

*E*choes of the Company



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

2016

No. 5



Holy Year of Mercy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spiritual Life

Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul.....259
Father T. Mavric, Superior General

International Vincentian Session.....266
Our ethical use of the Internet (continued)
Father Fernando del Castillo, CM

News of the Company

Appointments.....278
Designation of Visitatrixes

Sisters' Testimonies
Province of Graz-Central Europe.....279
Hospital chaplaincy
Sister Agnès Zeba and Sister Marianna Sebestyén, Daughters of Charity

Province of Vietnam.....283
Training domestic workers
Local community of Bat Phuc-Phuoc Loc (Annex of Emmanuel, Lang Cat)

Works of Mercy

Province of Chelmno-Poznan (Poland).....286
"I was in prison and you visited me"
Local community of Wejherowo

The Charter of the Daughters of Charity

Consecrated because "more exposed", Consecrated to
reach all people.....292
"Enclosure"
Father Jérôme Delsinne, CM

Province of Fortaleza - In the Northeast of Brazil.....298
 A local community on the move from 1968 up to today (continued)
 Exodus local community

History of the Company

Encountering the God of mercy with Saint Vincent de Paul.....300
 Father Frédéric Pellefigue, CM

Feast of Saint Vincent De Paul

Rome, 19 September 2016

Dear members of the Vincentian Family,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

It is with great joy and thankfulness to each of you, who are serving “our lords and masters” all around the world, that I address this letter to you for the first time as Superior General. I would like to express my deep gratitude and admiration to all of you living and serving even in the farthest corners of the globe as witnesses to Jesus’ love! We are all servants and it is wonderful to know that in this service we are never alone. It is Jesus, our Mother Mary, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, and all the other blessed and saints of the Vincentian Family who accompany us on the journey.

Let me take this moment to thank profoundly Father Gregory Gay, CM, our Superior General for the last 12 years, as well as all the other members and leaders of the Vincentian Family on the international, national, and local levels, who have so tirelessly and with so much enthusiasm and dedication served in the past years to make possible the affective and effective proclamation of the Good News to the Poor.

I also would like to use this opportunity to thank so very much all of you, members of the different branches of the Vincentian Family, who had written to me after my election as Superior General and expressed so wholeheartedly your



*Spiritual
Life*

Feast of St. Vincent De Paul

good wishes and, in a special way, your promise of regular prayer. As it will not be possible for me to respond and thank each one of you individually, be assured that you are included personally in these words of thankfulness, as I extend to each of you my promise of daily remembrance in prayer.

It is a moment of “special grace” that Providence is offering us in the upcoming 400th Anniversary (1617-2017) of our common Vincentian Spirituality and Charism. Many of you already have begun intensive planning to share and encourage others to follow our Vincentian spirituality and charism on the local, national, and international levels. I encourage all of us to keep reflecting, planning, and acting together as how best to share with others this “special moment of grace.”

The motto of the whole Vincentian Family for 2017 that is going to shed light on it all is: “... I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25:35). As our sight is directed toward our brothers and sisters, especially the most abandoned and those for whom no one cares, in order to be sure that our reflecting, planning, and acting go in the right direction, the path always needs to begin with us. The Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul gives us a renewed opportunity to reflect on the reasons and ways of Vincent’s reflecting, planning, and acting.

The theologian Karl Rahner, at the end of the 20th century, had pronounced these prophetic words: “The Christians of the 21st century are going to be mystics, or they will not be.” Why can we call Saint Vincent de Paul a “Mystic of Charity”?

I would like to invite and encourage each of us, individually and as a group, to reflect, plan, and act on the following point:

Why and how can I describe Vincent as a Mystic of Charity?

I asked three of our confreres, who had reflected and written on this subject in the past, to share a short personal reflection. May these thoughts help us to renew and deepen our own reflections.

Father Hugh O’Donnell, CM

We all know Vincent was a man of action, so we may be surprised to

260

hear him also referred to as a mystic. But in fact it was his mystical experience of the Trinity and in particular the Incarnation that was the font of all his actions in favor of poor people. Henri Brémond, the distinguished historian of French spirituality, was the first to bring it to our attention. He said, “...it is (Vincent’s) mysticism which gave us the greatest of the men of action.” André Dodin and José María Ibañez later called Vincent a “mystic of action” and Giuseppe Toscani, CM, united mysticism and action and came to the heart of the matter in calling him “a mystic of Charity.” Vincent lived in a century of mystics, but he stood out as the Mystic of Charity.

Being a mystic implies experience, the experience of Mystery. For Vincent it meant a deep experience of the Mystery of God’s Love. We know that the Mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation were at the heart of his life. The experience of the Trinity’s inclusive love of the world and the Incarnate Word’s unconditional embrace of every human person shaped, conditioned, and fired his love of the world and everyone in it, in particular, sisters and brothers in need. He looked upon the world with the eyes of Abba and Jesus and embraced everyone with the unconditional love, warmth and energy of the Holy Spirit.

Vincent’s mysticism was the source of his apostolic action. The Mystery of God’s love and the Mystery of the Poor were the two poles of Vincent’s dynamic love. But Vincent’s Way had a third dimension, which was how he regarded time. Time was the medium through which the Providence of God made itself known to him. He acted according to God’s time, not his own. “Do the good that presents itself to be done,” he advised. “Do not tread on the heels of Providence.”

Another aspect of time for Vincent was the presence of God here and now – “God is here!” (influence of Ruysbroek). God is here in time. God is here in persons, in events, in circumstances, in poor people. God speaks to us now in and through them. Vincent was a man of unfolding history in the deepest sense. He followed the lead of Providence step by step. He had neither an ego-agenda nor an ideology. It took him decades to arrive at such interior freedom, which is why Vincent’s journey to holiness and freedom (1600-1625) is the key to understanding the daily dynamic of the Apostle of Charity.

Feast of St. Vincent De Paul

Father Robert Maloney, CM

When we speak of mystics, we usually think of people who have extraordinary religious experiences. Their quest for God moves from active search to passive presence. They pray, as Saint Paul says to the church in Rome (8:26), “with sighs and groans too deep for human words.” Mystics have ecstatic moments when they are completely lost in God, “whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know,” as Saint Paul recounts his experience in 2 Corinthians 12:3. At times, they have visions and receive private revelations. They attempt, with difficulty, to describe for others their moments of intense light and painful darkness. Saint Vincent knew the writings of mystics like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Though generally cautious about unusual spiritual phenomena, he admired Madame Acarie, one of the renowned mystics of his day, who lived in Paris during his early years there.

Vincent’s brand of mysticism was strikingly different. He found God in the people and events around him. His “visions” were deeply Christological. He saw Christ in the face of the poor. To use a phrase from the Jesuit tradition that has become popular in Vincentian documents, he was a “contemplative in action.” Christ led him to the poor and the poor led him to Christ. When he spoke of the poor and when he spoke of Christ, his words were often ecstatic. He told his priests and brothers: “If we ask Our Lord, ‘What did you come to do on earth?’ he answers, ‘To assist the poor.’ ‘Anything else?’ ‘To assist the poor.’ So, are we not very fortunate to belong to the Mission for the same purpose that caused God to become man? And if someone were to question a Missioner, wouldn’t it be a great honor for him to be able to say with Our Lord, ‘He sent me to preach the good news to the poor’” (CCD:XI:98). When he spoke about Christ, he could be rapturous. In 1655, he cried out, “Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, that disposes us to go as He went ... He sends us, like the apostles, to bring fire everywhere, to bring this divine fire, this fire of love ...” (CCD:XI:264).

For Vincent, the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of spirituality were both indispensable. He saw love of Christ and love of the poor as inseparable. Again and again, he urged his followers not just to

act but also to pray, and not just to pray but also to act. He heard an objection from his followers: “But there are so many things to do, so many house duties, so many ministries in town and country; there’s work everywhere; must we, then, leave all that to think only of God?” And he responded forcefully: “No, but we have to sanctify those activities by seeking God in them, and do them in order to find Him in them rather than to see that they get done. Our Lord wills that we seek above all His glory, His kingdom, and His justice, and, to do this, we make our primary concern the interior life, faith, trust, love, our spiritual exercises, meditation, shame, humiliations, our work and troubles, in the sight of God our Sovereign Lord. Once we’re grounded in seeking God’s glory in this way, we can be assured that the rest will follow” (CCD:XII:111).

In a ground-breaking 11-volume work written almost a century ago, Henri Brémond described Saint Vincent’s era as the time of “The Mystical Conquest.” At the conclusion of an eloquent chapter about Vincent, he stated: “It was mysticism that gave us the greatest of our men of works” (*Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, III “La Conquête Mystique” [Paris, 1921], p. 257).

Father Thomas McKenna, CM

For this title to serve well, the word “mystic” has to be understood in its most general sense. The more popular connotation is that of a person who has more or less “direct” experience of God (visions, voices, leanings, sounds), more unmediated than not. The literature of mysticism describes experiences like ecstasies, being taken up into “a third heaven,” taken out of oneself and “sinking into” the Mystery (e.g., into the Abyss, Ocean, Ground) who is God. Its vocabulary is distinctive; e.g., progressively deeper inner mansions, active and passive contemplation, purgative/illuminative/unitive stages, passing beyond oneself, dark nights and dazzling darkness. By contrast, Vincent’s language for religious experience was quite simple and direct, and neither did he testify to these kinds of occurrences in his own life.

But the word mystic can be applied in a wider sense. That is to say, it might refer to someone who has a lived and felt contact with the sacred in life, and who responds to that encounter in service to the neighbor. Under this broader meaning, Vincent can be thought of as a mystic.

Feast of St. Vincent De Paul

The more inclusive sense might be something like this. A mystic is one who listens to and gets caught up into God's love for creation, and who then commits himself both to recognizing that love in the world and also bringing it there. For Vincent, this love (better, "loving") of God revealed itself especially in people who were poor and marginalized. He came to recognize them both as privileged bearers of God's love and as particularly deserving recipients of it. And he followed up on this by actively bringing the Good News of that love to those poor ones.

Much like the way the right lyrics can draw out the deeper beauty of a melody, the words from Isaiah that Jesus spoke in Luke chapter 4 gave a particularly resonant expression to Vincent's experience of God. Here was Jesus announcing not only His own mission from His Father, but also His own experience of His Abba as Love for the world, especially for the downcast: "I have been sent to bring the Good News to the poor." To paraphrase, "The fire of my Father's love ("loving") is burning within me, and it drives me to bring just that love to the world, most especially to the poor ones in it." To follow the analogy, Vincent recognized these words as the lyrics to a melody that had been playing deeper and deeper within him. It was as if on hearing this text at a particular juncture in his life, Vincent said something like "Aha! That's it! Those words catch just how I'm experiencing God's love – and just how I want to spend my life in responding and spreading it."

Another angle. You might describe Vincent as a "bi-spectacled" mystic. That is to say, he was (seeing) experiencing the same God through two different lenses, both at much the same time. One lens was his own prayer; the other was the person who was poor as well as the world he or she lived in. Each angle of view influenced the other, the one deepening and sharpening the perception of its opposite. Vincent "saw" (and felt) God's love through both these perspectives at the same time and acted vigorously to respond to what he was seeing.

To keep our reflecting, planning, and acting in the right direction as members of the Vincentian Family, to help us reflect on Vincent as a Mystic of Charity, the many Congregations that are part of the Vincentian Family or will become part in the future have their own Constitutions as the first and most important source, and all the branches as a whole have the writings and conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul,

as well as the writings and conferences of other blessed and saints of the Vincentian Family. May the reading and praying of these texts be part of our daily commitments.

As we approach the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul that we will celebrate with the whole Vincentian Family, as well as with many other people, groups, and organizations whom we touch and serve, may we be deeply encouraged by this "moment of special grace" that Providence is putting in front of us, the birth 400 years ago of our common spirituality and charism.

I wish each of us a wonderful celebration, as we continue our prayers for one another!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Tomaž MAVRIC, CM
Superior General

International Vincentian Session

Our Ethical use of the Internet (continued)

Forming conscience and discernment
relative to new communication technology

IV - FORMATION FOR VIRTUE

New information technologies offer us great possibilities but at the same time make evident the need for an ethical approach, adopted in freedom out of a sense of personal responsibility and from a mature understanding of what is true and good. The ethical use of the internet involves what we call “unity of life” where “flesh and spirit”, the virtual world and the real world, are brought together in a balanced way. In other words, we are present and navigate the internet as believers, without creating false identities, without making the web an escape of dreams and fantasies, without falling into the idealism of “if only I were...” Values cannot be absent from the digital world. We need to be virtuous in our use of the web in order to live in accordance with who we are and with our convictions, overcoming the “dictatorship” of feelings as the criteria for behavior and acting out of conviction and not on a whim.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines virtue as “a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions” (CCD, no. 1803). Virtue strengthens us and guides us toward seeking holiness and committing ourselves to spreading the Gospel; it leads us to act in such a way that those who know us recognize the aroma of Christ in us (cf. 2 Cor 2:15) and discover the face of the Teacher through our actions. Our presence

on the internet should not be an anonymous presence but one that is fully engaged.

In order to love perfectly, with a spiritual and personal love, we need virtues, not as an obligation or a duty, but rather as a means to seek happiness. This aspect is indispensable: seeking what is good in a holistic way for a person, taking moral law into account, and seeking the truth about humanity. We cannot do away with the ethical dimension of using technology. Our activity on the web has repercussions for others and for ourselves; we are responsible for all our actions.

A first step in formation for virtue is to acquire a reflective attitude in order to effectively use the opportunities offered us. We need to step back and take time to make decisions in the virtual world and to grow in our identity so we do not become objects of consumption. Jesus’s warning is valid in this context as well: What does it profit us to use technology if we do not have a sense of ethics? Just because something is possible doesn’t mean we should do it. We must ask ourselves questions about how we can use this resource in a positive way without losing control of our own actions. We must question not just the ‘how’ but also the ‘why’ that leads us to act in a particular way. The ideal is that the use of new technologies results in the holistic improvement of the person, taking on good habits, virtues, a virtuous “style” of using networks and discerning the risks and benefits of advances in information technology in light of our Christian vocation. We do not learn alone; we need others to accompany us in order to think critically and to mature in values, a virtuous use of media, developing moral practices that serve as criteria for us: moderation, reflection, recollection and virtues related to social interaction or manners. Morality is not a fact that I deduct, but rather a gift to be lived: a gift, not an obligation. If Christ is the reason behind our entire lives, our life should not be governed by our will; rather, we should try to conform ourselves to Christ’s will and to let faith enlighten our behavior as believers.

We need to educate ourselves to become aware of the potential offered us as well as its risks. Ethical problems posed by the internet are the same problems posed in an ethics of traditional communication: interpersonal communication, listening and communication skills and an ability to choose, analyze and recognize possible manipulation. The internet isn’t

Our Ethical Use of the Internet

for everything; it has its limitations. There is too much “digital trash”; the good and bad of humanity appear on the internet.

* On the internet, information must be objective, accurate and true, just as in any other means of communication. The objectivity and truthfulness of information must be respected.

* The internet doesn't make it right to violate rights to individual and institutional privacy. Internet technology does not guarantee total security of our files nor personal immunity from potential enemies and blackmail.

* In terms of respect for intellectual property and creativity, plagiarism is not acceptable.

* Virtual reality does not exempt us from being honest with ourselves and others; we should not hide behind anonymity.

What we need is not so much to learn techniques but rather to form our conscience, to adopt authentic criteria and moral judgments. We are living in a new age, but with age-old problems. The internet is a new forum that has created a new culture, which influences us positively and negatively on all levels, including the perception and transmission of values, ideas and religious convictions. A well-formed conscience will help us to recognize what is good, live according to the truth, discern appropriate content and spot what is detrimental to us. The conscience is the compass that directs our navigation, the ethical instrument that points out the course to follow and the reasoning that determines the goodness or evil of our actions. It is not a code of conduct imposed from outside but rather a deep-rooted standard, engraved on the very heart of a person, which must be formed to act in an upright way. Norms are intended to help us discover the truth of love. We cannot be naive: the reality of sin is always present in a person's life. The internet awakens desires. At the press of a button, we can do things at a distance, but we are not exempt from responsibility: visit web pages with content that is dangerous from a moral point of view, spread computer viruses, pirate programs or illegally download music, violate confidentiality of IT systems, send anonymous emails with false information, defame or slander and use these media in an abusive way to the detriment of family, social, professional or religious obligations.

We need to learn how to work well in the world of cyberspace, how to make mature judgments according to sound moral criteria and how to use new technology for our holistic development and the good of others. It is useful to distinguish what is illegal from what is dangerous. What is illegal is what violates the law and personal safety; what is dangerous is a situation that morality condemns but current law allows. The technology is new, but the criteria are not.

With respect to content, the objective is communication where values and content have priority over the means, people over technology, culture over the market economy and the public over the consumer. Formation of conscience involves reflection and interior peace, awareness of the stress produced by that new information and communication technologies, of the implicit relativism entailed and of our irresponsible behavior on the web. It is indispensable that we pay attention to these issues; we need a solid intellectual formation and ethical and moral values that allow us to think critically and practice virtue.

Every ethical system is a proposed set of virtues.

The internet could become a school for virtue where we learn to acquire this habitual and firm disposition to do what is good. We are responsible for our actions. We can learn from our mistakes if we have a well-formed conscience. This requires a certain amount of sacrifice, a specific way of behaving and living in a spirit of conversion. We need:

- **prudence** to see the potential for good and evil and the implications of this new media and to respond creatively to its challenges and opportunities. Prudence to practice what is good, working with moderation and applying moral principles to concrete actions. For example: not giving confidential information, not forming relationships with unknown people, knowing when to get out of a situation...

- **justice** to accomplish good in society and overcome the digital divide between the rich and the poor. This demands respect and recognition of intellectual property and rejection of pirated goods, in order to give each person his due.

- **fortitude** to stand up for and persevere in what is good, to overcome difficulties, and courage in facing relativism, consumerism and sin. This calls for defense of truth in the face of religious and moral relativism, generosity in the face of individualistic consumerism and the virtue of

Our Ethical Use of the Internet

chastity and the beauty of love in the face of frivolous relationships.
- **temperance** (or moderation), self-discipline to use the internet wisely and only for good. Moderate the attraction that we feel toward hedonism and comfort... We cannot be online hour after hour. We must dedicate the appropriate amount of time to the internet. Some people speak about a “Sabbath day” each week, a day to not be connected. Being present in the digital world does not mean that we stop being present in other realities. The internet does not solve everything.

V - ETHICAL CRITERIA: THE PERSON, THE COMMON GOOD AND SOLIDARITY

Internet use has positive and negative consequences on the psychological, moral and social development of individuals, on the workings of society, cultural exchange, perception and transmission of values, ideas about the world, ideologies and religious convictions. The ethical question must be posed whether the internet is contributing to authentic human development and helping individuals and peoples. The Church indicates human dignity and the common good as criteria for discernment and ethical evaluation.

The first ethical principle is this: *“The human person and the human community are the end and measure of the use of the media of social communication; communication should be by persons to persons for the integral development of persons”* (Ethics in Communications, 5). The centrality of the person, his liberty and his culture is the underlying ethical criterion. When we recognize the other as the likeness of God, getting beyond any individualistic ethic and developing universal moral values, we are promoting a way of thinking and living that does not exclude God. The person is not a tool but what is primarily responsible for culture. The internet offers a lot of information, but it does not teach values, and without values society is dehumanized and declines. Keeping this principle in mind will help us to live in the digital world in a balanced way. A doctor cannot spend more time looking at her computer screen than at the patient who has come to her office.

The second ethical principle is the common good: *“the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily”* (Guadium et spes,

26). In a globalized world, the most appropriate response is solidarity as a moral and social attitude, a commitment to work for the good of all. Solidarity is *“not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”* (Sollicitudo rei socialis, 38). Solidarity for the common good is a fundamental criterion for the use of new technologies. They contribute not just to special interests but to the good of all and should promote social justice.

Solidarity, as a human and Christian virtue, expresses a spirituality of communion in which the other is acknowledged in his dignity and in which we recognize our responsibility for the life of the other. The preferential option for those who are poor is, in this sense, a basic criterion for the ethical use of new information and communication technology. The message and life of Jesus are imbued with this solidarity that includes the specifically Christian aspects of reconciliation, unconditional giving and gift of self. Solidarity can help us get beyond divisions and conflicts between peoples and cultures.

“The Church does not presume to dictate these decisions and choices, but it does seek to be of help by indicating ethical and moral criteria which are relevant to the process - criteria which are to be found in both human and Christian values” (Aetatis Novae, 12). The internet can serve to foster prosperity and peace, intellectual growth and understanding among peoples. It can also help us in our search for our own identity. The Church continually announces the only satisfactory response to the questions found deep in the human heart: Jesus Christ, who truly became man and shows us the vocation for which we were created. Persons, the common good and solidarity take form in Jesus Christ.

VI – EVANGELIZATION AND THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHARISM

The digital evangelizer needs accompaniment and a spiritual life in order to learn to use the internet based on these ethical criteria: truth, objectivity, integrity and honesty as social norms, as well as freedom

Our Ethical Use of the Internet

from addictions that it can create. We need personal discernment to determine what leads us in one direction or another and to know our state of mind in order to detect the action of the Spirit within us.

Discernment is also necessary for service: we must choose between two ways of living and acting. We cannot choose something that goes against Gospel standards or our vocation. We take in a lot of stimuli that make it difficult to calmly evaluate everything that is happening to us. Filled with grace, we need to live from what is inside us, learn to look at reality better and develop and examine our conscience each day. We need to learn to contemplate our life with internal knowledge of reality, not live on a superficial level and open up paths of justice and solidarity. The Church asks that we become aware of communal “ethos” in order to establish relationships of truth and authentic dialogue and to present the Gospel as a way of life, committing ourselves to the creation of a new society based on liberty, justice and love.

INSTRUMENT OF CHARITY

Charity is the primary principle of moral conscience, the fundamental criterion. Charity is the expression of true humanity based on gift of self, acceptance, and communion. Charity in truth involves acting according to the logic of gift, entering into the dynamic of dedication; accepting the principle of gratuitousness, which helps us to have a human vision of technology, considering it in the context of God’s plan. Charity is the pillar, the operating principle for the criteria of moral action and therefore also the criterion for our presence in digital culture.

It is necessary to understand more deeply the anthropological, ethical, theological and pastoral dimensions of new information and communication technologies in order to use them appropriately according to Gospel principles, not just based on efficiency or consumption but rather on gratuity and compassionate solidarity. We need a spirituality of gift to be able to announce Christ’s love to the world and to invite the world to let God be a part of the picture and accept the power of love. In this way, information and communication technology can be a cause and a building block of solidarity and humanization. In what way does this spirituality of gift influence our use of the internet?

THE CHURCH AND THE INTERNET: EVANGELIZATION

A new type of communication has arisen in which the person who receives the message or the person who sends it counts less than the message itself and the way it is transmitted. Sharing a message in one way is not the same as doing so in another way. It has a very different effect. However, what is essential in evangelization is not so much the method as making an experience of God possible. Evangelizing is not simply making the Good News known; it is proclaiming a reality that transforms the individual, a reality that leads to an encounter. In reality, evangelization only happens when there is an encounter with Christ.

The objective is therefore to transform the digital culture into a culture that creates life, making Gospel values present in it; these values do not come from our feelings or our personal preferences, but rather from Jesus Christ, from the Gospel itself. It is not enough to share some content; we must share our very selves and use our own experience to help others have their own encounter with Christ. People today limit their experience to what is directly known and thus lack the self-awareness that makes religious experience possible.

Our own charism, as an experience of the Spirit, allows us to accept the digital reality based on our fundamental experience: the charity that God wishes to pass on to “digital natives” so that they might know the Gospel. What we do on the internet will be the fruit and the work of the Spirit. The more we are configured to Christ, the better we can share our own experience with others. How can the Daughters of Charity live out charity in this digital culture? How can we make the Vincentian spirit present on the internet?

The Church has always had a great interest in the means of communication because they put people in relationship, with the purpose of spreading God’s plan. “*The internet: a new forum for proclaiming the Gospel,*” John Paul II stated in 2002. It is a legitimate and effective tool for evangelization. The Church invites us to navigate, to cross the new threshold and enter more deeply into the web in order to show the world that the glory of God shines in the face of Christ. It is not enough to use it as a tool to spread the Gospel; the challenge is to integrate the message of the Gospel into this new culture. The internet is, without

Our Ethical Use of the Internet

question, a new mission territory because behind each screen there is a flesh and blood person who is looking for God.

The internet offers many opportunities to disseminate information and bring people into contact with the Gospel. We *“should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world”* (John Paul II, Message for the 35th World Communications Day, 2001). What is essential is to give witness to the Gospel, to demonstrate the transcendent destiny of the human person, to make a preferential option for those most in need out of a spirit of solidarity and justice. The Church’s goal with regard to the internet is a commitment to true humanism and establishment of a civilization of love: *“to encourage their right development and right use for the sake of human development, justice, and peace — for the upbuilding of society at the local, national, and community levels in light of the common good and in a spirit of solidarity”* (Pontifical Council for Social Communication, 2002, *The Church and the Internet*, 3).

The internet is important for pastoral ministry and evangelization: in catechism, in educational settings, in administration, in spiritual life... *“Although the virtual reality of cyberspace cannot substitute for real interpersonal community and the liturgy, it can complement them, attract people to a fuller experience of the life of faith, enrich the religious lives of users”* (no. 5) and bring the Gospel message to them.

“Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from real-world interaction with other persons of faith” (no. 9).

The internet is an invitation to creativity; we should use the internet creatively, exploring the possibilities the internet offers us for encounter and dialogue and to share our belief and charism with others. We can participate in debates and be more present in the dialogue with the world seeking solutions to its problems. The challenge for us is finding ways to make people who do not think as we do notice these ideas and to

relate to their needs, raise questions in their minds and help them find the answers. Currently, there are many experiences of evangelization on the web: online retreats, prayer resources, evangelization by Twitter, networks of friends... We are even invited to create a virtual community, a meeting place for persons who are searching: *“At the same time, pastoral planning should consider how to lead people from cyberspace to true community and how, through teaching and catechesis, the Internet might subsequently be used to sustain and enrich them in their Christian commitment”* (no. 9).

All of this requires:

- specific formation in means of communication to be able to make good use of social communication’s possibilities and develop a communication style that connects with the sensibilities and interests of people who are immersed in the digital culture.
- doctrinal and spiritual formation; *“In order to witness to Christ it is necessary to encounter Him oneself and foster a personal relationship with Him through prayer, the Eucharist and sacramental reconciliation, reading and reflection on God’s word, the study of Christian doctrine,”* loving and serving those who are poor (John Paul II, Message for the 34th World Communications Day, 2000).

We are a part of what we communicate. We must go out and give witness in order to “grow” in our projects so that our presence might be meaningful. When information is exchanged, persons share a part of themselves, their visions of the world, their hopes and their dreams. Therefore, it can be said that a Christian style of presence exists in the digital world as well, characterized by forthright and open communication that is responsible and respectful toward the other. Communicating the Gospel through the new means of communication not only means putting explicitly religious content on various media outlets, but also giving a consistent witness in one’s own digital profile and in the way of communicating preferences and options... We are called to announce the Gospel of charity and give reasons for our hope to those who are poor.

What can we bring there? What can our contribution be? What is our current presence on the internet like?

Our Ethical Use of the Internet

Our presence on the internet demands balance between fidelity to our vocation and charism and trusting openness to the digital world with the goal of better service of those who are poor.

- We can be closer to others by taking their circumstances into consideration and reach the “existential peripheries”.
- Distinguish the wheat from the weeds, announcing the truth of Gospel values and denouncing everything that is incompatible with human dignity. Be voices of denunciation, of prophecy and proclamation of a more just world.
- Pass on the joy of faith through our way of life; communicate our experience joyfully and in an attractive way.
- Always remember that we are God’s instruments and be patient, humble and steadfast.
- Contribute silence. Since the web opens up a world where silence is absent, it is important for us to turn it off in order to maintain a productive balance.
- Interpret and help others find the center of life in the Gospel.
- Adapt religious language for the people of today who live in a new culture. Sometimes a message loses its force because of the format we use.
- Contribute our specific charism.

The Church must continue making the Gospel incarnate in the new culture and casting its nets on the internet. We do this by giving “soul” to this virtual reality and explaining who we are, what we believe and what we do. It is a question of touching persons’ hearts, helping them to find God, not with “Google” but in what is hidden, in those who are poor, and in a world where God must be proclaimed and loved.

We must be act in a way that comes across well through “online socialization”. We have lost visibility and run the risk of passing unnoticed. It is not a matter of propaganda, but of freely sharing what we have received free of charge. The internet allows us to promote our own identity to tell our story and what we do. New forms of communication have arisen that reach thousands of individuals: 13 million persons follow the Pope on “Pontifex”. The internet is a new reality that has burst into our life. It is an opportunity to become aware of our identity and our responsibility: called by God to be communication for the world.

We must strive to:

- create stronger connections between the real and the digital world by expanding networks of friends and creating groups dedicated to evangelization and service of those who are poor;
- know ourselves and show interest in people’s goals, in their deep needs.

We cannot be satisfied knowing we are Daughters of Charity. It is our role to bear the fruit of holiness. It is time to walk forward. It is time to navigate. It is time to love.

Father Fernando del CASTILLO, CM

Designation of Visitatrixes

PROVINCE OF MADRID-SANTA LUISA: Sister Antonia GONZALEZ GRANADO was designated Visitatrix on March 16, 2016.

PROVINCE OF ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC-ASIA: Sister Mary Anne EVIDENTE was designated Visitatrix on March 30, 2016.

PROVINCE OF CAMEROON: Sister Aleksandra WYDRA was designated Visitatrix on April 27, 2016.

PROVINCE OF THAILAND: Sister Consolacion EATA was re-designated Visitatrix for a three-year term on May 25, 2016

PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Sister Gloria ANIEBONAM was re-designated Visitatrix for a three-year term on June 8, 2016.

PROVINCE OF KRAKOW: Sister Anna PIETRASIK was designated Visitatrix on June 8, 2016.

PROVINCE OF CENTRAL AFRICA: Sister Maria Remedios LOPEZ SORLOZANO was re-designated Visitatrix for a three-year term on June 22, 2016.

PROVINCE OF PORTUGAL: Sister Maria Fatima VIRISSIMO FERREIRA was designated Visitatrix on September 28, 2016.

Province of Graz-Central Europe

Hospital chaplaincy

The Daughters of Charity came in 1844 to the hospital of Schwarzach, a small Austrian town in the State of Salzburg. I have been a member of the hospital chaplaincy service for 17 years along with seven other persons. The hospital has about 500 beds and 1,300 employees. In this Year of Mercy, I offer two examples that illustrate our chaplaincy service.

INTRODUCTION TO HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY SERVICE

Pastoral care in the hospital has always existed in Austria, but for 40 years now it has been recognized as a full-fledged profession. Chaplaincy service is professional work comparable to that of a psychologist or social worker. Therefore, in order to work in chaplaincy, some strict requirements must be met: theological formation in pastoral care, missioning by the bishop of the diocese and a certain level of human and emotional maturity.

There are four aspects to pastoral care:

- **Visits to patients and conversation with them.** Each pastoral care team member is assigned to certain wards for patient visits. These visits and conversations are quite varied, ranging from simple encounters to long, deep conversations. Illness is not the only subject of conversation; quite frequently, discussion deals with ordinary life, with its joys, difficulties, successes and what is most difficult to bear in their personal and family life.

- **The sacraments, liturgy and ritual actions.** The Eucharist is celebrated daily in the hospital chapel. Patients as well as those from

Sisters' Testimonies

the area participate to the extent possible. Our elderly Sisters pray the rosary each day with and for patients.

- **Collaboration.** Within the hospital, we work with other groups of professionals, such as health care workers, doctors, psychologists and social workers. We are able to attend interdisciplinary meetings and are a part of various groups such as the ethics committee, meetings concerning palliative care and development of hospital-wide values or principles.

- **Administration.** All of our activities are reported on the internet; there are also phone calls to make and correspondence to keep.

HERE ARE TWO EXAMPLES AMONG MANY FROM OUR EVERYDAY PRACTICE.

One day, I went to visit the patients assigned to me. In one of the rooms, there were two men. After greeting them, I briefly introduced myself. The first man politely said that he did not want to talk further. I wished him a good day and turned to the second man. I greeted him and asked him how he was doing. After a rather long silence, he looked at me attentively and asked, "Why do you want to know?"

Surprised, I answered him, "I care about the patients' situations, so I care about yours, too."

"You're really interested?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, if it's true, have a seat!"

It struck me as a rather unusual beginning, but I listened to him.

"Sister," he said, "you want to know how I am doing. I wanted to know first if you were really interested or if it was just a polite question. Here is my response to your question: I am doing well, but I don't always feel well. You see, I have been suffering from cancer for two years. It was found right after I retired.

The diagnosis came as a bombshell. I had so looked forward to my retirement and had planned to do so many things. And then this! Basically, I worried day and night. Why me? Why just now when I would have time, this time that I had anticipated with such joy? Why, why? I couldn't sleep or eat; nothing gave me pleasure any more. I seriously thought about going home to the Lord before my time; I knew well how to do that. But one sleepless night, I said to myself, 'No, I won't do such a thing; it's dishonorable.'

I became aware that I was only looking at what was negative, what wasn't going well. I suddenly had the idea to turn my questions around, to look at them 'from the other side'. Yes, it's true that I don't feel well and have certain limitations, but I asked myself, 'What can I still do in spite of this?' Upon reflection, I observed that I was still able to see, hear, eat, and do many other things. I paid attention to the shining sun, to delighting in birds' singing but also in each visit, etc. I discovered so many things that I was filled with joy; I became more calm, more relaxed. In a word, I came back to life! Before, in a way, I lived on the sidelines of life: I just worked and lived. Now, you see, these are my most wonderful years, the most intense ones of my life. I fully welcome each day and am truly happy to be alive today. So, I can honestly answer your question by saying, 'I am doing well!'"

My heart was filled with gratitude for this patient who helped me to more deeply understand the greatness of life and the gift of each day. Indeed, "persons who are poor evangelize us".

The second example is of an elderly woman who comes to the hospital frequently for rather extended periods. While she was being cared for at the hospital, she learned of her son's death. He was her second child to have died! Because of her illness, she could not attend the funeral, which caused her great suffering. In the course of our conversation, I offered to take her in a wheelchair to our chapel at the time the funeral would be celebrated. She immediately agreed.

In preparation for this prayer service, I suggested that she ask her family to send a photo of her son. With the caregivers and nurses on the ward, I prepared the chapel and made arrangements to get her there.

Sisters' Testimonies

During the celebration, after lighting a candle in front of the photo of her son, we sprinkled it with holy water, incensed it and prayed together for him. The silent, prayerful atmosphere was intense. At the end of the prayer service, the tearful woman warmly thanked us.

Over the following days, I visited her several times. Each time, she spoke of this experience of prayer in the chapel, for which she was very grateful. Thanks to a simple celebration, this woman was consoled and comforted in her sorrow.

Consoling the afflicted and praying for the dead, aren't these works of mercy?

Sister Agnès ZEBA and Sister Marianna SEBESTYÉN
Daughters of Charity

Province of Vietnam

Training domestic workers

A bold initiative at our ministry

Vietnamese culture has always considered domestic work insignificant, appropriate only for those of a lower social class. Domestic workers are also called “valets” and are held in no esteem in the eyes of society. These domestic workers are particularly at risk of discrimination in terms of employment and working conditions and other violations of human rights.

With economic growth in the country, domestic workers have come to represent a significant proportion of the population, and, gradually, this work was recognized as a profession. On June 16, 2011, the first International Domestic Workers Convention was adopted.

In Vietnam a government decree (no. 27) took effect in May 2016 to protect domestic workers. Now they all have the right to sign employment contracts, to benefit from minimum wage standards, to have vacation days, health insurance and benefits and to have access to adequate protection to resolve conflicts. Nonetheless, not everyone in Vietnam knows civil legislation, especially those who live in the countryside, so it is hard to change mentalities. Even in difficult financial situations, mothers do not want to engage in this profession nor allow their children to do so; if they do, it is reluctantly.

With the goal of the promotion of girls who come from remote areas without any possibility to pursue their studies, in 2006 the Daughters of Charity came up with a bold initiative: they opened a new department for household work in their Vocational Training Center. Over these last few years, a great deal of effort had to be put into recruitment and formation.

Challenges in offering this training

Because of the prevailing attitude not yet considering this work as a profession, it is difficult to recruit young women. The young women themselves come with a sense of inferiority. It is difficult to help them to overcome this negative feeling, recover their self-confidence and value their work.

The majority of the girls come from remote areas and haven't had the opportunity to become familiar with living conditions and the culture of the city. Therefore, in order to assimilate into their new environment, they must overcome many difficulties both in relation to other girls and the staff.

- Their knowledge of the Vietnamese language is limited. Some young women do not have great ability for learning and communicating, which demands much patience on the part of teachers.

- Natives of the countryside, the majority are timid, lack self-confidence and have an inferiority complex with regard to the other students taking other courses at the same Vocational Training Center. They need encouragement to discover their potential as well as the dignity and importance of their work, and the necessity of knowing their rights and responsibilities.

- Seeped in the rural mentality, they remain quite attached to their family and village, and it is very difficult for them to change habits and learn to plan and budget. This requires that the support person develop a very close relationship with them and have a lot of sympathy and understanding in order to learn their culture and be able to adapt her accompaniment.

- For studies, the level of instruction (secondary school levels) is a challenge because some of the students progress very slowly; instruction must be more flexible and sometimes requires personalized support based on the abilities of each student.

- With the teachers and support staff, we emphasize the need for kindness in a caring accompaniment as a priority over vocational skills.

As Daughters of Charity, even if we don't have all the necessary experience, we can always offer the students the love and support that they need in order to persevere in their formation program.

Faith and hope

There are many challenges to meet for this household work training; however, the Sisters find many values in their students: simplicity, modesty, good will. These young women love their families and villages; they want to learn, hoping that with vocational certificates, they will be able to earn a salary to help their family get out of poverty. They also want to contribute to establishing a strong household in the future and building up their village and country... This situation and our desire to promote persons who are poor is what encourages the Daughters of Charity to overcome the difficulties that they face. Many students have managed to become good household workers, and their example is encouraging for younger generations. It also gives the Sisters hope for the future of this domestic worker training program.

The Sisters encourage each other in community and receive support from the Center and the Province. Despite the limitations of their professional skills, the Sisters try to put into practice the words of Saint Vincent, "Love is inventive to infinity," in order to find solutions to various problems and to receive formation regularly in order to overcome the ongoing difficulties that arise against the continuation of this department for training in household work.

Local community of Bat Phuc – Phuoc Loc
(Annex of Emmanuel – Lang Cat)

Province of Chelmno-Poznan (Poland)

“I was in prison and you visited me.”

W

Works of
Mercy

“The Church does not exist to condemn people but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God’s mercy... In order for this to happen, it is necessary to go out: to go out from the church and the parishes, to go outside and look for people where they live, where they suffer, and where they hope,” Pope Francis says (*The Name of God is Mercy*).

In the Province of Chelmno-Poznan, prison ministry is provided by several local communities, including ours in the city of Wejherowo. As a community, we administer and serve in a social service center for adults. During this Year of Mercy, we decided to revive prison ministry, which has frequently been limited to correspondence, and to “go out” to invent new paths for this ministry.

The prison of Wejherowo has two prison buildings and four detention buildings with a total of 400 prisoners. They are incarcerated for various reasons, ranging from unpaid fines, traffic accidents, petty crime and corruption to serious crimes. Prison sentences vary from several months to 25 years.

One of the Sisters who is a nurse, the leader of the Vincentian volunteer group, offered to go twice a month to the prison with some volunteers. The director of the penitentiary center gave his consent for the Sisters and volunteers to visit the prisoners but, for reasons of security, only when accompanied by a priest chaplain.

The most important moment of these visits is the Eucharist, followed by time for meeting and discussion. The prisoners are divided into several groups for Mass. Each group celebrates at a different time; beforehand, they must sign up. On average there are 12 to 30 persons, only a few of whom receive Communion. For many of them, Mass is a form of entertainment and not an encounter with God.

Here is the testimony of the Sister and volunteers: *“Starting with the first visit, the volunteers and I became actively involved in preparing the liturgy and songs with guitar accompaniment. At the time of the homily, the priest chaplain invited us to explain what we were doing. After our introduction, I emphasized that, whatever our situation, we are all loved by God with the same strength because God loves us unconditionally, and He is not able to love in any other way. I was surprised to see prisoners then enter into dialogue with us, saying that they also wanted to help others and feel useful. One of them added that it is important to pray and remain hopeful that their life would change one day. They then introduced themselves and, at the end, thanked us for our presence and shook our hand. They asked us to return the following week. This was a priceless gift for us, a sign that they trusted us.”*

In 1991, Pope John Paul II, during his pilgrimage to Poland, visited prisoners. It was the first time that a Pope had visited prisoners in Poland. On that occasion, he said: *“It’s only when the penitentiary system is founded on the basic truth of the dynamism of the human persons, on the possibility of moral development, that prison gives a detained person a real chance for a complete return to society... The worst prison would be a closed and hardened heart and the worst evil, despair. Entering into penitential structures, we thank God for our brothers’ open hearts, for their welcome as we ourselves receive much from them”* (Speech of John Paul II to prisoners, June 7, 1991).

When we returned to the prison, an unusual event occurred. One of our volunteers, Jacek, was wearing a black T-shirt with the words, *“conquer evil with good”* (Rom 12:21) and the picture of Blessed Father Jerzy Popieluszko, chaplain to the members of the “Solidarity” movement, which consisted mostly of working class persons. (Father Jerzy, whose motto was “conquer evil with good”, was persecuted by the Communists because of his faith and priestly ministry. He always

Works of Mercy

responded to persecution with acts of love and mercy. One night in 1984, the Communists arrested, imprisoned and cruelly assassinated him.) At one point, one of the prisoners came up to Jacek and told him that he would like the same T-shirt. Without a moment's hesitation, Jacek took off his shirt, and the two men traded clothes. I saw how much this gesture impressed the others. Jacek received a simple faded smock, but he was happy to be able to meet that man's desire.

During another encounter in response to a specific situation, we had a discussion on the value of intercessory prayer. We then divided the prisoners present into six groups and asked them to tell God, in the silence of their hearts, their greatest desire, the intention they held closest to their heart. We placed six candles with the logo of the Year of Mercy on the altar. We were six visitors as well. We began by praying together for their intentions, and then each volunteer lit a candle and took it home, promising to pray each day for the prisoners in the group until Easter Sunday. We also promised our daily prayer for them. Those who initially had a very negative image of the Church were then astounded to hear that we wanted to pray for them, who are incarcerated. *"Something happened in the deepest part of ourselves,"* they told us. Touched, they thanked us: they felt noticed and loved.

During a homily in the month of May, we spoke about the Virgin Mary and the Miraculous Medal. After the Eucharist the prisoners received the medal. Some of them took one for a cellmate, their wife or child.

Most of those who come to Mass are young men aged 25-30; just one appears a little older. Some of them have a haggard look and appear skeptical, but I also see in their faces a desire to give meaning to their lives. Others have peaceful faces that bear a little hope and even, recently, a sort of friendship. They come up to us, ask us questions and reveal greater openness. Francis, recognizing one of the volunteers, an old elementary school classmate, began to speak to us and now helps us establish increasingly open relationships with each person.

In a conversation with A. Tornelli, Pope Francis said: *"I have a special relationship with people in prisons, deprived of their freedom. I have always been very attached to them, precisely because of my awareness of being a sinner. Every time I go through the gates into a prison... I*

always think: Why them and not me? ... Their fall could have been mine. I do not feel superior to the people who stand before me" (The Name of God is Mercy).

When I entered the prison for the first time, I didn't feel fear or anxiety with the prisoners but rather inner joy. Each time that we come, we are well received, and it is evident that they are waiting for us. It's incredible, but it's as if they were part of my family or loved ones. In reality, we are part of one single family, that of the children of God, not only through creation but also through baptism. They are Christians, Catholics who, at a given moment in their lives, broke their connection with Christ. This is what happens to us as well each time we fall into sin.

This is why we do not seek to convert our brothers, the prisoners; we don't ask them anything about their past. However, we do listen to them when they want to talk about it. Many people advised us to be on guard that they don't take advantage of us. But it's nothing like that. The proof that these people need spiritual support is the fact that they don't ask for any material assistance; they don't want us to do anything for them outside of the prison. The only thing they desire is that we come and share our faith and our love for Jesus with them. They need Jesus. The psalmist says: *"For the Lord hears the poor, and does not spurn those in bondage"* (Ps 69:34).

During his meeting in December 1983 with the persons detained in the Roman jail of Rebibbia, John Paul II said: *"True liberation is thus possible thanks to conversion and purification of heart, in other words, thanks to a radical change of heart, mind and life that only Christ's grace can achieve... When the grace of the Redemption frees man from the bonds of his sins, then, whatever the external conditions, he begins to rejoice in inner freedom, which is the source of all other freedoms."*

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we, together with the chaplain, thought that it might be good to leave the Blessed Sacrament in the prison chapel so that the Lord Jesus would be truly present there. This initiative left some prisoners skeptical because, although Catholics are a majority, they are not all Catholic. Once the priest chaplain had received permission from the Archbishop and the director of the prison, we worked with volunteers to raise funds to buy a tabernacle and new supplies for the chapel. The

Works of Mercy

priest assured us that he would make up the difference if needed. We bought new altar cloths and candles; the local community in Gdynia donated altar linens and the Provincial House all the lectionaries. The boss of one of the volunteers bought a new chasuble and promised to buy a full set of chasubles before the end of the year. In each event, we recognized the action of Divine Providence and Jesus' desire to be present, He who gave His life on the Cross to free us from slavery to sin and save each of us. He says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

"Ministry with prisoners continually forms us," Sister Alexandra said. *"But from time to time, I participate in meetings of the Regional Prison Association, which has a great deal of experience in prison ministry."*

At the April formation meeting, I heard a testimony from a former prisoner, currently a member of a rehabilitation community called "Matthew". When young, he had immigrated to the United States with his parents, but he soon joined a criminal group. He had served several prison sentences. During his last imprisonment, he was converted thanks to encounters with Christians. He went reluctantly... but he returned transformed. He began to read the Bible, and the more he read, the more the Word of God transformed him. After his release, he returned to Poland. Today a devout Catholic, he bears witness to the power of Divine Mercy.

The testimony of this man, as well as that of prison employees, and our own experience in the prison of Wejherowo reinforce my conviction that it is an essential service and that these persons are waiting not only for freedom but for God."

We are grateful to God and to the Company for the possibility to visit our brothers in prison and be witnesses of Divine Mercy, from which we are the first to benefit. During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, God has allowed us to go out to the peripheries to have a closer relationship with our detained brothers, as our Inter-Assemblies Document, *The Boldness of Charity*, invites us. "What a happiness to serve those poor convicts," Saint Vincent said (CCD X, 103).

We have experienced the beauty of networking through real collaboration among priests, Sisters, volunteers, selfless lay persons and the residents of the Social Assistance House (who support our mission with their prayer), all of whom sow the seeds of the Love of God.

We trust in the merciful Jesus. May He make our hearts like His loving heart. "How true, Sisters! [...] Each time a Sister goes to visit them... she will find God there" (cf. CCD IX, 199).

The local community of Wejherowo

**Consecrated because “more exposed”,
Consecrated to reach all people...**

“ENCLOSURE”

C

“And you, Sister,” said our worthy Father, turning to another Sister; “please tell me why Daughters of Charity should work at acquiring the virtue of obedience.”

“Because nuns have cloisters, Monsieur, but we don’t; and if obedience didn’t **restrain** us, we’d be in danger of committing many faults.”

“Mon Dieu! that’s well said! That’s very well said, indeed! So, Sister, do you think obedience should restrain you as much as cloisters restrain nuns?”

The Sister answered that she did, adding that, even though we’re not enclosed, we’re no less obliged to be obedient than nuns.

“In that way, Sisters, **obedience serves you as walls**. How beautiful that is! A Sister will nurse sick persons in a parish. If she were her own mistress, she’d have no problem going now to this place, now to another, to the home of a Lady she knows or to a relative, or of lingering longer than **her work requires in places where she is called to minister**. **Holy obedience keeps her from all that; she goes simply where the work demands**, and wastes no time in useless visits. Isn’t that what you mean, Sister; when you say that nuns have cloisters but Daughters of Charity have only obedience? Do you think that a Daughter of Charity who observes obedience exactly does

just as well as a nun in her cloister?”

The Sister said yes, and M. Vincent went on, “Yes, Sisters, you can be certain of that. If there’s anything beautiful to see, anything that’s pleasing to God, and admirable in the eyes of angels and humans; if there’s a phenomenon worthy of amazement, it’s to see Sisters living on their own in a room, who seem, in the judgment of those who don’t know them, to be doing as they please, but in reality are so submissive that it may be said that they never do their own will because they do nothing except by holy obedience. No, dear Sisters, you can rest assured that nuns, confined their entire lives within their cloisters, do no more than you, if you’re obedient, and that what you do by this virtue is so great that it would be hard to find anything greater.”

(Conference of August 7, 1650, Obedience, CCD IX, 416-417)

“When a city is besieged, the Governor and those responsible for defending it keep guard, see where danger may be lurking, and reinforce the weak places. If some gate isn’t secure - and even if it is - they still post a sentry. See what vigilance is used for what concerns the body, dear Sisters, once people know where the dangers are. God inspired you to make such an important remark, Mademoiselle; may He be blessed for it! Let’s now see where the enemy could make a breach; let’s ask ourselves where he might be able to get in, **let’s build a wall** there and mount our cannon; in a word, let’s look for the means of thwarting him; for, once this enemy of our souls succeeds in penetrating the Company, what would he not do to ruin and overturn it?”

(Conference of May 25, 1654, *The Preservation of the Company*, CCD IX, 547-548)

SOME REFLECTIONS

“She goes simply where the work demands”

Saint Vincent connected obedience to mission, to service. If *restriction* and *enclosure* exist, if you are *restrained*, to use the terms from religious life employed by Saint Vincent, it is according to what your “*work requires*”. It entails going “*simply where the work demands*”. You live in a space of liberty, a vast, broad space – the world – with movement in the streets, on roads, in the homes of the sick (“*You are not*

Enclosure

enclosed”), which nonetheless involves limits, a “wall” or a framework: the demands of work.

Here is another passage that confirms this and the necessity of formation: *“Make good use of the free time you have after caring for the sick. Never be idle; apply yourself to learning how to read - not for your own advantage but to **be in a position to be sent to places where you could teach.** Do you know what Divine Providence wants to do with you? **Be always ready to leave** whenever holy obedience sends you.”*¹

In several other conferences, Saint Vincent wages a fierce battle against idleness. *“How will two persons with nothing to do occupy themselves, if not first of all in useless and dangerous conversations? Then they’ll go on to make damaging and disparaging remarks, gossip, fabricate lies, murmur against Superiors, criticize the Rules, speak contemptuously of them and build castles in the air. Don’t I myself know what extravagant notions can pass through an idle mind?”*²

I’d like to take a moment to consider the expression “*extravagant notions*”. I immediately think of its opposite: the straight-and-narrow or what is well thought-out, well-reasoned, with well-defined parameters. The parameters or framework in this case regulate movement: the fact of going – “*be in a position to be sent*”. It is related to the missionary service to which you are sent – we should do this and not something else. It further relates to how to do it. There are frames within the frame! I am particularly thinking of two areas in which, faithful to your charism, you are involved: health care and education.

Care for persons who are sick is indeed “regulated”, even highly regulated. There are protocols, restricted conventions, narrow paths to follow, effective techniques to apply. Some protocols are complicated and difficult to implement, but they save lives. There are head nurses to keep everyone within the boundaries. In the educational world, we regularly speak about parameters and frameworks: the structure of an establishment, principles written into a charter, educational guidelines and goals, teaching methods, a support team, etc. They are not an end in and of themselves but rather means to an end.

1. Conference of July 31, 1634, *Explanation of the Regulations*, CCD IX, 6

2. Conference of November 28, 1649, *Love of Work*, CCD IX, 385

Obedience, a virtue to be acquired, is a means and should remain a means. It is more difficult to adopt a way of living and serving on a spiritual level than to physically build an enclosure with posts and barbed wire, construct a “wall” to protect the city or erect a dyke to protect a port city. It is a means, and not an end in itself, to fulfill the service of health care or education. Obedience – I would distinguish three facets – involves **listening** in order to receive one’s mission, **following** the indicated path and finally **showing up**.

We have a wonderful example of obedience, that of Mary, the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I listened and said yes, like Mary listened to the Angel’s message and said yes to God’s plan: I will be the servant of the Lord. I repeat my yes each day. I leave the community house to go to the house and then the room of a sick person, and I care for him. I fulfill my promise and accomplish the necessary work. We can also connect obedience to fidelity to our vocation. However, I don’t want to get ahead of myself and the eighth day of the retreat which will bring out the words profession and professed and this theme of fidelity.

“Wastes no time...”

For what other reason do we need to be “*restrained*”? We all know that time management is a challenge. Sometimes we overextend ourselves. And there is always that tendency, in society as in the Church, to be efficient and more productive: not to deviate from set objectives, to accomplish those objectives, to remain within the framework, to follow the protocol. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac undeniably established a professional requirement, the requirement of being well trained. We certainly cannot, even with our limited means, simply “wing it” or improvise the service of persons who are poor. “Effective love” is efficient charity because it is organized and professional. It flows from the life of individuals, “corporally and spiritually”. We know the precision, nearly surgically so, written into the Rules of the Confraternities of Charity. It is like a check list for an incident-free take-off, navigation and landing of a commercial airplane filled with passengers...

Enclosure

At the same time, Vincent is not a “Stakhanovite”. Nor did he wish for “red” martyrs: countless times, he advised Louise to take care of her health.³ He made the same recommendation to the Daughters of Charity and his brother missionaries. Louise also asked Vincent not to overtax himself. This is because service must continue and get done. Vincent and Louise, at the beginning of the two Companies, didn’t have as many human resources as slave ships with their slaves or, to use a modern sports image, not as many players as football coaches for a national team, with substitute players on the bench. All of the Daughters of Charity and Priests and Brothers of the Mission, once formed, were employed full-time. And if one or another of them fell sick or died, Vincent as well as Louise had to deal with what was most pressing, most urgent, the most necessary. If there is anything that “restrains” us, that rises before us as a “wall”, as a constraint, a limit that hems us in or defines our missionary activities, it is the ongoing practice of discerning what is “necessary”. Once the time has been taken to discern well, we do our best to do it well.

A final point: are we always ‘enclosed’ in work? No. We must necessarily ‘leave’ it in order to ‘consecrate’ ourselves to other times: time for rest, time for formation and reflecting on our lives, time for going to the source, which is the Word of God, time for immersing ourselves again in the Vincentian spirit through the writings of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and our Constitutions... For “Marthaism”⁴ threatens us every day. In work as well, we are ‘exposed’ to routine, lassitude and misunderstanding (by others or our own).

QUESTIONS

- How do I live obedience?

- What is easiest or most difficult for me: listening, following the path or showing up?

3. L. 198b, to Louise de Marillac, CCD I, 280-281

4. Pope Francis, *Angelus* of Sunday, July 21, 2013 (Luke 10:39-40)

PROVOCATIONS FROM POPE FRANCIS

“The Lord prepares the soul and the heart, and He prepares them through trial, obedience and perseverance... When the Lord wants to give us a mission, when He wants to give us a task, He prepares us to do it well, just like He prepared Elijah. The important thing is not that you’ve encountered the Lord, no, no. What’s important is the whole journey to accomplish the mission that the Lord entrusted to you. This is the difference between the apostolic mission that the Lord gives us and a good, honest human task: Ah, you should fulfill this duty, you should do this... When the Lord bestows a mission, He always employs a process of purification, a process of discernment, a process of obedience, a process of prayer” (Homily of June 13, 2014, Saint Martha Chapel).

Father Jérôme DELSINNE, CM

Province of Fortaleza

In the Northeast of Brazil

A local community on the move from 1968 up to today (continued)

GOD WALKS WITH HIS PEOPLE

OUR EXPERIENCE WITH POOR PERSONS IN THE CITY

1. Victims of flooding

In times of extended drought, there is significant rural flight, and displaced persons build their houses of clay and straw in dry river or lake beds. During the rainy season, nature reasserts its rights, and new problems come to the outskirts of Fortaleza.

In 1984, following a harsh winter, the majority of houses built of mud, wood, clay and straw collapsed, and many families from 72 outlying neighborhoods of Fortaleza found themselves homeless.

During that Holy Week, we went to assist those who were experiencing their own literal Way of the Cross. Thanks to tents donated by the National Guard, families were temporarily sheltered. On Easter Sunday, we were exhausted but happy to have shared in the suffering of those who are “crucified” on this earth; this was the most significant Easter celebration of our lives.

2. Protest

Another significant experience was our participation in a protest organized by the Landless Workers Movement on behalf of country dwellers whose rights have not been respected by competent authorities, specifically their rights to education, health care, land on which to live and work, safe drinking water, etc. When a person from the country doesn't have a job or land and is called a “bum”, his dignity is not being respected.

During the 17 days of the protest, makeshift tents were set up on a major boulevard of Fortaleza in front of the Department of Agriculture. We remained the whole time with 2,000 agricultural workers and their families. Various associations, Sisters and other farmers shared their talents and organized about thirty workshops: sewing, embroidery, paper-mâché, recycling, painting, etc.

Before negotiations began, police opposed to the demonstrators fired teargas to expel them from their tents. Despite the teargas, we were able to remain in the alternative medicine tent to care for the wounded.

In collaboration with other consecrated persons, we staffed the Bible tent: we reflected in particular on the passage of Exodus, which offered insight on the presence of God in the struggle taking place. Liturgical celebrations were also privileged moments that helped us face the difficult moments in the day.

3. Missionary formation

Several young people from the city joined us during our visits to rural communities, especially for two special periods at Carnival and Holy Week since it was not possible for those living in the countryside to get to distant churches or religious facilities.

During a major prayer vigil, we reflected on the situation of communities affected by floods. After sharing on the Word of God, we chose several commitments in response to their needs.

Two groups of young people were established: the first to help rural communities and the second for flood victims. They did remarkable work, but the need to better understand the Word of God became evident, and they received several months of catechetical formation. These young people then formed the “missionary group” and were involved in the mission of the metropolitan region, a ministry put in place by the Cardinal of the Archdiocese of Fortaleza.

(To be continued.)

Exodus local community

International Vincentian Session

Encountering the God of mercy with Saint Vincent de Paul

FROM A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TO A MISSIONARY ONE

H

History of the
Company

Every Holy Year is an opportunity for renewal, as we found with the Year of Faith. In the Church of France, “*that country where I come from*”, it seems to me that we are experiencing a sort of renewal thanks to the Holy Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. This may also be true elsewhere, where you live, for example. The word “mercy” was not particularly fashionable, and our Pope has put it back in the spotlight. He has helped me realize that mercy does not only concern our spiritual relationship with God but also our way of being in the world. Mercy might have particular importance for us as Vincentians. This is what I would like to explore with you over these two days as we look back to our Founder from the perspective of the theme of this jubilee. What might Saint Vincent have experienced of God’s mercy? What did God’s mercy lead him to do? How might his experience help us today?

My reflection will be divided into two parts, not according to chronology but by a distinction that will help us grasp Vincent de Paul’s experience of God’s mercy: on the one hand, as part of his more personal development; on the other hand, in the context of a shared vocation.

I – PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ON VINCENT’S PATH OF CONVERSION

We are aware of some decisive elements that shaped Vincent de Paul’s early years. Born into a farming family of six children, he was singled out by his parents for his intelligence. They recognized, even more than the faith that he shared with them, his capacities that would enable him to enter the priesthood and in that way obtain, in line with common thinking at the time, a source of revenue to support the family. He benefited from some family relationships. He had connections with the abbot of Arthous in the environs of Dax, Sauveur Diharse, a close relative on his mother’s side. The abbot, having become bishop of Tarbes, would ordain him a deacon. There was also Monsieur de Comet who would help him. He would offer housing to the boy for his initial schooling in Dax and also gave him the opportunity to practice as tutor for his own children.

This initial experience would not fail to influence his future. Vincent would replicate it near Toulouse by running a boarding house for students to cover his living expenses and complete his university studies. Even more significantly, it would allow him to enter into the service of the de Gondi family¹, who would play such a crucial role in Vincent’s commitment to his missionary vocation. It would seem that his father was not mistaken when he decided to sell a pair of oxen to pay for his schooling in Dax.

I want to highlight two more almost innate advantages the young Vincent had from the start and which would work to his benefit. From his youth, he proved to interact with others easily. Perhaps it’s my lack of understanding about lifestyles in that time, but I find this characteristic remarkable in him and connect it to his great capacity for movement. He travelled a lot. He relied, of course, on his family network, but when he was at a distance from his family, in Toulouse, Avignon, Rome and Paris, he continued to meet influential people. He was clever enough to be ordained a priest in Château-l’Evêque, far

1. Tutor for the two boys, Pierre and Henri.

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

from his diocese of origin, younger than the permitted age (19 rather than 24). In his defense, guidelines from the Council of Trent had not yet been introduced to France. When he arrived in Paris, he managed to enter rather quickly into the service of Queen Marguerite, ex-wife of King Henri IV and still endowed with royal wealth. He connected with well-known people, such as Pierre de Bérulle, who would open many doors for him in the Church of France and in wealthy society and, even more importantly, open doors in his spiritual life.

On this topic, I note a second quality that Vincent de Paul demonstrated: his openness, his willingness to explore new ideas. He wouldn't attach himself to one school of thought nor to one spiritual tradition. I like to compare him to a bee, able to gather pollen from several different flowers and make his own honey. Vincent would be influenced by Carmelite, Ignatian, Bérullian and other spiritualities... Presumably based on his extensive reading, he would regularly quote great authors like Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas. He would draw from a wide range of sources of inspiration in order to establish his own way from them.

With his promising beginnings, the young Vincent could have managed to make the place for himself that he seemed to be looking for in the world, even if everything didn't work perfectly. We know the troubled period he must have gone through in his search for a sure benefice. Several benefices were lost (like the parish of Tihl) or turned out to have little value (for example, the abbey of Saint Léonard de Chaumes). Still, it is remarkable that at the moment when he could make out the prospect of a good situation (with the curate of Clichy and then entrance into the service of the de Gondi family), Vincent set off on another path, in the service of those who are poor. What made him change?

Authors have often spoken of his definitive conversion based on his encounter with those who are poor in 1617 in Gannes and then in Châtillon. I do not doubt that this two-fold transition represents an essential and decisive step in the life of Vincent. I would like to step back from those two events and attempt another complementary analysis of his interior life. I am going to take the risk of going forward based on a hypothesis... What particular role might have God's mercy played in this change of course for Vincent de Paul? I suggest that we try to

answer that question based on what I have noted from his spoken and written words about God's mercy.

What if Vincent de Paul accepted to be called by the God of mercy? Let's bring to mind, as a prototype of conversion, the figure of Levi in the Gospel according to Saint Luke (Lk 5:27-32), even if I haven't found any explicit reference by Vincent de Paul to that passage. You have a man, seated at his tax collector's table. He must make a good living. Jesus went up to him, who was alone, and called him to follow Him. Levi immediately responded by getting up and leaving all behind. Then, he organized a great banquet in his home to welcome Jesus, a large number of colleagues and others. The encounter with Jesus put Levi in contact with his peers and opened up other relationships, whom the opposition of the Pharisees makes known to us as "sinners". And Jesus answered his critics: *"Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners."* Levi, in following Jesus, found himself in the midst of sinners and called to conversion. Jesus, in meeting people, reveals to them their state as sinners and the love of God who calls them to a new life in solidarity with others in salvation.

Couldn't we suppose that Vincent de Paul might have experienced a similar call? In his trial of temptation against the faith, Vincent de Paul chose to trust in God's grace. It was when he made the resolution to give himself to God in the service of those who are poor that he was freed. He let God come to him and take hold of him to get him out of his quagmire. He would later realize, thanks to Francis de Sales' example, how essential this act of letting go is:

"I remember something the Bishop of Geneva said on this topic - divine words, worthy of such a great man: 'Oh,' he said, 'I wouldn't want to go to God, if God didn't come to me!'... a heart perfectly enlightened in the science of love! That being so, a heart truly filled with charity, which understands what it is to love God, wouldn't want to go to God unless God anticipated him and attracted him by His grace. That's a far cry from wanting to carry God away and draw Him to himself by hook or by crook. No, no; in those cases, nothing is gained by force" (August 4, 1655, Repetition of Prayer, *Excesses to be avoided in the love of God* – CCD XI, 207-208).

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

Just like Levi, Vincent de Paul could walk in the footsteps of his Lord, in going out to meet the poor, because he let the Good Shepherd approach him and lead him down His paths toward the sheep that had strayed, sinners called to conversion. To have this disposition, we should make clear that two attitudes are necessary.

First, the encounter with the Good Shepherd involves recognizing that one is a lost sheep since those who are healthy do not seek out a physician. Vincent de Paul would confess on numerous occasions his sinful state, and we cannot suspect him of playing simply for a spiritual effect. Recall, for example, what he said to the Priests of the Mission about lying to God:

“If it’s intolerable to be called a deceiver by a man of the world... what will it be like when God himself says to us, ‘Oh, there you are...you villain, you liar, you coward... who promised me on my altar only to deceive me; a traitor who enlisted under my banners, only to abandon them, follow the troops of my enemy, and serve the devil! ... To break our word to a God, and to a terrifying God! Alas, Messieurs! What shall we do? We must tremble and have recourse to His infinite mercy...” (Conference of August 13, 1655, *Poverty*, CCD XI, 220).

Vincent de Paul, knowing his sinfulness, called upon God’s mercy. While we do not know if he made this connection, we could see a sort of parallel between this admission and Vincent de Paul’s own experience. He had the harsh experience of being “called a deceiver”, all the more difficult because he was innocent (accused of theft by his roommate). After trying out several paths, he was able to recognize where God was really calling him, above and beyond simple pastoral ministry. He was able to hear the radicality of God’s call, demanding a real letting go and a real gift of self on his part. Vincent de Paul did not assist persons who are poor out of mere philanthropy but out of fidelity to the God of mercies who forgave his sins and called him to solidarity with other sinners.

The encounter with the Good Shepherd would then lead him to entrust himself to the mercy of God who alone makes it possible to keep going despite sin. Vincent would learn to go forward in the footsteps of his Lord, relying on Him, and this new trust in Christian discipleship was

marked by the act of “leaving all,” as with Levi. Don’t forget that Vincent de Paul would gradually renounce all his financial benefits (his benefices and inheritance) to dedicate them to the good of those who are poor. He helps us in this way to see the importance of this letting go, which touches the totality of a believer’s life and represents a fundamental attitude. Monsieur Vincent would speak of this, for example, on the occasion of the loss of the Orsigny farm:

“Let’s adore [God’s] justice and consider that He’s been merciful to us in treating us this way: He’s done it for our own good... So, let’s reckon that we’ve gained a great deal by our loss; for, together with this farm, God has taken from us the satisfaction we have in possessing it... Now, by the mercy of God, we’re delivered from that danger...” (Conference of September 1658 – *Loss of the Orsigny Farm* - CCD XII, 49; 50-51).

With his companions, Vincent learned, by God’s mercy, to lose the world to gain it, as the Lord taught: “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive back an overabundant return in this present age and eternal life in the age to come” (Lk 18:29-30). On other similar occasions of loss of property, Vincent wished to allow for God’s provident action and find in the God of mercy the source of a well-ordered life. The stakes are no less in the present time because it involves adopting the attitude of righteous souls, as Saint Vincent explained to the Priests of the Mission:

“... [Our Lord is] the only one who can set us free and give us the peace enjoyed by righteous souls. This grace depends on His goodness and mercy; that’s why we have to ask Him for it” (Conference of August 29, 1659, *Teachings contrary to those of the Gospel* - CCD XII, 262).

In His mercy, God frees man from his earthly attachments and illusions of power. God offers him the strength to turn away from the world in order to reveal and share His riches with him. This is what is at stake in every conversion.

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul
A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN HIS MISSIONARY VOCATION

Once this decisive change of course had occurred, Vincent de Paul embarked on his missionary vocation, and, by God's mercy, he found the strength of fidelity. Until the end of his life, Vincent de Paul proved tireless despite recurring trials. He could have felt disappointment and fatigue in the face of his own limitations, but God's mercy made him steadfast. He knew on whom he could count and from whom all graces come. He reflected on this, first of all related to himself:

"The Congregation is growing in numbers and virtue, by God's mercy, as was apparent to me during the visitations and as everyone recognizes. Only I, wretch that I am, still go on burdening myself with new evil-doing and abominations. O Monsieur, how merciful God is to bear with me so patiently and for so long, and how weak and miserable I am to make such poor use of His mercy! I beg you, Monsieur, to offer me frequently to His Divine Majesty" (L. 1137 To a Priest of the Mission, in Rome, 1649 – CCD III, 479).

Vincent de Paul frequently called upon God's mercy and upon his collaborators' prayer for his own sins. Although he was contrite about the greatness of his failings, he did not concede defeat because he chose to rely on Him who is mercy, without fear of exceeding the limits of His mercy in his evilness. He asserted, *"The throne of His mercy is the greatness of the faults to be forgiven"* (Exhortation to a dying brother, 1645 - CCD XI, 130). Vincent de Paul remained hopeful for himself not out of pride but because of his faith in God's infinite love. Recall, as a sort of echo, these Scripture passages: *"If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts"* (1 Jn 3:20); or we could think of Saint Paul's letter to the Romans: *"Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more"* (Rom 5:20).

Just as he did with the dying brother, Vincent knew how to share his faith and sought to help his collaborators believe in the help that God can bring. Remaining steadfast in one's vocation does not result primarily from our good will, which is sometimes so weak and fickle:

"My Lord Jesus Christ, it's true that, of ourselves, we're poor creatures capable only of offending Your Divine Majesty and dishonoring by our

weaknesses the choice that You, in Your goodness, have made of us to serve You... Yet, trusting in that same divine goodness and mercy, with our whole heart we ask Your grace for all of us... to observe the Rules You willed to give us... Should we be so weak as to allow ourselves to fall, stretch out Your helping hand to us in Your immense charity to raise us up from our falls..." (Conference of May 30, 1647, *The Rules* - CCD IX, 252-253).

The God of mercy, whom Vincent de Paul helps us to know, is not a "bogeyman" God, only interested in the evil that we might commit and the corresponding punishment. Biblical tradition reveals God to us as "slow to anger and rich in mercy", capable of compassion and effective love so as to come to the assistance of men and women who are lost in their weaknesses. Along these same lines, Vincent de Paul offers us a beautiful reflection:

"We have to make provision for the necessities of nature, since God has made us subject to them, and adapt to its weakness. That's what God wills; He's so good and just that He asks for nothing more: He's well aware of our woes and, in His compassion and mercy, supplies for our defects. We must act very simply with Him and not be so anxious about this; His goodness and mercy will provide whatever we need" (August 4, 1655, Repetition of Prayer, *Excesses to be avoided in the love of God* - CCD XI, 207).

With Vincent de Paul, we understand that, in God's mercy, we are expected to do the little we can, but all we can, by a genuine commitment with the help of God.² This is the fundamental attitude of humility in which we admit our limitations, not to relieve ourselves of our responsibilities, but to better identify and welcome the One who can make up for our weakness. The perfect God does not call perfect people to enter into His service, but it is He who will obtain for His servants what they need to accomplish His work.

2. Cf. Introduction to the *Common Rules* of the Congregation of the Mission

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

Trusting in the mercy of God, Saint Vincent de Paul's devotion to Divine Providence would grow. In the trials that he would go through and the solutions that would get him out of those troubles, he learned to recognize God's loving presence and action on behalf of His faithful servants. You know well that he would always attribute the initiative of the works he began to God.³

Vincent de Paul learned to give way to God in order to rely on His mercy that went before him, for the merciful God cannot abide seeing man suffering and gives the needed support. Through his devotion to Divine Providence, Vincent de Paul teaches us to walk at God's pace, to let God go ahead of us so that we can walk in His footsteps. This is the very process of following Jesus. But those who respond to God's call also have to do their part to progress in service as God expects of them (= the little we can, all that we can, with the help of God). God does not impose Himself, but He calls us and opens us to His graces:

"Lord, pardon our failings [in the practice of Gospel teachings]... and increase in us the grace of living them as they are in our little Rules. In this way, my dear confreres, we'll find in them the Spirit of Our Lord, the spirit of His teachings and everything He points out to us in them to make us worthy workers of His Gospel... So then, by His mercy we're quite ready and strictly obligated to practice these teachings..." (Conference of February 14, 1659, *Gospel teachings* - CCD XII, 109).

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FAITH IN GOD REVEALED BY JESUS CHRIST

Saint Vincent de Paul shows us the important role his experience of mercy played in his change of course and his renewal. He first accepted the call to broaden his life perspectives, wider than his initial intuitions and his legitimate basic needs. Seeking to draw nearer to God, he was

3. *"I've told you many times, Sisters, that you can be very certain God is your founder, for I can tell you before Him that in my whole life I never thought of it, and neither, I think, did Mlle Le Gras... events whose initiators can't be discovered proceed from the hand of God. Since your institution is not the work of human persons, you may therefore boldly declare, Sisters, that it's the work of God"* (CCD IX, 192; 194).

turned toward those who are poor. On this new path, he then found in mercy a source that renewed his strength. He relied on God who never tires of loving and forgiving us in order to send us with Him in the service of those who are poor.

Finally, mercy developed Saint Vincent's trust in God. It is remarkable to see how often the two are connected in our Founder's words. We already heard this in the previous quotes, but we are going to focus on this idea now.

The God of mercy is not a judge ready to condemn but a God who seeks to save (cf. Jn 3:16-17). He inspires confidence in whoever encounters and comes to know Him, as Saint Vincent did. Vincent would rely on God so that he wouldn't concentrate on his own limitations.

Awareness of sin that relentlessly tempts us cannot have the final word for someone who trusts in God. Vincent de Paul wrote to an anxious priest about this:

"The holy Apostle had seen wonderful things in heaven but did not consider himself justified because of that, for he saw in himself too much darkness and too many struggles. Still, he had such great confidence in God that he believed nothing in the world could separate him from the charity of Jesus Christ. This example should suffice for you, Monsieur; to remain at peace in your dark moments and to have perfect and total confidence in the infinite goodness of Our Lord. Wishing to complete the work of your sanctification, He invites you to abandon yourself into the arms of His Providence. So then, let yourself be led to His paternal love, for He does love you. Far from rejecting such a good man as you, He never even abandons a wicked man who hopes for His mercy" (L. 1456 *To a priest* – CCD IV, 317).

Trust in God is tested in hope in His mercy that will act in favor of a repentant believer. Faith is born from the promise of life that God makes to man, whom God invites to set out in order to inherit a new land. It is God Himself who gives the means to progress in holiness. Vincent does not hesitate to ask God regularly for the graces needed to live out his vocation in practical terms.

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

“When God wants to communicate himself, He does it effortlessly, in a perceptible, very pleasant, gentle, loving way; so, let’s ask Him often and with great confidence for this gift of meditation [ask the same for the practice of Gospel teachings]... and be assured that, in His great mercy, He’ll grant it to us in the end. He never refuses when people pray to Him humbly and confidently. If He doesn’t grant it in the beginning, He does so later on. We have to persevere and not become discouraged: and if we don’t have that spirit of God now, in His mercy He’ll give it to us if we’re steadfast - perhaps in three or four months, more or less, or in a year or two...” (August 4, 1655, Repetition of Prayer, *Excesses to be avoided in the love of God - CCD XI, 208*).

God intervenes in the everyday practical details of a vocation to support and guide those who commit to it since a major challenge for those who respond to God’s call is indeed fidelity. At its highest level, this is at stake in bearing witness, in martyrdom:

“M. Vincent also recommended to the prayers of the Company Messrs. Mousnier and Bourdaise who, he said, are on the island of Madagascar and are daily exposed to new dangers, that God in His mercy may be pleased to give them the spirit of Saint Lawrence and help them, like this great saint, to be steadfast to the end and to overcome all the difficulties that may arise” (August 10, 1655, *Repetition of Prayer, Retreat Ministry - CCD XI, 214*).

While a vocation doesn’t necessarily lead to death in persecution, it demands accepting a project that is given by God. It thus requires an attitude of total openness to what underpins it. As an example, a missionary is made to go forth.

“Ah, Messieurs! Let’s all ask God fervently for this spirit for the whole Company, a spirit that will take us everywhere, with the result that, when someone sees one or two Missioners, they can say, ‘Those are apostolic persons ready to go to the four corners of the world carrying the word of God.’ ... We must have a heart like that, everyone having the same heart, detached from all things, so that we may have perfect trust in the mercy of God, without wondering, or worrying, or losing courage. ‘Will I have this item in that country? How will I get it?’ O Sauveur! God will never fail us! ... So then, let’s not be bound to this or that;

let’s be courageous! Let’s go wherever God may call us, He will be our provider; let’s not fear anything...” (August 22, 1655, *Repetition of prayer – CCD XI, 264-265*).

Vincent de Paul also helps us see that God does not abandon in their troubles those whom He sends on mission. I haven’t verified if he had already been in some sort of extreme danger – perhaps during the Fronde, in his diplomatic efforts for peace with the Cardinal Prime Minister as he crossed military lines. In any case, he frequently recalled the situation of missionaries sent into all sorts of dire straits, stressing that they continued because they knew how to count on God in the face of danger:

“Take Messrs. Desdames and Duperroy in Warsaw, for example; what have they done? Neither cannons, nor fire, nor pillage, nor plague, nor all the other troubles and dangers in which they live caused them to leave there or to abandon their post and the place where Divine Providence had placed them, preferring to risk their lives in that way rather than fail to practice that beautiful virtue of mercy” (November 2 and 3, 1656, *Repetition of Prayer – CCD XI, 329*).

We have tried to better understand God’s mercy with Saint Vincent de Paul, examining it first from his personal experience. Indeed, God addresses each person individually to call him to life that is stronger than any evil and death itself. But what the believer receives from divine grace does not only affect him on an interior level. God so loves the human race that He sent His Son who became man. The very action of God reaches humanity in all aspects of its reality: body and spirit, personal and social. We will therefore observe now how Vincent de Paul, personally touched by mercy, also became a collaborator in God’s activity of mercy. Committed to discipleship of Jesus, Vincent de Paul met people who are poor and shared with them what he had received from God: the Good News, effective love and communion of life.

II – MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE

In terms of Saint Vincent de Paul’s history, we understand that mercy essentially shaped his vocation starting from the two foundational encounters of 1617 with poor persons.

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

In January, he went to the bedside of a poor dying man to hear his confession. In the presence of Madame de Gondi, he made known the grace he received from this sacrament that he had so long neglected. She, realizing how the parishioners were distant from God's love, asked Monsieur Vincent to encourage them to make a general confession. Mercy led him to evangelize those who are poor: to make known to them the Good News of God, who loves them and, out of mercy, seeks them out.

In August, having been made aware of the perilous situation of a family in the parish of Châtillon-les-Dombes, he encouraged his parishioners to come to its assistance. With some people of good will, he found many on the way or at the home bringing something to offer. The pastor took care of bringing the Blessed Sacrament. Mercy led him to serve those who are poor by the works of mercy, according to the Lord's words, which he and the first Ladies of Charity took from Matthew 25 for the November-December 1617 Rule of Châtillon.

These two discoveries, just a few months apart in all the years of his long life, led Saint Vincent to bring together this two-fold approach: serve those who are poor spiritually and corporally as the Lord did and taught. This double hallmark would appear in his three major foundations and constitutes a single ministry of evangelization with diverse applications. Once this principle is understood, we can freely distinguish the two in order to better understand this two-fold missionary approach on which Vincent de Paul embarked with those who are poor in going out to meet God.

A MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE OF PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS TO THOSE WHO ARE POOR

First, we can note that Vincent placed God's mercy at the origin of the Congregation of the Mission, both as the starting point of the missionary vocation and the place in which it was maintained. He wrote to René Almérás that it is mercy that had called them to the 'profession of missionaries' and that gives the Priests of the Mission their success (cf. L. 1245 *To René Almérás*, August 19, 1650 – CCD IV, 62). We should recall that, in his experience of Gannes-Folleville, Vincent drew the essence of the missionary vocation from listening to the Gospel of Jesus

Christ according to Saint Luke, chapter 4: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to announce Good News to the poor...*" I stop the quote there to emphasize the essential element, as Vincent did, even if, as we know, this beginning does not exclude what follows.⁴ I even intend to bring this out. Until then, we'll stop here first so as to better take it all in:

"I've often been very consoled - and it consoles me even today - to see that God has granted us the grace, as He did for His Apostles, of sending us out to preach His word throughout the world... by the mercy of God, a man going off joyously to carry this word to the ends of the earth... they go everywhere like the Apostles, and they preach the word of God the way the Apostles preached it" (Conference of August 20, 1655 – *Method to be followed in preaching* – CCD XI, 237).

The most important thing, therefore, is to proclaim the Word of God to all, in other words, not only to Christians. This is even more difficult today in milieus that are secular, where there is religious plurality and a minority of Catholics! It involves speaking about God as He revealed Himself through His Word. Conveying the kerygma, the essence of Christian faith in Jesus crucified and risen from the dead, is inevitable, even if it is often impossible to present directly. It is necessary to be attentive to the situation of people to be evangelized. In Folleville, Vincent de Paul exhorted them to general confession based on an identified need, specifically the danger in which souls that had strayed from God found themselves.

He would never fail to entrust this aspect of proclamation to the Ladies and Daughters of Charity because it has no less importance for them. You know that he invited them to systematically say something about God that was appropriate to the situation of the individual whom they were coming to serve. He specifically told the Daughters of Charity that spiritual service is essential:

"For you see, dear Sisters, it's one thing to assist physically those who are poor; in truth, however, it was never Our Lord's intention in founding

4. "*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*"

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

your Company that you should care only for the body, because there will always be someone to do that; but Our Lord's intention is that you assist the sick poor spiritually."⁵

Moreover, I note how Vincent mentions joy in speaking about the missionary going out to carry this word to the ends of the earth. Joy is a precious indicator of a missionary way of acting according to Saint Vincent. Joy communicates effectively and is a sign of the gift that the missionary intends to share... God's mercy is Good News for the person who is lost and who, touched by mercy, can come to know that he is loved. According to Saint Vincent, Missionaries do not come to teach a lesson but to pass on the joy of the Gospel that they have received and that calls to new life in God.

In another passage, the only one in which Vincent de Paul speaks to the Priests of the Mission about mercy as a topic, and which we'll take up again a little later, we can see two details that he provides concerning mercy in speaking:

"So then, let's be merciful, brothers, and let's practice mercy toward everyone, so that we'll never meet a poor person again without consoling him if we can, or an ignorant man without teaching him in a few words the things he must believe and do for his salvation" (Conference of August 6 [1656] – *The Spirit of mercy and compassion* - CCD XI, 309).

Consoling and teaching are the two actions that Vincent de Paul hoped to implement in order to express God's mercy. He cared for the person in spiritual or moral distress by providing comfort, and for whoever stood in need of knowledge of God, by sharing faith and the Word of God with him. He intended to be realistic in assisting them, according to what is possible, and simply (*"in a few words"*). This practice should remind us of the method of the Lord Jesus, who never imposed anything but who tenderly welcomed repentant sinners. We can then appropriately hear this prayer of Saint Vincent as part of the imitation of Christ:

5. Extract from the Conference of November 11, 1657 – CCD X, 269.

"Yes, my Savior, my most merciful Savior, we entreat You most humbly to give us the grace to practice, for the rest of our lives, this holy virtue, which was proper to You and which You came to teach us; we beg You, by the depths of Your mercy, to give us this spirit and a share in the great love You have for this virtue" (Conference of August 13, 1655 - *Poverty* - CCD XI, 232).

It seems important to me to further emphasize a practice of the proclamation of mercy in which Vincent de Paul engaged with his companions.

"It is the distinctive duty of priests to procure mercy and to be merciful to criminals, so you must not always refuse to help those who seek your intervention, especially when there is more misfortune than malice in their crime. There is a letter in Saint Augustine on this topic..., which points out that to free sinners and prisoners by way of intervention and leniency is not promoting or condoning vice; it also points out that it is part of the propriety and charity of priests to plead for them. Therefore, you may do so whenever you see that the case merits it, and you can prepare the minds of the judges by telling them that it is not your intention to defend crime but rather to practice mercy, by seeking it for the guilty and demanding it for the innocent, according to the obligation of your state" (L. 2765 *To Pierre Cabel, in Sedan*, December 28, 1658 - CCD VII, 443).

The practice of mercy concerns sinners, even those weighed down by serious faults. Forgiveness requires discernment so as to avoid confusion and to produce its intended effect: to witness to the love of God who calls to conversion. Through this practice, we can see that Vincent de Paul continued to reflect the Gospel according to Saint Luke, chapter 4: *"proclaim liberty to captives"*. We can imagine that this reflection by Monsieur Vincent in a letter to a Priest of the Mission is supported by his long years of experience with the galley convicts. God's mercy reveals each person worthy and capable of forgiveness and conversion. Mercy knows no limits in the love of God.

A MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE OF PASSING TO EFFECTIVE LOVE

God's mercy thus calls Jesus' disciples to action. It does not stop with

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

the relationship between God and each person called to conversion. The person who encounters Jesus and begins to follow Him, like Levi, finds himself drawn along in His footsteps to live out God's mercy, proclaim it and share it. Vincent de Paul, rooted in the tradition of the Church, would regularly recommend practicing the works of mercy. We already noted this in the November-December 1617 Rule of Châtillon. It is interesting to note that Vincent de Paul came to present it as a fundamental attitude, a habit of a life of faith:

"...those good Sisters [Daughters of Charity in Nantes]... practice mercy, that beautiful virtue of which it's said, 'Mercy is the distinctive feature of God.' We practice it, too, and must do so all our lives: corporal mercy, spiritual mercy, mercy in the rural areas and in the missions by hastening to meet the needs of our neighbor, mercy when we're at home with regard to the retreatants, and with regard to the poor, by teaching them the things necessary for salvation, and in so many other circumstances God presents to us" (Repetition of Prayer, November 2 and 3, 1656 – CCD XI, 328-329).

Mercy can be practiced on all occasions, and Vincent de Paul emphasized it even with the Priests of the Mission during the conference on *The spirit of mercy and compassion*, describing it as the very nature of their life:

*"How fortunate are our confreres in Poland, who have suffered so much during these latest wars..., and who are still suffering from practicing corporal and spiritual mercy and relieving, assisting, and consoling the poor! Fortunate Missioners, whom neither cannons, nor fire, nor weapons, nor the plague could drive out of Warsaw, where the misery of others was keeping them. For the sake of mercy they persevered, and still persevere courageously, in the midst of so many dangers and sufferings! How fortunate they are to make such good use of this instant of time in our lives for the sake of mercy! Yes, this very instant, for our whole life is but a fleeting moment, which disappears immediately. Alas, the seventy-six years of life I've lived seem to me now only a dream, only an instant; and nothing more is left to me but the regret of having made such poor use of this moment. Let's think about the deep sorrow we'll have at the hour of death, if we don't use this moment to be merciful" (Conference of August 6 [1656] – *The Spirit of mercy and compassion* - CCD XI, 308-309).*

To illustrate this faith reality, we could paraphrase what Monsignor Rhodain said concerning charity: "Any time is a good time for mercy." At every moment of every day, we are called upon to live from it.

For additional details on this practice, let's read, as way of example, the advice Vincent gave to the Ladies of Charity:

"The Foundlings

(1) You practice in their regard the seven corporal works of mercy, and, in a certain sense, the spiritual works of mercy; consequently, you merit all the graces God has attached to each of the seven works, of which visiting the sick of the Hôtel-Dieu is only one. You feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, etc.

(2) They are in extreme - or almost extreme - need, and each of us is obliged to come to their aid. It's obvious that it's extreme since, without your help, they will all die" (The Works of the Hôtel-Dieu and of the Foundlings - April 1640 - CCD XIIIb, 405).

What is at stake in the practice of mercy is indeed the life needed by those who are poor. Just as God's mercy saves man from death, Vincent clearly notes that the works of mercy carried out offer vital support for those who are poor. Here is a criteria for our discernment about our missions: if there is a danger, if those poor persons would die without our help, we should go there! Vincent de Paul can help us to protect ourselves from the temptation of thinking we are all-powerful by reminding us of the spiritual motivation, which he professes on other occasions:

*"Each individual, then, has to strive to be conformed to Our Lord, to distance himself from the teachings of the world, and to be bound in affection and practice to the examples of the Son of God, who became man like us in order that we might not only be saved, but, like Him, saviors; which means, by cooperating with Him in the salvation of souls" (Conference of December 13, 1658, *Members of the Congregation and their ministries* - CCD XII, 97). Whoever commits to following Jesus finds himself associated with Jesus' action and called to participate in God's work of salvation, in His way, which is the way of the Suffering Servant.*

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul

So, let's return one last time to the conference on *The spirit of mercy and compassion* in order to better grasp what Monsieur Vincent explains about the practice of mercy. It isn't a certain amount of good works to accomplish in order to make sure we've behaved well and to receive a corresponding reward. Above all, it entails entering into the relationship Christ has with human persons: this relationship is characterized by His compassion for every type of suffering and His desire to free people from their woes; He enters into a personal relationship with each person. Jesus does not impose a ready-made solution but shows interest in each individual, as with the blind man of Jericho: "*What do you want me to do for you?*" (Mk 10:51; Lk 18:41). Vincent de Paul strove to follow his Master in this same enthusiastic response of compassion and mercy and invited his collaborators to do the same:

*"When we go to visit poor persons, we have to sympathize with them in order to suffer with them, and put ourselves in the dispositions of that great Apostle, who said: 'I have made myself all things to all men' (1 Cor 9:22)... For that purpose, we have to try to stir our hearts to pity, make them sensitive to the sufferings and miseries of our neighbor, and ask God to give us the true spirit of mercy, which is the characteristic spirit of God; for, as the Church states, it's the distinctive feature of God to be merciful and to impart His Spirit. So let's ask God, my dear confreres, to give us this spirit of compassion and mercy, to fill us with it, and to preserve it in us so that whoever sees a Missioner can say, 'There's a man full of mercy.' Let's reflect a little on how much we need mercy, since we have to practice it toward others and bring it to all sorts of places, and to suffer everything for its sake" (Conference of August 6 [1656] – *The Spirit of mercy and compassion* - CCD XI, 308). Vincent de Paul, through his experience and his words, reveals to us that mercy becomes a way of being, a way of life that allows us to enter into the very life of God.*

A MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNION WITH THE LIFE OF GOD

Based on his personal experience of God's mercy, Vincent de Paul accepted the commitment to live it out as a missionary dynamic. God calls and sends people among their peers to share His gift with them. God's mercy, which calls us to reconciliation, is thus not only a matter

of our good relationship with God, nor only with those who are close to us. Following the model of Saint Vincent de Paul, let us ask ourselves what reconciliations we might be able to live in the Church, in the Company and in our local community. Our relationships are not always easy or unbroken with our different sensibilities and responsibilities... Monsieur Vincent told the Priests of the Mission that they had to live charity among themselves if they hoped to spread it throughout the world. We could apply this line of reasoning to mercy. In order to be able to respond to the call of God to be merciful as He is merciful, we first need to live it out in practice in the primary place where we live, our Companies. Only then can we ask ourselves what reconciliation this Year of Mercy might allow us to promote in the different milieu where we are sent. And what if our Church, your Company and your local communities, engaged in this jubilee year of mercy, became better artisans of mercy? There is a domain for the boldness of charity! When we receive God's mercy for ourselves, what are we going to do with this profusion of love?

Monsieur Vincent shows us the missionary way of mercy. Let us first of all recall with him that "*the true spirit of mercy... is the characteristic spirit of God*" and that it is God who gives it to us, to each one of us personally and to our communities. Then, we can remember that God's mercy can act in us as a powerful force when we let it:

"I would like to hope that God in His goodness has put all of you more closely in touch with His Spirit during your retreats so that you will be able to convey His gifts to the souls that Providence will send you at your house and during your missions. In addition, so that His infinite mercy may not stop there, it is to be hoped that by it each one will become more humble and zealous" (L. 2712 To Edme Jolly, in Rome - CCD VII, 360).

Saint Vincent's words clearly show us that we alone can place a limit on mercy, especially because of our lack of faith. An attitude of welcoming God's gift and of awaiting His action in our service makes us instead enter more deeply into communion with Him. This attitude can even take us further in the mission than we had imagined: "*God be praised, Monsieur, that peace is being discussed, and may He in His infinite goodness bring it about, for that is not under human control*

Encountering the God of mercy with St. Vincent de Paul
and is a work worthy of His power and mercy!” (L. 3063 To Guillaume Desdames - CCD VIII, 252-253).

Mercy makes it possible for people to attain shores that are not necessarily usual for them. Recall the teaching of Jesus that called the crowds to practice a justice that surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 5:20). He declared that He had come to fulfill the Law and, inviting people to something beyond its narrow observance, He called them to perfection.

Finally, let us note the privileged place that Vincent de Paul accorded to the service of those who are poor for entering into communion of life with God: *“You are right in having no scruple about missing Mass to assist the poor, for God prefers mercy to sacrifice” (L. 2512 To Sister Nicole Haran, January 16, 1658 - CCD VII, 66).*

As an echo, we hear the passage from the Gospel in which Jesus recalls the words of a prophet (Hosea 6:6) *“I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 12:7)*, as well as the scribe’s comment after Jesus’s response to his question regarding the greatest commandment: *“Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, ‘He is One and there is no other than he.’ And ‘to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself’ is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mk 12:32-33).*

I think that the Daughters of Charity helped Vincent de Paul understand how these words of faith are put into practice. They are regularly confronted with this dilemma of missionary priorities in their lives dedicated to *“honor our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity, serving Him corporally and spiritually in the person of the poor” (cf. C. 7)*. You know better than I do the response of your holy Founder: *“To leave God for God is not leaving God at all, that is, to leave one work of God to do another, either of greater obligation or of greater merit... And if there is ever a legitimate reason, dear Sisters, it’s the service of the neighbor” (Conference of May 30, 1647, The Rules - CCD IX, 252)*. The service of persons who are poor is the door leading to a communion of life with the merciful God, not only because we imitate Jesus Christ through this service, but also because, in serving those who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ. God Himself, through the

incarnation of His Son Jesus and His saving action, becomes present in those who are poor. We can’t help recalling along with Vincent: *“Lord, when did we see you? ... - Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (cf. Mt 25:37, 40).*

A communion of life with God begins on earth, through His Son and with those who are poor, and continues in eternal life:

“God has chosen to take from us one of our best Brothers, namely, Brother Sirven, who was the living Rule of the Company in Sedan. A wise, intelligent man, he did good to everyone and devoted himself willingly to the care of the sick and the consolation of the afflicted. The whole town looked upon and loved him as a saint and has expressed great regret at losing him - even heretics, who were edified by his unassuming behavior. We have good reason to believe that God has crowned his soul in heaven, giving him the crown He has prepared for His beloved who practice works of mercy on earth” (L. 3160 To a Priest of the Mission, July 1660 - CCD VIII, 393).

SENDING

The practice of mercy is like a visa for the Kingdom of God. Saint Vincent de Paul helps us to know the terms for obtaining this visa: mainly, by proclaiming the mercy of God as Good News for all; by living out mercy through corporal and spiritual service of those who are lifeless; finally, by participating in the saving action of God. So then, may each of you and your entire Company have a good trip toward this beautiful country of God!

Father Frédéric PELLEFIGUE, CM

**A spirituality of communion
implies also
the ability to see
what is positive in others,
to welcome it
and prize it
as a gift from God:
not only as a gift for the brother or sister
who has received it directly,
but also as a “gift for me”.**

John Paul II,
Apostolic Letter Novo millennio ineunte no. 43

