

*E*choes *of the Company*



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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SISTER EVELYNE FRANCO, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of January 1, 2014

Dear Sisters,

"May God have pity on us and bless us, may He let His face shine upon us!"¹

Happy feast of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, and a holy New Year to each one of you!

Thank you for the warm wishes you have sent me during these recent weeks. Some of the messages allowed me to participate in your daily life, and I placed all the intentions you confided to me (for those who are poor, Sisters who are sick, the Assemblies, your families, etc.) in the hands of the Child in the manger; He is the eternal light of the Father who breaks through our night so the day might be born there; He comes to teach us to build a world of justice and peace:

"Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people."²

A week ago, the liturgy took us to Bethlehem, to the cradle of the Faith and of the Incarnation, and we united our prayer to that of the humble shepherds who had come to adore Him. Today, the Gospel offers us a radiant image of the peace that nurtures this "Holy Family" with an incomparable spiritual unity. A climate of peace, interiority and humility, characteristic of Christmas, emerges from these pages of the Gospel and can help us approach the year that is beginning.

1. Psalm 67:2

2. Isaiah 52:9



Spiritual Life

THE HOLY FAMILY AND FAMILIES

You are aware that Pope Francis sent a questionnaire with 39 questions intended for the lay faithful to the Bishops' Conferences throughout the world. This process has the goal of taking the pulse of Catholics concerning the reality of the family in their countries. An Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated to pastoral care of the family, will take place in Autumn 2014 in order to evaluate the responses received. It will be followed by an Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2015 to seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family. It is thus a long and delicate process. Let us support it through our prayer and reflection born from our experience of the family issues present in our society.

FRATERNITY, THE FOUNDATION AND PATHWAY TO PEACE

In his January 1 message, Pope Francis explains that the poverty of relationships *“can be overcome only through the rediscovery and valuing of fraternal relationships in the heart of families and communities, through the sharing of joys and sorrows, of the hardships and triumphs that are a part of human life.”*³

How can we contribute to making our world more fraternal? What witness does it expect from our local communities, from the Company, from the Vincentian Family?

MARY'S INTERIORITY

*“Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”*⁴ This reminds us that what is immediate and momentary can cause us to live at a superficial level. Our worth is not primarily found in the speed of our capacity to react, but in the interior life that we develop from the life events that we pass through. In this respect, it could be enlightening to distinguish “moment” from the “present”. “Moment” is of a chronological nature. It is what passes by constantly without any depth. The “present” is what lasts over time. Authentic presence is that which brings the experience of the past with it.

3. Pope Francis, Message for January 1, 2014, n° 5

4. Luke 2:19

At the beginning of this year, may the example of Mary encourage us not simply to be carried along by the flow of one moment after another, but rather to develop the attitudes that make us “present” to ourselves and to others in community life and in service. These attitudes are born from personal and shared prayer, from discernment, and from dialogue. This is, moreover, what you have experienced, are experiencing or will experience during your Domestic Assemblies, according to what you write to me. I hope that these might be the underlying attitudes of your Provincial Assemblies in 2014.

THANKSGIVING FOR 2013

Like each one of you during the end of the year retreat, I gave thanks for the past year...

-for all the visits carried out in the Provinces with the General Councillors. They allow for better understanding of what you live and reinforcement of communion and the sense of belonging to the Company, in the spirit of the Constitutions;

- for the birth of five new Provinces: in March and May, those of España Sur and San Vincenzo Italia, then in July, the Provinces del Caribe, la Milagrosa Bogota-Venezuela and Nuestra Señora de la Misión-América Sur;

- for other plans for unification in progress that will come into being after the 2015 General Assembly;

- for the opening in Belize of a local community of the Province of Mexico, in collaboration with the Province of Central America;

- for the communion lived in the Company to support the Sisters living in countries gripped by violence, such as Syria and the Central African Republic...

- for the missionary momentum aroused after the Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in the Philippines, among the Sisters of that Province, and for the generous solidarity demonstrated by the other Provinces;

- for the beatification in Tarragona of our 20th century martyrs. The witness of their lives and their faith left a significant mark on us and helps us in our everyday choices.

In 2013, the whole world emotionally followed Pope Emeritus Benedict's humble and dignified stepping aside and the election of Pope Francis, whose piercing and casual style moves the multitudes. Like me, you have surely noted how much his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* supports the theme of our Assembly. We find impassioned expressions about missionary

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momentum and the power of charity in it. Let us give thanks for these events and joyfully prepare ourselves to celebrate the canonization of Blessed Popes John XXIII and John Paul II in 2014.

The Gospel for today's feast also calls to mind humility, one of our family virtues, which Pope Francis stresses so much. Allow me, then, to conclude this letter with some advice from Saint Vincent and Saint Louise on this subject.

In his conference on secret pride on March 15, 1654, Saint Vincent explained the importance of humility, *"very pleasing to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave us an example of it himself throughout His life, and willed that His Mother should be the most humble of all creatures."*⁵ Further on, Saint Vincent, after having warned the Sisters against secret pride, of which he gave nine signs, told them, *"So there, dear Sisters, is the enemy unmasked; I've shown him to you; be very vigilant and make good resolutions beginning right now. If you're faithful to them, the Company will be the Company of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and you will acquire the title of His spouses."*⁶

In January 1647, Saint Louise wrote this to Sister Elisabeth Turgis, *"At the start of this new year, rededicate yourselves to His service with the fervor that you had at the beginning."*⁷ Let us make one of her thoughts on Marian devotion our own: *"Let us celebrate, in a special way, the Church feasts honoring Mary... and each day, let us implore her to help us ...to be submissive as she was in accomplishing His holy will."*⁸

Happy and holy New Year, united in the joy of being given to God, in community, for the service of Christ in those who are poor!

With my devoted affection and the assurance of my prayer,

Sister Evelyne Franc
Daughter of Charity

5. Saint Vincent, Conference of March 15, 1654, Coste IX, p. 529

6. Ibid. p. 535

7. Saint Louise, Spiritual Writings, p.190

8. Saint Louise, Spiritual Writings, p.785-786

Letter of January 21, 2014

To all Daughters of Charity

Dear Sisters,

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

I am writing this letter together with Fr. Patrick Griffin, CM. Our purpose is to announce to you that Fr. Patrick will not be able to continue in his role as Director General.

We have come to this unwelcome conclusion only after much discussion and prayerful reflection. It is based solely on Fr. Patrick's health situation. For some time, he has been attentive to a heart condition which has raised greater concern in the last six months. His doctors are universally and consistently recommending a program of care and lifestyle which make carrying out the responsibilities of the Director General difficult and incomplete. I have spoken to Patrick many times, as well as to his Provincial Superior, Fr. Mike Carroll, to my Council, to Sr. Evelyne and to her Council. With their guidance and understanding, I have come to the current conclusion.

I do not need to tell you that this was a difficult decision for all of us. Patrick and I have spoken about our love for the Company of the Daughters of Charity and our desire to serve them and our beloved poor in the best way. Both of us recognize that this goal is not possible in Patrick's role as the Director General because of his doctors' advices. Acceptance of the sometimes mysterious will of God, as reflected in the circumstances of our life, brings us to this point.

Thankfully, Fr. Patrick will be able to carry out another ministry with different responsibilities in his Province and for the Congregation. I am

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sure that I speak for all of us when I thank him for his service and offer him our continued prayerful support. I also ask for your prayers as I begin the process of seeking a successor as your Director General.

May the Lord continue to bless you in your service of those who are poor.

Father Gregory Gay, CM
Superior General
and Father Patrick Griffin, CM
Director General

FATHER GREGORY GAY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter of January 24, 2014

To all Daughters of Charity

Dear Sisters,

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

A few days ago, Father Patrick Griffin and I informed you of Fr. Patrick's health situation that no longer allowed him to fully carry out his ministry as Director General. Therefore, I consulted Sister Evelyne and her Councillors, as well as Fr. Patrick himself, in order to find someone to succeed him in this ministry.

I thus announce to you today that, having considered the suggestions received, and with the consent of my Council, I have appointed Father Bernard Schoepfer as Director General of the Daughters of Charity for a three-year term. He generously accepted his appointment and counts on your prayers to help him in his new mission.

Fr. Bernard, originally from Alsace in eastern France, was born March 13, 1962, in Basel, Switzerland. He was admitted into the Congregation of the Mission September 10, 1984, and ordained to the priesthood May 4, 1989. Since that time, he has fulfilled numerous ministries. After his ordination, he was sent on mission to a rural area in the Diocese of Amiens. In 1998, after a formation program at CIF, he was assigned responsibility for the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Concurrently, he was part of a team accompanying the seminarians of the Congregation of the Mission for their formation to priestly ministry. From 2000 to 2007, he was the spiritual advisor for the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in France. Since 2004, he has been responsible for the Mother House of the Priests of the Mission, in Paris, rue de Sèvres; and

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since 2007, he has been the national chaplain for AIC France. To finish this brief introduction, I'll add that he was a member of the Provincial Council of Paris for ten years.

Together with you, I thank Father Bernard for his availability and promise to be with him through our prayer and fraternal support. Along with you as well, I wish to again express my deep gratitude to Fr. Patrick Griffin for the tireless devotion and generous availability he demonstrated during these past three years in responding to the varied demands of his service as Director General. Let us pray that God grant him good health and that he can continue to serve Him wherever He will call him. For his part, I am certain that he will continue to pray for you and the poor whom you serve.

Together, let us entrust Father Bernard's mandate to Mary because "when the Mother of God has been invoked and taken as patroness in important matters, everything can only go well and accrue to the glory of Jesus her Son" (Saint Vincent XIIIb, p. 3).

With my best wishes,

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M
Superior General

SISTER EVELYNE FRANCO, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

Letter of February 2, 2014

Dear Sisters,

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us forever!

With the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the liturgy has us enter onto the path that will lead us to Easter. Indeed, the humble gesture of Mary and Joseph who come to offer their child in the Temple prefigures the total gift of self that Jesus will make on the Cross. This is why Blessed John Paul II chose this feast for the Day for Consecrated Life, and, since 1997, the Church on this day gives thanks for this gift and prays for those who have given their life to follow Christ.

*"The Daughters of Charity, in fidelity to their Baptism and in response to a divine call, give themselves entirely and in community to the service of Christ in their brothers and sisters who are poor, in an evangelical spirit of humility, simplicity and charity."*¹

In the Company, the date of February 2nd is also traditionally associated with the request for Renovation that is presented to the Superior General. Again this year, I met Father Gregory to joyfully and humbly ask him for permission to renew our vows. With him, I brought up our desire for fidelity to God's call and to the charism of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise despite the difficulties we encounter and our weaknesses. Because of his visits, Father Gregory knows the context of the Company well, and we discussed at length the challenges that confront it, situations of war, humanitarian emergencies, open or latent persecutions against the Church, etc. He encourages us to live our Provincial Assemblies in

1. C. 7a

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an atmosphere of prayer and total openness to the Spirit in order to go deeper into the theme, *the Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum*, which is so rich.

Our Superior General grants us the grace of the Renovation for March 25, on the Feast of the Annunciation. I repeated to him how much we have appreciated Father Patrick's accompaniment these past three years and how much we regret that he is not able, because of his health, to continue his service with us. At the same time, I assured him that we have welcomed Father Bernard's appointment in a spirit of faith and gratitude.

The weeks between February 2 and March 25 are a privileged time to prepare ourselves for Renovation, and this year I wish to reflect with you on the missionary spirit of the Company by connecting it to the fourth theme of our Inter-Assemblies Document, "*Deepen our sense of belonging to the Company and take responsibility for the 'Company of the future' (cf. C. 59).*"² I am sure that you worked in depth on this theme during your Domestic Assemblies. Let us take it up again in the context of the missionary mandate that Jesus Christ gave to His Church and the context of the missionary tradition of the Company.

Introduction

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* has already very concisely affirmed: "*Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity.*"³

Recently, in his first Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis encourages us to rediscover the joy of proclaiming the Gospel. He wishes to encourage "*the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come.*"⁴

With his characteristic piercing and simple style, the Pope affirms that missionary activity is the major challenge for the Church at this time:

2. IAD 2009, p. 15 and 25

3. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14

4. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1

*"In our day Jesus' command to 'go and make disciples' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary 'going forth'. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel."*⁵

This passion for the proclamation of the Good News was deeply rooted in the hearts of our Founders: "*It's true then, that I'm sent not only to love God but to make Him loved. It's not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor doesn't love Him,*"⁶ Saint Vincent would say more than once.

As for Saint Louise, urged by the Charity of Jesus Christ crucified, she dedicated herself completely to the mission of forming the Sisters for the corporal and spiritual service of those who were poor. With great fervor, she encouraged the Sisters to love God and to announce Him to those who were poor; that's why, she would tell them, God had granted them the grace to call them to the Company and remove them from the world.

Faced with their contemporaries' extreme poverty and pitiful state of ignorance, neglect and social marginalization, our Founders let themselves be touched and took action to come to their assistance, taking care of both their material and spiritual needs. They learned from Jesus Christ to look at each person with the eyes of their hearts and let themselves be called forth by the destitution of these poor people who were lost and confused like sheep without a shepherd.

I suggest that we develop our reflection in two stages: first, we will recall the foundations of the missionary spirit of the Company; then, in the second phase, we will ask ourselves how the Company participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church today.

1. The charity of Jesus Christ urges us⁸

5. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20

6. Saint Vincent, Conference of May 30, 1659, Charity. Coste XII, p. 215

7. Cf. 2 Cor 5:14; Constitutions p. 15

8. Cf. 2 Cor 5:14; Constitutions p. 15

Our Founders, as we have said, felt the urgent need for evangelization, as demonstrated by the actions that they undertook and the fruits that remain today, nearly four centuries later.

A Daughter of Charity lives her vocation as a progressive modelling of herself on Jesus Christ, source and model of all charity, and a participation in His mission: *“It’s certain that, when charity dwells in a soul, it takes full possession of all its powers... it’s a fire that’s constantly active; once a person is inflamed by it, it holds him spellbound.”*¹⁰

Being a Daughter of Charity, Saint Vincent would say, is doing what the Son of God did on earth, constantly working for one’s neighbor, visiting and caring for the sick, instructing the ignorant for their salvation. *“He came to teach and to enlighten. That’s what you’re doing. You’re continuing what He began; you are His daughters, and you can say, ‘I’m the daughter of Our Lord,’ and you must resemble Him.”*¹¹

Saint Louise encouraged the Sisters along these same lines. One time she wrote to Sister Françoise Ménage in Nantes in this way: *“Remember..., my dear Sister, that you must take great care to help them to know and love Our Lord.”*¹²

Mission and charity

Mission and charity are inseparable in the Vincentian vocation. Therefore, in their service of persons who are poor, the Daughters of Charity’s *“primary concern is to make God known to them, to proclaim the Gospel, and to make the Kingdom present.”*¹³

9. C. 25a

10. Saint Vincent, Repetition of Prayer of August 4, 1655. Coste XI, p. 203

11. Saint Vincent, Conference of February 9, 1653, On the Spirit of the Company. Coste IX, p. 466

12. Sainte Louise, *Spiritual Writings*, L. 548, p. 573

13. C. 10a

Attention to the spiritual and corporal needs of those who are poor constitutes an essential element of the identity of a Daughter of Charity. The Constitutions adeptly summarize the Founders’ teaching in this way: *“With constant concern for the promotion of the whole person, the Company does not separate corporal service from spiritual service, nor the work of humanization from that of evangelization. It joins service and presence as Christ did when he revealed the love of the Father and gave as signs of His mission: ‘The blind regain their sight, the lame walk...and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.’”*¹⁴

Today as in the past, so many men and women seek the meaning of their life; they thirst for God, sometimes without realizing it. The wave of secularization and relativism is accompanied by a thirst for the transcendent. We can observe how much people seek it in pseudo-spiritual movements, in sects, etc. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said, *“We cannot forget that the greatest poverty is that of not recognizing the presence of the mystery of God and his love in the life of the human being, which alone saves and liberates. In fact, ‘Anyone who excludes God from his horizons falsifies the notion of ‘reality’ and, in consequence, can only end up in blind alleys or with recipes for destruction.’”*¹⁵

From the very beginning, sent forth on the pathways of the world

Saint Vincent’s biographers tell us of the missionary spirit that animated him throughout his life. He had great devotion to Saint Francis Xavier, the patron saint of the missions, whose life and letters were read in the refectory at Saint Lazare. Starting in 1639, we find references in Saint Vincent’s writings to the mission ad gentes and several plans for missions.

Filled with apostolic zeal, Saint Vincent invited his confreres to share their missionary experiences, and he enthusiastically spread the news he received to the rest of the Congregation. The world was small for

14. C. 14

15. Aparecida Document, 405, quoting the Inaugural Address of Pope Benedict XVI in the 5th General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM)

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the missionary heart of Saint Vincent, who was prepared to “go to the Indies to win souls to God there, although I were to die on the way or on board ship.”¹⁶

With the audacious courage of the apostles, Saint Vincent and Saint Louise sent forth the Daughters of Charity on the pathways of the world. The Founders encouraged the Sisters to be ready to go wherever they would be sent: “*That’s how you must act in order to be good Daughters of Charity, and to go wherever God wants: if to Africa, then to Africa; to the army, to the Indies, wherever people may ask for you, it doesn’t matter; you’re Daughters of Charity, you must go.*”¹⁷

Daughters of Charity, from the beginning, have thus been characterized by their mobility and availability to carry out any type of service.

The Company has a missionary heart and face

The Company is present today on every continent and in 95 countries with the concern to make God known to those who are poor, to proclaim the Gospel, and to make the Kingdom of God present through quite diverse ministries.

Availability, an unambiguous expression of a vocation lived authentically and consistently, requires clearly realizing that we do not belong to ourselves. By giving ourselves to the Lord in the Company, we commit ourselves to placing all that we are and all that we have at the service of the mission. Availability entails mobility and the ability to change places, local communities, and ministries, as well as personal perspectives or fixed ideas. Availability is full of detachment and humility; generosity and joy go hand in hand with it. A sense of belonging to the Company is inseparable from availability. “*Availability helps all the Sisters to transcend their own opinions and interests for the common good, and enables the Company to provide the services entrusted to it.*”¹⁸

16. Saint Vincent, Repetition of Prayer of June 17, 1657. Coste XI, p. 357

17. Saint Vincent, Conference of October 18, 1655. Coste X, p. 105

18. C. 31c

Are we still able to plough new furrows in the great mission of the world, to the ends of the earth or on the corners of our streets, in the peripheries of human and spiritual poverty in order to bear witness to the charity of Christ through our ministries, our lives and our proximity?

Yes... because I see the generosity of Provinces and Sisters when there are new implantations of the Company; I also admire the Sisters who are ready to leave everything in situations of natural disasters, those who accept temporary services in other Provinces and unexpected changes of their local communities within their Provinces, those who sacrifice and pray for the Sisters in direct service of those who are poor...

But... the fourth appeal of our Inter-Assemblies Document invites each one of us personally to greater detachment, greater availability, in fidelity to the vows that we wish to renew, so that the fire of the Vincentian charism might continue to inflame us whatever our age, our health, etc.

*“Dear Sisters, your Rule tells you that for you to be good Daughters of Charity and for me to be a good Missionary we must be in this general state of indifference and strive to be attached to God alone, so that, detached from creatures, our hearts may hold fast only to Him. We have to be flexible in doing whatever God asks of us, ready to go wherever He’ll send us through our Superiors.”*¹⁹

Such flexibility will be very necessary for us in order to respond to the call that Pope Francis is addressing to the entire Church.

The Company participates in the universal mission of the Church²⁰

The vocation and mission of the Company are perfectly in line with the call to new evangelization, to mission, as it is expressed in the propositions coming from the Synod of Bishops on the *new evangelization for the transmission of the faith* and, of course, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

19. Saint Vincent, Conference of June 6, 1656, Indifference. Coste X, p. 127

20. Cf. C. 1a

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This document from Pope Francis and all his speeches, presentations and messages impact the minds and hearts of Christians, as well as non-Christians. They nourish our prayer and reflection, and it seems useful to me to explore how they can help us to prepare for Renovation.

Daughters of Charity, evangelizers through the diakonia of charity

God chose the Sisters to be apostles of Charity²¹, evangelizers in the service of charity. Charity is the cornerstone for the life and action of the Christian community in the world; it is the heart of all authentic evangelization.

We can never separate nor oppose faith and charity. It is a matter of putting the Gospel into action. The recent Encyclical *Lumen Fidei* recalls the impact of faith on human society: “*the light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law and peace.*”²² *Evangelii Gaudium* expresses it in this way: “*the task of evangelization implies and demands the integral promotion of each human being.*”²³

It is essential to understand charity as the heart of the Church’s work of evangelization. The Vincentian experience of charity that evangelizes is in itself a proclamation of the Gospel; it is the best expression of God’s love. Let us remember how Saint Vincent would so often repeat to the Sisters: “*you’re destined to represent the Goodness of God to those poor people. Now, since the Divine Goodness deals with the afflicted in a gentle, charitable manner, so the sick poor should be treated...*”²⁴ This is also what Pope Francis calls the “art of accompaniment”: learning to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other and to adopt a steady and reassuring pace reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze, which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.²⁵

Our Founders were convinced, and passed this conviction down to us, that when we exercise charity in the spirit of Jesus Christ, He Himself becomes present.

21. Cf. Saint Vincent, Conference of August 8, 1655. Coste X, p. 85

22. *Lumen Fidei*, 51

23. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 182

24. Saint Vincent, Conference of November 11, 1657. Coste X, p. 268

25. Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169

How do we accompany our brothers and sisters experiencing difficulties?

We live in a complex and fascinating era. Our contemporaries are offered only a more and more secularized society of comfort or a purely material development. In many countries, the media fuel a climate of indifference, even rejection, towards the Christian religion, presumed to be outmoded. To meet such challenges, we need solid convictions, well rooted in faith and in our Vincentian charism.

Daughters of Charity motivated by firm convictions and missionary enthusiasm

In order to feed the flame of our charism and live as joyful and faithful members of the Company,²⁶ we must live in a state of charity and continuous mission. The mission renews the Church, strengthens faith and Christian identity and gives us new enthusiasm. Let us rekindle our convictions; let us be clear-sighted about the difficulties that could put a damper on missionary enthusiasm.

One difficulty is found in the very heart of the person who evangelizes: weakness of faith and the interior life, weariness, and lack of motivation. Pope Francis expresses it clearly: “*Today we are seeing in many pastoral workers, including consecrated men and women, an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity... As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though they pray, a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervor. These are three evils which fuel one another.*”²⁷

In addition, some difficulties come from the external environment; some wonder if the proclamation of the Gospel hasn’t been replaced by interreligious dialogue, if human promotion isn’t a sufficient goal, if respect for conscience and freedom doesn’t exclude suggesting conversion.

26. Cf. IAD p. 15

27. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 78

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Others wonder where the mission is today and run the risk of reducing it to the mission ad extra alone. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI had this wonderful phrase: “*the missionary activity of the People of God is not only intended for non-Christian peoples and distant lands, but above all for social and cultural contexts and hearts.*”²⁸

Zeal for evangelization is born from genuine holiness of life, nourished by prayer and especially by love for the Eucharist. It is supported by a deep faith life and a lifestyle consistent with Gospel values, in communion with the Church. “*The world is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible. The world calls for and expects from us simplicity of life, the spirit of prayer, charity towards all, especially towards the lowly and the poor, obedience and humility, detachment and self-sacrifice.*”²⁹

What about our convictions and the witness that we give to those around us?

Is our sense of belonging to the Company very clear, very visible? Are our insertion in the diocese and our participation in parish life significant?

Are we careful not to give in to the temptation of spiritual worldliness, that is, acting for our own fulfilment rather than for the glory of God,³⁰ as Pope Francis emphasizes?

Our Statutes stress the importance of religious education, especially of ordinary working people, and spreading the Marian message of 1830. What is the place of youth ministry in our local community, our educational institutions and our Province?

We need deeply-rooted convictions, a very solid springboard from which to take our momentum, a new missionary momentum.

28. Benedict XVI, Address on Fortieth Anniversary of Ad Gentes, Aparecida Document, 375

29. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 76

30. Cf. Pope Francis’ speech to Pontifical Representatives, June 21, 2013

Daughters of Charity who take responsibility for the Company of the future

The fourth theme of our Inter-Assemblies Document reminds us that we are responsible for the Company of the future. The Vincentian charism is the treasure God has placed in our hands so that we might live fully from it and pass it on to new generations.

The new evangelization needs bold Daughters of Charity, committed to going against the tide, seeking new ministries, and developing a way of being present that makes the Lord’s compassion and mercy for suffering humanity, thirsting for life, even more visible. In some cases, what exists must be strengthened; in others, the courage to innovate is needed.

Yet even if it is important to pay attention to the options for service, to the means and to the places that we should prioritize, true change comes into being in the heart; it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who renews all things.

The Charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us to pursue the fight of faith with the renewed energy of the Spirit of Pentecost in order to resist the temptation of worldliness or secularism.

The Charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us to serve coming and going on the great highways of the new evangelization, fighting against the globalization of indifference.

The Charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us to affirm the value of fragile life that grows or is extinguished in weakness, to promote a culture of encounter and a civilization of living together in peace and freedom, to accompany those who live in despair and solitude, and to be those who bring mercy and forgiveness.

The Charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us to peacefully accept remaining on the banks of the mission, by offering up illness and age as a sign of full participation in the new evangelization.

How can we take up these challenges, personally and in community, in our Provinces and in the Company?

Conclusion

In order to follow Christ and carry out His mission, we commit ourselves to live our baptismal consecration through the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, making us available for the purpose of the Company: the service of Christ in persons who are poor.³¹

The annual renovation of vows, a free act of the will inspired by love, helps us to strengthen our determination to be faithful to our vocation.³²

This grace of the Renovation leads us to confirm our total gift of self to God through a specific vow to serve those who are poor corporally and spiritually.³³ Let us live our service rooted in the Vincentian mystique.

We are Daughters of Charity, sent on mission in a continuous way throughout our lives. Let us allow ourselves to be evangelized by those who are poor. *“The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church’s pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”*³⁴

In an environment contaminated by the quest for personal satisfaction, let us live, in following Jesus Christ, the evangelical counsel of chastity that frees us from internal and external attachments for an unconditional gift and total availability in the service of those who are poor.³⁵

Pope Francis strongly stresses joy in order to have a fruitful life. *“... chastity, as a precious charism that broadens the freedom of our gift to God and to others, with tenderness, mercy, closeness to Christ. ... a ‘fruitful’ chastity which generates spiritual children in the Church!”*³⁶

31. Cf. C. 8b and 27

32. Cf. C. 28d

33. Cf. C. 24a

34. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198

35. Cf. C. 29a

36. Pope Francis, May 8, 2013

In a utilitarian world that privileges consumption and overemphasizes comfort, let us live the evangelical counsel of poverty that leads us to place all that we are and all that we have at the service of those who are poor,³⁷ in following Jesus Christ who assumed it in a spirit of abandonment to His Father and as a sign of His mission in the world.³⁸

Poverty is expressed “... *in moderation and joy in the essential, to put us on guard against material idols that obscure the real meaning of life. A poverty learned with the humble, the poor, the sick and all those who are on the existential outskirts of life. A theoretical poverty is no use to us. Poverty is learned by touching the flesh of the poor Christ, in the humble, in the poor, in the sick and in children.*”³⁹

In a society that promotes a self-referential culture and the cult of self, let us live the evangelical counsel of obedience, in following Jesus Christ and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, making to God the offering of our freedom⁴⁰ in order to remain available for the mission.

It is a great and beautiful thing to agree to cast our nets again even though “*we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing,*”⁴¹ simply because the Lord says so and desires it. The vocation of a Daughter of Charity can only last with an ongoing willingness to live obedience, to seek and accept God’s will.

I sincerely wish you a fervent preparation for Renovation. I give thanks for the challenges voiced during your Domestic Assemblies and, in advance, for the commitments that will be born from your Provincial Assemblies.

In renewing our Yes, we entrust ourselves to the Virgin Mary, only Mother of the Company and star of the new evangelization who illumines the desert of this world. May she guide us on our way and

37. Cf. C. 30a

38. Cf. C. 30a

39. Pope Francis, May 8, 2013

40. Cf. C. 31a and c

41. Lk 5:5

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help us to cross through it by directing our hearts toward “*what is essential: the gift of the Spirit, the company of Jesus, the truth of his word, the Eucharistic bread which nourishes us, the fellowship of ecclesial communion, the impetus of charity.*”⁴²

On your behalf, I thanked Father Gregory for his unflagging attentiveness to the Company, for his visits and his warm cordiality. In your name, I reiterated to Father Patrick our gratitude for all that we received from him over these last three years; to Father Bernard, I passed on your wishes welcoming him to his new ministry. I addressed a grateful greeting to Father McCullen, Father Maloney, Father Quintano and Father Javier. Finally, I assured Mother Duzan and Mother Elizondo of our respectful affection, along with our prayers.

With my devoted affection and the assurance of my prayer for each one of you,

Sister Evelyne FRANC
Daughter of Charity

42. Message to the People of God, Synod of Bishops, October 2012

Lent 2014

Lent and the lesson of Lampedusa

To all members of the Vincentian Family

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

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

Let me begin with these words from Sacred Scripture to frame our focus for Lent:

“For you know by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). We may wonder at times what it means to be poor or to be rich. But as Lent begins, these words of St. Paul remind us that this season calls us to see poverty and riches through the eyes of God.

The ‘Riches and Poverty’ of Lent:

Viewing riches and poverty from the lens of contemporary society may seem a waste of time. Today, to be rich is always associated with material wealth, a desired goal granting power, privilege, and access to the finer things of life. Poverty, on the other hand, is seen as a scourge and mark of inferiority, often dehumanizing the poor and scape-goating them for society’s woes.

What a difference it makes when viewing poverty and riches in the way of Jesus! The Lenten Scriptures tell stories of wealthy people whose

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lives are turned upside down by Jesus. In Mark's Gospel, a rich young man is attracted to follow Jesus, but when asked to give away his earthly treasures to the poor, he "went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mk. 10:22). In Luke's parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor man has a name and place in heaven, while the rich man is consigned to anonymity and damnation, due to his indifference to the beggar in his midst (Lk.16:19-31). One seeks, but cannot come to conversion; the other cannot see beyond his life of ease. St. Paul offers us a sobering image on worldly wealth: "Their end is destruction. Their god is their stomach...their minds are occupied with earthly things" (Phil.3:19).

St. Vincent de Paul saw poverty not only as a means for ministry, but an evangelical end: achieving a life of union with Jesus Christ. Members of the Vincentian Family who take the vow of poverty, along with our laity whose baptismal vows commit them to our charism, must strive for conversion to Christ before we can walk in the world of the poor. To ready his first followers for this path, Vincent said: "Let us seek to lead strong interior lives, to make Jesus Christ reign in us...let us seek the glory of God and the reign of Jesus Christ" (Vol. XII, Conf. 198).

This season of grace is a time to seek and savor both the riches and poverty that Lent offers. Its riches are many: a treasure trove of Gospel and daily Scriptures for reflection and prayer; devotions centering on Jesus' passion, death and resurrection; moments of quiet in the presence of the Lord assessing the direction of our lives; and sharing in the sacramental life of the Church, including the sacrament of penance. Lent is a season providing great spiritual nourishment.

Lent is also a time of confrontation, as we come face to face with the poverty in ourselves. What holds me back from living as a disciple of Jesus and follower of St. Vincent? What worries and fears lurk in the dark places of my mind and heart, blocking God's grace, and keeping me from serving those in need? In experiencing emptiness, Lent leads us to Jesus, who helps us pray from the heart, discipline our desires, and give generously of our time, talent, and resources. When we do this, we act in solidarity with the Lord who comes in the least among us.

The 'Logic' of Love

In his first *Message for Lent*, Pope Francis described the Incarnation of Jesus as "the logic of love." Christ entered the human condition to "be among people who need forgiveness, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins. In this way, he chose to comfort us, to save us, and to free us from our misery" (Message, 2014). It might seem strange linking 'logic' and 'love' in the same phrase. But in accepting the Father's mission of salvation, Jesus reveals its purpose: to manifest fearless love and selfless service to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth.

What motivated and drove Jesus' mission was his unity with the Father and a desire to share God's unceasing love with all, especially the poor. Pope Francis noted that "love makes us all similar, it creates equality, and it breaks down walls and eliminates distances." In the Incarnation, "God did this with us" (Message, 2014). At its core, Jesus' love for us is a truly sacrificial one, a "love unto death" (Rom. 5:8). Lent is the time to ponder and remember that love.

St. Vincent came to believe in and to embrace this 'logic of love'. As the Lord gave him deeper faith, it freed him to love God, serve the poor, motivate and equip his Missioners, Daughters of Charity, and laity to do the same. In the poor, Vincent met the suffering Christ and became a true disciple and servant. He reminds us that despite their outer appearances, the poor "are taking the place of the Son of God who chose to be poor", and that "we ought to have the same spirit and imitate Christ's actions...take care of the poor, console them, help them, and support their cause" (Liturgy of the Hours, vol. IV, 27 September, Office of Readings). Vincent's Christ-centered spirituality became the genius of his apostolate in serving the poor.

This Lent, I suggest you take time to read and reflect on the life and writings of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. Many excellent printed and digital resources are available to us. Renewing the bond we share with our Holy Founders deepens our understanding of them and an appreciation of our charism, awakening a desire to be more and to do more as disciples of Jesus.

To Recognize and Encounter 'People on the Periphery'

The 'logic of love' Jesus modelled by his life led Vincent and Louise to

Lent and the lesson of Lampedusa

serve the poor and the ‘people on the periphery.’ In a meeting with the Union of Superiors General, Pope Francis challenged us to motivate our members to go out to the margins: “*We have to look at things from the periphery. We have to go there in order to really know the life of the people*” (Vatican Press Office, November 2013). I know this is easier said than done, so where do we start?

We can start with the Lenten Sunday Gospels. They provide opportunities to reflect on the ‘people on the periphery’ before we encounter them in ministry. Beginning with the story of Jesus’ temptation in the desert (Mt. 4:1-11), we see how Christ chose to enter the periphery by going to the desert, a place of danger and desolation to fast, pray, and endure temptation. But Jesus overcame it all. Thus, the periphery became a springboard for the public ministry of Jesus.

There are many Lenten scriptural passages that speak of the “people on the periphery”, but two in John’s Gospel stand out. These are the encounters of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4), and the man born blind whom Jesus heals (Jn. 9). Jesus sees two people stigmatized by society and religious officials, due to behavior or illness. He enters their lives, heals them, binds up their wounds, and leads them from the periphery back into the community.

The lives of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac were a continual journey to people on the periphery; to help, guide, lead, and empower them. Perhaps this Lent can be a time to reflect and pray on new ways to seek out people on the periphery in our own settings. Pope Francis said there is but one true poverty: “*not living as children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ*” (Message, 2014). Let this Lent guide us to seek and serve the poor in Christ and Christ in the poor.

Challenging the “Globalization of Indifference”

The theme of this letter highlights Lampedusa, a small island off Sicily that has become a flashpoint for asylum-seeking refugees. Tragedy struck recently when an overloaded boat sank, killing hundreds of men, women, and children from Libya and Eritrea. Fr. Zeracristos, our Assistant General, was called away from our retreat to go to a morgue to identify some of the dead who were from his village in Eritrea. Like

millions before them, they are anonymous ‘people on the periphery’, relegated to the ash heap of history.

Pope Francis made the first trip of his papacy outside Rome to Lampedusa. There, he prayed, visited survivors, thanked those caring for the refugees, and put a wreath in the ocean in memory of the dead. In his homily at a Mass that day, the Holy Father coined a poignant phrase defining the reason for the plight of these and countless other ‘people on the periphery’. He called it the “globalization of indifference”. Here is an excerpt from his homily that day:

“The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, indeed; it even leads to the globalization of indifference. We become used to the suffering of others: it doesn’t affect or concern me; it’s none of my business! Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it?” (Homily, 8 July 2013)

As with poverty, war, violence, and acts of terror, indifference also kills: not only people, but the human spirit as well. Overcoming the “globalization of indifference” starts when each member of the Vincentian Family recognizes one’s riches and poverty before the Lord and then decides to put them at the service of our Vincentian charism for the good of God’s poor. This Lenten season, we who share the heritage of hope - our Vincentian charism - should see these words of the Holy Father as a clarion call to conversion. On Ash Wednesday, the Scriptures tell us what makes for a Lenten conversion: “*Rend your hearts, not your garments*” (Joel 2:13).

Lent’s gifts are paradoxical, but they reaffirm a great truth: in bringing both our poverty and riches to the Lord, we are renewed and strengthened as followers of Jesus in the Vincentian way. May Christ’s riches and poverty be yours, bringing you blessings and a fruitful Lent!

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.
Superior General

End of year Retreat 2013

“Saving the best for last”

We have all read the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana. It is the story of the first miracle which Jesus performs. We might think of it as the action that ends his “hidden” life and begins his “public” life. It should not surprise any of us that Mary is a participant in this moment.

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.” So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from— although the servers who had drawn the water knew —, the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.” (Jn 2:1-10)

There is something wonderful about this story. It puts Jesus in a familiar setting; he is there with some of his disciples; his mother is also there and doing what Jewish women would do at such events—helping out and keeping an eye on things. It is at this event that Mary gives us the single direct piece of advice which we find from her in the Gospels “*Do whatever [Jesus] tells you.*” Today, that wonderful teaching of this Gospel is not the one to which I would like to direct your attention first. I would like you to consider the last line of this passage:

“Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.” (Jn 2:11)

At the beginning of this month, I turned 61. That would not seem so old to some of you. To some others, it might begin to describe the condition known as “old.” I assure you, for the students that I worked with at St. John’s University, I am old! It is okay to be getting older. What is more important is to learn to start using the gifts that come only with the years. Now is the time for the good wine!

I do not want to present an apologetic for aging today, but I want to speak about the need to be always serving the good wine. The coming year is always the time for serving our best, for growing closer to the Lord, for becoming more and more committed to each other and the Company. Whatever gifts or talents or virtues that we have kept hidden and unavailable, that we have not shared well during this past year, we will now put on display and at the service of one another and the poor.

We will begin with a reflection on changing water into wine, then move to generosity in service, then to obedience in doing what we are asked, and finally about giving our best.

1. CHANGING WATER INTO WINE

More than 70% of the earth’s surface is covered with water. It falls from the sky, and when we dig deep enough in the right places, we can eventually hit water again. For some people, water seems to be super-abundant, though for others, usable water is a precious and treasured commodity. Yet, it looks incredibly ordinary. It has no color and no particular taste, yet when it is fresh and cool, it is really refreshing. Wine is also a simple beverage, but requires some more effort to produce. Lots of people have cultivated palates and can appreciate the flavors and aromas of good wines.

The Gospel story speaks to us about changing water into wine so that the wedding ceremony can continue to be a celebration.

For us, however, there can be a different significance. Perhaps we can

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find ourselves reflecting on the ordinariness of our service (the water), and how it might become extraordinary (like wine). This is true no matter what our service is:

Are you asked to welcome the pilgrims? Hundreds and thousands of people make their way to our door each day and week. Sometimes the only welcome which they will get here will be ours. It seems ordinary enough, doesn't it? A simple smile, a kind word, a bit of instruction—they all seem like water offered without ceremony, but, you know, they can become wine. People know when we are really paying attention to them, when our smile is heart-felt, when our welcome comes from the heart. And when they feel this special concern, they realize that we are serving good wine.

Do you take care of our older and infirm Sisters? How easy is it to simply do what is necessary in a professional and efficient manner? This is serving the water. What does wine taste like in this circumstance? Well, it is no doubt suffused with the bouquet of tenderness and fermented with a love which grows deeper and more flavorful with each passing year. It is also offered in abundance.

Are you one of the Sisters who needs special attention? You can accept that care with humility and stoicism without complaining, but that seems pretty watery to me. What would wine taste like? How easy can you make it for your Sister to carry out her task? How cheerful and supportive and interested can you be in the work of our Sisters and the Company? How grateful and welcoming can you be for the love shown to you? Where are your prayers and devotion targeted? What does your wine taste like, and is it your best vintage this year?

Do you serve our Sisters through administration? Do you think about it as digging the hole to create the well for water? But you might also consider how you tend the vineyard: clearing the ground, planting the vines, caring for them, and being attentive to the growth of the grapes. It is an important job and can be embraced as the necessary step which makes the good wine possible. Paul understood all these roles:

“What is Apollos, after all, and what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, just as the Lord assigned each one. I planted,

Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building.” (1 Cor 3:5-9)

All of these tasks turn water into wine and express the presence of Christ in the world. And within our Eucharistic context, the wine becomes the body and blood of Christ.

In the Gospel story, the headwaiter does not know where this fine wine has come from, but the servants know that it comes from Christ. The good wine we serve comes as a result of Jesus being present in our minds and hearts. This sure knowledge urges us forward and sanctifies our day.

2. GENEROSITY IN SERVICE

The jars of water which are used in the story of Cana were available for the guests who needed to purify themselves before entering the house or taking part in a celebration. It was a normal part of Jewish ritual. Each jar holds about 100 liters and there are six of them! Jesus instructs the waiters to fill all of them with water, and then he changes this water into wine—perhaps 550 to 600 liters of wine, meant to emphasize generosity. He does not simply provide a couple of bottles of wine to tide the group over till they can run to the store; he provides an abundance of wine and a good wine.

This story always puts me in mind of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish where Jesus provides an abundance of bread and fish for the large crowd.

We, too, are invited to provide an abundance when we share our resources. We need to provide it with generosity and munificence.

There is a wonderful story about Dorothy Day which has always stuck in my mind. She is one of the figures whom I most admire in 20th Century America; she is also a fellow New Yorker. She was a great servant of the poor as well as a promoter of peace and a deep believer.

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One of the members of her community came to her one morning and told her that they had only enough money in the treasury to buy fresh bread for the evening meal of the poor, or with the same amount of money they could buy day-old bread and have enough for two days' worth of meals. They asked her: "What should we do?" What would you do? The question seems clear enough and seems eminently practical. What would you do? What did Dorothy respond? Well, she said to buy fresh bread because the poor are always getting day-old bread, and used clothes, and hand-outs of other kinds. They deserve to be treated with the best care that we have.

Would that have been your answer? What do you think? Was it the correct answer? What about tomorrow?

There is something great about that spirit of generosity which does not count the cost. Remember the woman who washes the feet of Jesus and then pours an entire vial of perfume on his feet (Lk 7:37-38; cf. Jn 12:3). It is a story of generosity. Remember how Jesus offers the rich young man the opportunity for discipleship, but he must sell what he owns and give the money to the poor (Mt 19:21). Jesus challenges him to significant generosity leading to deeper discipleship. Remember how Barnabas sells his property and places the proceeds at the feet of the disciples for the benefit of the poor (Acts 4:36-37). In this act, he provides a witness and an example for generosity to the Christian community. In each of these cases, people are offered the opportunity to provide their best wine, and some are able to respond to the invitation with generosity.

In the story of the Wedding Feast at Cana, Jesus provides abundantly for the needs of those at the wedding. He provides not only abundantly but with quality. His generosity in service provides an example for us in this, to provide abundantly now and with our best quality.

3. OBEDIENCE IN SERVICE

The story of the Wedding Feast, as I mentioned earlier, contains the single direct piece of advice which we find from Mary in the Gospels: "*Do whatever [Jesus] tells you.*" When Jesus tells the servers to fill the jars with water, they do it and fill them "to the brim." When Jesus

tells them to bring some of the liquid from the jars to the headwaiter, they do so immediately. There is something very attractive about these unnamed stewards. They listen to Mary directing them to Jesus, and they listen carefully to Jesus as he gives them instructions. I love the detail in the story which says that they filled the jars "*to the brim.*" These stewards were not half-hearted in the way in which they attended to the words of Jesus; they take the message seriously.

Do you find a lesson in this little detail of the story? Are you ready to do what is asked of you with a willingness and responsiveness that leaves no doubt as to your intent or where your heart lies? Obedience means more than simply doing something which one is told to do. It also involves one's mind and heart. It flows from an attentive listening to the Word of God and the teaching of the Church as well as the signs of the times and the voice of those called to leadership. When we choose to be obedient and to do what is asked of us, our obedience is the product of a willing spirit which is prepared to surrender self for a greater goal. It reflects a desire to collaborate with our Sisters in a common project.

In this coming year, obedience can be expressed in a call to give my best in responding to what is asked of me without complaining or half-measures. We want to hear the directive of Mary—"*Do whatever he tells you*"—and the instruction of Jesus to do a particular task and with a given attitude. When we respond, we do so in a manner which fills our jars "*to the brim.*"

4. GIVING OUR BEST

When I was in the seminary high school I joined what was called "The Speech Club." It was a group of seminarians who memorized famous speeches or poems or scenes from the theater and then went into competition against other high schools where we performed our pieces and were graded on our performances. I was particularly attracted to a British poet named Robert Browning—his wife is also a well-known poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. I memorized a number of Browning's poems and recited them in my repertoire. One of these poems was called "Rabbi Ben Ezra." It was a poem about getting older:

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*Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
the last of life, for which the first was made.
Our times are in his hand
who saith, "A whole I planned,
youth shows but half;
Trust God: See all, nor be afraid!"*

It seems a strange poem to attract a 15 year old boy, but I heard it as a joyful invitation with a clear intent. There is a joy in living and allowing the years to prepare one for the future which stretches out ahead. Shakespeare writes in *The Tempest*: "What's past is prologue." All that I have done up to this time has prepared me for this moment. It is the future that needs to be embraced and challenged, not the past that needs to be dusted off.

We are always "saving the best for last." This next year is the only year in which I can use all the learnings of the past 60 years. I expect this to be my best year in ministry—or, at least, I know that it can be because I am now more able to respond in ways which were not possible before. But will I allow it to be?

For example: is it possible that our elderly Sisters are doing their best ministry right now? Is the work of patient suffering and prayer the work for which their whole lives has been preparing them? Having listened to the word of God for so many years, having received Christ in the sacrament of the altar on countless occasions, having been taught by their experiences of the poor, have they now reached the point at which they know what is most important and how to come before the Lord in devotion and petition? Shouldn't that be true of each of us as well?

Perhaps you have done the same as me. When confronted with a difficult situation, I do all that I can to resolve it, and when I am finished with all that effort, I say: well, now the only thing which we can do is pray. It seems like prayer comes at the end of the process, when it should, in fact, come at the outset. We should begin our tasks with prayer, continue our prayer during the effort, and finally consign all our work to the Lord. That is the wisdom which should come with the years.

The Gospel story offers a thoughtful insight of the headwaiter. He says: "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now."

In ministry, as in many tasks, it is possible that we begin with excitement and hope. We really give our best effort to the task at hand and carry out our responsibilities with joy and eagerness. After a time, however, we can become weary and bored with what is asked of us. We still carry out the task, but without excitement and passion. We are beginning to serve the inferior wine because we think that people no longer are attentive or appreciate what we do. We need to be always seeking out and pouring the best wine. The people whom we serve deserve it, and the acceptance of a Gospel life demands it. We are not slouching our way into heaven.

The truth is, I can, in fact, do more from a Gospel point of view now than I could before. Let this be the year that I truly make the Lord better known through my words and my faithful witness. This year, I will serve my best wine!

CONCLUSION: "MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME"

The Gospel story of the Wedding Feast at Cana is, like all Gospel stories, filled with aspects and ideas which can challenge our imagination and inspire reflection. One of the lines which Jesus speaks is particularly interesting to me.

"Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come."

When we hear it, it certainly sounds as though Jesus is not prepared to act on Mary's observation about the lack of wine; yet, he does act and carries out the first miracle of his public ministry in John's Gospel. What do you think about that?

The "hour" of Jesus is, of course, when he begins his public ministry and begins to reveal himself and the Gospel message of the Father in earnest. Perhaps, Jesus has not thought about exactly when that hour would begin.

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Yet, he listens to Mary. She is not telling him what to do; she is simply pointing out the reality of a human need. Perhaps this causes Jesus to rethink his position. Perhaps this was exactly when and how his ministry should begin: in a family environment with a simple need and the opportunity to make life easier for a couple who was starting life together.

In fact, the miracle which he carries out is not public nor a source of great wonder. The story tells us that the headwaiter did not know where the wine came from: only the stewards who had drawn it knew. Jesus carries out this simple action without seeking attention. His “hour” arrives in humble service.

Today, we might think about our “hour.” Has it arrived? I want to insist that it has now arrived for all of us. We do not have any other hour in which to act or on which to plan. The year stretches ahead of us, filled with opportunities and challenges. We have whatever gifts are available to us at this moment. Sisters, now is our hour. This is the time to serve our best wine. We all know that famous line attributed to St. Vincent when he was asked what else he could have done in ministry. He simply says “more.” I hear that as referring not simply to more tasks but to deeper commitment and further fidelity to our call and charism. In this year that “best wine” which we have been saving will be poured and consumed.

Father Patrick GRIFFIN, CM
Director General

BEATIFICATION OF THE SPANISH MARTYRS

The Spanish Martyrs

Lives that change lives

Introduction

“*Defend and care for life*” is this year’s chosen theme for Daughter of Charity schools in Spain. The logo to illustrate it: *Everything for life!* The inter-Provincial Commission of Sisters drew up educational, pedagogical and pastoral materials for students and teachers. When the Spanish Conference of Bishops presented its quarterly Pastoral Plan in November 2012, the decision was made to close the Year of Faith with a great Celebration of the Faith that would include the beatification of more than 500 **martyrs** from the 20th century. This celebration in Tarragona on October 13, 2013, would be an opportunity to strengthen our faith. Among the martyrs are 27 Daughters of Charity, a lay woman belonging to the Children of Mary and 14 members of the Congregation of the Mission.

In their message to the people of God, the Bishops invited us to “*glorify God for the faith that has conquered the world and that lives on despite the dark periods of history and human failings. The martyrs ‘conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; love for life did not deter them from death.’ Through their life and death, they gave glory to God and became signs of love, forgiveness and peace for us. The martyrs, by uniting their blood to that of Christ, are a prophecy of redemption and of a divine future that will be truly better for each person and for the whole of humanity.*”



Special
Beatifications

Beatification of the Spanish Martyrs

The martyrs gave their lives for another Life. From the beginnings of Christianity, *the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the Church*. Tertullian strongly asserted this after his conversion to Christianity, seeing the martyrs' steadfastness and strength. Saint Justin, Saint Sebastian and so many others embraced the faith when they gave up Judaism or paganism. Throughout the history of the Church, martyrs have strengthened the Christian faith. Like the Resurrected Jesus, their lives were transformed and took on new meaning, which they sealed with their blood. This is why we chose "Lives that change lives" as the title for this article.

Jesus changed the lives of a few fishermen and many other people. He revealed himself as someone who brings about life: "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly*" (Jn 10:10). His life-giving actions and signs are numerous. As the Son of the Father, He is the author of life, as Saint John writes in his Gospel: "*In him was life, and the life was the light of all people*" (Jn 1:4).

During his ministry, he chose simple men, fishermen, to give them a share in his mission and make them evangelizers, "fishers of men". The Gospels show us individuals who met Jesus and changed their lives: Peter and the apostles, Zaccheus, Mary Magdalen, the blind man of Jericho, the centurion on Golgotha...over the centuries, many people have encountered Jesus and this changed their lives in a radical way...Jesus' death on the cross was an opportunity for conversion: the good thief, the Roman centurion whose duty it was to supervise the crucifixion, would exclaim, "*Certainly this man was innocent*" (Lk 23:47) or, "*Truly this man was the Son of God!*" (Mk 15:39). He became a witness to the faith.

The same was true for the martyrdom of some of our Sisters. For example, the militiaman Marchen, who was present at Sister Martina Vasquez's death, admitted that this event made him return to the faith that he had rejected long before. Sister Martina's forgiveness, her way of praying to prepare herself for martyrdom, and her way of dying while courageously and firmly confessing Jesus Christ touched him deeply. The Communist Committee had chosen Marchen to shoot her. Some of those with him had benefitted from the soup kitchen she had established in Segorbe (Castellón). When he was young, Sr. Martina had welcomed and cared for him at the hospital and school in Segorbe because he had

been orphaned and was alone in the world... When he wanted to blindfold her, she answered that she wanted to see those she was forgiving. Her gentle gaze and her words before the shooting touched his hardened heart. After his conversion, he would admit this publically.

Our Sisters' martyrdom brings out the message of love they proclaimed by their lives of charity. Among those who shot the Sisters, many had been their students in primary or vocational schools or had enjoyed meals in their soup kitchens. Saint Vincent de Paul's conviction was lived out: "*You must also remember that your principal concern, which God asks especially of you, is to be very attentive in serving the poor, who are our lords. Oh yes, Sisters! They are our masters. That's why you must treat them gently and kindly, reflecting that this is why God has brought you together; and why He formed your Company*" (Coste IX, p.97: Conference of June 14, 1643, on the Explanation of the Rules). Poor people who were deceived and manipulated would take away the Sisters' lives.

Shedding one's blood for someone is the greatest proof of love that can be given; it is the proof that love is stronger than death: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*" (Jn 15:13). Martyrdom consists in shedding one's blood for faith in Christ Jesus and out of love for Him. When love of God is strongest, it overcomes fear of death. This is the secret of their martyrdom.

In its pastoral plan, the Spanish Conference of Bishops presented the beatification of the Spanish 20th century martyrs during the Year of Faith in the light of Pope Benedict XVI's words from *Porta Fidei*: "*By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel that had transformed them and made them capable of attaining to the greatest gift of love: the forgiveness of their persecutors*" (No. 13).

Martyrdom, the high point of the Beatitudes

The Beatitudes show us the way of true happiness. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of the price to be paid for the joy of the Kingdom: poverty of spirit, patience, repentance for one's sins, hunger and thirst for justice, mercy, a desire for peace, and persecution. "*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs*

Beatification of the Spanish Martyrs

is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me” (Mt 5:10-11).

The Beatitudes are the heart of the Gospel, the “Great Charter” of Christianity, the “manifesto of Jesus”. Through the Beatitudes, Jesus presents the fundamental values and attitudes of the Christian life: poverty, gentleness, humility, purity of heart, mercy, justice, a desire for peace, and strength in persecution. Jesus is the first to live according to these attitudes: he is the poor man with a pure and merciful heart... He is the first “blessed” who gives us a “code of happiness” based on a love that gives without counting the cost.

The Beatitudes express the values of the Kingdom announced by Jesus and point out the demanding conditions for following Christ. They are a way of life that is essential for all believers and all Christian communities. They are also a message of happiness, but not the happiness of this world... During their lives, our Sisters put these beatitudes into practice on a social level, freely choosing the poorest of the poor in response to God’s call to continue Jesus’s mission. They lived poverty, humility, respect and charity. With hearts overflowing with compassion and affection they comforted the afflicted.

Daughters of Charity, they hungered and thirsted for justice... Sister Adoración Cortés, Sister Joaquina Rey and Sister Josefa Martínez defended the rights of the oppressed before the leaders of the Committees and Peoples’ Tribunals who would sentence them to death.

They came to arrest Sister Josefa Martínez’s sister, whose husband had been shot three months before because he had allowed the Sisters of the town to have a night of Eucharistic adoration in his home. Sister Josefa went to see the leader in order to take the place of her sister, who was pregnant. She told him that it was unjust to have arrested her sister with the intention of killing her when she was expecting a child. Her request was granted and she died in place of her sister, thereby saving two lives: that of her sister and that of the unborn child. Before she died, Sister Josefa proclaimed her faith in Jesus and forgave her persecutors. These Daughters of Charity strove to restore peace in the midst of violence, responding with goodness, forgiving insults, calumnies, humiliations and

being stripped of their possessions. Their final cry, “Long live Christ the King,” is a confession of faith by which they proclaimed that God alone was the master of their lives. Before the final shot, they prayed the Our Father. This was the martyrs’ way of placing their lives in the Father’s hands and dying in a spirit of forgiveness.

According to the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (no. 2473): “*Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith ... The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose.*” Many saints were not physically martyred in a violent way for the faith, but they lived the martyrdom of charity and fidelity to the Gospel, day after day. Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, Marguerite Naseau and many other martyrs of faith and charity throughout history lived the charism, through their devoted and hidden service to God and the poor. The Sisters loved God and their Sisters in community with all their hearts, and they saved the lives of many children, sick persons, beggars, galley slaves, prisoners and marginalized persons. They set up schools and small hospitals. Some were called upon to witness to Jesus during times of persecution: “*If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you*” (Jn 15:20).

From the beatitudes to martyrdom as an offering of love.

From Leganés (Madrid), Inmaculada School († Aug. 12, 1936): Sister M. Adoración Cortés, Sister Severina Díaz-Pardo and Sister Estefanía Saldaña. From Saint Elizabeth’s Psychiatric Hospital: Sister M. Dolores Barroso and Sister M. Asunción Mayoral (the latter had taken refuge there, but she came from the Asylum for the Blind in Madrid).

From El Nerval Tuberculosis Hospital in Jaén, Sister Ramona Cao Fernández and Sister Juana Pérez Abascal († Aug. 12, 1936): when they arrived in Madrid’s village of Vallecas, they were persecuted and shot on the “death train”, which they were forced to take.

From Saint Eugenio Residence in Valencia, Sister M. Rosario Ciércoles, Sister M. Luisa Bermúdez and Sister Micaela Hernán († Aug. 18, 1936) hid in Puzol (Valencia) in the home of a member of one of her companion’s family; a Franciscan priest stayed there too and celebrated Mass for them, and this was the cause of their death.

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From the Misericordia House in Albacete, Sister M. Dolores Caro, Sister Andrea Calle and Sister Concepción Pérez Giral († Sept. 3, 1936): expelled by the authorities and threatened with death, they took refuge in Madrid with a relative of the Sister Servant. Three of them sought help from another family member in Vallecas, but they were refused admission. They were then brutally martyred.

From the hospital and school in Segorbe (Castellón), Sister Martina Vázquez († Oct. 4, 1936): since the community had been expelled, the Sisters took refuge with a former student. When men came to arrest them, Sr. Martina, who had long been Sister Servant, asked that her companions be spared. Her request was granted, and she was the only one to be martyred.

From the General Hospital in Valencia: After the community was expelled and dissolved, Sister Josefa Martínez Pérez took refuge with her family in Alberique (Valencia). As her family was persecuted, she offered to die in place of her pregnant sister whose husband had recently been shot. Her request was granted and she died as a martyr of Faith and Charity († Oct. 15, 1936).

From the Public Charity House of Valencia: The Sisters were driven out of their local community. Some of them took refuge with the family of one of their companions. Two priests were also hidden in this house. They secretly celebrated the Eucharist each day and this led to the martyrdom of Sister Joaquina Rey and Sister Victoria Arregui († Oct. 29, 1936) in Gilet (Valencia).

From Saint Christina Maternity Hospital in Madrid, Sister Modesta Moro Briz and Sister Pilar Isabel Sánchez Suárez were martyred. They had found shelter in a boarding house in the center of Madrid. They very much wanted to participate in the Eucharist for All Saints' Day. On their way to where Mass would be held, they were arrested and condemned to death by a peoples tribunal († Oct. 31, 1936).

From Atocha and Carabanchel Hospitals in Madrid, Sister Josefa Gironés Arteta and Sister Lorenza Díaz Bolaños were persecuted and shot. They were condemned because of their fidelity to the Faith and to their vocation

when confronted with their persecutors' immoral propositions († Nov. 22, 1936).

From 'El Carmen' School in Bétera (Valencia), Sister Josefa Laborra, Sister Carmen Rodríguez Banazal, Sister Estefanía Irisarri, Sister Pilar Nalda, Sister Isidora Izquierdo and Dolores Broseta (Child of Mary) were assassinated. The community was harshly persecuted. The Sisters were hidden in a boarding house in Valencia. Dolores Broseta brought them their meal which was prepared every day by former students from Bétera. She and a companion took turns in giving this service. One day, one of them was followed, and the militiamen came for the Sisters to shoot them. They did this immediately († Dec. 9, 1936).

From Puerto Rico to Madrid, from Madrid to heaven: After serving for a long time as a missionary in Puerto Rico, Sister Gaudencia Benavides Herrero returned to Spain for health reasons; she had a heart problem. She was recognized as a Sister, arrested and imprisoned in three different prisons where she was subjected to terrible treatment. Her body was covered with wounds, and as no medical care was available, she died witnessing to her faith in Jesus Christ and forgiving her persecutors († Feb. 11, 1937).

The death of Jesus Christ was really the crowning point of his life. The same goes for the martyrdom of our Sisters and the testimony given to the faith by the witnesses who will be beatified in this Year of Faith. John Paul II spoke of the "countless multitudes" who followed the crucified King, showing that "*love is stronger than death.*" In them, Benedict XVI's conviction becomes a reality: "*By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel that had transformed them and made them capable of attaining to the greatest gift of love: the forgiveness of their persecutors.*" (Porta Fidei n° 13).

We entrust ourselves to their intercession because they are examples of Gospel living and models of fidelity to the charism. May they help us to rekindle our faith and allow the power of the Beatitudes to transform our lives.

Sister Maria Angeles INFANTE
Daughter of Charity

Beatification of martyrs for the faith in Tarragona

Introduction



On Sunday, October 13, 2013, nearly 2,500 members of the Vincentian Family gathered for the celebration of the beatification of the Spanish martyrs in Tarragona, including approximately 1,000 Sisters from Spain, Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General, and her Council, two Sisters from each Province in Europe, 56 Vincentians, among them the Superior General and the Visitors of Spain, and more than 1,000 lay people who were related to the martyrs of the Vincentian Family.

On Saturday, October 12, the team of Daughters of Charity preparing the celebration wished to commemorate the Company's beginnings in Spain in 1792 when Sister Jeanne David, Assistant General of the Company, and 5 Spanish Sisters arrived at Saint John the Baptist Hospital in the city of Reus, where Sister Jeanne David would die two years later. At that time, Sister Jeanne David had ensured a solid formation for the establishment of the Daughters of Charity in Spain. Our martyred Sisters are the fruit of this seed of charity sown by Sister Jeanne in Reus from 1792 to 1794. The memorial ceremony took place at the church of St. Peter's Priory in Reus during a prayer vigil.

Next, five Sisters from each Province attended Vespers at the Cathedral of Tarragona to pray as Church and to represent the Company of the Daughters of Charity, *a petitioner for the causes and postulation*.

After the meal, all of the participants attended a wonderful performance depicting the martyrdom of Saint Fructueux and his companions, Deacons Augure and Euloge, the first Spanish martyrs, who were burned alive in 259 in Tarragona.

On **the following day, Sunday, October 13**, by 7am, sunlight had already lit up the esplanade of the Tarragona Educational Complex, and the first pilgrims began to arrive: greetings and songs echoed throughout the square, and the radiant faces of the martyrs' family members and the various religious families could be seen.... This event united us all. While those taking part - civil authorities, priests, family members and pilgrims - continued to stream in, we heard songs and hymns in honor of the martyrs about to be beatified. Testimonies about their lives and excerpts from the accounts of their martyrdom were also broadcast, as an immediate preparation for the beatification. Today, with the entire Church of Spain, we give thanks to God and rejoice over the beatification of our 42 martyrs of the Vincentian Family: 27 Daughters of Charity, 11 Vincentian Priests, 3 Vincentian Brothers, and one Child of Mary (Dolores Broseta).

With the choral academy of the Abbey of Montserrat, the beatification ceremony began at noon with a message from Pope Francis, who joined the celebration in spirit. In his message, he invited us to imitate the martyrs because *"we must always die a little in order to come out of ourselves, our selfishness, our comfort, our laziness."* He also encouraged us to *"be Christians not just in words, but also in deeds, so that we are not mediocre Christians, Christians that only have a Christian veneer, but no substance."* He made us realize that *"the martyrs didn't only have a Christian 'veneer', but were witnesses to the very end"*; he concluded by saying, *"Be builders of fraternity and solidarity."*

A celebration of faith with a vast crowd of pilgrims



Beatification of the Spanish Martyrs

In the presence of more than 20,000 pilgrims, including 105 bishops, 1,386 priests, religious and 4,000 family members of the martyrs, Cardinal Angelo Amato (Prefect for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints) presided over the solemn Eucharist for the beatification of 522 martyrs, witnesses of the faith, who were sacrificed for the sole reason that they were disciples of Jesus Christ. They died in the chaotic and violent context of the Civil War, but the cause of their death was simply the religious persecution of the Church during these years when all Spaniards suffered.

Among the most moving moments in the celebration, we can single out:

- at the beginning of the Eucharist, the solemn procession of an urn containing relics of the martyrs, accompanied by palm-bearers,
- the reading of the Apostolic Letter that declared these 522 witnesses of the Faith “Blessed”, and the unveiling of their portraits.
- the presentation of the Apostolic Letter to each postulator by His Eminence Cardinal Amato: a solemn ecclesial gesture, full of meaning. The Cardinal warmly greeted each one of them.

During the homily, the Papal Legate recalled that forgiveness is part of “the essence of Christianity” and that nothing justifies *“fratricidal war or the murder of one’s neighbor.”* He emphasized that the 522 Blesseds were not victims of the civil war, but martyrs *“of a radical religious persecution whose goal was to make the Church systematically disappear.”* He spoke of the 1930s as a dark period of hostility towards Catholics: *“Your noble nation was plunged into the diabolic fog of an ideology that enveloped thousands and thousands of peaceful citizens, burning churches and religious symbols, closing convents and Catholic schools, destroying part of your precious artistic heritage... The Church does not want to forget its courageous sons; it honors them with public devotion because the Church, the house of forgiveness, does not seek out the guilty.”*

The Cardinal called to mind that it was in Tarragona that the first Spanish martyrs were burnt alive in 259: Saint Fructueux and his Deacons Augure and Euloge. Today, with the beatification of these 522 martyrs, Spain has 1,523 martyrs beatified since the 20th century (including 11 who have already been canonized).

The average age of these beatified martyrs is approximately 44 (130 were 30 years old or younger at the time of their death; the youngest, a Carmelite brother, was 18; the oldest, a Servant of Mary, aged 86). The martyrs included 88 diocesan priests (including 3 bishops), more than 400 religious men and women from various congregations, including some twenty Benedictine monks from Montserrat, and 7 lay people. 515 of the martyrs are Spanish and 7 foreigners (3 French, 1 Cuban, 1 Columbian, 1 Filipino and 1 Portuguese).

Among the civil authorities who participated in the ceremony were the President of the Generalitat of Catalonia, Artur Mas, the Interior Minister, the Justice Minister, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, the Delegate of the Government of Catalonia, and mayors and city council members from the martyrs’ birthplaces.

More than 400 journalists were present to cover the event and broadcast the ceremony which was attended by nearly 20,000 people. On the square, there was an enormous altar, two large screens, an urn with the relics of the first Spanish martyrs and those of the 20th century, and a statue of the Black Madonna, the Virgin of Monserrat, patron saint of Catalonia.

The entire celebration took place in an atmosphere of faith and quiet prayer. Our prayers of praise, gratitude and supplication rose up to God like incense in His presence. Together, we continue to ask the martyrs’ intercession that the faith of Spanish Catholics and of Catholics throughout the world may be increased.

A celebration with a very powerful message

This beatification brings out the grandeur and beauty of Christian martyrdom. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (art. 2473) defines martyrdom as *“the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith.”* The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* asserts that *“the Church... considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love”* (L.G. 42). It is the epitome of faith. Christian martyrs are a priceless treasure for the Church; they are the palm and crown of Christian life, faithfully imitating Christ. They are the hope for a better Church and humanity, bearing witness to the highest values of human dignity. Martyrs show

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us a radiant, committed, apostolic, practical faith, which goes beyond a surface level and is free from mediocrity. This is what the Pope asked of us in his video message. It is a faith that translates into action, compelled by charity, a faith that grows and bears fruit through martyrs' blood and by the bloodless witness of martyrs of everyday faithfulness to the Gospel through a generous gift of charity.

Cardinal Amato is yet again very explicit in two other messages in which he asserts that *“forgiveness and conversion”* are gifts the martyrs offer to all of us. Forgiveness gives peace in our hearts, and conversion brings about fraternity. He also stresses that we honor martyrs because they are *“heroic witnesses of the Gospel of charity, they deserve our admiration and they inspire the desire to imitate them.”* As the Church is, and always should, be the house of forgiveness, martyrdom is a school and a source of forgiveness. That's what the Archbishop of Tarragona said during Vespers the previous evening: *“God looks with compassion on each person, as much on the executioners as on those who died. The final way the martyrs looked on others was with forgiveness. May this be our attitude, too.”*

Martyrdom is a school and source of communion. The first Christians had this experience; we lived it in our own way in Tarragona, through thousands of gestures that encourage goodwill and fraternity in the Church and in civil society.

Sister Maria Angeles INFANTE
Daughter of Charity

TESTIMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Province of the Philippines

Central Philippines after Typhoon “Haiyan/Yolanda”

INTRODUCTION

With its 93 million inhabitants, 70 dialects, and spread out over the more than 7,000 islands of the archipelago, the Philippines, the only Catholic country in southern Asia, is among the most populous countries in the world. Filipinos are a very welcoming and generous people who know how to bear suffering and give it meaning, thanks to their Christian roots.

TYPHOON “YOLANDA”

On November 8, 2013, typhoon ‘Haiyan/Yolanda’, the most devastating typhoon ever to hit the archipelago, left central Philippines literally in ruins with thousands dead. The Visitatrix and the Provincial Assistant share with us how the Sisters came to the assistance of the victims of this natural disaster “as one runs to a fire”.

As soon as Yolanda wreaked her havoc, we, the Daughters of Charity of the Philippines, contacted the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) National Office to know how we could participate in providing relief for the victims. We were told to go to the **island of Leyte** to coordinate assistance with local government officials in **Tacloban**. Days passed, *but it was impossible to get there*, as the airport was destroyed and roads were impassable.



News
from the
Provinces

Testimonies of the Sisters

The Island of Cebu

After receiving news from our Sisters in *Bogo* and *Daanbantayan*, two severely affected areas on Cebu, the Provincial Council decided to send the first volunteers there. More than 20 Sisters and 4 lay partners have since taken turns to reinforce the local communities of Daughters of Charity and to coordinate the distribution of goods provided by different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Now, in *Bogo* and *Daanbantayan*, the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA, the action arm of the Philippine Catholic Church) and Habitat for Humanity are providing shelter materials, so our Sisters and lay partners are in charge of monitoring the construction of homes.



In Manila

On November 15, 2013, a television station presented the difficult situation of some evacuees from Leyte brought to Manila but with nowhere to stay because they have no relatives in the city. There and then, we called the Undersecretary of DSWD and the National Capital Region (NCR) Director in **Manila** to inform them that the *Hospicio de San Jose* would open its doors to the evacuees. More than a hundred evacuees have stayed in the residence's Crisis Center. It was a beautiful opportunity to help Tacloban's victims since we could not reach it, either by land because the roads were blocked by fallen trees, electric pylons, etc. or by air because planes were used only to evacuate people and bring in relief goods. Moreover, the whole city was filled with dead bodies. After a few days, *Asilo de San Vicente de Paul* opened its doors. Some Sisters and lay partners from Metro Manila and the Provincial House volunteered to take in and console the evacuees arriving from Leyte and Samar as well as to assist them in finding accommodation.

The Island of Panay

After the Diocesan Social Action Director asked us to evaluate the situation and coordinate aid distribution, on November 16 we sent a team of 4 Sisters and 8 lay partners to two totally devastated towns in northern Iloilo: *Concepcion* and *San Dionisio*.

Two days later, three other Sisters went to other ravaged towns in the **province of Capiz**. In *Roxas City*, the Sisters of St. Anthony's Hospital visited the homes of more than 70 personnel who were badly affected by the typhoon.

Six Sisters in *Iloilo* spent their Christmas break organizing assistance while supervising the building of the first fishing boats. The Sisters had submitted two project proposals to foundations (one for fishing boats and the other for repairing homes), which were approved, and an engineer was sent to make necessary negotiations for the purchase of materials needed. The role of the Daughters of Charity is to organize the people, monitor the building of boats and homes and give spiritual/values formation. We will continue to send volunteers while rehabilitation is in process.

Testimonies of the Sisters

The Island of Samar

On November 25, the next batch of volunteers was sent to **Basey** in the **province of Samar**. Since the Daughters of Charity started Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) in different dioceses on the island, the people were overjoyed to welcome back the Sisters and wholeheartedly cooperated in the data assessment and relief organization. After living for some time in the house of a BEC member, the people ‘gave’ the Day Care Center at **Cambayan** as a lodging place for them, and they have been able to continue to collaborate with people from several NGOs. The Sisters have credibility with those who have the resources because we provide specific individual data about families/persons affected by the typhoon, and many people have given money for farming materials, seeds, fishing boats and shelter kits. We will continue to be present there for at least three more months while rehabilitation is carried out.

The Island of Leyte

At the request of the Claretians with whom we collaborate on Leyte, a group of 9 Sisters also volunteered for stress de-briefing work and caring for children in schools without roofs in **Tolosa** last December 3 -15. Almost at the same time, the Sisters also started data assessment and organization of relief distribution in **Tanauan**. Many of the survivors are still hoping that they can find missing relatives, and rehabilitation is quite slow. Nonetheless, the majority have the great desire to rise up and rebuild their lives despite all the odds, and we admire their way of handling grief and their courage to go on.

CONCLUSION

This disastrous typhoon came at a time when we were holding our Domestic Assemblies, discussing the “Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum”. We are actually living out the theme of the Assemblies in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. This is what the Boldness of Charity means. When we lobby the ‘rich’ and NGOs for material aid to provide for the survivors’ needs, this again entails boldness. When we have to “burn the midnight oil” to finish our data assessment and project proposals in order to get funding from foundations, that is boldness.

It is heartbreaking to hear horrific stories on how the super typhoon destroyed families and homes. We feel the immense pain of loss and despair. No words are adequate to describe the grief of the people who survived.

This disaster has seemingly robbed the people of their future, but they have shown incredible tenacity in rising above trauma, and they are yearning to just get on with their lives. They need immediate assistance: food, water, mosquito nets, school supplies for children, sanitation services and a roof over their heads. They want their children to be able to play and to live like children in safer surroundings. They want to be able to make a living again so that they can take care of themselves.

We draw strength from their faith and inspirational outlook. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the assistance that we receive from the General Council and other Provinces every time we are beset by disasters. Please keep us in your prayers.

Sisters E. FERRIOLS and M.S. EVIDENTE
Daughters of Charity

Province of Mozambique

Daughters of Charity in the service of people infected with AIDS

AIDS IN MOZAMBIQUE

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region most affected by AIDS, with more than 22 million HIV-positive persons.

The Daughters of Charity have been in Chalukuane and Chokwe in Mozambique for forty years. Sister Maddalena, an Italian, arrived in 1970 and experienced Portuguese colonization, then the communist experiment after independence in 1975 following the Carnation Revolution that resulted in the collapse of the dictatorship in Portugal. It was the illusion of scientific socialism that opened up the country to North Korean, Cuban and East German volunteers who organized health care and the police.

In two villages about twenty kilometers from each other, six Daughters of Charity, including three young Mozambicans, manage hospitals, one in Chalukuane and the other in Chokwe. The goal of these health care centers is not only to provide medical care but to restore hope. Women are discriminated against; often they don't have the right to medical care or to study. The Sisters strive to support them and help them to take on responsibility for their future. They help young women with their studies in Chokwe or in Maputo.

In Chalakuane, when the guerillas were advancing in 1990, the sick had to be evacuated, the clinic was set on fire, and the patients and medical staff lived in the sacristy of the church in Chilembene for two years, waiting for a peace agreement. Then, AIDS spread everywhere

among the inhabitants of the region. International statistics revealed that almost one in every two people in this region carried the virus. Ten years ago, the Community of Sant'Egidio decided to support the efforts of the Daughters of Charity and established a program to supply the necessary medications for fighting against the disease and allowing the infected persons to live a normal life. Within three weeks, we can see patients gain the upper hand. These medications now allow a pregnant woman not to transmit AIDS to the child she is carrying.

Today, Chalukuane has 23,000 residents, including more than 600 children orphaned because of AIDS. Those suffering from AIDS are cared for at the Daughters of Charity hospital. Currently, 3,000 AIDS patients benefit from treatment. There are two Sisters at the service of the sick. One is a doctor, the other a nurse, and the third Sister is in charge of administration and fund-raising. The struggle against the illness is primarily centered on women because they are more at risk of contracting the disease than men. The Sisters strive to make the women aware of the value of their life. The inhabitants are deeply religious and have a highly developed sense of the transcendent, but they are often very attached to their customs and are prisoners of traditions that keep them in situations of suffering. The Sisters must compete with the 700 healers who hold sway in the region, against just 5 or 6 doctors. The healers say that illnesses do not exist and are the result of a spell. In that way, they make AIDS a sort of weapon to reinforce their power over the population of Chalukuane.

Chokwe looks like a European regional capital, with small homes built by Portuguese colonists in 1950. In 1999, the former Carmelite monastery was transformed first into a hospice and soon became a health care center: on the cloister side, 110 beds are used by patients, the majority of whom also have tuberculosis because tuberculosis is one of the diseases most frequently connected with AIDS. On the patio side is the home where 20 sick, abandoned and orphaned children live. A Sister ensures that the children's life is well-ordered; providing their medicine, supporting their schooling and, in the afternoon organizing games and study. Each day, the courtyard of the health care center is full of patients. They arrive on foot or in crowded buses. There are about 1000 each day, waiting their turn after a sleepless night, either to receive their pills for the month or have their annual or quarterly blood

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test; others come because they have been newly infected.

More than 6,000 patients come to the former monastery of Chokwe each month to receive their triple combination therapy.

For 20 years, the Daughters of Charity in Chokwe and Chalukuane have led a fight to beat death. With them, women fight to stand up tall and be full of life and love. The arrival of AIDS medications has allowed them to hope. This does not exempt them from the need to keep on fighting, often just to be able to eat. Nor do medications free them from their dependence on men who, quite often, do not consider them as equals and do not allow them to make choices in their lives.

Excerpt from a special edition of *La Croix*
“All the energy in the world”
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TESTIMONIES OF THE SISTERS

Week of Formation in Rome for persons working with Project DREAM

DREAM is an English acronym that stands for Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition.

In December 2013, the Community of Sant’Egidio, the international DREAM Team, and the Daughters of Charity organized a training course in Rome for sisters and staff who work in the DREAM programs in Africa.

The Daughters of Charity have large DREAM programs in 6 African countries: Mozambique, Congo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Tanzania and Kenya. In some of these countries, there is more than one DREAM Center, and between them all, they take care of more than 10,000 people who are HIV positive. Each DREAM Center provides a wide range of services. All this requires a very competent and well trained local staff for each center.

Since 2005, the community of Sant’Egidio, a lay Catholic Community founded in Rome, and the Daughters of Charity have worked together, collaborating in those six countries to bring state of the art facilities and treatment programs to people in need, especially the poor or marginalized. One of the big contributions both communities make is to train and develop local sisters and staff in the DREAM model and protocols.

The course in December 2013 was held in Rome at the San Gallicano, the DREAM headquarters and international office. (San Gallicano is a hive of activity with a network of communication and support reaching out to the African countries where the Community has an active and ongoing presence.) The course addressed the many challenges for the future for patients affected by HIV/AIDS, better protocols for a more

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effective prevention of the transmission of the disease from mother to child, the need to retain more patients in order for them to do well in the treatment against HIV and tuberculosis.

During the course, to allow a better follow up of the patients, we examined topics regarding:

- the organization of care centers and laboratories,
- the use of telemedicine,
- the prevention of cardiovascular disease and cancer,
- practical aspects, such as the use of solar energy systems in the centers located in rural areas or the use of computer programs for the management of the sick.

Andrea Riccardi, Founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio, welcomed the delegates from the different countries and emphasized how the continent needs alliances in the name of the deprived to bring them peace and hope. During the course, there were also visits to some services of the Community of Sant'Egidio in nearby places: the soup kitchen, the house for the sick, the home for the elderly, and the art exhibition of friends.

Fr. Robert Maloney, coordinator of this collaborative program in DREAM, gave an inspiring talk on the role, character and charisms of faith-based communities and initiatives. On the final day, Sr. Evelyn Franc, Superioress General, addressed the group to encourage their on-going service to others and to the sick, and shared her appreciation for the efforts of all concerned in ensuring a program of excellence for people in need.

Each of the 6 countries sent 4 staff to the conference. In addition, there were members of the coordinating team, IPS (International Projects Service), which helps raise money for DREAM, and sisters from the General Council of the Daughters of Charity. It was a wonderful gathering of diverse cultures and languages. There were very dynamic and rich interchanges between the participants and the many DREAM professionals. The participants stayed at the Daughters of Charity house at Via Ezio in Rome and either walked or took the bus each day to San Gallicano. It gave all the newcomers to Rome an opportunity to see the city and especially the Vatican. The sisters at Via Ezio arranged for

tickets for the group to attend the general audience with Pope Francis. On the weekend all the participants had an opportunity to see some of Rome, shop, and generally relax and enjoy a great experience.

Bonds were created between the various DREAM centers and with the communities of Sant'Egidio and the Daughters of Charity. This formation gave each participant new energy and hope.

A participant

**Saint Vincent, student and teacher,
or
teaching today, according to Saint
Vincent**

H

History
of the
Company

Introduction

Obviously, times have changed considerably since the beginning of the 17th century in France, and especially with regard to schools and teaching.

It is estimated that during the first years of the 17th century, three-quarters of the male population and nine-tenths of the female population were completely illiterate. Boys were busy with farm work according to the season; girls were responsible for the housework. Neither of them needed to attend school for that.

The north of France was not as underprivileged as the south, and, in general, the cities were more advanced than the countryside. But, over the course of the 17th century, an extraordinary movement was set in motion by the lords and especially by the bishops, and village schools multiplied. Nonetheless, the results were slow and rather relative given the modest educational level of the school teachers, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the irregularity of school attendance. However, when we compare official registers from the beginning and the end of the century, we see a very significant increase in the number of those who knew how to sign their name.

Let us also note that it was the Church that initiated this

movement, and Saint Vincent, as we will see, participated very actively in it. The Church's goal was clearly evangelization. We could hardly criticize it for this. Faced with the threat and advance of Protestantism, the Church judged it appropriate to enable as many Christians as possible to read, understand and remember the catechism that the Council of Trent had just updated. Schools were therefore opened in villages; they were established as a means of teaching reading and writing for catechesis. This perspective of evangelization is found in the plans and advice that Saint Vincent gives for the schools and to the Daughters of Charity who were involved in them.

Such was, painted with broad strokes, the educational situation in France at the time of Saint Vincent. Throughout our study it would be good to remember these brief comments because Saint Vincent, quite naturally, thought and acted in accordance with his time. In comparison with his contemporaries, he was, by temperament and by spirituality, even among those most rooted men in his context.

Vincent de Paul was not an armchair theorist. Certainly, he was very intelligent and even cultivated for his time, but above all he was a practical man, a committed man, a man for whom the best doctrines and the greatest values only had value insofar as they could be translated in practical terms in the field. I'd even go so far as to think that in this regard M. Vincent could still be quite useful to our National Education System.

I cannot resist the pleasure of rereading this well-known passage with you. I always try to put at the beginning of sessions since, in my opinion, it is one of the major keys for understanding and studying Saint Vincent. It seems to me that this passage illustrates very well everything I told you about the temperament and spirituality of Saint Vincent in regard to teaching, as to every other subject.

“Let us love God, brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows; for very often many acts of love of God, of devotion, and of other similar affections and interior practices of a tender heart, although very good and desirable, are, nevertheless, very suspect if they don't translate into the practice of effective love ‘By this,’ says Our Lord, ‘is my Father glorified, that you

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may bear much fruit.' We have to be very careful about that; for there are many who, recollected exteriorly, and filled with lofty sentiments of God interiorly, stop at that, and when it comes to the point of doing something, and they have the opportunity to act, they come up short. They flatter themselves with their ardent imagination; they're satisfied with the sweet conversations they have with God in meditation and even speak of them like angels; but when they leave there, if there's a question of working for God, of suffering, of mortifying themselves, of instructing poor persons, of going in search of the lost sheep, of being happy when they lack something, or of accepting sickness or some other misfortune, alas! they're no longer around; their courage fails them. No, no, let's not fool ourselves: Totum opus nostrum in operatione consistit.

This is so true that the holy Apostle declares to us that only our works accompany us into the other life. So, let's reflect on that, especially since, in this century there are many who seem virtuous – and who actually are – but, nevertheless, are more inclined to a soft, easy way than to a painstaking, solid devotion. The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones. Nothing is more in conformity with the Gospel than to gather light and strength for our soul in meditation, reading, and solitude on the one hand, and then to go out and share this spiritual nourishment with others. This is to do as our Lord did, and His Apostles after Him; it's to unite the office of Martha to that of Mary and to imitate the dove, which half digests the food it has eaten and then uses its beak to put the rest into that of its babies in order to feed them. That's what we should do, that's how we should witness to God by our works that we love Him” (Coste XI, 32-33).

You cannot expect to find specific teaching on schools, or teaching as such, in Saint Vincent's spoken or written words. However, in his experience, in his practical advice, in his reactions to children's problems and situations, it is possible to discover some broad outlines and some principles that still have their value today and explain the specific spirit that should animate us in teaching roles.

If you agree, this evening we will speak more specifically about Vincent de Paul's personal experience with regard to teaching and some conclusions that can be drawn from this. Tomorrow, we will

deal more directly with the theme of teaching in the vocation of the Daughter of Charity.

1. MONSIEUR VINCENT'S EXPERIENCE

This first part of my presentation is especially important. Vincent de Paul was indeed a man of experience. This is perhaps his character trait that shows up most clearly all through his life. He had the gift of studying, reflecting on, and taking full advantage of what he had experienced: the Gannes-Folleville event, that of Châtillon, and also encounters like those with St. Francis de Sales, Louise de Marillac, Marguerite Naseau, or a visit to a prison or a hospital. Thus, in his conferences or letters, we often catch Vincent reflecting on an event and drawing lessons for his action from it.

As far as teaching is concerned, it seems obvious that M. Vincent used his own experience quite a lot and this was more important than anything else.

Let us recall: Vincent was born April 24, 1681, in the village of Pouy, on a small farm. From his earliest years, he was involved in working the land. According to what he said about himself, his main work was tending the flocks. There was no question of his going to school, any more than his three brothers and two sisters could: the family was too poor! During his first fourteen years, the young Vincent had time to experience the hard and thankless life of poor country people and to reflect on it. Very early, in the little mind of this child, a sort of ambition was born and developed. You all know this childhood memory that Vincent would recall when he was 78 years old: “*I remember that when I was a little boy, as my father used to take me with him into town, I was ashamed to go with him and to acknowledge him as my father because he was shabbily dressed and a little lame*” (Coste XII, 351). Vincent's father died in 1598, and this confession was made in December 1659. A touching remorse and a significant reaction. Vincent was very intelligent (he would amply prove this); he perhaps thought at that time that he could do something other than watch over cows, sheep and pigs on the banks of the Adour River.

Vincent's father finally agreed to let him go to the small school in Dax in

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1595. In order for this to happen, he made two big material sacrifices, in the hope that Vincent would quickly obtain a good position that would then allow him to help his family.

So, Vincent began his studies at the age of 14 and didn't waste any time. Two years later, in 1597, he was already attending the University of Toulouse. Of course, the level of studies at that time is not comparable with those today, especially ecclesial studies. But it cannot be denied that Vincent was a gifted and hard-working student. If he turned toward ecclesial studies, it is probably at least in part because they were, at the time, almost the only way out for poor boys and the only way to obtain an education without being too much of a burden for relatives.

Vincent had to interrupt his university studies for some time in order to take over the running of a small school in Buzet, 30 kilometers from Toulouse, where he taught a few young boarders.

He was ordained priest at this juncture, on September 23rd 1660, in Château-l'Évêque, when he was only 19 and a half years old. In 1604, he left the University as a bachelor in theology, which entitled him to teach in a university.

So, Vincent de Paul was, for his times, and compared with most priests of his era, very well educated. The period that followed showed him all too well how much this intellectual baggage accumulated over the course of nine years of studies could effectively serve for the promotion of those who are poor, such as himself.

Vincent would never forget this experience, which in large part explains the importance that he would always give to instruction and teaching in the service of those who are poor.

It is significant, for example, that, in the February 17, 1610, letter to his mother (the only letter to his mother that has been preserved), written while he was chaplain at the court of Marguerite de Valois, Vincent de Paul specified: "*I should also like my brother to have one of my nephews study*" (Coste I, 16). In fact, one of Vincent's nephews did begin his studies and became a priest: François de Paul was prebendary of Capbreton; he died on June 8, 1678.

Vincent would always remember this experience of advancement through instruction. His perspective in terms of effective charity was not just to rescue or to help but to give the poor the means to meet their needs. This phrase often returns to the pen and lips of Vincent de Paul, and it undeniably constitutes one of the major principles of his action. Now, through experience, Vincent had realized that instruction was a very effective means of enabling poor persons to provide for their needs. Hence the importance he gave, right from the beginning, to teaching in the service of persons who are poor, an importance that he would constantly recall until the end of his life.

We have just been recalling Vincent de Paul's experience as a student, the experience of social advancement due, in great part, to studies. Now, let's look at his experience as a teacher.

Unfortunately, we have very little information and few documents about this experience. Still, it is worth emphasizing that Vincent de Paul's first professional activity was teaching. At the school in Dax, when he was only 15-16 years old, he was already acting as tutor for M. de Comet's young children. Later he would take care of a small boarding school in Buzet, where he taught; finally, he was tutor for the de Gondi family.

Before the famous year of 1617, the year of Gannes-Folleville and Châtillon, Vincent held the position and role of teacher for about ten years. I think that this point has not been stressed enough, which is nevertheless very important in Saint Vincent's experience. Without exaggerating, I think that we could say that, chronologically, he was a teacher first and, doubtless, a gifted teacher.

If we had the time, we could devote it to a long development of M. Vincent's pedagogy: pedagogy in terms of catechesis or preaching or the methods he used in his talks to the priests and brothers of the Mission and especially in his conferences to the Daughters of Charity.

In all these domains, we certainly discover the fruitful experience of Vincent the teacher. As far as the Daughters of Charity are concerned, a study of volumes IX and X of Coste would be especially interesting and enlightening. We know that with very few exceptions, these first Daughters of Charity were poor village girls, a number of whom did

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not know how to read or write. M. Vincent patiently sought the best method of ensuring their instruction and formation. He greatly valued the dialogue method in his teaching. But, he noticed that it was the most educated who spoke most frequently and at greater length than the others. He came to the question-response method, sometimes taking great pleasure in stressing the value of a perhaps somewhat unoriginal response, but one expressed by a less gifted Sister. He had the art of putting his listener at ease and giving them confidence. He had the art of explaining things simply and of returning to a subject already studied, as a sort of review. He had the art of providing illustrations and was concerned to always maintain the connection between what he taught and life. He was deeply involved in giving the conferences to the point of forgetting the time or being unable to control his emotions; he attentively reread the notes that were taken. In short, Vincent de Paul the teacher showed himself to be a gifted, passionate and experienced pedagogue. A good thesis could be written on this subject.

But let's come to some conclusions. Vincent de Paul was a student for a good number of years, and he never forgot all the benefits this brought him. For many long years he was a teacher, and he remained one, in one way or another, practically throughout his life. Vincent methodically made the most of this twofold experience for a better service of those who are poor.

1. First of all, and whatever may have been said, M. Vincent always had a positive attitude towards study. He has sometimes been represented as a sort of Curé d' Ars before the fact, with limited ability but extraordinary holiness. This view corresponded, quite honestly, to a certain trend in spirituality in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. In order to better highlight the action of grace and accentuate the supernatural side of holiness, the importance of reality and natural giftedness would be minimized.

Vincent de Paul, as you know, had followed excellent courses of study for his times, and, in all likelihood, he had acquired a quite remarkable level of general knowledge. He sometimes described himself as a "poor fourth form student"; this was just a little humility seasoned with a good dose of Gascon humour. Speaking to his communities, he frequently reminded them of the need for the congregation as a whole to practice

humility, but he also insisted a lot on competence, which he saw as a necessary requirement stemming from respect for those who are poor and something that was their due: "*although all priests are obliged to be knowledgeable, yet we are especially obliged to be so because of the ministries and exercises to which the Providence of God has called us*" (Coste XI, 115). And he added: "*Education is necessary, my dear confreres, and woe betide those who don't use their time well! But, let's fear, let's fear, dear brothers, let's fear, and, if I daresay, let's tremble, and let's tremble a thousand times more than I could say; for those who are intelligent have a lot to fear: knowledge inflates (1 Cor 8:1), and it's worse for those who are not, if they don't humble themselves!*" (Coste XI, 116-117).

In his congregations M. Vincent would not tolerate using study as a way to appear important and put oneself forward, and he denounced those "*desiring to look good, feeding on pipe dreams, wanting to have the upper hand over others, to be considered discerning*" (Coste XI, 116). For him, study, in his congregations, must remain a means of better evangelization and better service of those who are poor. He wasn't, and never had been, opposed to study, quite the contrary! However, insofar as the Priests of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity were concerned, he did not want any studies that were not oriented toward evangelization and the service of the poor. I hope I'll have the opportunity to speak about this to you again. For the time being, I'll add a few words about the essential action undertaken by Saint Vincent for the instruction and formation of the clergy through the work of the seminaries and by a sort of on-going formation that he conceived and carried out called the "Tuesday Conferences," weekly meetings during which priests shared "on their pastoral experience, went deeper into one point or another of theology and did practical exercises in preaching and catechizing." Far from having been a sort of obscurantist, Vincent de Paul, quite the contrary, actively worked to raise the intellectual level of the Church of his time.

2. From his experiences as a student and teacher, Vincent de Paul drew the conclusion that education was one of the most effective ways of serving the poor. Of course, for him as for the Church as a whole in his time, instruction and even more basically literacy, (because that was mostly what it included) was a means for better evangelization and

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for longer lasting catechesis. But it seems clear that Saint Vincent, as we would say today, was perfectly aware that, for those who are poor, instruction was a means of advancement and social autonomy, a means of liberation. Of course, we do not find any of these expressions in Vincent's vocabulary, and for good reason! But we find the equivalent words or expressions like those we've already seen: the poor should not be a burden on anyone, they would provide for their own needs, they would earn their living.

In all the regulations for the Confraternities of Charity found in volume XIIIb of Coste (pages 1-107), these expressions constantly turn up in one way or another. M. Vincent goes so far as to specify that only little children, the disabled and elderly will receive the entire amount of what they need for living; on the other hand, he said, those who can earn a part of what they need, will only receive from the Confraternity the amount they still lack. You know that at the time national assistance was distributed in Lorraine or in Picardy after the devastation of war, Vincent asked that, once emergency assistance had been shared out, tools and seeds be distributed to peasants who had lost everything. This always had the same objective: to allow the peasants to be self-sufficient as quickly as possible. This was the fundamental principle of Vincentian charity, and it was from this perspective that Vincent de Paul considered the position of the teacher and the role of the school. The latter, according to Vincent, should supply the poor child with the means to leave the ranks of those receiving assistance. That's why Vincent de Paul established veritable professional schools in villages; children learned to read and write there, but above all they learned a trade. He called this kind of school a "workshop".

In the regulations for a mixed Confraternity of Charity, we read the following: *"The little children, the disabled, and those who are aged and infirm will be given weekly what they need to get by; to those who will earn part of their own living, the Company will give the other part. The youths will be placed in some modest trade, such as that of a weaver, which costs only three or four ecus per apprentice; or a workshop will be set up for some simple work... All the youths will be brought together in some suitable rented house, where they will be helped to live and work under the direction of a priest and the leadership of a master workman ... The poor apprentices, together with their parents, will give their word*

on oath to teach their trade, free of charge, to the poor children of the town who will come after them, whenever the officers of the Charity direct them to do so, and the apprentices whom they will teach will be fed by the Company" (Coste XIIIb, 82-83).

Today all this may seem rather rudimentary, but in the 17th century, this type of undertaking was almost unheard of. In any case, this example of workshops shows what Saint Vincent's concern was in terms of education, that is, to prepare concretely for life and give poor children the best possibilities and means to support themselves without fear of the uncertainties and the humiliation of having to receive assistance and alms. Even if Saint Vincent did not use these terms, I believe that it was indeed a matter of what we would today call concern for the social promotion of those who are poor. We should also mention in this context all that Vincent undertook with the first Daughters of Charity for women's promotion. In his time, nine out of ten women and girls in France were illiterate. The cruel repartee of the characters in "Les Femmes Savantes" ("The Learned Ladies") or "Les Précieuses Ridicules" ("The Affected Ladies" [plays by Molière]) are all too well known... In the domain of female literacy as well, Saint Vincent played a significant role.

For the time being, let us recall that, from his experience as student and teacher, Vincent de Paul came to the conclusion that teaching was one of the greatest and most effective means to concretely serve persons living in poverty. It is therefore not surprising that, in all his foundations - the Confraternities, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Company of the Daughters of Charity - he built in a significant place for the teaching role.

3. A final conclusion from Vincent de Paul's twofold experience: instruction and education are effective means for the evangelization and salvation of those who are poor. They ensure human and social advancement, but with evangelization and salvation in mind. This was the perspective, and to some extent the calculation, of the Church after the Council of Trent: schools should give those who are poor the means to sustain and defend their Christian faith, thanks to reading and studying the catechism and the Gospel.

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After 1617, the year of his conversion, Vincent became profoundly missionary, and all his plans and achievements were missionary from then on. Of course, and much more than most of his contemporaries, he placed great importance on what we call “promotion”, but it is obvious that for him, the goal of schools and teaching was evangelization. According to his own words, evangelization meant “*to make God known to poor persons; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it’s for persons who are poor*” (Coste XII, 71). This overriding concern for evangelization in and through teaching is found in practically all the Vincentian texts related to teaching.

For Saint Vincent, teaching derived all its value, and only had value, to the extent that

- it was clearly a work of evangelization,
- it was aimed at those who are poor.

Once these two conditions are met, neither Priests of the Mission nor Daughters of Charity could ever think or say that as teachers they feel more or less on the margin of their vocation.

Once these two conditions were met, Saint Vincent was convinced (as he frequently asserted) that schools and teaching constituted an effective and privileged means of serving the poor.

We have just discussed the experience of Vincent de Paul as a student and teacher. We have seen how much this two-fold experience was decisive for him and for persons who are poor.

Father Jean Morin, CM

**To grow in tender love,
and a respectful and sensitive charity,
we have a sure Christian model
to contemplate:
Mary, the Mother of Jesus
and our Mother,
who is always attentive
to the voice of God
and to the needs and troubles
of her children.**

**Message of Pope Francis
For the World Day of the Sick, 2014**

