that of those around them. He wanted to reveal how Jesus Christ is present in this poor person: “... in serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ. How true, Sisters! You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as we are here.” (Coste IX, 199)

4. TESTIMONY

The service of poor persons about which we have just spoken is certainly a form of witness. I would like to speak now about personal testimony, the personal way we live out our faith.

One day when M. Vincent was speaking to the Daughters of Charity about modesty, he illustrated what he was saying by the example of Saint Francis of Assisi: “One day Saint Francis took a Brother with him and said, ‘Brother, let’s go and preach.’ When they had gone through the town and were on their way home, the Brother said to him, ‘Father, you said you were going to preach, and yet you haven’t done it.’ ‘Eh quoi! Brother, wasn’t going modestly through the town a form of preaching? It was a silent sermon.’ You can’t imagine how many people—even men—have told me, on seeing you go through the streets, ‘Monsieur, you have Sisters who edify me more by their modesty than a sermon would do; they preach without saying a word.’” (Coste X, 305)

In this instance he was speaking about modesty, but in a general way we can say that Saint Vincent, in comparison with other founders and spiritual masters, was distinctive in that he proposed an extraverted perfection. (Excuse me for using this barbaric term borrowed from modern psychology.) Extraverted, in the sense of focused on others. I’m sure that you have read spiritual books dealing with perfection. What stands out in my memory is a four-volume treatise on perfection, the work of a certain Rodriguez, which caused more boredom and despair than delight for the novices of my day (1940). It was entitled “On Christian Perfection” and we had to summarise these four indigestible volumes! My spiritual stomach remembers it to this day. An introverted perfection was presented here, focused interiorly, on ourselves. It was a perfection that simply involved God and the individual. And we have to admit that many of the major currents of spirituality in the Church are to some extent marked by this trend.

Here again, Vincent de Paul had original and quite revolutionary ideas. He recommended a form of spirituality or rather a perfection that was open to the world and more specifically, the world of poor persons. To the priests of the Mission, he proposed a missionary perfection; to the Daughters of Charity, he proposed perfection as servants. In both cases, this perfection was a sort of professional conscience.

This is why for the Daughters of Charity, he chose from among the evangelical maxims, the three virtues of simplicity, humility and charity. He chose these, he said, because he considered them to be the professional virtues of a servant of those who are poor.

It is appropriate here to refer to the three conferences from February 1653 on the spirit of the Company of the Daughters of Charity. (Coste IX, 456-478) It is interesting to study them, for they demonstrate that this was the moment that Vincent de Paul determined the three characteristic virtues of the Daughters of Charity. We can follow, almost step by step, his process of selecting them. He looked at the Community; he reflected and finally, little by little, he chose these particular virtues. The reasons for his choice are eloquent. If you take the time to analyse these texts, you will understand that Saint Vincent proposed an “extraverted” perfection for you, one in direct relationship to service, completed focused on poor persons and on Jesus Christ present in those who are poor. In this way, the most personal aspects of your

life, your search for God, your intimate relationship with Jesus Christ will become a testimony and you will have access to perhaps the most effective means of awakening and renewing faith.

This was Saint Vincent's plan for his time, for the Daughters of Charity and for poor persons of his day. It is up to you to see if these ideas still have value. It is up to you to decide HOW TO TRANSLATE the insights of Saint Vincent into the concrete realities of your life and in the situations in which you find yourselves.

Father Jean Morin, CM

SOURCES AND UPDATES

Letter from Saint Bernadette to a Daughter of Charity

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes, we are publishing a document from the Archives of the Provincial House of the Daughters of Charity in the Province of Naples: a letter from Bernadette Soubirous to a Daughter of Charity, Sister Constance de Paneboeuf.

This letter was written on ordinary sized white paper (13.5 cm x 21 cm) and dated 18th December 1865, Lourdes. Yellow with age, it has all “the characteristics of irrefutable authenticity.” The style is that of Bernadette, with some spelling corrections made by a Sister. The name of the person to whom the letter was addressed does not appear on the letter but it would have certainly appeared on the envelope that has since been lost. How can we go back to this person who was Sister Paneboeuf? In the Archives, the following is recorded: “On March 15th 1906, Sister Constance, Aglaé, Marie de Paneboeuf, died at Naples, at the age of 79.”

In the 30th edition of the book entitled *Bernadette* (Paris, Lethellieux, 1933), Father André Ravier, SJ, mentions this letter and makes a connection with Sister Constance, Daughter of Charity, who taught Bernadette while she was living at Tarbes (from May 1856 to June 1857). In fact, Sister Constance was the teacher for a class of young girls at the school in Tarbes during this period. Father Ravier confirmed that this letter had reached Sister Constance.

WHO IS SISTER CONSTANCE?

At l'Isle en Jourdain

Born on October 6th 1827 at l'Isle en Jourdain (France), Constance had a happy childhood in an aristocratic family. Her father was the Marquis of

Paneboeuf. When she was 20 years old she expressed her intention to enter the Daughter of Charity. Her father, wanting to hear nothing of the matter, refused her request and disinherited her. This young woman resolutely entered the Company.

Montpellier

At the end of her Seminary, Sister Constance was sent to take care of orphans at the hospital in Montpellier. She showed extraordinary availability and accepted any task given to her. During the Crimean War (1854-1856), cholera broke out and Sister Constance was sent to the mobile field hospitals where she worked with her Sisters in caring for the wounded on the battlefields. Wounded soldiers piled one on top of another died hour after hour, victims of infections and injuries sustained in battle. Sister Constance guided countless numbers of wounded soldiers to conversion, according to the testimony of a young officer confided to her care. When the war was over, he left the army, joined the Franciscans and later was made a bishop. He always remembered “his spiritual mother,” as he liked to call her, and wrote to her from time to time.

Tarbes (1856-1860): meeting Bernadette

From 1856 to 1860, Sister Constance was a teacher at Tarbes. Here, she had the opportunity to help Bernadette, who was living with her aunt in the city and working in her inn as the Soubirous family was very poor. After this relatively short period of time together, Sister Constance and Bernadette continued to maintain contact and exchanged correspondence for several years. Sister Constance never forgot Bernadette, so much so that at the time of her death, she continued to expect a visit from her, saying: “I won’t die yet, because Bernadette has not yet come to visit me.”

The mission of Sister Constance after Tarbes (1860)

In Portugal

Sister Constance was sent to Lisbon to the Community of Daughters of Charity working with Queen Elizabeth in the service of persons who were poor. Three years later, the queen was exiled and the Sisters were expelled.

In Italy

In 1866, Sister Constance arrived in **Naples** to serve those who had contracted cholera. She fell ill and miraculously escaped death thanks to the Miraculous Medal.

At this time, the “**Refuge of the Poor**” house was in a desperate situation: they needed a Sister to care for the orphans. Not finding a Sister, the Royal Superintendent confided the direction of the orphanage to a lay person who was not able to cope with this difficult situation. This led to a revolt. The Daughters of Charity in Trinity Hospital, among them Sister Constance, were called on to intervene. After cleaning and disinfecting the premises, and with the moral influence of the Sisters, the uprising was quelled. Sister Constance would remain in this “Refuge of the Poor” house for 10 years. Despite experiencing many difficult circumstances, she always maintained her serenity and good humour.

Afterwards, she was sent to the hospital in **Caltagirone**. In this city, she started the work known as "Tapinelle". Here she took in young girls who were living on the streets, provided them with food, clothing and formation with a view to finding them employment, and introduced them to the Christian faith. Having inherited land from her family, she had a house built there to take in these young women. This was the beginning of a service which continued for many years. She was also able to acquire significant aid for the hospital in Caltagirone that was experiencing difficulties.

In 1888, Sister Constance was named **Sister Servant of the "Refuge of the Poor" in Naples**, where everyone had fond memories of her. She was so hardworking and humble that no one had any idea of her aristocratic origins. Her final years were difficult ones. After much suffering, she died in 1906. Over 700 persons attended her funeral, among them many poor people and children who wanted to pay tribute to this good daughter of Saint Vincent.

Teresa Tortoriello

Extract from " Informazione Vincenziana "

Below is a faithful transcription of the letter from Bernadette to Sister Constance (translated)

My dear Sister,

Please forgive me for not replying sooner to your loving letter. It has been so cold here that I have been confined to bed with a bad cold. I began to feel better yesterday, and it is with much joy that I dedicate my first free moments to you. The brief time that I spent with you will never fade from my memory. In recalling these memories, I am happily reminded of a person for whom I have a special affection. Please believe me when I say I will never forget you.

As for the help of my prayers, you can be sure that this will not be lacking, but alas, my prayers are quite weak. In return, allow me to ask you for a small intention in your own, for I am in great need of it.

Together with the entire Community, I am making the novena for the person about whom you are concerned. We will continue to remember this person in our prayers, as it is so important that Our Lady of Lourdes obtain for us at any cost what you are asking. The chapel at the grotto is making good progress and the crypt is almost finished. The first Mass will be said there in the near future, and I promise to think of you when I have the happiness of attending it. Until then, I await that joyous day.

Respectfully yours,

Bernadette Soubirous

Lourdes, 18th December 1865

Index 2008

SPIRITUAL LIFE

• SUPERIORS GENERAL

Father Gregory Gay

Letters

- Lent 2008..... January-February 23
- Letter of March 14th 2008..... March-April 85
- Special 100th anniversary of the Miraculous Medal Association:
 “100 years of journeying with Mary, through the
 Miraculous Medal, united with Jesus in persons who are poor
 Father Gregory Gay, Superior General May-June 183
- Letter of July 18th 2008: To all members of the
 Vincentian family July-August 283
- Advent 2008..... November-December XXX

Sister Evelyne Franc

Letters

- Letter of 1st January 2008..... January-February 5
- Letter of 2nd February 2008..... January-February 9
- Family News: Letter of March 14th 2008 March-April 86
- Family News: Letter of May 10th 2008..... May-June 181
- Letter of 15th August 2008..... July-August 271
- Intervention at the Synod of Bishops in Rome, October 2008..... November-December XXX
- Family News: Letter of 7th November 2008 November-December XXX

Visits

- Province of Central Africa, July 28th 2007
 The Sisters of the Province..... March-April 134
- Province of Ireland, March 14th 2008
 Sister Rosaleen MacMahon, DC and Sister Elma Hurley, DC..... May-June 230
- Province of Bolivia, February 12th 2008
 Sister Andrea Emcerita Medina, DC..... July-August 324
- Province of Eritrea, July 26th 2008
 The Sisters of the Province September-October 344
- Visit to Tanzania, 16th August 2008
 Sisters of Masanga..... November-December XXX

Father Javier Alvarez

Conferences

- “The other shore”..... January-February 29
- Reflections prior to the coming Provincial Assemblies..... March-April 104
- “The reason for the hope you all have” (1.P. 3:15)..... July-August 275
- Authority-Service..... September-October 309

Guidelines for the Monthly Retreat

- “He is risen, He is not here.” (Mk. 16:6)..... January-February 39
- “Serve the Lord with gladness”.....November-December XXX

• WRITINGS

- Forming a servant of the poor to be prophetic
 Sister Julma Neo, General Councillor March-April 104
- Mary, “Prophet of a Loving God: Source of strength
 and hope for the poor”

Sister Anne Prevost, Daughter of Charity.....	May-June	186
• Special 150 th anniversary of the Apparitions at Lourdes: “A window on the other world”		
Fr Andre Doze (Extrait from the Minutes of the Jubilee Colloquium, 2008) ..	May-June	191
• The Eucharist at the school of Mary		
Fr. Guillaume de Menthiere, Prof. of Mariology & Patristic Studies.....	July-August	287
• The authority of the Church, authority in the Church		
Bishop Jerome Beau, auxiliary Bishop of Paris	September-October	320
• Homily given by Pope Benedict XVI during the Mass for the sick celebrated on the Rosary Esplanade at Lourdes (15 th September 2008).....	September-October	329
• Homily for the Eucharistic Celebration of 27 th November 2008 at the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal		
Bishop Jean-Michel Di Falco, Bishop of Gap and Embrun	November-December	XXX

TODAY’S CHALLENGES:

• Some reference points for discernment: “From one model of modernity to another”		
Father Joseph-Marie Verlinde, Monastic Brotherhood of the Family of St. Joseph.....	March-April	116
• Guidelines for discernment: “Origins of neo-pagan revelations”		
Father Joseph-Marie Verlinde, Monastic Brotherhood of the Family of St. Joseph	May-June	204
• Introduction	July-August	313
• “Serving with creativity and compassion people who are in prison.”		
Province of Los Altos Hills (California)		
Sister Christina Maggi, Daughter of Charity	July-August	314
• The International Committee of the Daughters of Charity on “human trafficking” Albany Province		
Sisters Donna M Franklin DC and Joanne Dress, DC.....	July-August	320
• “Working with migrants’ families in their homeland”		
Philippines Province		
Sisters Maria Teresa Mueda DC and Teresita Laguna, DC.....	September-October	334
• How the Daughters of Charity view their mission at the Centre for patients suffering from AIDS at Mai-Hoa Province of Vietnam		
Sister Tue Linh, Daughter of Charity	September-October	340
• Mission in Kazakhstan: “Ministry of presence”		
Province of Chelmno (Poland)		
The Sisters on mission in Kazakhstan	November-December	XXX
• Mission in Balta, Ukraine		
Province of Crakow (Poland)		
The Sisters on mission in Balta	November-December	XXX

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCES

• DESIGNATION OF VISITATRICES AND NOMINATION OF DIRECTORS

Visitatrices

• Ethiopia	May-June	227
• Madagascar	May-June	227
• Chile	May-June	227
• Great Britain	May-June	227
• Albany (USA).....	May-June	227
• Los Altos Hills (USA).....	May-June	227
• Mozambique	November-December	XXX
• Santo Domingo	November-December	XXX
• Slovenia	November-December	XXX
• Congo-Congo	November-December	XXX
• Near East	November-December	XXX
• Sienna	November-December	XXX
• Granada	November-December	XXX
• Indonesia	November-December	XXX

Directors

• Barcelona	May-June	228
• Chile	May-June	228
• Eritrea	May-June	228
• Haiti	May-June	228
• Emmitsburg (USA).....	May-June	228
• Central Africa	May-June	228
• Recife	May-June	228
• Slovenia	May-June	228
• Portugal	May-June	228
• Thailand	May-June	228
• Puerto Rico	May-June	228
• Slovakia	May-June	228
• Hungary	May-June	228
• Fortaleza	November-December	XXX
• Ethiopia	November-December	XXX
• Rio de Janeiro	November-December	XXX
• Belo Horizonte	November-December	XXX
• Central America	November-December	XXX
• Cali	November-December	XXX
• Congo-Congo	November-December	XXX
• Haiti	November-December	XXX
• Mozambique	November-December	XXX

• VISITS BY SUPERIORS

• Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor: Visit to the Province of Central Africa, July 28 th 2007 The Sisters of the Province.....	March-April	134
• Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General: Visit to the Province of Ireland, March 14 th 2008 Sister Rosaleen MacMahon DC and Sister Elma Hurley DC.....	May-June	230
• Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councillor: Visit to the Province of Bolivia, February 12 th 2008 Sister Andrea Emcerita Medina, DC.....	July-August	324
• Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor: Visit to the Province of Eritrea, July 26 th 2008 The Sisters of the Province.....	September-October	344
• Sister Evelyn Franc, Superioress General and Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor: Visit to Tanzania, August 16 th 2008 The Sisters of Masanga	November-December	XXX

• BEATIFICATIONS**SISTER LINDALVA JUSTO DE OLIVEIRA, BEATIFIED DECEMBER 2, 2007**

• Province of Recife: Homily for the celebration of the beatification of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira Cardinal Gerlando Majella Agnelo, Archbishop of Salvador.....	January-February	44
• Beatification at Salvador de Bahia: An extraordinary experience... a sacred moment... a sacred place... God was there! The Sisters of the General Council	January-February	47

SISTER GIUSEPPINA NICOLI, BEATIFIED FEBRUARY 3, 2008

• Province of Sardinia: Who is Sister Nicoli?	January-February	51
• Province of Sardinia: Celebrations marking the beatification of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli, Cagliari, February 3 rd 2008 <i>"I want to belong completely to God."</i> Sister Maria Ida Cislachi, DC (Province of Turin).....	January-February	54

SISTER MARTA WIECKA, BEATIFIED MAY 24, 2008

• Province of Cracow: Sister Marta Wiecka Beatified on May 24 th 2008 at Lvov in Ukraine The Sisters of the Province	March-April	139
---	-------------	-----

• **LIFE OF THE PROVINCES**

AFRICA

Central Africa

- Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and Sister Wivine Kisu, General Councillor
Visit to the Province of Central Africa, July 28 – August 5, 2007
- The Sisters of the Province..... March-April 134
- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228

Congo-Congo

- Designation of the Visitatrice..... November-December XXX
- Nomination of Provincial Director November-December XXX

Eritrea

- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228
- Visit of Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and Sister Wivine Kisu,
General Councillor, July 26th 2008
- The Sisters of the Province..... September-October 344

Ethiopia

- Re-designation of the Visitatrice for three years May-June 227
- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years..... November-December XXX

Madagascar

- Re-designation of the Visitatrice for three years.....May-June 227

Mozambique

- Gathering of the Provincial Councils of the African Continent
- Sister Elsa Fatima Uassiquete, Echoes correspondent..... January-February 59
- Designation of the Visitatrice..... November-December XXX
- Nomination of Provincial Director November-December XXX

Mission in Tanzania

- Visit of Sister Evelyn Franc, Superioress General and Sister Wivine Kisu,
General Councillor, August 16th 2008
- The Sisters of Masanga November-December XXX

NORTH AMERICA

Albany, New York

- Designation of the Visitatrice..... May-June 227
- The International Committee of the Daughters of Charity on “human trafficking”
Sisters Donna M Franklin DC and Joanne Dress DC July-August 320

Emmitsburg

- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228

Los Altos Hills

- Designation of the Visitatrice..... May-June 227
- “Serving with creativity and compassion people who are in prison.”
Sister Christina Maggi, Daughter of Charity July-August 314

LATIN AMERICA

Central America

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years..... November-December XXX

Bolivia

- Visit of Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and
Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councillor, February 12th 2008
- Sister Andrea Emcerita Medina, DC..... July-August 324

Brazil**Amazonia**

- 5th Interprovincial Gathering for Vincentian Vocation Ministry
Srs Anagilsa Sampaio Bentes, Cecília Sa Miranda,
Maria Rejiane de Mata Dias, DC May-June 234

Belo Horizonte

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years..... November-December XXX

Fortaleza

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years..... November-December XXX

Recife

- Homily for the celebration of the beatification
of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira, December 2nd 2007
Cardinal Gerlando Majella Agnelo, Archbishop of Salvador..... January-February 44
- Beatification at Salvador de Bahia: An extraordinary experience...
a sacred moment...a sacred place...God was there!
The Sisters of the General Council January-February 47
- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228

Rio de Janeiro

- Nomination of Provincial Director November-December XXX

Chile

- Designation of the Visitatrice..... May-June 227
- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228

Colombia**Cali**

- Formation sessions for parents of handicapped children
to help them become “co-therapists”
Sister Lucia Gomez Oviedo, correspondent for the Echoes..... May-June 237
- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years..... November-December XXX

Haiti

- Nomination of Provincial Director for one year May-June 228
- Nomination of Provincial Director November-December XXX

Peru

- After the earthquake, love and hope spring up again
Sister Marina Melendez, Visitatrice of Peru January-February 61
- 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Vincentian charism in Peru
Sister Mery Sajinez Bautista, Daughter of Charity March-April 145

Puerto Rico

- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228

Santo Domingo

- Designation of the Visitatrice..... November-December XXX

Venezuela

- A star is born! (Newsbriefs) November-December XXX

ASIA**North India**

- “Empowering ethnic young women”
Sister Rosalie Palayoor, DC July-August 328

Philippines

- Philippines Province: Working with migrants’ families in their homeland
Sisters Maria Teresa Mueda DC and Teresita Laguna DC September-October 334

Near East

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years..... November-December XXX

Thailand

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director May-June 2

Vietnam

- How the Daughters of Charity view their mission at the Centre for patients suffering from AIDS at Mai-Hoa
Sister Tue Linh, DC September-October 340

EUROPE**Spain***Barcelona*

- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228

Granada

- Re-designation of the Visitatrice for three years November-December XXX

San Sebastian

- Mission in Chad - Collaborating with our Protestant brothers and sisters
The Bebalem community September-October 349

Great Britain

- Designation of the Visitatrice..... May-June 227

Hungary

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years..... May-June 228

Ireland

- Opening of Seminary in Kenya
Sister Catherine Madigan, Daughter of Charity March-April 142
- Visit of Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General and
Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General, March 14th 2008
Sister Rosaleen MacMahon and Sister Elma Hurley..... May-June 230

Italy*Sardinia*

- Province of Sardinia: Beatification of Sister Giuseppina Nicoli
Who is Sister Nicoli? January-February 51
- Province of Sardinia: Celebrations marking the beatification of
Sister Giuseppina Nicoli, "I want to belong completely to God."
Sister Maria Ida Cislachi, Daughter of Charity (Province of Turin).... January-February 54

Sienna

- A "Palio" to honour the 150 years presence of the
Daughters of Charity in Sienna
Sisters of the Province September-October 357
- Re-designation of the Visitatrice for three years November-December XXX

Poland*Chelmno*

- Mission in Kazakhstan: "Ministry of presence"
The Sisters on mission in Kazakhstan November-December XXX

Cracow

- Province of Cracow: Sister Marta Wiecka
Beatified on May 24th 2008 at Lvov in Ukraine March-April 139
- Mission in Balta, Ukraine
The Sisters on mission in Balta November-December XXX

Warsaw

- The happiness of serving children with learning disability
The Lbiska community September-October 351

Portugal

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director for three years May-June 228

Quasi-Province

- Motherhouse, Paris: Meeting of newly appointed Provincial Directors (Paris, March 26th -April 2nd, 2008)
Fr. Ferdinand Macias Fernandez, Provincial Director in Chile..... July-August 332
- The power of love: “My faith saved me”
Extract from the publication “Pilgrim” no 6554 July-August 339
- Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to France
Sister Marie, Daughter of Charity September-October 353
- My meeting with Benedict XVI
Liliane September-October 359

Slovakia

- Nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228

Slovenia

- Re-nomination of Provincial Director May-June 228
- Designation of the Visitatrice..... November-December XXX

Switzerland-Turkey

- Health for all, respect for all
Sisters of the Provincial House January-February 63
- 30th European Youth Encounter at Geneva animated by the Taizé Community: “The Pilgrimage of Trust”
Sister Catherine and Sister Emmanuelle, Daughters of Charity March-April 149
- A Precious Sacrifice
Extract from publication: “Presence” (Catholic Church in Turkey)..... May-June 241

NEWS BRIEFS

- Sister Evelyne Franc, Auditrice at the XIIth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome (October 5th- 26th 2008) September-October 361
- A star is born! (Province of Venezuela) September-October 362
- 61st Annual DPI/NGO conference to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights September-October 376

HISTORY OF THE COMPANY**Special centenary of the birth of Mother Guillemin**

Mother Suzanne Guillemin, 1906-1968, Daughter of God, Daughter of the Church, Superioress General of the Company

- Part VII: Continuation of the post-Conciliar period
Sister Claire Herrmann, Archives Service January-February 65
- Part VIII: Continuation of the post-Conciliar period:
“Mother Guillemin in the service of the Church”
Sister Claire Herrmann, Archives Service..... March-April 154
- Part IX: Mother Guillemin, from words to actions
Sister Claire Herrmann, Archives Service May-June 244

In St. Vincent’s days.....and in our own times

- Introduction July-August 342
- Vincent de Paul and the Holy Spirit
I. Holy Spirit, who are you?
Father Jean Morin, CM..... July-August 343
- II Holy Spirit, what are you doing?
Father Jean Morin, CM..... September-October •363
- The faith of Saint Vincent
I – Saint Vincent, a believer
II – Saint Vincent, someone who reawakened and renewed faith
Father Jean Morin, CM..... November-December XXX

THE FAITH OF SAINT VINCENT

I Saint Vincent, a believer

1. Christ
- 2 The Gospel
3. The Church
4. Events

II. Saint Vincent, someone who awakened and animated people's faith.

1. Preaching
2. Catechesis
- 3 Service of the poor
4. Witness