

*E*choes *of the Company*



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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ELECTION OF POPE FRANCIS

March 13, 2013 Election of Pope Francis



*Life of the
Church*

Elected on April 19, 2005, as successor to John Paul II, Benedict XVI announced on February 11, 2013, that he was resigning from office and that this would take effect on February 28. From then on, he would become, in an entirely unique way, “His Holiness Benedict XVI, Bishop Emeritus of Rome”.

Pope Francis succeeded him on March 13, 2013.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, born on December 17, 1936, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is the first Pope to come from the Company of Jesus (Jesuits).

He is the first Pope to take the name Francis, a name he chose in memory of Saint Francis of Assisi’s commitment to the struggle against poverty and work for peace.

Words of Pope Francis before his first Angelus at Saint Peter’s Square.

*“Feeling mercy, this word changes everything. This is
the best thing we can ever feel: it changes the world.”*

Election of Pope Francis

On this Fifth Sunday of Lent, the Gospel presents to us the episode of the adulterous woman (cf. Jn 8:1-11), whom Jesus saves from being condemned to death. Jesus' attitude is striking: we do not hear words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversion. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (v. 11). God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience he has with each one of us? That is his mercy. He always has patience, patience with us, he understands us, he waits for us, he does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to him with a contrite heart.

... Feeling mercy, this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient... Let us remember the Prophet Isaiah who says that even if our sins were scarlet, God's love would make them white as snow. This mercy is beautiful!

Let us not forget this word: God never ever tires of forgiving us! We, we grow weary of asking for forgiveness, but He never tires of forgiving. He is the loving Father who always pardons, who has that heart of mercy for us all. And let us too learn to be merciful to everyone. Let us invoke the intercession of Our Lady who held in her arms the Mercy of God made man.

Rome, March 17, 2013

Conference in preparation for the Renovation
Paris, April 6-7, 2013

“Interior and Exterior Renovation”

On a visit to the Superior General, I traveled to Rome and visited the four great Basilicas: Saint Peter, Saint John Lateran, Saint Paul Outside the Walls and Saint Mary Major. It gave me an opportunity to reflect upon our faith and our need to be deepened in it. On my journey, I made the intention of praying for you as Daughters of Charity and for me as your Director. I asked the Lord that we might be faithful to the ministries which God has given us.

As I entered St. Peter's Basilica, just as I had done many times when I lived in Rome, I was immediately drawn to that first chapel on the right which contains the Pietà—Michelangelo's indescribably beautiful presentation of Mary with the dead body of Jesus in her lap. Once one looks seriously at this statue, it is difficult to look away. For me, it projects an image of absolute stillness and silence. It invites me to meditation. The seemingly spotless white marble offers no distractions of color, and the genius involved in the falling of the garments and the body is gentle and still and so smooth. Inevitably, I find myself drawn to the face of Mary. It is a comparatively small part of a large work, but I can hardly look away from her.



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The face of Mary draws me in. I am sure that different people see different things about her and will offer various opinions about what they perceive. I wonder how much of this is colored by our own thoughts and experiences of the moment.

As we look at Mary at this extraordinary event in her life, one could speak of the sadness and the grief which must fill her heart at this instant. Others might grasp a sense of helplessness and powerlessness in her. Some might feel her awareness of being alone now—her only son is dead and she has no one else upon whom she can totally rely. All of these perceptions undoubtedly capture a part of what can be conveyed by her portrayal. For me, I confess that my awareness is one of complete interiority. As I look at this face captured in marble, I wonder how much Mary has totally entered into her deepest self. We read so often in the Scriptures how Mary took in experiences and pondered them in her heart. I wonder how much that dynamic is present at this moment. I wonder how much we can find the literal sense of our motto in this image: “the love of Christ crucified . . . urges us.” The statue certainly holds out for us the image of Christ crucified which is held by one who loved him more than any other. To what are Mary’s thoughts driven?

We can probably run through the instances of Mary mentioned in the Scriptures rapidly in our minds: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth of Jesus, the Presentation, the Finding Jesus in the temple, the Wedding Feast at Cana, and so on. There are certainly hundreds of encounters of which we know nothing. Mary was Jesus’ mother. The bond which united them is one which we can only imagine through a reflection on our own family. I wonder if Mary has allowed her mind and heart to return to that first moment when Jesus came into her life with the Annunciation, her saying “yes” to God, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. With that first “yes,” Mary had agreed to all the other events of their life together, and that included this moment in the shadow of the cross: “*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.*” It is true: the surrender to God’s will in her life at the moment of conception led to this moment of death; her complete acceptance of God’s plan for her has not been lessened. Even now, she must accept the reality of the moment as what God asks of her. She knows that.

I wonder to what extent the Pietà allows me to enter into her mind. Is this a moment of profound prayer for her? Is she telling God with the same fervor as her first commitment that she accepts even the death of her son as part of the divine request? Is this the time when she needs to discover again the movement of the Holy Spirit and the impulse towards hope? When she had told the angel Gabriel of her confusion regarding how she could be the mother of Jesus as a virgin, the angel had told her that nothing is impossible with God. And she believed him. Is she thinking that this is another moment when she does not understand what is going to happen, but she hears again the promise of the angel who tells her that nothing is impossible with God? Could we think of this as a moment of “renovation” in her life?

I have intended to give you some idea of the thoughts which flowed through my head on that day when I stood before the Pietà and considered what this beautiful work of art said to my heart about Mary. I would also like to tell you what it might say to us on this day when we reflect upon the renovation of our vows. But first, let me walk away from this beautiful work with you, toward another statue, that of Saint Vincent.

As most of us know, on the second pillar of St. Peter’s, on the right hand side, only thirty meters from the Pietà, is the statue of St. Vincent which was carved by Pietro Bracci.

It is not of the same magnitude of genius as that of Michelangelo, but it is substantial nonetheless.



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Attentively considering this statue of Vincent after spending so much time thinking about the Pietà, I found the contrast stimulating and suggestive. This statue is larger than life, which is in keeping with the dynamism of Vincent at this moment (while the Pietà is life size and thus seems most in keeping with the human drama). It is made of a darker grey stone which is coarser than the sleek marble of Michelangelo's work. I am sure that a real artist could point out a thousand technical differences between the two, but the major one for me was the energy and movement in the statue of St. Vincent. While Mary offers an image of stillness, Vincent is completely in motion. Imagine it: Vincent is presented as stepping forward with his right hand abruptly raised in making a gesture which is so forceful that his whole body is involved in the action. His index finger is extended as if to make a point or perhaps point towards heaven. In his left hand is a large crucifix which seems to rest against his hip. Vincent is looking out and holds his community in his gaze. One can imagine the audacious words which would emerge from his mouth. The force and energy of these words is suggested by the movement of his clothes and vestments. Everything is in motion; nothing remains calmly in place. Look at his stole, his cassock, his surplice—everything shifts as he surges forward! I am not drawn to his face so much as to the power in his entire body. The statue presents Vincent as someone in action: someone who has something to say and do; someone who is not shy in his proclamation. This statue, in contrast to the Pietà, is completely outward directed. He is stepping into our life. One can recognize at Vincent's feet an open text. From the ground level, one could hardly tell what is written on the page. For the Vincentian Family, however, just the few letters which are visible tell us that it is the motto of the Congregation of the Mission: "*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*"—"He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the Poor." The crucifix in Vincent's hands once again draws our attention to the crucified Christ, but in this statue, he is the Christ proclaimed and lived; he is the Christ who has been raised from the dead and who summons to discipleship. I asked myself if we could name this statue "*the love of Christ crucified urges us.*" But now, this love emphasizes the urge to speak and to act.

As much as the Pietà suggests contemplation and the inward journey, the statue of St. Vincent suggests proclamation and the outward journey

into dynamic service. For me, on this first day of my pilgrimage, the two works of art offered a reflection which I could not ignore. For the rest of my afternoon, I stayed around St. Peter's and prayed about where the Lord was leading me with you. I could not help but reflect that this pilgrimage and these images brought together three elements: first of all, a meditation on renovation and what it suggests as an interior and an exterior commitment; secondly, I thought about gathering with you here in these days; and thirdly, I began to explore the teachings in our *Instructions on the Vows*.

Thus, you are probably not wondering why I am sharing this pilgrim experience with you on this day as you reflect on your willingness to renew your vows. I made my pilgrimage with you in mind, and with my service to you. I wanted to ponder my own faith, but particularly how I could share it with you and aid you in growing in your faith. At each of my stops, I prayed for you and our life together. This first stop made me think particularly of the vows which you make. Let me offer some brief thoughts on these promises on this day of prayer and reflection. My hope is that the image of Mary with her inward journey and that of Vincent with his journey outward may be useful for your meditation as you discover the ways in which the vows become an expression of your deepest self and the commitment of your entire self.

POVERTY:

Poverty is an expression of your mind: when you realize what you need and no more; when you are satisfied with whatever goods that you have and are willing to share what you do not need with others; when you are prepared to place your time, gifts, and effort at the service of those in need. Our *Instructions on the Vows* offers direction:

"In the spirit of the Founders, the Daughters of Charity must live interior and exterior poverty by reason of their vocation of Servants of Christ in the Poor." (Instructions, p. 61)

And this is developed further:

"Evangelical poverty is, first of all, spiritual poverty, the one beatified

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by Jesus; at the same time, it is **real poverty**, the one which Jesus willed to live personally by sharing the life of the poor.” (Instructions, p. 65)

Poverty proclaims that in the deepest part of yourself, God is your only need and treasure (C. 30a). You are willing to be poor, because in that poverty you are enriched by the presence of the Lord and that becomes the gift which you share.

When I look at Mary in the Pietà and think of the virtue of poverty, I am struck by how poor she is at this moment. Not having significant material resources would be no new experience to her, but she always had Jesus since that first moment of the Incarnation. Now, she does not even have him. She is truly among the poor and her dependence upon God achieves a new meaning. On the cross, Jesus had been truly poor—stripped of his clothes, his dignity, and finally his life. He gave all this up in his surrender of self to the Father. Mary shares in that experience and she, too, knows the fullness of poverty. Again we can look to our Instructions for some inspiration:

“The Founders never separated the Son of God from Mary, His Mother, in whom the Daughters of Charity can contemplate ‘the humble and faithful servant of the designs of the Father, and model of the poor in Spirit.’ (C. 1. 12 para 4)” (Instructions, p. 81)

For us, the vow of poverty also involves this willingness of a total inner surrender of personal resources in order to have the Lord as our only possession. He becomes all that we need. Everything else can be taken away, but when we have given ourselves to the Lord, we have what is sufficient. Remember the opening words of Psalm 23: *“My shepherd is the Lord, there is nothing that I shall want.”* Our vow of poverty expresses that truth.

Poverty is also an outward expression of yourself. It is how you live—simply and with a minimum of fuss. Vincent calls us to live without significant resources. All these should be turned to the service of those who are poor and truly in need. The poor Daughter of Charity is satisfied with enough, and, on occasion, perhaps with even less than enough. She proclaims simplicity by her choices and

directions. Is it really so difficult for a person to live within the vow of poverty—to allow the situation of the poor to be a measure of one’s own possessions? One can look at the ministry of Jesus and his final expression of poverty on the cross as a model; we can reflect on the poverty of Mary throughout her life and at the foot of the cross; we can hear the exhortations of Vincent and Louise to live simply and with generosity. All of these individuals were rich in the gifts of God, though poor in the possessions of the world. They offer us wondrous models for inspiration and direction in considering our vow of poverty as grasped and lived.

OBEDIENCE:

Obedience as a virtue must also reside deeply within a person and be expressed in one’s outward behavior. It does not involve simply doing what one is told, but it turns one’s will to the one whom one freely obeys. This happens through the gift of the Holy Spirit: *“the Spirit is the foundation of Christian freedom” (Instructions p. 92).* Our Instructions teach:

*“In cooperating with the Father’s loving plan by giving her ‘Yes’ of obedience, the Daughter of Charity finds inner peace and participates in ‘the happiness of the Blessed,’ according to the words of St. Vincent. In this way she witnesses to the poor the **true liberation** brought about by Christ.” (Instructions p. 92)*

When we consider Mary at the cross, we are reminded of someone who has given her whole life in obedience to what has been asked of her from the first moments of her life until this moment. Obedience characterizes her deepest self which is always turned towards the Lord. She expresses this most fully in her “fiat” at the Annunciation, but it is not the only place where we can look to her for example along these lines. In her only explicit effort to give advice to us, she points towards obedience: at the wedding feast of Cana, she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. Can we surmise that her reflection at the cross with the body of Jesus in her arms suggests to her (and to us) the place to which obedience can lead? When she and Joseph had found the teenage Jesus in the Temple after they had been separated for some days, Jesus told them that he *“must be about his Father’s*

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business” (Lk 2:49). Jesus’ death on the cross, as she knows, was the fullest sign of his carrying out the “business” of the Father through faithful listening. On one occasion, Jesus had described his mother in terms of obedience: “*whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother*” (Mk 3:35). Obedience characterizes Mary till the end of her life and in every event. She offers us an opportunity to reflect on its importance in our life and the depth to which it challenges us. She gives the foundation for our meditation. Once again, we can look to the Instructions for further affirmation:

“By associating their total gift to God for the Service of the Poor to Mary’s ‘Yes,’ the Daughters of Charity devote themselves, with her, to the Father’s Loving Plan, carried out in Jesus Christ and continued today by the Church.” (Instructions p. 101)

Vincent offers us an opportunity to reflect on how obedience gets expressed in deeds. His portrayal as a man of action certainly speaks truly about his willingness to carry out the will of God in his life. The text at his feet in the statue (“*The Lord has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor.*”) emphasizes the fact that his proclamation and ministry are in faithful obedience to his being sent. When Louise looks for inspiration for the spirit of the Daughters of Charity, she finds it in her adaptation of St. Paul: “*the charity of Jesus crucified urges us*”—again the emphasis is on being pushed forward into action. When Vincent or Louise acted, it was never to further their own designs. They placed themselves under the guidance of those who had responsibility in their world. They strove always to discern where God was leading them and their followers. When they spoke about responding to Divine Providence, they were referring to the way in which we should respond to the manner in which God’s plan is made known to us.

Vincent knew the meaning of obedience and spoke of it often to his daughters and sons. In obedience, the Company and the Congregation were able to serve the poor effectively: obedient to the will of God as they came to understand it through their prayer and reflection, through the guidance of their Superiors and Directors, and through the teachings of the Church. This obedience led clearly to the service of the poor in practical and effective action. It was the Gospel which

Vincent preached and lived; it was the message with which Louise joined him in faithful and joyful mission.

This obedience is also a value to which we vow ourselves. We do not give up our freedom, but freely choose to follow a common path for the good of all and the service of those who are poor. We recognize the blessings of leadership, the strength of cooperation and collaboration, and the need for constancy. We also accept that the truth which undergirds every exercise of legitimate authority is the wisdom and power of God. Our Instructions make this clear:

*“The obedience of the Daughters of Charity is rooted in baptismal obedience and is lived in that of faith, which is **adherence to God and to His Word.**” (Instructions p. 87)*

Thus, our obedience is always prompted into action as a response to God’s will as we have come to know and experience it.

To this virtue of obedience, which we embrace and live, we vow ourselves in our choice for renovation.

CHASTITY:

The opening paragraph of our *Instructions* captures the essence of chastity for us:

*“As a response in love to a call of Love, perfect chastity lived in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven frees the heart of a Daughter of Charity and causes it to burn with greater **Love of God and the Poor.**” (Instructions p. 44)*

Like other virtues and vows, chastity must be understood in both its interior and exterior expression. The respect which one needs to have for one’s own self and for others is central to the consecrated and vowed life. Thus, chastity must be treated within the context of human love and the life which the consecrated person embraces for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

In chastity, we consider the willingness of a person to choose to give

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one's life in love of others without the exclusivity of an individual relationship. Jesus showed this kind of love in dying for us: "*There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (Jn 15:13). The image of the body of Jesus in the Pietà scene reminds us of that truth. The presentation of Mary might suggest as well the greatness of a love which gives what one loves most for the sake of others. She brought Jesus into the world and gave him to us for the sake of our salvation. She had been warned by Simeon that her heart would be pierced by a sword (Lk 2:35)—this was never to be an actual sword. As she holds the body of Jesus at the foot of the cross, one wonders whether her mind returns to that revelation of Simeon and her fuller understanding now of what he had meant. Her love was not focused upon her own needs, but those of her son and of other people. The *Instructions* describe her in this way:

"The Blessed Virgin was perfectly pure because she belonged to God in a perfect manner. Her whole life was spent in intimacy with Christ. This personal life in very close union with Him is the strength, sweetness and wealth of our chastity." (*Instructions* p. 56)

The love of Mary was a true chaste love for the sake of others and the Kingdom of God as revealed by Jesus. She models this truth for us.

Within chaste love, obviously other people are important and one needs to be connected to a community in order to live it fully and creatively. Mary, at the foot of the cross, received the Beloved Disciple as her son. She is present with the community preparing for the Pentecost event (Acts 1:14). Her focus is on the needs of the Church.

The statue of Vincent expresses the love which characterizes chastity in an exterior form. Vincent moves dynamically forward into the world of service. The *Instructions* speaks about this in relation to the Daughters of Charity:

"By consecrating to God all their potential for loving, the Daughters of Charity witness that, henceforth, His love is capable of filling their lives. They become the witnesses of this love to the Poor, by loving and serving them with the same love which God loves them." (*Instructions* p. 53)

The charism of Daughters of Charity "*requires constant openness and presence to the world in which they live*" (C. 29b). The challenge of this missionary life style requires, of course, a serious commitment to prayer and the sacraments, but also a balanced life style, a strong community spirit, and regular dialogue and communication within the Company (*Instructions* pp. 55-56). Through these a woman can confront her own weaknesses and can draw strength, both from the one loved and from those who love her, as she vows to lead a true and rich chaste life.

CORPORAL AND SPIRITUAL SERVICE OF THE POOR:

The vow to serve Christ in the poor is the one to which all the others tend and which gives them particular emphasis. It is central to the identity of a Daughter of Charity. In considering poverty, obedience and chastity, we have spoken of how these vows lead one to a proper and dedicated commitment to Christ for the whole of one's life; everything focuses on effective service. Our *Constitutions* make this truth explicit:

"In order to serve Christ in persons who are poor, the Daughters of Charity commit themselves to live their baptismal consecration through the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, which receive from this service their specific character." (C. 27)

A Daughter of Charity cannot speak convincingly about her support of those in need unless she also embraces the personal and community values which make that assistance possible and a Gospel value. The positive and life-giving character of the vows is made explicit in the inner conviction and outer expression of her particular vow of service to the poor in whom she serves Christ.

CONCLUSION:

Sacramentals have always been a part of Christian practice. Items such as holy water, rosaries, medals, pictures and statues are used to give a physical form to our devotion, to draw our minds to that which is represented in the object. Truly great works of art can, perhaps,

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exercise a powerful attraction for us. As the product of human genius, they capture the divine gift and invite our deeper reflection. The Pietà is one of the greatest works of art in the world, and it calls us to meditate on Mary and her experience at the death of Jesus. It can totally engage us in reflection and contemplation on the virtue of our Blessed Mother.

The statue of St. Vincent by Bracci calls forth a different yet important consideration and appreciation of the importance of action and proclamation for the sake of the Gospel. These masterpieces have provided a starting point for me as we prepare for renovation. In the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal we can wonder at a place where the Blessed Mother chose to be present among us; we can recognize the bodies of St. Louise and St. Catherine and the heart of St. Vincent. All of these provide suggestive material for our reflection.

I began this presentation by calling to mind the model of a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is as much (or more) an inward journey as an outward one. Our call in this year is to grow in our faith. The character of a pilgrimage involves one in a sacred time, place, action, and goal. Our effort on this day can capture those elements. It is

- a sacred time which we set aside for making our commitment seriously;
- a sacred place in many ways but perhaps most so because we gather as a Company to prepare and act;
- a sacred action because we will speak words which capture our entire self as we promise to live for God in poverty, chastity, and obedience;
- a sacred goal: to give ourselves completely for one year in the service of those who are poor. This can be a pilgrimage day for us.

At the end of a pilgrimage, we surrender ourselves to God in faith. That should be the goal of every Christian journey. The perfect expression of that gift of self in these days is the renewal of our vows with simplicity and fervor. We can ask for that blessing through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of our Blessed Mother.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Do you recognize the mutual enrichment of an inner and outer acceptance of your vows? As you live the vows faithfully, are you aided in understanding their meaning? As you contemplate their meaning, are you led to a more faithful living?

In this Easter Season, has the Paschal suffering and dying with Christ led to an awareness of the possibilities of resurrection and new life for you as you are invited to say “Yes” to the Lord once again in your promise of self through renovation?

Think about the way in which Mary had to renew her acceptance of God’s will in her life through her various experiences. Can you seek and accept her guidance and intercession in your own commitment to God’s will in your life?

Both Vincent and Louise had a genuine understanding of the need for “coming and going” in the charism of the Company. Are you ready to once again take up that task of dynamic and energetic service of those who are most poor in the task to which you are assigned?

Living the vows is a daily call. Are you ready to allow them to be made new in your life once again with joy as they point and guide you towards the life which binds you to your Sisters and to your mastery of self for mission?

Renovation Day, April 8, 2013

Commanding God's Angels to guide us: Renovation and Vow Renewal, 2013

"Because you have the LORD for your refuge, no evil shall befall you... for he commands his angels to guard you wherever you go."
(Psalm 91: 9-11)

Today's annual renovation and renewal of vows is a time-honored tradition in the Company of the Daughters of Charity. This unique undertaking reminds us of our need for constant conversion to Christ and the poor. In their daily words and deeds, Saints Vincent and Louise turned to the Father in prayer, sought Jesus in Word and Eucharist, and went out to serve Christ in the poor. And to insure their actions would continue as a vibrant, ongoing movement, our Holy Founders gave us the vows and Vincentian virtues to bind us to God, one another, and in discipleship with Jesus.

Growth in discipleship and the vows is not easy. Despite our good intentions, there are many challenges to living our vow commitments in today's world. We can often feel conflicted between the ways of the world and the demands of community life and the apostolate. This can lead to a temptation to believe that our spiritual life, vows, or work depend solely on oneself. This is the "myth of self-sufficiency", the idea that one can be one's own savior. It is the greatest of lies from the Master of Lies.

The Gospel story of the temptation of Christ is proclaimed annually the First Sunday of Lent. I will use it as a framework for reflection today. Why? It reminds us that even God's Son had to endure temptation. Jesus, fresh from his overpowering baptism, was "driven" into the desert for forty days. And how Jesus encounters and overcomes the three temptations of Satan can guide us in doing the will of the Father.

We are all familiar with the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert. In the three Gospel accounts, Mark's is the shortest, with two sentences: *"The Spirit drove Jesus into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him."* (Mk 1:12-13) Luke and Matthew give detailed accounts, with variations. But both arrive at the same end: Jesus resists Satan and reaffirms his place as God's Son. In doing so, he shows us how to face and overcome temptation.

The devil finds Jesus at a vulnerable time: he is tired and hungry. This is how the 'tempter' works: when our defenses are down, he manipulates us to doubt oneself, one's decisions, or one's direction in life. The three temptations Satan poses to Jesus are not just about hunger, power, and prominence. They are thinly veiled ways to get Jesus to rupture his relationship with the Father by distrust, denial, and disobedience.

Despite his weakened condition, Jesus displays a calm confidence, one steeped in Scripture. He offers no clever retorts, but goes to that which nourishes and guides him: the Word of God. The bread Satan tempts Jesus with to distrust his Father will make him hungry again in hours, but the living Word of God Jesus feasts on survives any famine. He is grounded in a humble realization that all he has comes from God.

Satan again tries to take advantage of Jesus by offering a grand visage of all he could have if he falls down in worship. But Jesus knows all this is illusionary. Great kingdoms rise and fall in the march of history; authority given is easily revoked; and the divided heart that tries to worship both heaven and earth equally denies God. Jesus again answers this empty promise with a Scriptural affirmation: *"Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."* (Dt 6:13) Jesus' simplicity in spirit triumphs over pride.

Grasping at straws, Satan tries to create distance between Jesus and his Father. Using Scripture, he tempts Jesus to make himself equal or superior to the Father. But Jesus will not be tricked into disobedience, and prays the ultimate pledge of loyalty: *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."* (Dt. 6:16) And after the temptations cease, we are left with a wonderful image: that of angels who wait on Jesus as Satan

storms off.

The end of the story left me wondering: what could these angels have done for Jesus? And then I wondered, where are those angels when one is tempted by Satan's seduction to be distrusting, to deny God's presence in our midst, or to be disobedient to what the Church, the Company, or the poor? Where are our angels in those times?

Well, my dear Sisters, I have news: I found three angels who are always available. You know their names: **humility, simplicity, and charity**. They are not often recognized for all they do. But when heeded, they create an angelic-like aura for the soul, in the community, and with the poor we serve. They bind us like "glue" to the Lord, the Sisters we live and work with, and the poor whom God puts in our path. Created by God, venerated by Jesus in his earthly life, they were entrusted to you by St. Vincent who said, "*It is God's will that the Daughters of Charity devote themselves to the practice of humility, simplicity, and charity*" (SV, IX Conf. 51, Feb. 9, 1653). I ask you to imagine these angels as three of the most wonderful Sisters you have ever known.

The first, **Sister Humility**, is quiet, aware, and confident. She knows of "*the gifts she has received from God, to be grateful, and to place them at the service of others*"; that she must "*acknowledge her own limitations and need for conversion*"; and to be effective, she must "*remain close and available to the Sisters and the poor in an attitude of servant*" (C.18a). Humility's lesson is not to think less of oneself, but to think of oneself less. She is an angelic presence you can trust, one that every house and work of the Company should welcome with open arms. For the coming year, I ask you to welcome Sister Humility into your heart, home, and daily duties.

The second, **Sister Simplicity**, is fully at ease with her words and actions. Like Jesus' disciple, she is one in whom no guile can be found. She "*seeks, loves, and defends the truth, especially in situations of injustice*", and is "*transparent, authentic, and consistent in her words and how she lives*" (C.18b). Simplicity is in great demand in the world and Church today. Some classify her as an "endangered species". In the Company, St. Vincent gave her a permanent place: "*God has given me such a high esteem for simplicity that I call it my Gospel*" (SV, IX,

Conf. 52 Feb. 24, 1653). For the coming year, I ask you to welcome Sister Simplicity into your heart, home, and daily duties.

Lastly, **Sister Charity** radiates love and a quiet, irrepressible joy. Her virtue lies in the good she draws out from others. She shows us we were created by a loving God, and that every action of our lives is a response to that love. Sister Charity helps us to "*love God with all our being*"; and "*fosters a communion among the Sisters*"; while helping them to "*serve those who are poor, and to help everyone to fulfill his or her vocation as a child of God*" (C.18c). Described as a "noble mistress" and the "goodness of God" by St. Vincent, she seeks nothing for herself. For this coming year, I ask you to welcome Sister Charity into your heart, home, and daily duties.

I portray these three Vincentian virtues as your Sisters, because I thought, if left as angels, they might appear too esoteric. In Scripture, angels are a sign of God's love and abiding presence among us. So too with these virtues. Like the Sisters you most admire, they support you in living the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience you have renewed. They are tangible means to an eschatological end; to help you live as Jesus' disciples and to advance the Vincentian charism. Like the vows, they remind you that who you are and what you do is for God, the Company, and the poor.

As you view the situation in the world, the Church, or even the Company, you can sometimes feel overwhelmed at the weighty challenges, and become discouraged. That is the temptation we must avoid at all times. Jesus faced the three temptations of Satan fortified by God's Word, and grounded in the Father's love. So must we. Luke's account of this story ends on an ominous note: the devil "*departed from Jesus for a time.*" (Lk 4:13) Luke wanted to warn us the devil would be back to cause more havoc. But no matter- Jesus never wavered, nor did Vincent or Louise. Nor should we!

Easter season is the 'spring time of the soul'. We are people of the Resurrection who share in Christ's triumph of good over evil, life over death, and salvation over sin. Let this renovation bring an inner renewal so you may live the vows and virtues more faithfully and fearlessly. As Pope Francis said at his Mass marking the start of his

Commanding God's Angels to Guide Us

Petrine Ministry: "Today, amid so much darkness, we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others... to be a shaft of light breaking through the heavy clouds, to bring the warmth of hope" (March 19, 2013).

This coming year, as you welcome the 'angelic' Sisters Humility, Simplicity, and Charity into your heart, home, and daily duties, I pray that you will continue to be the light and warmth of hope for the Church, the Company and the poor you serve.

Father G. Gregory GAY, C.M.
Superior General

FATHER PATRICK GRIFFIN, DIRECTOR GENERAL

An Undivided Heart: Service and Eucharist

The Eucharist is at the center of the Christian life. One who chooses the consecrated life with an undivided heart finds at the Eucharist the community, the teaching and the nourishment which leads to and proceeds from the presence of Jesus among us. The Church document *Vita Consecrata* speaks powerfully of the role of the Eucharist in our lives:

In the first place, the Eucharist "contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover and living bread, who, through his very flesh, made vital and vitalizing by the Holy Spirit, offers life" to the human family. This is the heart of the Church's life, and also of the consecrated life. How can those who are called, through the profession of the evangelical counsels, to choose Christ as the only meaning of their lives, not desire to establish an ever more profound communion with him by sharing daily in the Sacrament which makes him present, in the sacrifice which actualizes the gift of his love on Golgotha, the banquet which nourishes and sustains God's pilgrim people? By its very nature the Eucharist is at the center of the consecrated life, both for individuals and for communities. It is the daily viaticum and source of the spiritual life for the individual and for the Institute. . . . In the celebration of the mystery of the Lord's Body and Blood, the unity and charity of those who have consecrated their lives to God are strengthened and increased. (VC 95)

The particular value which we will consider in this context today is service and its expression in the theology of the Eucharist. Fed by the Sacrament of the altar, we choose to serve with an undivided heart.

In my 15 months of ministry to the Daughters of Charity, I do not think that any Scripture passages have entered more frequently into my presentations than those which deal with the washing of the feet.

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There are two events which I have reflected upon: when Jesus has his feet washed by the so-called sinful woman and when Jesus himself washes the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. My thinking has used these events to speak about the ministry of hospitality and welcome, the dignity of work, the call to service, the need to respect the one for whom one ministers, and the responsibilities of obedience and authority.

As you probably know, there are four stories of the institution of the Eucharist in the New Testament: one in Matthew, one in Mark, one in Luke and one in Paul (in 1 Cor 11:17-34). John has no story of the institution of the Eucharist in his Last Supper narrative. In place of the story of Jesus identifying the bread and wine as his body and blood, John tells us the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. The question which should emerge for us is: why does John do this? It is not possible that he does not know the tradition of Jesus and the origin of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Much of the theology of the Eucharist is found in the sixth chapter of John (which includes the so-called “bread of life discourse”). First, we have to ask, however, what John is teaching us about the nature of the Eucharist by his particular telling of the Last Supper events. What is the Holy Spirit saying in this circumstance about the sacrament which is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen gentium*, no. 11)?

1. THE EUCHARIST: SYMBOL OF SERVICE IN THE WASHING OF THE FEET

Perhaps the clearest teaching connected with the washing of the feet is service. It is demonstrated in the effort of Jesus, in the explanation of his action, and in the commission which he gives to the disciples at the end of his task. We know how the undertaking goes: Jesus washes both feet of all the disciples—including Judas—by himself. This activity would have taken some time and effort, but Jesus does not shrink from the task in its fullness. Then, after he has washed all their feet—and in response to the objection of Peter—Jesus speaks to the disciples about what he has done:

So when he had washed their feet [and] put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have

done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. (Jn 13:12-17)

The lesson is clear: if one chooses to follow Jesus, one must do what he does; one of the things which he does is serve his brothers and sisters. The washing of the feet is a symbol of that service, and the disciples are called to that same activity. In the story of the institution of the Eucharist, notice the way in which the disciples are invited to remember Jesus (“*Do this in memory of me*”); notice also how they are invited to remember Jesus in the washing of the feet (“*as I have done for you, you should also do*”). The focus falls upon how the disciples are to remember Jesus and what they are to remember. Clearly, they are to find him present among them in the Eucharistic elements, but they are also to remember him in the fullness of their experience with him. They are to remember him in the community which gathers together and is served; they are to remember him in the eating of the bread and wine which has become his body and blood and which nourishes them in care for one another. They are to remember him in what he has taught them and the way in which that teaching finds expression in action.

Let us go back to the narrative of the Last Supper in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus has just instituted the Eucharist—identifying the bread and wine as his body and blood and sharing this with the disciples, and then (unbelievably) a dispute breaks out among the disciples:

Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘Benefactors’; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. (Lk 22:24-27)

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The shadow of meaning from the washing of the feet in John falls across this Lucan passage. Jesus came to serve; the disciples of Jesus are to give themselves in service. The Eucharistic celebration leads to this resolution. We gather to be taught and strengthened and then sent. Jesus is present at each step and becomes the center of our celebration.

The connection between the Eucharist and service is made clear from the presentation in John's gospel. One can also see it in the Eucharistic stories of the multiplication of the loaves and fish where the disciples are sent by Jesus to distribute the bread which he has blessed. To live as Jesus is to live a life of service, and especially to those in the greatest need.

2. THE EUCHARIST: THE BANQUET OF THE POOR WHERE ALL ARE EQUAL

The Eucharist is remembered as the Passover Meal in the Christian tradition. This was the meal celebrated by the people of Israel who were enslaved in Egypt and had cried out to the Lord for deliverance. The Lord does give them deliverance and the night before this event, they are told to celebrate the Passover meal with unleavened bread and the sacrificial lamb. It is the time of the barley harvest. This unleavened bread is the bread of the poor—often much cheaper and rougher than the better breads made from other grains. The commemoration of this deliverance from slavery is carried out in the Passover meal.

We will recall that in the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Matt 14:13-21; 15:32-39; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-14), Jesus had been healing the sick and casting our demons and preaching to the people. He was then filled with compassion for them and did not want to send them away hungry, so he chose to feed them. In the story in John's Gospel, the barley loaves—that cheap and rough grain—appears as well as mention of the Passover:

The Jewish feast of Passover was near. . . . One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?" (Jn 6:4, 8-9)

Once again, the people are fed with the bread of the poor and they are delivered from their hunger as well as being filled with the words of Jesus and the healing which he brings into their community.

All are equal in this setting. When Paul tells the story of the institution of the Eucharist, he does so in the context in which he chastises the community for not remembering the poor as they celebrate the Lord's Supper:

When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. (1 Cor 11:20-21)

Paul, thus, reminds the community of their equality at the Eucharistic setting. The rich cannot be favored over those who have little; the vulnerable may not be ignored in that gathering of the community which calls to mind the Lord who died for them all. Nowhere is this more powerfully suggested than in Paul's writing to Philemon. In that letter, the Christian community has to recognize the equality of even the Christian slaves at the Eucharistic banquet! All are welcome without distinction at the Eucharistic table.

At the Eucharist, the unity of the entire Christian community is celebrated. In John's Gospel, Jesus emphasizes this fact at the Last Supper by his washing of the feet. He who is the teacher and master assumes the role of servant and cares for the needs of his disciples—all of his disciples: the ones who will flee as well as the one who will remain firm. All the disciples, even Judas and the reluctant Peter, get their feet washed and they are told in no uncertain terms that they must then be prepared to wash the feet of one another.

Can we see how at the Eucharist we are taught to serve our Lords and Masters who are poor? They have an equal and even honored place at this banquet where the food of the poor is served, where the hungry and afflicted are nourished, and where the master-as-servant washes the feet of the servant-as-master. One can hear the instruction of Louise and Vincent regarding the care of our "Lords and Masters" emerging clearly in this context.

3. THE EUCHARIST: ONE IS INSTRUCTED BY THE WORD OF GOD

In the stories of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, Jesus is busy instructing the people who have come to him for guidance.

In those days when there again was a great crowd without anything to eat, he summoned the disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a great distance." His disciples answered him, "Where can anyone get enough bread to satisfy them here in this deserted place?" Still he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" (Mk 8:1-5)

Jesus feels responsibility for these people who are poor and wants to offer them physical nourishment as well as the nourishment of his teaching. He summons his disciples to this task. They feel overwhelmed by it, but Jesus responds in the most practical of manners: how many loaves do you have? Jesus always begins with what is possible. He wants his disciples to look at what they can do and offer that. With the few loaves and fish which they have, Jesus blesses their effort and the people are fed and fed abundantly. The same could be said regarding the nourishment with his word. He does not give people just enough, but an abundance of teaching and lessons.

Through the Bread of Life discourse, Jesus invites his disciples to meditate on this event and to reflect on his questions and actions. The disciples need to learn this lesson to live it. One needs to tell the stories of Jesus. Recall the lesson taught to the disciples on the road to Emmaus who encounter the Resurrected Lord on the way. When the Lord interprets the Scripture for them, they feel the summons of the Word of God touching the depth of their thinking:

Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32)

The message of Jesus is powerful and is meant to give guidance and direction to the life of the attentive Christian. This word is spoken at the Eucharistic celebration. (See also Acts 20:7-12.)

Louise valued the opportunity to reflect on the word of God:

"Immediately after rising, I shall meditate for an hour or at least three quarters of an hour on a subject that is taken from the Gospels or the Epistles . . ." (LdM, Spiritual Writings, A. 1. p. 689)

And the *Constitutions* pick up that attitude:

"In reading and meditating Holy Scripture, the living and efficacious Word, [the Daughters of Charity] deepen their knowledge of the person of Christ and His attitude towards those who are poor and lowly." (C. 22a)

When Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, he puts action to the words which he has always spoken to them, and then he explains the action afterwards:

"Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it." (Jn 13:12-17)

Jesus has not simply given his disciples a message to bring; he has given them an action which they must perform. They are called to service in action—blessed are you if you do it!

At the Eucharist, the Word is proclaimed into the Christian Assembly and it now exists in the Assembly in the minds and hearts of those who have heard it and resolved to put it into practice—in our minds and hearts. The Word of God is only such when it exists in the men and women who have heard it and are attentive to its teaching.

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The way in which we are called to serve and the action which we are to perform are presented to us in the Liturgy of the Word. There is an intimate connection between the word which is proclaimed and the strength which one gets from the sacrament of the altar.

The encouragement for a Daughter of Charity to reflect upon the reading for the following day's Mass is an important one: "Preparation for the next day's prayer is made by reading the Word of God" (S. 3b). When Vincent writes to the members of the Congregation he offers particular advice on how one should approach this Scripture:

"...read a chapter of the New Testament, reverencing this book as the norm of Christian holiness. For greater benefit this reading should be done kneeling, with head uncovered, and praying, at least at the end, on these three themes: (1) reverence for the truths contained in the chapter; (2) desire to have the same spirit in which Christ or the saints taught them; (3) determination to put into practice the advice or commands contained in it, as well as the example of virtues." (SVdP, Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, X, 8)

Notice the attitudes which he insists on:

- first, a reverence for God's word: one must read the Bible with the proper attitude as God's self communication of the Divine truth before which we stand with humility.
- second, a desire to understand these truths properly as taught by Jesus and the saints;
- and third, a determination to learn from the word of the Sacred Scripture and put its lessons into practice—both in action and in virtue.

For Vincent, it was always about how one puts the Word of God and the example of Jesus into practice. He would offer the same guidance for his Daughters of Charity in their service.

The question which Jesus asks in the Johannine Last Supper narrative is key: "Do you realize what I have just done for you?" We can hear these questions today at each Eucharist: Do you know what the message is for this Eucharistic celebration? Perhaps one is aided in that by the homily; perhaps one is invited to discover one's own meaning

as the Scriptural text finds its place in our lives. The washing of the feet reminds us of our responsibility to learn what Jesus has to teach at the Eucharist especially through the Scriptures and how it leads us to the service of those who are poor.

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined." (Mt 7:24-27)

When the Word of God is taken to heart, it leads to well-founded service and then back to God.

4. THE EUCHARIST: ONE RECEIVES AND BECOMES THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD

We believe that Jesus becomes present among us in the Eucharistic elements. The simple bread and wine becomes the body and blood of Jesus. The Lord God takes up his dwelling among us in this way. When we come forward to receive communion, we receive the Lord under the humblest of elements and this food becomes nourishment for our spirits as well as our bodies. We become Christ. He becomes the energy which gives us life and enables us for service. We have all heard that type of teaching before, but how has it influenced our thinking?

The Eucharistic elements are distributed to the Christian community, and, ideally, all the bread and wine consecrated at that Eucharist should be consumed at that Eucharist. This is to symbolize that the body and blood of Christ which has become present to us in the Eucharistic elements on the altar are still present among us but now in the assembled Christian community. We are the body of Christ and we go forth in service as the Body of Christ!

The Lord has chosen to become present among us in a particular way:

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food. The Lord could have chosen to remain present as a diamond or a mountain or the sun, but no, he selects the simplest of items bread and wine—staples in the diet for many human beings. Food is to be eaten, and food is to be shared, and this happens most often in the context of a family and community. Jesus chose to become part of who we are. We literally become Christ in the consuming of this humble fare. This gives particular meaning to Paul's statement in the Letter to the Galatians: "yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

"This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." (Jn 6:50-51)

Eating the Eucharistic elements enables one to be filled with Christ and become Christ present to the world through action in service. We can recall the famous poem of St. Teresa of Avila:

Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

5. THE EUCHARIST: ONE IS SENT FORTH ON MISSION

At the conclusion of the Eucharist, the members of the Christian community who have gathered together as one family, who have listened to the word of the Lord, and who have been nourished by the sacrament of the altar are then sent forth on mission. Again, we can return to the story of the washing of the feet and the instruction which Jesus gives to the disciples:

If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. (Jn 13:12-17)

The message is clear. The disciples are now sent to carry out the ministry of service which Jesus has modeled for them. That is the meaning of the commission which one hears at the conclusion of the Mass: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

After this the Lord appointed seventy [-two] others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household.'" (Lk 10:1-5)

Action in living one's life in service is an integral part of the Eucharistic celebration. Notice that in all the narratives which deal with the Last Supper, after Jesus has finished speaking and eating with his disciples, he gets up from the table and begins the journey to his death. His last meal and instruction has strengthened him for the service of sacrifice and the laying down of his life. Strengthened and instructed by the Eucharist, we begin our day filled with care and service of the other. From the Eucharist we receive this strength and are sent forth.

Even the gathering for the Eucharistic celebration is a service which we carry out for the Christian community. We read in our *Constitutions*:

"In praising God, listening to God's Word, entreating God, they [the Daughters of Charity] act not only in their own name but in the name of all humanity, whose joys, hopes, sadness, and anguish they bear. They offer themselves with the Lord Jesus in the memorial of His Paschal Mystery." (C. 19c)

Do you understand what that means? I find it a wonderful statement and a reminder of our priestly ministry from Baptism as well as the way in which we live out that commitment more fully in the consecrated life. It is all about service. A Daughter of Charity comes to the Eucharist with an attitude of praise, of attention to the Scripture, and of petition as she brings not only herself but all humankind (and especially those who are poor) to the celebration. She bears their hopes and fears and

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grief with her before the Lord. That is a real service. And she offers herself with Jesus, and as Jesus did, for the sake of the human family. Attentively and reverently partaking of the Eucharist is one of the services which a Daughter of Charity provides, one of the ways in which she serves our people who are poor each day. We bring them to the altar. It is the service of an undivided heart.

CONCLUSION:

Our *Constitutions* offer a clear and simple statement on the significance of the Eucharistic celebration for a Daughter of Charity:

“The Sisters are conscious of the vital importance of the Eucharist, center of their life and mission and an indispensable meeting each day with Christ and their brothers and sisters” (C. 19b).

The particular focus upon the meaning of this celebration as a summons to service is made clear in each of the elements which have been highlighted in our presentation today. In the Eucharist, we are all equal; we are given direction for service in the Liturgy of the Word; we remember the needs of all in our prayers for all; we are nourished in the carrying out of this service by the sacrament of the altar; and we are sent forth on mission to do as the Lord Jesus did in charity and compassion.

The Eucharist nourishes the undivided heart which is centered on Christ. We are called to a following of the life which he led which emphasized service and love. As Jesus said: *“If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it.”* (Jn 13:12-17)

Father Patrick GRIFFIN, C.M.
Director General

Mary, Mother of Mercy

*“As I looked on the [Blessed] Virgin,
I was aware only of a mantle of mercy”*

Alphonse Ratisbonne, January 20, 1842

INTRODUCTION

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise urged the Daughters of Charity to contemplate Mary as *“the Mother of God, **Mother of Mercy** and hope of the lowly”* (C. 15b). In the context of the Year of Faith, opened by Benedict XVI, let us rediscover the faith experience of a young Jewish man who converted to the Catholic faith and became an apostle. Alphonse Ratisbonne speaks about what happened to him as a revelation God made to him that had repercussions on his entire life; for him, there was *before* and *after*, where everything was different. On January 20, 1842, in Sant’ Andrea delle Fratte Church in Rome, Mary opened the “door of faith” to Ratisbonne, showing him the One who is the Door: Christ (Jn 10: 9). Passing through this door, Ratisbonne experienced God’s mercy, which caused him to pass from his present reality to God’s world. He entered into a faith relationship with Christ, let himself be touched by the Good News of Divine Mercy, and he discovered the fundamentals of the Christian life.

- In the first section, we will recall the life of Alphonse Ratisbonne
- Then, we will contemplate how the Immaculate One, the “Mother of Mercy”, drew near to Alphonse Ratisbonne.
- We will also look briefly at how Mary acted in her role of evangelization.

Mary, Mother of Mercy

- Finally, with regard to the new evangelization, we will let two essential aspects of our faith life emerge.

I – WHO IS ALPHONSE RATISBONNE?

Born on May 1, 1814, in Strasbourg, Alphonse Ratisbonne was the ninth and youngest child of a very rich and closely-knit family, related by marriage to the richest Jewish bankers, but non-practicing Jews. He studied at the Royal College of Strasbourg. His family upbringing and his intellectual formation took place without any religious principle as a point of reference. Intelligent and destined for a brilliant position, he had character but showed a lack of seriousness and a tendency to sneer.

In 1827, to the great distress of the entire family, the eldest brother, Théodore, converted to Catholicism and then became a priest. Furious and outraged, Alphonse became fiercely anti-clerical and rejected all Catholics, criticizing their proselytism.

After obtaining his degree, Alphonse lost his mother and, a few years later, his father. A childless uncle shared his love with his brother's children. This man, who was one of the foremost bankers, wanted to take Alphonse as his partner. After studying law in Paris, Alphonse returned to Strasbourg to work with his uncle and continued to enjoy life's pleasures. He treated himself to frequent trips to Paris.

He was engaged to a 16 year-old young woman, but the family decided to delay the marriage. He then took a long trip, leaving for Malta by way of Italy.

His priest brother, Théodore Ratisbonne, was appointed vicar at Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Church in Paris and assistant director of the parish association consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, whose objective was to pray for the conversion of sinners. To this effect, he requested the members' prayers for his own family. At the beginning of 1842, he asked the members of the Association to pray especially for "*a young Jew travelling in Italy*," whom he described as a "*libertine and free thinker*."

When Alphonse Ratisbonne arrived in Naples, he was invited by his friends to go to Rome. Despite his hesitation, he accepted and visited Rome as someone with just a superficial interest in the culture of that place.

On January 8, 1842, he met a childhood friend who was a Protestant. Gustave invited him to dine with his father. There he met Gustave's brother, M. de Bussières, who had become a Catholic and was a friend of Alphonse's own brother, Father Théodore. When M. de Bussières spoke to him about the greatness of Catholicism, he immediately felt a deep dislike for him and answered him in a very ironic and sarcastic way. Despite this hostility, M. de Bussières persevered:

- *Since you hate superstition and you are such an enlightened strong minded young man, would you be brave enough to subject yourself to a very innocent test?*

- *What test?*

- *It would be to wear something that I will give you...Here it is! It's a medal of the Blessed Virgin. This seems quite ridiculous to you, doesn't it? But, as for me, I attach great value to this medal...And, to complete this test, you must recite Saint Bernard's prayer to the Virgin Mary, the "Memorare."*

Surprised at this, Alphonse Ratisbonne burst out laughing, shrugged his shoulders, and then thought that by telling his friends about this, he would have a good laugh with them. So, he agreed to wear the medal and to read this Memorare prayer; in this way he would prove to M. de Bussières that what distances a man from religion is the very insistence with which people try to convert him.

On January 16, 1842, M. de Bussières dined at the palace of Prince Borghèse with the Count de Laferronnays, one of his fervent Catholic friends. He recommended the young Jew to his prayers. The Count showed a keen interest in this conversion and promised that he would confide him to the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

On the night of January 17, 1842, Count de Laferronnays died suddenly.

Mary, Mother of Mercy

On January 20, 1842, when M. de Bussières was going to Sant' Andrea delle Fratte Church to arrange the funeral service for the Count de Laferronnays, he saw Alphonse walking. He invited him to get into his carriage. When they arrived at the church, he asked him to wait a few minutes. However, Alphonse followed him and entered the deserted church. No artistic object attracted his attention. Suddenly, the church disappeared from before Alphonse's eyes; he saw only a great light. Mary showed herself to him when he was in a state of reluctance to understand the Catholic Church and he rejected it.

When M. de Bussières returned he found Ratisbonne, prostrated, and bathed in tears, his face transfigured by the light he had seen. He felt completely transformed, but he couldn't answer M. de Bussières' questions; he grasped the medal that he was wearing around his neck, saying, "Oh, it was indeed her!"

ALPHONSE RATISBONNE'S CONVERSION

RATISBONNE'S ACCOUNT

"I did not know where I was; I did not know whether I was Alphonse Ratisbonne or not; I was so completely changed, that I did not know myself. ... I seemed to be trying to find out who I was, and to fail in the effort;... the most glowing joy pervaded my heart; I could not speak, I could reveal nothing; I felt within me something so awe inspiring and so sacred, that I asked for a priest... I was taken to one..."

My first words were an expression of gratitude to M. de Laferronnays and to the Arch confraternity of Notre-Dame des Victoires. I knew intuitively that M. de Laferronnays had prayed for me. I cannot tell how I knew it, any more than I can account for the truths of which I had suddenly gained both the knowledge and the belief. All I can say is, that the moment when the Blessed Virgin made a sign with her hand, the veil fell from my eyes; not one veil only, but all the veils which were wrapped around me disappeared, just as snow melts beneath the rays of the sun.

I emerged from a tomb, from an abyss of darkness; and I was living, perfectly, vibrantly alive... and yet I shed tears. I saw before me the

fearful miseries from which I had been rescued by the mercy of God; I shuddered at the sight of my innumerable sins..."

Alphonse Ratisbonne's conversion is radical; his heart is completely changed. Having crossed over the "door of faith," he passes from his material reality to a spiritual reality, experiencing the Kingdom of heaven. The light contemplated and received reveals his own shadows, dissipates them and, at the same time, reveals the truths of the faith to him.

"I am asked how I attained a knowledge of these truths, since it is well known that I never opened a religious book and had never read a page of the Bible... How, then, did I come to this knowledge? I do not know. All that I know is, that when I entered that church I was profoundly ignorant of everything, and that when I came out I saw everything clearly and distinctly. The only explanation I can suggest is, that I was like a man suddenly roused from slumber, or rather, like a man born blind, whose eyes are suddenly opened; — he sees indeed, but he can give no definition of that light which enlightens him, and in which he beholds the objects of his gaze."

Alphonse Ratisbonne immediately asked to prepare for baptism, and the date was set for January 31, 1842. During these ten days of preparation, the change in his life was noticeable: he had a different way of looking at things, he experienced another form of love, he became totally receptive, he was aware of an invisible world and could recognize God as present in the heart of men and women. He said about his spiritual companion: "That man of God can hardly be called a man; he is rather all heart, — a personification of heavenly charity. But no sooner were my eyes opened, than I saw around me many, many men of similar stamp, of whose existence the world knows nothing. What gentle kindness, what delicacy, what goodness, have I found in my dealings with these true Christians... signs of the presence of God."

Baptized on January 31, 1842, Ratisbonne entered into the paschal mystery and through Jesus, with Him and in Him, the "Door of Faith" was opened wide to him. Now, he could say with Saint Paul: It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me!

**CONSEQUENCES OF ALPHONSE RATISBONNE'S
CONVERSION**

The night before his baptism, the news of his conversion was communicated to the members of the Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Association by Fr. Théodore Ratisbonne. After speaking about what was happening, Théodore said: *“This Alphonse about whom I’m speaking is my brother...”* This caused the whole assembly to cry out with joy, and gratitude to God rose in all their hearts because Alphonse had been recommended to their prayers in a special way for two weeks.

From then on, Alphonse Ratisbonne continued, day after day, to cross the threshold of the “door of faith” and to draw from the well of the abundant graces of his baptism, striving to correspond so that it would bear fruit in and through him.

Five months later, he entered the Company of Jesus and he was ordained six years later (in 1848). This spiritual experience at Sant’Andrea delle Fratte Church was interpreted by the two Ratisbonne brothers as a sign of God’s will that they should develop a work in the Church for dialogue with Judaism. In 1850, with the blessing of Pope Pius IX, Alphonse left the Company of Jesus to join his brother, Théodore, and the Congregation of Our Lady of Zion. Alphonse moved to Palestine in 1855 and consecrated his life to the catechumenate for converts of Jewish origin.

**II – THE APPARITION OF THE IMMACULATE ONE,
“MOTHER OF MERCY”**

Anyone who enters Sant’Andrea delle Fratte Church for the first time and looks at the side chapel where the apparition took place is drawn to the large central painting where Mary Immaculate is depicted as shown on the Miraculous Medal whereas Alphonse Ratisbonne presence is not represented. It is only when you approach the altar that you see on the right another painting representing the apparition of Mary to Ratisbonne and a commemorative plaque recalling the event.

Therefore, contemplating the large painting of the Immaculate Virgin, located at the center of the chapel, each pilgrim can put himself or

herself in Ratisbonne’s place and feel called to let themselves be enlightened by faith in order to contemplate what Ratisbonne himself contemplated.

There are many ways of exploring the rich meaning of this event. The proposed method is a re-reading of essential passages of Ratisbonne’s account, followed by a commentary to help us move beyond the literal meaning of words to discover their spiritual message. We are well aware that communicating a spiritual experience is never simple, and there is a gap between the object of contemplation and the words used to describe it.

The apparition took place in two phases:

- In the first phase, Mary presented herself to Ratisbonne and seemed to invite him to take the time to let himself be enlightened inwardly to prepare himself to enter into a relationship.

- In the second phase, Ratisbonne is aware first of the infinite beauty of the Immaculate One and then is dazzled by her incomparably merciful attitude that causes him to discover, in a luminous way, Divine Mercy.

1st phase: PREPARING HIMSELF FOR THE ENCOUNTER

When Alphonse Ratisbonne went into Sant’Andrea delle Fratte Church as a visitor, not understanding that this was a place where Catholics gather in God’s presence, he was suddenly interiorly drawn as by a great light, like that which enlightened Paul on the road to Damascus.

RATISBONNE’S ACCOUNT

“I raised my eyes toward the chapel radiating light... I saw standing on the altar the Most Blessed Virgin Mary... An irresistible force drew me towards her; she made me a sign with her hand that I should kneel down; and then she seemed to say, that will do! She spoke not a word, but I understood everything. Seeing this, I fell to my knees right where I was.”

Mary, Mother of Mercy

REFLECTION:

Light is a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven: in creation, light manifests something of God, He “who dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6: 16); when the Son of God became a man among humans, “he is the true light, which enlightens everyone” (Jn 1: 9). Such is the light that Alphonse Ratisbonne saw as he gazed at the Immaculate One! Interiorly enlightened by the Spirit, he saw Mary with the eyes of his heart.

With great kindness, she indicated that he should bow. Irresistibly attracted toward her, he advanced and then, at Mary’s sign, he stopped and “fell to his knees right where he was.”

This invitation from Mary to kneel down is undoubtedly a call, not to humiliate himself, but rather to prepare himself fittingly for the encounter. Grace is offered to Ratisbonne, but he still has to accept it to enter into this relational process, so he is invited to become attentive to the Presence, to silence everything that clutters his heart and carve out in it a space to welcome and really enter into relationship.

Ratisbonne kneels; this pause allows him to clothe his heart with loving patience, availability and attention to truly begin the encounter, in the light of God, where each person needs the other and each needs to love.

2nd phase: FINDING AND ACCEPTING MERCY

Contemplating the Immaculate One, he at first marvels at her beauty and majesty, but he is even more fascinated by her infinitely merciful attitude, which touches him very deeply. With Mary, he experiences a new life, where the relationship takes all its meaning from the light of God. He discovers God’s preferential love for him as if he were the only person in all the world.

Ratisbonne had agreed to wear the medal as an act of defiance and to read the Memorare¹ each day. Without realizing it, he was invoking

1. Prayer of Saint Bernard: “Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection...was left unaided.”

Mary as mediator of Divine Mercy, she whose mission is to make herself close to people and help them to accept God’s mercy. In his Encyclical, “*God rich in mercy*”, John Paul II also presented Mary as mediator of Divine Mercy. He stressed two aspects of Mercy that enlighten the mystery of Mary: “*daughter and mother of Divine Mercy.*”

Before Mary is “*mother of Mercy*”, she is first the “*daughter*”. Mary experienced, in a specific and exceptional way, God’s Mercy, and participated in it interiorly. In her Magnificat, Mary exalts God’s Mercy² and proclaims that she received all that she has and all that she is from the mercy of God: “*He has looked with favor on his lowly servant... the Almighty has done great things for me*”.

At the foot of the cross, Mary understood that God expected her to speak in her heart the same words as her Son, “Father, forgive them.” Mary receives the mission of becoming the Mother of John and therefore mother of each one of us. Through her, as through pure crystal, God’s mercy passes to us. With her, we learn to become people of grace in Jesus Christ, imbued with His Mercy.

This double gift of Mary, “*daughter of Mercy*” and “*mother of Mercy*,” seems to be the heart of the message revealed to Ratisbonne.

MARY “DAUGHTER OF MERCY”

RATISBONNE’S ACCOUNT

“*Several times I tried to raise my eyes to the Most Blessed Virgin, but her greatness and splendor made me lower them, which, nonetheless, did not keep me from contemplating this apparition*”... She was “*standing and very beautiful, full of majesty, utterly merciful ...*”

REFLECTION: THE BEAUTY AND MAJESTY OF MARY

2. “*He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation*” (Lk 1: 50)... “*He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy ...*” (Lk 1: 54).

Mary, Mother of Mercy

Mary is “*standing and very beautiful.*” Ratisbonne contemplated a woman of indescribable beauty, resplendent in her reflection of the beauty of God, of this beauty that shone in Christ at the Transfiguration, as it will shine in us on the day of our resurrection. The beauty of the immaculate person of Mary is due entirely to Mercy. Totally transparent to God, the Immaculate One cannot stand in the way of Divine Mercy; she is its vessel: God’s grace is reflected on her face, in her smile and in her look.

Mary is “*full of majesty and utterly merciful.*” Ratisbonne admired the majesty of the Mother of God that reflects the majesty of God. The extreme modesty of the merciful attitude of the “humble servant of the Lord” expresses this interior majesty and indirectly teaches him that beauty and majesty can only exist together with humility and mercy.

With Mary, Ratisbonne can experience the beauty and majesty of Jesus Christ, *the Servant “meek and humble of heart.”*

MARY “MOTHER OF MERCY”

RATISBONNE’S ACCOUNT

Arms wide open, Mary is “*in attitude and appearance just as she is represented on the medal.*”

REFLECTION: MARY’S WELCOME

Hands held out toward Ratisbonne, the Immaculate One seems to be welcoming him, just as he is. Mary, who held Divine Mercy in her arms, is completely turned toward Ratisbonne, completely attentive, like a mother towards her child, wanting to offer him the best she has: the grace of God. The first gift, delivered by the hands of the Immaculate One, is the very love of God.

Mary’s welcome reveals to Ratisbonne that he is precious to her and, at the same time, reveals to him that God is a heart that welcomes every man and woman. Mary’s wide open arms reflect the loving relationship that God offers to each human being, coming to them where they are, in order to give Himself to them.

RATISBONNE’S ACCOUNT

“*All I was aware of about the Virgin was a mantle of mercy...I fixed my eyes on her hands and I saw in them the expression of forgiveness and mercy.*”

REFLECTION: MARY’S MERCY

In the same way that Catherine Labouré contemplated the beams of “*rays of dazzling brilliance*” coming from Mary’s hands, Alphonse Ratisbonne was attracted to Mary’s hands which expressed the gentleness and mercy of her heart. Full of tenderness and gentleness, these hands expressed, for him, the fact that he was loved and forgiven. These are the hands that held the Infant Jesus, cared for Him and consoled Him, those with which she offered Him so many services when she lived in Nazareth, always ready to help those around her. This is how, gradually, Jesus’s hands became like those of His mother: hands full of affection to welcome the little children (Mt 18: 1-4), hands of the Good Shepherd, full of gentleness to welcome the sheep that strayed, hands full of compassion to heal the sick, to pardon, to wash the feet of his disciples...

With Mary, Ratisbonne discovered the happiness of being loved unconditionally; he understood that God welcomes sinners, offers them His Mercy if they consent to being loved, and wants to unite Himself to them to soothe them, encourage them, reconcile them and share with them the fullness of life.

RATISBONNE’S ACCOUNT

“*In the presence of the Most Blessed Virgin, although she did not say a word, I understood the horror of the state I found myself in, the enormity of sin, the beauty of the Catholic Church; in a word, I understood everything.*”

REFLECTION: MARY’S LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

During the apparition, the “*Mother of Mercy*” does not speak; she is in an attitude of proximity, but she remains silent. It is surely not

Mary, Mother of Mercy

without reason that Mary says nothing: as Jesus refuses to dwell on fault or guilt, Mary is neither astonished by the lack of belief nor the aimlessness of this man; she does not think only of his ironies or accusations; she does not reproach him or give him advice; on the contrary, she loves him as he is, simply sees his true dignity and shows him great trust. Mary's silence is not an inability to speak but rather a silence of communion that offers itself. The attitude of the Immaculate One recalls the attitude of the father in the parable of the prodigal son who, full of compassion, goes out to meet his son to communicate his love and forgiveness. The father feels the joy of being merciful: *"because this son of mine was dead and has come to life again."*

For Ratisbonne, this is a revelation; he discovers the language of the heart: no need for words, just a humble and loving presence, a glance that is full of goodness and mercy, like God. The Mother of God is not a vague loving presence; her presence itself announces the love of God who loves unconditionally. Through what she is in herself, Mary speaks of God; her action is effective. She really accomplished something in Ratisbonne's heart: the shadows that darkened it disappeared, the light of Love allowed him to see clearly in his life. God has never abandoned him; He never stopped being present in his life although Ratisbonne denied Him for a long time. Ratisbonne understood the good news of God's love and forgiveness.

III – MARY “STAR OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION”

On May 6, 2008, Benedict XVI named Mary *“Star of evangelization and Queen of Apostles.”* If it is appropriate to speak of Mary as *“Star of evangelization,”* the key to understanding this expression is found in the fact that she is the Queen of Apostles: it is the Spirit who makes apostles and works through them; therefore, Mary, filled with the Holy Spirit, exercises a special mission in the Church.

AFTER THE DEATH OF JESUS

The scattered apostles came together in the Upper Room. They were completely overwhelmed; they didn't understand anything about the events that had just happened. Everything happened so quickly. One of them who received Mary as mother at the foot of the cross,

gives witness to the others. From then on, Mary will have a unique role: she is with the apostles, and the apostles are with her. We can imagine the trusting welcome that Mary gave to each of the apostles, who had become her children. Far from blaming Peter for his denial and the others for abandoning Jesus, she consoles and comforts them, repeating Jesus' words of trust and hope. Imperceptibly, she prepares the apostles to recognize the unexpected and inexplicable presence of the Risen Lord when he will manifest Himself to them.

DURING THE FORTY DAYS BETWEEN EASTER AND THE ASCENSION

Mary is there, at the service of all, a visible sign of the invisible Christ. She is a link between the disciples, a leaven for unity and communion. It is the role of a mother in a family to be a link with all her children. She is also a source of grace: in Mary's heart, divine life is shared with us.

AFTER THE ASCENSION

Mary fulfils a deeply apostolic mission: she accompanies the apostles, poor sinners, and prepares them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now, one with Mary, they are totally open to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

MARY AT THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

Mary's mission is therefore not only to be the model of the Church, but to exercise a truly maternal role at the heart of the Church. Mary's action for us is the continuation of her maternal action for the Incarnate Word. Her maternal action works on us by preparing us and disposing us to receive the grace of Christ. Her role as mother is to make of us children like the child she had on earth, it is to bring us to the very life of the Risen Lord. Mother of Mercy, she is not unaware of our fate and pays attention very specially to our suffering hearts. This is her role with Ratisbonne.

DURING HER APPARITIONS

Mary, Mother of Mercy

Mary addresses all levels of society: poor and rich, believers and non-believers ...

If we briefly compare her encounter with Alphonse Ratisbonne to two other apparitions: one, at the Chapel on rue du Bac (12 years earlier), the other, at the grotto of Massabielle (16 years later), we can notice that her way of reaching out to each seer is not pre-packaged but personalized.

The three locations of the apparitions, Paris (1830), Rome (1842) and Lourdes (1858) remind us of the history of the three witnesses: Catherine Labouré, Alphonse Ratisbonne, and Bernadette Soubirous.

- *Catherine Labouré*, from a little village in Burgundy from a rural practicing Catholic family, is a 24 year-old Daughter of Charity; she has deep faith and a fervent heart.

- *Alphonse Ratisbonne*, from Strasbourg, from a non-practicing Jewish family, is a young 28 year-old banker, rich, atheist and anticlerical; he hates the Church and its clergy.

- *Bernadette Soubirous*, from a little village in the Pyrenees, from a Catholic family that has become very poor and marginalized, is a young 14 year-old girl, of frail health, illiterate, too ignorant to learn the catechism; she finds herself excluded from Eucharistic communion.

With each of them, Mary acts in a different way, taking their own circumstances, their family, social and religious origins into account.

- *With Catherine Labouré*, Mary sits on a chair as a mother sits with her daughter to speak to her and confide secrets to her. Talking to Catherine about the pattern of her life, she reveals to her the mystery of her Immaculate Conception and confides to her the mission of having a **Medal struck** that recalls this mystery by the invocation “*O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.*”

- *With Alphonse Ratisbonne*, Mary presents herself as standing just as she is represented on the Miraculous Medal. Mary does not speak to Alphonse, but her presence is enough to reveal to him the love

with which he is loved by God. Allowing himself to be reconciled with God, he will become the fervent apostle of *mercy and Judeo-Christian dialogue*.

- *With Bernadette Soubirous*, Mary presents herself as a “catechist.” In 18 “lessons” she guides Bernadette in her initiation to the Gospel and the mysteries of the faith. On March 25, 1858, Bernadette became *the messenger of the Immaculate One*, who came personally to confirm the dogma of her Immaculate Conception proclaimed four years earlier by Pope Pius IX.

This rapid presentation of these three Marian apparitions shows that the Immaculate One does not obstruct the personal and diverse spiritual journey of those she addresses; she places herself in the human and spiritual experience of each one and accompanies them in a unique way.

IV – A MESSAGE FOR THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

This particular story of Alphonse Ratisbonne is an invitation to anyone who wishes to be interested in the event in order to receive the heart of the message that can be summed up in this way: “*God is merciful Love; he loves us as we are and wants our happiness.*” In order to experience this Year of Faith well, let us allow two essential aspects of our faith, directly linked to mercy, to resound in our hearts:

- Mercy in evangelization
- Prayer for all

1 – MERCY IN EVANGELIZATION

In the Gospel, we see the welcome that Jesus reserves for sinners, affirming that this is how the heavenly Father acts. In the January 20, 1842, apparition, Mary also shows a great closeness that is full of mercy for this unbelieving man who has no religious point of reference. She sets the tone for the relationship: she does not seek to attract or seduce him, she does not try to transmit a doctrine or message to him; she simply gives rise to the trust that allows him to open his heart and accept the truths of the faith: where there is love, God is present.

Mary, Mother of Mercy

It is simply the quality of her presence that evangelized Ratisbonne. This teaches us that, even if words are useful, they are not the most important thing for entering into a relationship.

In this encounter, Mary seems to set us on the path of the Gospel of the Good Samaritan. It is not a question of knowing who your neighbor is; it is more about knowing how to make yourself close to another person. If we make ourselves close, the other person draws close, but if we reproach, we push our neighbor away and dig a pit that separates. In order to evangelize those who are far from the Church, doesn't Mary encourage us to have a sort of "pastoral" approach consisting of proximity and mercy? People who have the experience of Divine Mercy know interiorly that it restores peace in their hearts. Our merciful God calls us to be a discreet and attentive presence to the mystery of the other person, an invitation to act with no desire for power, but to be respectful companions, able to lift up, encourage and support.

2 – PRAYER FOR ALL

The apparition to Ratisbonne is closely linked to the prayer of the Christian community. The theme of prayer in the Church for the conversion of sinners is therefore strongly emphasized. This apparition seems to come about through the Miraculous Medal combined with the faith and prayer of a chain of believers, beginning with Fr. Théodore Ratisbonne, the members of the Association of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires, M. de Bussières, Count de Laferronay, and so many other believers who prayed to God throughout the world.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks us to pray ceaselessly and at all times: "*Whatever you ask for in prayer in faith, you will receive*" (Mt 21: 22), "*all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours*" (Mk 11: 24). Praying for sinners is one of the missions of a Christian: even if we are all sinners, we are called by Christ to participate with Him in the salvation of our brothers and sisters. It is a duty of solidarity and compassion to bring others before God, love them, bring mercy "*wherever sin is abundant*" because God does not want a single one of his children to be lost.

When the Church calls us to pray for sinners, we spontaneously think of "saying" prayers. Yes, but we need a deeper attitude that consists of entering into relationship with God. By placing ourselves in the presence of God, as God is present to us, we make all those we hold in our heart present before God. In our prayers of supplication, God makes us enter into His Kingdom by crossing through the "door of faith" and so the people for whom we pray can already benefit. Intercession for our brothers and sisters is not just a pious devotion; it is a great act of mercy on the part of believers, unable to keep for themselves the fullness of happiness contained in the experience of God's love. On July 18, 1830, Catherine Labouré was invited by Mary to pray for all humanity touched by violence and suffering. God does not cease to give Himself in the midst of a world of sin, precisely where He is rejected, because that's where He is needed. How many times did Catherine go "to the foot of the altar" to pray for suffering humanity?

On February 24, 1858, in Lourdes, during the eighth apparition, Bernadette Soubirous was also invited to "*pray for sinners.*" This call from Mary, repeated during the following apparitions, changed Bernadette's life considerably. It was a mission for Bernadette, even if she was aware that she herself was numbered among the sinners who needed the prayer of others. Bernadette remained faithful to prayer all her life, especially the prayer of the rosary.

CONCLUSION

These reflections are not intended to prove anything; they are simply meant to testify to the path of happiness that Mary offers to those who agree to recognize the light and life of God. Even if the deep communion of Mary and Ratisbonne is well beyond words, it is clear that this privileged encounter is essentially permeated with God's infinite mercy. Mary's maternal action is exercised in the Church. She prepares the Church and disposes it to receive Christ's mercy.

The teaching of Pope John Paul II confirmed the definitive place to be given to Divine Mercy, a real intuition inspired by the Spirit for the new millennium: "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.*" We are invited with Mary to have a renewed experience of

Mary, Mother of Mercy

God's mercy. The words of the angel to Joseph are addressed to each one of us: "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home" (Mt 1: 20)... you will find in her only divine mercy.

With Mary "Mother of Mercy," let us generously welcome Divine Mercy so that it may dwell in our hearts, heal them and unify them at a deep level so that, in this way, by our service, the mercy of Christ may enter the heart of those who are poor.

Sister Anne PRÉVOST
Daughter of Charity

APPOINTMENTS

**Designation of Visitatrixes
and appointment of Provincial Directors**

DESIGNATION OF VISITATRIXES

PROVINCE OF BELO HORIZONTE: Sister Caetana Luisa Heleno GOMES was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Maria das Graças ALVES, December 12, 2012.

PROVINCE OF THE PHILIPPINES: Sister Efleda FERRIOLS was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Maria Teresa MUEDA, December 21, 2012.

PROVINCE OF IRELAND: Sister Goretti BUTLER was designated Visitatrix, replacing Sister Catherine PRENDERGAST, February 20, 2013.

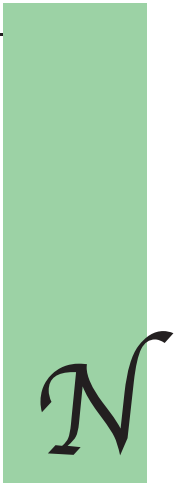
NEW PROVINCE OF ESPAÑA-SUR: Sister Maria Pilar RENDON de DUENAS was designated Visitatrix, February 20, 2013.

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NOMINATION OF PROVINCIAL DIRECTORS

PROVINCE OF PERU: Father Ruben Pedro BORDA MONTES was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, October 31, 2012.

PROVINCE OF CAMEROON: Father Emmanuel TYPAMM was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, December 10, 2012.



*News
from the
Provinces*

Appointments

PROVINCE OF RECIFE: Father José MOREIRA RIBEIRO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, January 10, 2013.

PROVINCE OF WARSAW: Father Kazimierz MALZENSKI was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a mandate of three years, March 13, 2013.

PROVINCE OF MADRID SAINT LOUISE: Father Antonio MOLINA SALMERON was re-appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for a mandate of three years, March 27, 2013.

NEW PROVINCE OF ESPAÑA-SUR: Father José Maria LOPEZ MASIDE was appointed Director of the new Province of the Daughters of Charity, January 10, 2013.

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Apostolic project of Saint Hyacinthe House in San Salvador

Saint-Hyacinthe House, established in 1911, is a residence for senior Sisters. The local community is responsible for several works: Saint Catherine's School with 850 girls, a day care service and nursery school for 125 children of poor parents, and a social service project for elderly and abandoned people. The Sisters also support victims of natural disasters. Finally, the house hosts retreats and sessions for the Sisters or members of Church movements.

In 2001, at the time of two earthquakes and other disasters that shook El Salvador, the Sisters helped with the emergency services. This is how we came to be in this rural region of extreme poverty, and where the majority of houses were destroyed: the "San José el Cedro" district, 20 kilometers from the capital.

After helping with initial emergency services, we discovered poverty and malnutrition among children, so the community decided to take on this new mission. From that time onwards, a Sister from the local community has been accompanying the people of "Cedro" and collaborates in projects to help the inhabitants. In this way, and with assistance from different organizations, we help people, some of whom belong to Protestant churches, to form one family, loved by God.

With the help of Christians and American benefactors, we took part in a project to build decent housing, an ongoing project because there are always more families and the work progresses more slowly because of the recession.

We became aware of malnutrition among many children in the village and so we set up a cafeteria (Casa del Cipote) in a warehouse. With the assistance of generous people, we bought some land and built the Saint Vincent de Paul Center where all the services of the community

Sisters' Testimonies

are based. All the families in the district collaborated in the Center's construction and are proud to be owners of it.

The Saint Vincent de Paul Center is home to:

- The cafeteria that twice a day caters for about a hundred children, aged 2 to 12. As malnutrition is overcome, the children are more able to benefit from school. Mothers help in the kitchen. A vegetable garden allows vegetables to be produced for sale and encourages the women to grow produce at home that will help them to feed their family even if this is sometimes difficult because of lack of water.

- The small nursery school for children aged 4-6 years. They learn there how to work together and develop their skills, and this prepares them to make a good start in primary school.

- A computer class which helps young people to obtain a diploma and then find work. Twenty-five scholarships were awarded to children from large families living in poverty. We are convinced that the best way to help these poor people is to give them the opportunity to study and prepare themselves to take on life's responsibilities.

- A sewing and local crafts workshop for women. This training allows women to acquire skills and eventually make some money for their families.

In order to help families, an aid committee was set up four years ago with members of the rural community in order to obtain interest-free loans, thanks to some benefactors. This year, we have increased the number of families benefiting from this service, allowing them to purchase fertilizer, pesticides, and seeds. They make a commitment to pay back the loans after the harvest as well as to do work that is in the general interest of the Center. These families are happy and grateful to be able to meet their daily needs in this way.

- A sports center for children and young people. The goal is to teach young people to use their time well according to the saying "a healthy mind in a healthy body" and to avoid the temptation of vices and drugs. One of the conditions for using the facility is participation in

educational support and formation in human values. A trainer helps them develop their skills.

The villagers organize themselves and manage their own progress. With the help of two lawyers and the Sisters, they established an association, the Integrated Vincentian Center (CIV), which has legal status. It gives hope for those who are poor: it's a good means of continuing to create new projects to improve their lives. Our local community of Daughters of Charity supports and accompanies them. We share the joys and sorrows of the poor we serve at Saint Hyacinthe House and in the "Cedro" district.

All this work goes hand-in-hand with evangelization: catechism for the children and pastoral guidance for families. On a national and international level, many people help us as volunteers or benefactors.

With Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, we say, "Love is infinitely inventive." Divine Providence is with us because this work only exists thanks to Providence; we receive no assistance from the government.

These poor people evangelize us constantly through their faith, trust and hope in God. They are full of gratitude to God and the Daughters of Charity who accompany them and help them transform their lives. We strive to be the vehicle of God's tender love for them.

As a local community, we give thanks to God for the happiness of serving and accompanying our poorest brothers and sisters. May Mary, only Mother of the Company, watch over each of the families, especially those who suffer from poverty, insecurity, violence and injustice yet maintain their trust in God.

The Sisters of Saint Hyacinthe House

Motherhouse, July 1-14, 2012

Meeting of the Provincial Directors

In conformity with the practice mentioned in the *Directory of the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity* (p. 14), our Superior General, Fr. Gregory Gay, CM, called together the Provincial Directors at the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity in Paris for a meeting from July 1-14, 2012. Most of the Provincial Directors were able to attend. The theme of the meeting was *“The Provincial Director: Animating, Accompanying and Forming the Daughters of Charity.”*

In a letter of welcome to his confreres, Fr. Gregory described the importance of this role and his intent for the meeting:

I believe that you know how important our ministry to the Daughters of Charity is for me, as I am sure it is for you. This service was very close to the heart of St. Vincent. Clearly, the work which he did for the poor of France and the world could not have been accomplished without the support of St. Louise de Marillac and those first Daughters of Charity. It is still true today. We unite with our Sisters in the living expression of our common charism. Your work as Provincial Directors is particularly significant in that regard.

My intent for this gathering is that we take time to come to know each other and share our collective wisdom. Some of us will be new to the role of Provincial Director; others of us will have faithfully served in this work for many years. Some of what will be said will be new information for some of us; much of it will be familiar to others. All the information and discussion will be filtered through the lens of our different cultures and situations. That is the nature of the worldwide Church and our worldwide communities, and it is a blessing for which I am particularly grateful.

Please take the opportunity here to teach and to learn from each other. I intend to do so. That will be the work of the Spirit in our midst.

We can describe the learning environment of the gathering under three headings: the meeting sessions, prayer in common, and informal sharing.

1. MEETING SESSIONS

Much of the time of our gathering was consumed by the sessions which took place in the Conference Hall of the Daughters on the rue du Bac. Through the generosity of Sr. Evelyne, DC and her Council, the confreres benefited from facilities of the Sisters, and they extended a wondrous hospitality of time and resources, especially the Sister translators.

Each day, a theme was developed for the formation of the Provincial Director

The first day, Monday, July 2nd, opened with a morning of recollection presented by the Director General, Fr. Patrick Griffin, CM. He spoke about *“The Congregation at the Service of the Company”* and used Luke 4:16-21 as the basis for the reflection. In the afternoon, Sr. Evelyne Franc, DC, Superior General, made a presentation on *“The Company—today and the future.”* Five of the General Councillors offered a summary report on the May Encounter of the Visitatrices. This first day, therefore, oriented the assembled confreres for the weeks of work to come.

The following days we dealt with the theme:

- “The Founders”:
 - * “St. Vincent as cofounder of the Daughters of Charity”
 - * “St. Louise de Marillac and the spirituality of the Daughters of Charity.”
- “The Church and the Company,” during which we reflected on the documents of the Church and discernment for a vocation to the consecrated life in the Church.
- “Identity and the Company.” This comprised talks on:
 - *The identity and the special character of vows in the Company

Meeting of the Provincial Directors

*Essential documents of the Company: “From Common Rules to Constitutions.”

- Reading the *Directory* together, to consider what changes might be useful for the future.
- Ministry of animation
 - *The role and action of the Holy Spirit in spiritual animation
 - * Various types of animation: retreats, conferences, and days of recollection.

Sunday was welcomed as a “day of rest,” which allowed confreres to visit Paris and walk in the footsteps of our Founders. Work resumed next day with the following themes:

- Accompaniment and pastoral visits. The fraternal and supportive element of these visits was linked to their essential character of priestly service.
- Initial and ongoing formation
- Issues and principles connected with the Canon Law of the Church and the Particular Law of the Company. Many questions about these were explored during the discussion and questions sessions. In the later part of this afternoon, we returned to the theme of “Accompaniment” and spoke about the special ministry to aged and infirm Sisters.
- The Director’s role with regard to the Provincial Council and the Provincial Assembly. The quality and diversity of the conversation came from the varied experiences of the Directors themselves. The afternoon focused on the special cases of “Sisters with difficulties.” Members of the General Council were invited to give the presentations and lead the discussion.
- Then there was an opportunity for the confreres to have a plenary group discussion with the Superior General, Fr. Gregory. He prompted the conversation with some issues and then accepted comments or questions. That afternoon, the some of

the Directors presented their experiences, leading to a beautiful sharing and time for reflection.

On the final day, Fr. Pat Griffin gave a summary of the themes discussed and focused on collaboration. Fr. Gregory thanked all those who made this meeting possible, especially the generosity of Sr. Evelyne and our Sisters, Fr. Bernard Schoepfer and our confreres at Saint Lazare, the translators, the technicians, and the members of the General Secretariat at the rue du Bac. Fr. Gregory ended by inviting the confreres to share what values they would be taking home with them from this meeting, and he thanked everyone for their service as his delegates to our Sisters, as well as for their lively participation in our gathering.

We asked the Blessed Virgin to continue to bless us and the Holy Spirit to continue to guide us as we moved towards the celebration of the Eucharist.

2. PRAYER IN COMMON

Early in the morning and as evening fell, the attentive ear could distinguish the sound of singing in various languages coming from the ground floor all the way to the third floor in Saint Lazare. The Directors were divided into five language groups (French, Spanish, English, Italian, and Portuguese) for morning and evening prayer.

For the Eucharist, with the homilies translated and distributed in the various languages, and liturgy books providing the text for the prayers in the language of the day, all the confreres were able to celebrate together and with one voice. Most often, the celebration of the Eucharist took place in the Chapel of St. Vincent on rue de Sèvres, on two occasions it was celebrated in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal and twice in the crypt of St. Joseph’s chapel, rue du Bac. These holy places reminded the confreres of our heritage and heroes and of the special place which Mary has in our charism and the devotion of our people, as well as the service given by our Sisters.

Of course our sessions always began and ended with prayer, as we invoked the Holy Spirit, praised our God, and sought the intercession of Mary.

3. INFORMAL SHARING

In addition to the quality of presentations and discussions, much of the learning took place—as Fr. Gregory wanted—during informal sharing at table, in walking back and forth to the meeting and in walks during the evenings. Difference of language did not prove to be a major obstacle as confreres acted as translators for one another. It was also not unusual to hear conversations that were a mixture of French, Spanish and Italian, ending with “okay.”

The global character of the Company as well as the Congregation was always evident. Confreres were very interested in one another’s experiences and the situations with which they dealt in their respective countries. Always evident, however, were the dedication of the confreres to our Sisters and the dedication of our Sisters to those who are poor and marginalized in every country and culture. The privilege and responsibility of the Provincial Directors as delegates of the Superior General to the Daughters of Charity are highly valued. Fr. Gregory expresses this sentiment clearly at the conclusion of his letter in our “*Directory of the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity*”:

“Provincial Directors can be assured that in serving the Sisters, they are serving those who are poor. I ask the Holy Spirit to accompany [you] and assist [you] in this ministry.” (Directory of the Provincial Directors, p. 6)

The accompaniment and assistance of the Holy Spirit were evident in the two weeks dedicated to ongoing formation. We pray, through the grace of this Spirit, and the intercession of the Blessed Mother, that we may continue to value and carry out this role faithfully in response to our common charism. As we collaborate in the animation, accompaniment and formation of the Daughters of Charity, we also contribute to our own.

Father Patrick GRIFFIN, C.M.
Director General

**BIRTH OF A NEW PROVINCE IN SPAIN:
“PROVINCE OF ESPAÑA-SUR”**

To give a better response to new situations today and take up new challenges, a new Province “España-Sur” is born. It unites the three former Provinces of Granada, Seville and the Canaries.

The official ceremonies for the establishment of the new Province took place on March 15, 2013, the feast of Saint Louise, in the presence of Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, Sister Rosa María Miró, Assistant General, and Father Patrick Griffin, Director General. Sister Evelyne installed the Visitatrix and the Councillors. She confided the official document of the erection of the new Province to Sister María Pilar Rendon. Father Patrick introduced the new Provincial Director.

**SENDING ON MISSION OF
FIVE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY
FROM THE PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AFRICA**

Following an urgent appeal from the Central African Republic, the mission of Safa in the Central African Republic was confided to the Province of Central Africa, in collaboration with the Province of Eritrea, in 2011.

After preparatory formation on the themes: mission of the Redeemer, evangelization in the modern world, missionary activity, prophetic nature of the Vincentian charism in the light of the Church’s social teaching, etc., 5 Daughters of Charity from the Province of Central Africa, including two originally from the Province of Eritrea, were sent on mission to Safa in 2012. Gradually the Sisters became acclimatized, learned something of the customs and cultures of the region and learned Sango, the country’s official language, so as to make communication easier. The Sisters now provide health services.

Saint Vincent's thinking on the Daughter of Charity as a teacher

(Cf. Coste IX, 64-66)

H Before reflecting on the theme “The Daughter of Charity as a teacher”, it would be a good idea to recall St. Vincent’s own experience as a student and teacher, and this for at least two reasons:

*History
of the Com-
pany*

1. Vincent de Paul always put a high value on experience, and everything that he experienced as a student and then as a teacher is found, in one way or another, in his projects and his missionary activities related to teaching.

2. A father should be a living and even a reassuring point of reference for all his children. This is especially true when the father is Saint Vincent. However, I sometimes find that those who are working within the latest social, professional or pastoral structures are perfectly at ease in their relationship with Saint Vincent de Paul, whereas teachers seem perhaps a little uncomfortable, as if the former were completely in line with his teaching and the latter somewhat on the margins. I am convinced that Vincent de Paul’s initial experiences were crucial for him and for his foundations and that they led him to regard teaching as a very important means of evangelization and of serving the poor.

To explore in greater depth the theme “The Daughter of Charity as Teacher, according to the mind of Saint Vincent de Paul,” we need to recall the story of Marguerite Naseau.

MARGUERITE NASEAU

Vincent de Paul’s first professional and pastoral activity was teaching. It is quite interesting and no doubt providential that the first Daughter of Charity in the person of Marguerite Naseau, was also, in her own way, a teacher.

You will be familiar with the summary of the conference from July 1642 on the virtues of Marguerite Naseau (IX 64-66), but it is fitting that you reread attentively a portion of it that relates directly to our topic: “*Sister Marguerite Naseau was the first Sister who came to serve the sick poor in the parish of Saint-Sauveur, where the Confraternity of Charity was established in the year 1630. Marguerite Naseau from Suresnes was the first Sister who had the happiness of showing others the way, both to teach young girls and to nurse the sick poor, although she had almost no other teacher or schoolmistress but God. She was just a poor, uneducated cowherd. Moved by a powerful inspiration from heaven, the idea came to her to teach young people so she bought a primer and, since she was unable to go to school for instruction, went and asked the Pastor or the Assistant to tell her the first four letters of the alphabet. On another occasion, she asked about the next four, and so on for the rest. Afterward, while minding the cows, she would study her lesson. If she saw a passerby who looked like he knew how to read, she would ask, “Monsieur, how is this word pronounced?” In this way, she gradually learned to read, then taught other girls in her village. Next, she decided to go from village to village to teach the young people, accompanied by two or three other young women she had instructed. One would go to one village, and the other to another. The amazing thing is that she undertook all this with no money or any other assistance except Divine Providence. She often fasted for entire days and stayed in places where only the walls were left standing. Sometimes she worked day and night teaching not only little girls but even the older ones, doing so with no motive of vanity or self-interest and no other intention than the glory of God, who provided for all her major needs, without her even thinking about them. She herself told Mlle Le Gras that one time, when she hadn’t had any bread for several days but hadn’t told anyone of her distress, she found, on her return from Mass, enough food to last her for quite a long time. The harder she worked at teaching the children, the more the village folk*

Saint Vincent's thinking on the Daughter of Charity as a teacher

ridiculed and calumniated her, but her zeal grew only more ardent. She was so detached that she gave away all she had, depriving herself even of necessities. She provided for the education of a few young men who had no means of their own, frequently supplied them with food, and encouraged them to serve God. Those young men are now good priests.

Eventually, as soon as she heard that there was a Confraternity of Charity in Paris for the sick poor, off she went, driven by the desire to be involved in this ministry, and, although she really wanted to continue to teach young people, nevertheless she gave up that practice of charity to take up the other, which she felt was more perfect and necessary. And that was how God wanted it, so that she might be the first Daughter of Charity and Servant of the Sick Poor in the city of Paris. She attracted to this other girls, whom she had helped to detach themselves from all superficial things and to embrace a devout life.

She was very humble and submissive, and so little attached to anything that she willingly changed parishes three times in a short period, and everyone missed her greatly when she left.

In the parishes, she was just as charitable as she had been in the country, giving away anything she might have, whenever the opportunity presented itself. She could never refuse anything, and would have been willing to take everyone home with her. It should be noted that at this time no Community had yet been formed, nor any Rule that might order her to do otherwise.

She was very patient and never complained. Everyone loved her because there was nothing in her that was not lovable. Her charity was so great that she died from sharing her bed with a poor plague-stricken girl. Attacked by this illness herself, she said good-bye to the Sister who was with her, as if she had foreseen that she was going to die, and went off to Saint Louis [Hospital], her heart filled with joy and conformity to God's Will." (IX, 65-66)

Some of these passages should be reflected on and given greater importance:

* First of all there is M. Vincent's affirmation that Marguerite Naseau was the first to come. This is an important, irrefutable statement relating to your origins and one, moreover, that is clearly evident in the first volume of Saint Vincent's letters.

* Marguerite Naseau is the first sister and she had the happiness of showing the way to others. "During the missions I met a good country woman, who had given herself to God to teach girls here and there. God inspired her with the thought of coming to see me, and I suggested the service of the poor to her. Immediately she gladly accepted, and I sent her to Saint-Sauveur, the first parish in Paris in which the Charity was established." (IX, 166) Marguerite was at the Confraternity Saint-Sauveur in 1630. "A Charity was next set up in Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, then at Saint-Benoit, where there were some good country women. God blessed them so much that, from that time on, they began to meet and come together almost imperceptibly." (IX, 166) The other Parisian Confraternities would also want these girls, and it was Marguerite who recruited them, preparing the members of the first community.

* She was only a poor uneducated cowherd. This sentence seems very significant to me: Marguerite was only a poor uneducated cowherd just as Vincent, at the age of 14, was only a poor swineherd. Marguerite surely had a great psychological and spiritual influence on Vincent de Paul's development. From 1617 to 1633, the Charities were affected by the years 1610 to 1624, a period spent by Vincent at court and with the de Gondi family. From 1633 onward, the Daughters of Charity worked for people of their own social class; Vincent had come to understand the great value of their origins, something he expressed wonderfully in his conference on the imitation of the virtues of country girls.

* Moved by a powerful inspiration from heaven, although she had almost no other teacher or schoolmistress but God, the idea came to her to teach young people. Teaching is a real vocation and here we have a rather unique and extraordinary one: an illiterate woman has the idea of teaching young people! It's really moving and, already, quite Vincentian. For some teachers, at least those who have a vocation to this work, it entails the most generous and selfless sharing of what

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you have. As for Marguerite, she goes so far as to share what she doesn't have, at least not yet. This is truly moving. Her project is, moreover, profoundly Vincentian, because it is first of all and quite spontaneously, outwardly directed, towards those who are poor. She will not study for her own advantage; she wants to learn in order to instruct young people.

* She bought a primer ...she asked... Afterwards, while minding the cows, she would study her lesson ... she gradually learned to read... There are several points to make here. First, we must emphasize Marguerite Naseau's exceptional personality. I wonder what would have become of such a girl if she could have benefited from the type of education we are used to today... while reminding myself that she became, in any case, much more and much better than a literate and cultivated woman.

Two more brief observations:

* You have surely noticed, incidentally, that she couldn't go to school. It's hardly surprising; schools were not for those who were poor and certainly not for girls; furthermore, Marguerite had to work. Mention of the pastor and vicar is very significant. We spoke yesterday about the important role of the Church in education of the masses. This sentence is also very significant: "If she saw a passerby who looked as though he knew how to read, she would ask, 'Monsieur, ...'"; this was an important test: someone who knew how to read or at least looked as though he could read, would inevitably be a man!

* In this way, she gradually learned to read, then taught and instructed others. Notice how Marguerite Naseau's project was always very clear. She had really studied in order to instruct other girls who were poor like her. But what's surprising here is Marguerite Naseau's temperament as an organizer, we could say as a foundress. We understand how this exceptional young woman could so impress Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. In this brief account, we see the courage and the genius of the self-taught girl, her passion to educate and instruct, her concern for formation of teachers, and, finally, the way she organized a literacy network, from village to village. How we regret that this famous conference on the virtues of Marguerite Naseau was abridged!

How we would love to have other details about this first Daughter of Charity who clearly had the vocation, genius and passion for teaching.

* "*The amazing thing...with no money...*" Obviously, Vincent the master organizer was completely astounded at this; he who was well aware of the cost of charitable initiatives!

* Notice also the ridicule and calumnies...It was almost out of place for a woman to be able to read. This was all the more reason why they didn't accept her starting to teach and, especially, as what follows indicates, teaching young people. It would be turning the world upside down!

* "*Although she really wanted to continue to teach young people...the sick poor.*" Saint Vincent's testimony leaves no doubt that Marguerite Naseau really wanted to teach young people. So it is evident that the first Daughter of Charity had the vocation, passion and gift for teaching but, clearly, teaching for the glory of God and the service of the poor.

I have deliberately spoken at length about Marguerite Naseau's personality and lived experience for two reasons:

1 – first of all because she is, according to Saint Vincent, the first Daughter of Charity. We could almost give her the title of co-foundress. At a time when, clearly, neither Saint Vincent nor Saint Louise thought of founding a community of young women, Marguerite Naseau spontaneously and providentially presented herself as a sort of prototype Daughter of Charity that appealed to Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul ;

2 – because I am persuaded that Marguerite Naseau's exceptional "teaching" experience was important and decisive for the apostolic direction of your Company. We find teaching mentioned, in fact, in the very first rules; that is from the very earliest days. This is Marguerite Naseau's contribution, an echo of her experience and that of the other young women "*whom she instructed*" and some of whom she surely formed to be the first nucleus of the Company.

THE ROLE OF TEACHING AS DESCRIBED IN THE FIRST RULES

On July 31, 1634, Monsieur Vincent decided to explain the rules to the first Sisters, after first reminding them: *“Providence seems to have brought the twelve of you together...”* Let us first speak about this “rule for the 12” presented this day by the Founder (IX, 1-13). We note that Marguerite Naseau’s experience has already been integrated into them. Yes, the main mission of the twelve is the service of the sick poor in their homes, within the framework of the Confraternities of Charity. But the work of teaching is also clearly affirmed there: *“Make good use of the free time you have after caring for the sick. Never be idle; apply yourself to learning how to read - not for your own advantage but to be in a position to be sent to places where you could teach.”* (IX, 6) This text is important because it proves that from the beginning teaching was an activity or an option for Daughters of Charity.

When, seven years later, Vincent again explains the same rule (August 16, 1641), he is even clearer: *“After Mass, you should work at learning how to read in order to be able to teach little girls. Apply yourselves seriously to this, dear Sisters, because it’s one of the two aims for which you give yourselves to God: the service of the sick poor and the education of youth, especially in country places. The city is almost fully furnished with Sisters, so it’s only right that you should go to minister in the country. Aren’t all of you disposed to do so, dear Sisters, with no further thought of where you may be sent, of your friends, or whether to places that are near or far?”* (IX, 43)

CRITERIA

It is clear that, from the beginning and until the death of Saint Vincent, teaching was regarded in the Company of the Daughters of Charity as an important form of service of the poor.

However, to Saint Vincent’s way of thinking, it was not a question of just any kind of teaching. He often recalled the criteria, which we can reduce to two, in order not to spend too much time developing the point.

1 – the Daughters of Charity’s teaching should be restricted to those who are poor;

2 – for the Daughters of Charity, teaching should never be detrimental to or take precedence over service of the poor. Vincent even specified that the ideal would be to find both options in each local community and this, as we will see, constitutes a rather original Vincentian idea about apostolic communities.

1 - The Daughters of Charity’s teaching ministry should be restricted to poor girls.

We should remember that there was no legislation about education at that time and that village schools were private initiatives, dependent only on their founders. Vincent could, therefore, easily give guidelines and norms for his works related to teaching. However, this should not lead us to minimize what he clearly wished to see implemented.

For him, the logic was simple. Daughters of Charity are by vocation servants of those who are poor, so no matter what a Daughter of Charity’s specific and practical form of service may be, she should be a servant of the poor, and so if she was a teacher, she should be a teacher of those who are poor. When Vincent spoke of the poor, he was speaking of those who were truly poor, those who lacked sufficient material resources to meet their needs.

Let us again draw close to Vincent who, on February 9, 1653, gave this commentary on the rule of the Daughters of Charity. He said to them: *“Another purpose of your Company, Sisters, is to teach the fear and love of God to children in schools, and you have that in common with the Ursulines. But, because their houses are large and wealthy, poor persons can’t go there, and come to you for assistance.”* (IX, 467)

On November 2, 1655, he again compared his Daughters to them: *“The Ursulines assist their neighbor by instructing and taking in pupils as boarders, but these girls are usually from the upper class; and you have to teach persons who are poor wherever you find occasion to do so - not only the children in your schools, but all poor persons, whom you assist...”* (X, 118)

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We don't need to multiply texts and references. We know Vincent's preferential, and we might say, his exclusive option in favor of those who are poor, especially in what concerns the Daughters of Charity. In his opinion, insofar as the ministry of teaching was for the benefit of those who were poor, it was authentic service of the poor and was perfectly in line with the spirit and ends of the Company.

That is the first criterion established by Saint Vincent for the ministry of teaching in the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

2–THE SECOND CRITERION CONCERNS THE HIERARCHY OF VALUES AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WHAT VINCENT CALLED THE TWO AIMS OF YOUR COMPANY.

If it is clear that teaching has been a ministry for the Daughters of Charity since their foundation, it is no less clear that it is the second of the two aims of the early Company: second in time and, for Vincent, second in terms of priority and importance.

Marguerite Naseau, the first Daughter of Charity, who cared passionately about and specialized in teaching, moved on from teaching to serving the sick poor. This was only a sign, but in the case of priority or competition between these two ministries, Vincent always had the same reaction as Marguerite Naseau. Explaining the rule for Sisters in parishes, Vincent told them: "*When they are able to teach little girls in the parish without being prevented from going to the sick, one of the two will do so, but will be relieved by the other when necessary...*" (X, 554)

He wrote about the Sisters in Warsaw, "*I praise God that the Daughters of Charity have opened their little schools, and am surprised that they have not been put to work caring for the sick poor of the town.*" (Letter to Charles Ozenne, V, 377)

For Vincent, caring for those who are poor and especially for the sick poor was the primary mission of the Daughters of Charity. However, instruction and formation of girls was definitely the second aim, something that was highly encouraged and in reality practiced in most of the first local communities, but always with the assurance that this

would not be detrimental to the primary aim.

I believe that we have kept truly faithful to what Saint Vincent wanted for the Daughters of Charity. It would be completely mistaken to say that the office of teaching should be considered as having the same importance and being on the same level as direct service to the sick poor. The office of teaching in the Company is justified insofar as it is a way of serving the poor.

We should mention here something that seems to me to be very characteristic of the thinking and practice of Saint Vincent. In his time, there were Daughters of Charity employed in the service of the poor; sick, prisoners, elderly, etc., and there were Daughters of Charity serving in schools. Now, Vincent seemed apprehensive about the specialization of local communities and didn't want, on the one hand, local communities of teachers and, on the other, communities of servants of the sick and of the elderly... He strongly insisted that each local community should include both ministries.

This fear of specialization in local communities struck me all the more when I found this to be exactly the same case for the Congregation of the Mission.

For the priests of the Mission, in fact, there were also two aims: evangelization of those who are poor and formation of the clergy. Vincent's reasoning was the same. For him, teaching in the seminaries was certainly an important task in the Congregation, but it was only justified to the extent that the formation of priests was a means for better evangelizing the poor. The needs of the formation of the clergy should never take precedence over the demands and urgency of the direct evangelization of the poor. Be that as it may, there were missionaries and teachers in the Congregation. And, here again, Vincent refused to establish local communities specializing in one option or the other. It was his wish and his policy that in each local community there should be missionaries and teachers.

To bishops who requested confreres for seminaries, he replied that he would send them provided that one or two missionaries could join their group in order to evangelize those who are poor. For him it

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was a way of keeping the teacher confreres in daily contact with the missionaries. So there were not two classes or categories: intellectuals and missionaries; rather, there was a single missionary community with two complementary works.

We discover exactly the same project and reaction with regard to the Daughters of Charity. Vincent clearly did not want local communities restricted to teaching or local communities restricted to the service of those who are poor, but he systematically developed local communities engaged in more than one work.

In 1640, the parish of Nanteuil asked for a Daughter of Charity for the school. Louise de Marillac, in agreement with Vincent, responded that they would like to send two, one of whom would care for the poor sick (II, 109-110). We also learn from a letter from Monsieur Vincent to Mademoiselle, from December 1639, that, "*because of the disease there [Richelieu],*" the Sisters had to stop visiting the sick and teaching in the schools (I, 596).

In a letter to Jean-François de Gondî, Archbishop of Paris, in August or September 1645, Vincent said this about the early days of the Company: "*... in the thirteen or fourteen years since this work was begun, God has so blessed it that at present there are in each of those parishes two or three girls who work every day assisting the said poor and even sometimes instructing poor girls when they can. They live at the expense of the Confraternity of the parishes where they are employed, but so frugally that they spend only one hundred livres a year, at the most for food and clothing, and in some parishes, only twenty-five ecus.*" (II, 600-601) Another letter from Vincent de Paul, who calls himself the most unworthy Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, gives the same details in almost the same words: "*... at present there are in each of those parishes two or three of these girls who work every day assisting the said sick poor, and even sometimes instructing poor girls when they can.*" (III, 60)

As much with regard to the Confreres of the Congregation of the Mission as to the Daughters of Charity, you really get the impression that Vincent feared a dangerous trend, a sort of deviation that would lead teachers to distance themselves from and have very little

connection with the poor. To ward off this danger, Vincent turned to mixed communities where the teacher Sister or Confrere would always work with the Confrere who would go and preach the mission in the villages, or with the Sister who would care for the poor sick in their homes or visit the prisoners in their prisons.

More than three centuries have passed and, as with other problems, that of specialization presents itself in a very different way today. God knows Saint Vincent considered competence important: the competence of the nurse, of the catechist Daughter of Charity, of the priest of the Mission working in the major seminaries or the Missions. In his time, however, competence could be acquired without specialization. Today, times have changed considerably, and there is no possibility of competence without specialization. This is certainly true for school disciplines: mathematics, literature, languages, science, technology... This is equally true for living environments: urban, rural, working class, marginalized... All this is quite true, but...

It is right, I think, to ask ourselves if Saint Vincent's intuition does not remain, like many of his intuitions, an issue for our own day.

Even today, specialization, which is often a professional requirement, has its limits and its dangers, and communication seems more and more necessary among confreres, and among Sisters engaged in different ministries. It is only through ongoing sharing and communication that the fundamental orientation of our Institutes can be preserved for the poor, their evangelization and their service.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that teaching as a way of serving the poor was, from the beginning, a ministry that Saint Vincent confided to the Daughters of Charity.

It is clear, too, that this ministry was considered as coming after the service of the poor in order of priority; it was the second aim and in no way was it to be detrimental to the first.

Saint Vincent's thinking on the Daughter of Charity as a teacher

Finally, it is clear that in accordance with Saint Vincent's thinking and wishes, this ministry, like all the works of the Daughters of Charity, should be directed towards those who are poor. Other students should be referred to the Ursulines.

As for the reasons why, Saint Vincent, from the very beginning, considered teaching to be an authentic and necessary service of those who are poor, we must remember:

- * that Saint Vincent had no formal education for fourteen years;
- * that he experienced human and social promotion through teaching;
- * that he himself subsequently became a teacher;
- * that, finally and most importantly, he met Marguerite Naseau, an extraordinary and passionate teacher, who brought all her experience and conviction to the founding of the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

In this we see important reasons for being faithful to the Founder's teaching that remain in force and should remain so in situations that are very different from those known by Saint Vincent, Saint Louise and Marguerite Naseau. This means that we have to search together for ways of remaining faithful to what is essential in the Vincentian ethos in today's context.

Father Jean Morin, CM

**“Whoever you are
that see yourself during this mortal existence
to be drifting in treacherous waters,
at the mercy of the winds and the waves
rather than walking on firm ground,
turn not your eyes away
from the splendor of this guiding star,
unless you wish to be overcome
by the storm.**

**When the storms of temptation burst upon you,
when you see yourself driven upon the rocks of
tribulation,
look upon the star and call upon Mary...**

**In dangers, in doubts, in difficulties,
think of Mary, call on Mary.**

**Let not her name depart from your lips,
never allow it to leave your heart,
and that you may more surely obtain the assistance
of her prayer,
do not neglect to walk in her footsteps.**

**With her as your guide, you will never go astray,
invoking her you will never lose heart.
So long as she is in your thoughts, you are safe
from illusion.**

**While she holds your hand, you cannot fail,
under her protection, you have nothing to fear;
if she walks before you, you will not grow weary;
if she shows you favor, you will reach the goal.”**

Bernard of Clairvaux

