

*E*choes of the Company



Spiritual Life - Challenges - News - History

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**Fraternal love
for a new
missionary
momentum**

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Letter of September 15, 2021

Feast of Saint Vincent De Paul

To all the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

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

*Spiritual
Life*

The month of September is called the Vincentian month because we, members of the worldwide Vincentian Family, prepare to celebrate together the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul with beautifully prepared Eucharists, liturgies of the Word, or other prayer encounters, engaging all the branches of the Vincentian Family in a given parish, village, city, region, or country. We also prepare to celebrate the feast with concrete acts of corporal and spiritual charity toward our Lords and Masters.

I would like to thank deeply and congratulate each branch of the Vincentian Family for the incredible inventiveness, engagement, and service it has shown from the outset of the pandemic through today to alleviate the suffering brought to the world by Covid-19, which, as always, hit hardest the Poor, the most vulnerable. We all hope and pray that the worst of the pandemic slowly is getting behind us, although that is true in some countries more than in others. We still live with much uncertainty as to what might come next.

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More and more, we are learning to use new tools to keep in touch with each other through social media, Zoom, and other platforms at our disposition. These are excellent means to grow in interconnectedness and collaboration. Nevertheless, we are experiencing, with even greater urgency, the need to resume personal encounters, meetings, and gatherings that we had before the Covid-19 pandemic spread around the world. After experiencing so long a period of isolation, distancing, and prohibition of meetings, it is our heart's desire to make personal encounters, meetings, and gatherings even more numerous.

While Vincent wrote more than 30,000 letters, the primary form of “remote” communication of his time, his days were filled with meetings with individuals and groups, and he clearly valued repetitions of prayer and conferences that brought together the confreres and the sisters.

Speaking of growth in interconnectedness, I would like to highlight three areas that I already discussed in the past. There have been big improvements in all of them, but there is still much to do to achieve the goals we set for ourselves in these spheres. Therefore, I am returning to them in this year's letter, convinced that if we succeed in intensifying interconnectedness and collaboration and in fulfilling the objectives we set for ourselves in these specific areas, the other areas will follow almost automatically, and it will be much easier to bring the 160 branches together for any new initiative that we may begin in the future.

1) National Councils of the Vincentian Family in all 162 countries where the Vincentian Family is present today.

The Vincentian Family Office (VFO) is working very hard to help to reach the following goal: by next year, 2022, all 162 countries will have a National Council of the Vincentian Family.

Who should be part of the National Council? The representatives of all the branches in a given country. No branch should be

left out, but all, large or small, should feel part of the same Family. If the country is big, there could be Regional Vincentian Family Councils, as well as Local Councils in large cities, as is already the case in some countries. All of these always would be interconnected among themselves and coordinated by the National Council.

I would like to call upon the branches in a given country, region, or city that have been there longer and have more experience than other branches in the field of organization to help bring the different representatives of the Family together. They are well positioned to invite branches and organize the Councils, in which every single branch will take part, in order to plan together different initiatives, projects, and encounters throughout the year. I encourage the National Councils not to limit encounters to once a year, but a few times a year, to develop and intensify collaboration and interconnection that will bring the Family together regularly.

To insist upon the importance of collaborating in initiatives begun by others and in line with the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission, Vincent imagined objections its members might make. *“Someone in the Company may say, ‘Monsieur, I’m in the world to evangelize the poor, and you want me to work in seminaries’”*¹; *“It’s fine for us to do that, Monsieur, but why should we be serving the Daughters of Charity?”*²; *“But the Foundlings, why burden ourselves with that? Don’t we have enough things to do?”*³ Vincent says that those who would turn away from such collaborative ministries are *“people who have only a narrow outlook, confining their perspective and plans to a certain circumference within*

1. Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XII, page 75; conference 195, “Purpose of the Congregation of the Mission.” Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD XII, 75.

2. Ibid., 76.

3. Ibid., 78.

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which they shut themselves away, so to speak, in one spot; they don't want to leave it, and if they're shown something outside it and go near to have a look, they immediately go back to their center, like snails into their shells."⁴

I invite you to do everything possible so that these encounters, projects, and initiatives will not be limited to two or three branches in a given country, region, or city, but include literally all the branches. Once one or another branch brings up an initiative and invites the other branches to collaborate, they certainly will follow.

2) Response to natural disasters, wars, and other calamities, as a whole Vincentian Family.

Within the Vincentian Family, we need to come up with a system on the international, national, regional, and local levels to respond as efficiently and quickly as we can to natural disasters, wars, and other calamities, not as a single branch, but together as the whole Vincentian Family. In fact, we already started to reflect and act in this area on the level of the Vincentian Family Executive Committee (VFEC).

Last year, we came together as an International Family to help the people affected by Covid-19, as well as the tragic explosion in the port of Beirut. The VFEC launched a campaign with the Committee of the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) to assist the hundreds of thousands of homeless in the Lebanese capital, through the Vincentian Family National Council in Lebanon, coordinated by its national president.

During the plague that struck Marseilles in 1649, Vincent, learning of the death of Father Brunet and of his lay collaborator, the Chevalier de la Coste, described a rapid response to the crisis. He wrote Antoine Portail, "*The Duchesse d'Aguillon is supposed to be sending you five hundred livres... If you need more money,*

4. Ibid., 81.

let me know; we shall send some immediately and, if need be, we shall sell our crosses and chalices to assist you.”⁵

By forming and strengthening the National Councils of the Vincentian Family in all 162 countries where we are present, we will have grassroots coordinating teams in collaboration with the Vincentian Family on the international level, which become a force on which the world’s poor can count. Every single branch, whether large or small, is an invaluable part of the wonderful mosaic that makes up the Vincentian Family.

3) Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) with its 13 Houses Campaign.

The FHA with the 13 Houses Campaign is an initiative in the area of charity that brings the Vincentian Family together and, thus, needs to be promoted within the Vincentian Family to reach each member’s heart so that everyone becomes involved. The FHA is our unique common project. Therefore, it must be promoted, introduced, and extended in all 162 countries where the Vincentian Family is present so that no Congregation or Association remains outside it, but all take an active part in the initiative in every corner of the world where we live and serve.

So far, 44 branches of the Vincentian Family have engaged actively in the FHA and the 13 Houses Campaign. It is now present in 44 countries; 1826 houses have been built, and 6628 people have been helped. We hoped that by last year’s Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul we would get many more additional branches, Congregations and lay Associations, to take part in one way or another in the FHA, but that goal was not reached. There is still a long way to go.

Unfortunately, the numbers of people who live on the streets, refugees who are displaced from their homes, and people living

5. CCD III, 465-466; L. 1125, “To Antoine Portail, in Marseilles,” 6 August 1649.

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in substandard housing are increasing drastically all around the world as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. A united response to these overwhelming needs is more necessary than ever.

Our time recalls the situation Vincent faced during the Fronde when he mobilized Vincentian and other ecclesial groups and individuals to assist displaced persons. He could report to his confrere in Poland, *“About eight hundred refugee girls have been placed in private houses, where they are taken care of and instructed. You can imagine how much harm would have been done if they had been left wandering around. We have a hundred of them in one house in the faubourg Saint-Denis; we are going to rescue from the same danger the nuns from the country, whom the armies have thrown into Paris. Some are on the streets, some are living in questionable places, and others are staying with relatives. Since, however, they are all in a state of dissipation and danger, it was felt that enclosing them in a monastery, under the care of the Daughters of Sainte-Marie, would be a service most pleasing to God.”*⁶

As I have written in a previous letter, we need to come quickly to the point where homelessness will not be tackled alone as an individual person or an individual branch, but together as a Family on the local, national, and international levels. Each branch, by bringing its long history of service to the homeless, its expertise, professionalism, and resources, helps to build up a wonderful force that becomes much more effective in helping the Poor.

To this end, I would like to invite any of the 160 branches of the Vincentian Family, which have yet to do so, to become active collaborators in the Famvin Homeless Alliance initiative by contacting the FHA coordinating committee member Mrs. Yasmine Cajuste: ([fha.info@famvin.org](mailto: fha.info@famvin.org)) to receive

6. CCD IV, 399; L. 1511 “To Lambert aux Couteaux, Superior, in Warsaw,” 11 June 1652.

information and materials. You also can visit the FHA website: vfhomelessalliance.org.

I wish every single member of the worldwide Vincentian Family in the widest sense of the word a deep experience of grace as we celebrate the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul in all corners of the world. May Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the Saints, Blessed, and Servants of God of the Vincentian Family continue interceding for us and inspiring us on the path to globalize Charity!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Father Tomaž MAVRIČ, CM
Superior General

Letter of September 27, 2021

Dear Sisters,

“Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God” (1 Cor 1:26-29).

This passage from the letter of Saint Paul, which the Vincentian Family liturgy offers us for September 27, makes me feel like I am listening to Saint Vincent himself, in terms of both the style and the content.

We know that the apostle Paul was someone fiery, provocative and sometimes verbally aggressive but who could challenge the crowds and pass on his faith. What a character! And what about Saint Vincent? We know our Founder well! He, too, was an uncompromising, resolute man who dared to shake up the first Ladies of Charity as well as the Daughters of Charity and the Priests of the Mission. Let us read a few of his conferences and delight in listening to him as he gets carried away. His heart speaks; he lays bare his life; his desire to serve God in those who are poor comes through powerfully:

“Wretched man, vile person that I am, to make use of an infamy! A beggar, a swineherd, riding in a carriage! Oh, what a scandal!

Savior of my soul, forgive me!” (June 8, 1658, CCD XII, 19). *“Prayer is as necessary to preserve the life of the soul as air is for a human being, or water is to keep a fish alive”* (November 17, 1658, CCD X, 484) and this well-known phrase: *“Quoi! To be a Christian and to see our brother suffering without weeping with him, without being sick with him! That’s to be lacking in charity; it’s being a caricature of a Christian; it’s inhuman; it’s to be worse than animals”* (May 30, 1659, CCD XII, 222).

While Saint Vincent is in his final years, he is for us a model of someone who, to the very end, maintained his enthusiasm, youthful heart, strong convictions and rebellious spirit in the face of injustice. He was clear-sighted and took a hard line with himself: *“I’m amazed at how they put up with me in my hastiness, outbursts, and so many other failings; yes, I’m amazed at how they can bear with me”* (May 30, 1658, CCD X, 388).

Sometimes, I question myself. Do I have this same lucidity about myself? Have I kept my inner fire burning enough to fight against injustice and suffering? Am I still eager to go to be with the Lord in the tabernacle?

Truly, Saint Vincent, with all his goodness and fieriness, points out the way for us. He does not seek the limelight; rather, he leads us towards Christ and urges us to be consistent and committed in the name of the Gospel. Indeed, it is folly in the eyes of the world to kneel down before a little piece of bread for adoration (Cf. Pope Francis, Angelus of August 22, 2021), just as to give one’s entire life for one’s brothers and sisters, convinced that fraternity can contribute to saving the world.

“God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong.”

Saint Paul clearly understood that with God, everything is the opposite of our very human reasoning. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways”* (Is 55:8).

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The same goes for Saint Vincent. He never tired of reminding the first Daughters of Charity of their origins and those of the Company made up of “*poor women who serve You [God] in the manner You have taught them*” (February 9, 1653, CCD IX, 469-470). When he spoke fondly of Marguerite Naseau, whose virtues we know well, he invited us to take her as a model whereas in the eyes of the world, she was “*just a poor, uneducated cowherd,*” and “*the village folk ridiculed and calumniated her*” (July 1642, CCD IX, 65).

The folly to which Saint Vincent invites us is precisely that of an extreme love in our gift of self to God, this going to extremes that impels us to go ever more towards those who are suffering the most, doing so freely, without special attachments and with the sole thought of serving our brothers and sisters. Isn't this our call? Going against the tide after the example of Christ of the Beatitudes, on the model of the Good Samaritan, is foolishness in the eyes of the world and wisdom in God's eyes.

I would like to share some touches of folly from our Sisters throughout the world, the folly of the Gospel in all sorts of peripheries! The folly of charity plays out in simple and creative fraternity in everyday events.

In Atar in the desert of Mauritania (Province of España Sur), the local community of three Sisters, along with disabled children, is developing a farm with goats, chickens, ducks... and a vegetable garden. Sales profit the children's families, an alternative to begging and all sorts of exploitation.

In Bolivia (Province of Nuestra Señora de la Misión America-Sur), the small local community of four Sisters in Porongo, prompted by families' isolation and dire poverty during the Covid pandemic, started making bread with the women of the AIC and a baker and organizing its distribution with the help of the parish priest!

In Brazzaville (Province of Congo), three Sisters and a postulant took advantage of school break to be more involved in a refugee camp of about 700 people, including 130 young children. They go out to meet them, empty-handed, open-hearted...

In Cuba (Province del Caribe), the political and economic situation of the country forces the Sisters to fight to survive together with the population.

In Ho Chi Minh City (Province of Vietnam), a group of Sisters preparing for vows are participating in the fight against Covid with young volunteers. Their mission? In a hospital, they clean, collect trash, empty waste bins, disinfect... They thus support the medical staff.

In Sassari (Province of Sardinia), the Daughters of Charity have provided emergency hospitality to families from Afghanistan, a total of 37 people, at the request of the diocese and the local government. Support and follow-up will take place in collaboration with Caritas and the diocese.

Local communities of elderly Sisters in every Province pray and remain open to the world. Their witness of faith, fidelity and fraternity is also a sign of this folly of the Gospel... another way to serve, proclaim the Good News and lovingly support the Company.

After a long process, four Provinces are going to dare to unite their forces for a better service of those who are poor. The Province of Madrid-Santa Luisa will join with the Province of Madrid-San Vicente on November 27, 2021, to form the Province of España-Centro. The Province of San Vincenzo-Italia will join with the Province of Sardinia on November 29, 2021, and will keep the name of the Province of San Vincenzo-Italia. We assure the Sisters of these four Provinces of our special prayer.

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All of this shows that Saint Vincent is very much alive today, everywhere. We are convinced of this, and it is the responsibility of each one of us to witness to this each day by simple acts, inspired by the boldness of those who know that they are weak yet chosen by God. He is the one who is at work. We trust Him, and as the General Assembly draws near, we place in His hands this encounter and all the Sisters preparing to come.

Thank you, Saint Vincent, and happy feast to all of you! Be assured of my prayer just as the General Councillors and I count on yours.

With my sisterly affection,

Sister Françoise PETIT
Daughter of Charity

Homily for Mass on Sunday, September 26, 2021

**Saint Vincent de Paul:
the man who tears open curtains!**

Chapel of the Mother House of the Congregation of the Mission
95 rue de Sèvres, Paris

The many missionaries present in our assembly have probably already flown on a plane! You have surely noticed, as I observed once again during my return flight from Rome Friday evening, that the first rows are reserved for passengers with a first-class ticket, and then come the rows for passengers with a second-class ticket.

Once the plane has taken off and they prepare to serve you refreshments, a steward or stewardess draws a curtain in the main aisle so that economy class travelers cannot see what will be served to those in first class and so that the latter won't be disturbed by envious looks from the other passengers.

Would Saint Vincent de Paul have sat in first class or in economy class? Our first instinct, considering his childhood and then his life, would be economy class. However, if we take the time to reflect on his apostolate with the powerful of this world, we could say that he also had his place in first class. The nobles with whom he rubbed shoulders, be they Queen Marguerite of France, the de Gondi family, Louise de Gonzague and many more, traveled in gilded carriages more often than in hay wagons!

Saint Vincent de Paul: the man who tears open curtains!

But make no mistake! If Saint Vincent was in first class, it was not for his personal comfort! His objective was to change how the nobles of his time looked at those who were most poor, explaining to the powerful that coming to their assistance is not only an act of charity but an act of justice. Saint Vincent de Paul, especially after 1617, an important date to which I will return, joined first class not to condemn it or judge those whom he met there but to convert them with no other arms than the Gospel, his faith and his perseverance. It is thus that Saint Vincent de Paul would tear open the curtain separating those who were rich from those who were poor, not by condemning but by converting!

However, before tearing this veil between rich and poor, Saint Vincent de Paul had to first tear the veil within himself. He himself had to go down the path of conversion. This path would be rough and last nearly four years. Four years for Vincent to understand and accept that God had to take His place in his life, that He had to reign there and for Vincent no longer to look out for himself but to seek to do God's business first. *We must seek God. God first, he would say, we must first look to God... let us seek the Kingdom of God, and all the rest will be added unto us. If we see to His affairs, He'll see to ours.* In the depths of the winter of 1617, at the bedside of a poor sick peasant man, God would beckon to him. That was where God would give him the certainty of his vocation and inner peace. It was there, in Gannes, in the department of Oise, that Vincent's inner curtain would be torn so that he would totally accept God's will. From that time on, Vincent would dedicate his life to tearing the curtains that impeded real charity among all, this charity in which each person gives and receives!

Tearing curtains! This was Vincent's vocation, and in this he was simply following his master, Christ. For Christ Himself came not to condemn or judge but to tear the curtain separating people from each other and people from God by calling them to conversion. The moment when the curtain would be torn definitively would be the moment of the cross. According to

Matthew the evangelist, when Christ died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (Mt 27:51). The curtain that concealed the holy of holies, the place of the divine presence, was torn because from then on, God no longer revealed Himself in the temple but on the cross. He revealed Himself in the most rejected and scorned of all people! Through the cross, Christ becomes fully, totally, the poorest person: the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the prisoner mentioned in today's Gospel, or the migrant, the lonely person, the homeless person... whom you encounter today!

Brothers and sisters, the next time that you take a plane, watch the steward or stewardess close the curtain. Then ask yourself: what is God asking of me? Which curtains am I called to tear within myself to recognize Christ in the poorest of the poor? Which curtains around me should I tear so that communion and charity gain ground in the world? With questions such as these, you can be sure that your trip will pass quickly and that, on arrival, you will not only disembark in another country, but you will already have one foot in the Kingdom of God! Amen!

Bishop Pascal DELANNOY
Diocese of Saint-Denis (France)

Reflection on the ministry of the Daughters of Charity

based on some texts of Saint Vincent de Paul

In our day, many people wonder about “the place of women in the Church.” In 2013, in the plane returning from World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Pope Francis lamented the lack of a “*profound theology of womanhood in the Church,*” without really specifying the content of such a theology. In the 17th century, moved on the one hand by the dire poverty reigning in vast swaths of France due to recurrent wars and, on the other hand, distressed by the lack of religious instruction for those dwelling in the countryside and the sorely deficient formation of priests, hindering access to the sacraments, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac created a Congregation of men (the Congregation of the Mission) and a Company of women (the Daughters of Charity), constituting a real ministry of corporal and spiritual service of persons who are poor with different methods, according to different qualities perceived as masculine or feminine. These two congregations had been preceded in 1617 by the creation of the Ladies of Charity, whom Saint Vincent placed in the tradition of “*deaconesses.*” Although Vincent did not explicitly compare the two roles, it seems evident that he considered the second as superior to the first: the role of deaconesses, according to him, was to “*seat the women in churches and teach them the rubrics then in use;*” as for the role of the Ladies of Charity, “*God established them as the mothers of abandoned children, made them the heads of their hospital and the distributors of alms from Paris for the provinces, principally for those in distress*” (CCD XIII, 432). It

is a real *diaconia* (service) of charity, a source of life for those who are marginalized.

For this essay, however, we will focus on the Daughters of Charity with the following method:

* By reading two conferences on the vocation of the Daughters of Charity (conferences of July 5 and 19, 1640, *CCD IX*, 13-16 and 16-23) and the conference on the virtues of Marguerite Naseau, archetype and model of the Daughters of Charity (conference 12, *CCD IX*, 64-66), we will study what being a Daughter of Charity meant for Saint Vincent, namely, being a daughter of God.

* Then, we will look at the first article of the Common Rules of the Daughters of Charity and that of the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission along with Letter 3077 to Jacques de la Fosse (*CCD VIII*, 276-279). This could help us to define the relationship between the ministry of the Congregation of the Mission and that of the Daughters of Charity and to show why we could speak of a single ministry encompassing complementary roles for the two congregations.

* Finally, we will use these reflections to try to draw a lesson on how we could today, after the example of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, organize a ministry joining men and women that responds to the needs of our time.

1 – The Daughters of Charity

In the corpus of letters, conferences and documents of Saint Vincent de Paul assembled and organized by René Coste in the 1920s, volumes IX and X contain the conferences to the Daughters of Charity. The two conferences of July 5 and 19, 1640, are dedicated to the vocation of the Daughters of Charity, presented as “*the happiness of Daughters of Charity: in what it consists, and what you must do to be good, true Daughters*”

Reflection on the ministry of the Daughters of Charity

of Charity.” Naturally, one could be a false and bad Daughter of Charity by failing to be faithful to what we might call the essence of the Daughters of Charity.

In the first conference of July 5, 1640, Vincent, in order to define this “happiness” of woman having chosen a particular vocation, starts from the happiness common to all Christians: “*remaining always in the state that makes them most pleasing to God so that there’s nothing that can displease Him.*” The happiness of Christians is doing what is pleasing to God. Only exaggerating slightly, we could say that the happiness of Christians is to make God happy; this happiness can thus only be defined in a relation and through a relation with their Creator. In a classic way, Vincent differentiates two categories, people who are married and dedicate themselves to their family and the “*observance of the Commandments,*” and consecrated people, “*those whom God calls to the state of perfection, such as religious in every Order and even those He places in Communities, such as the Daughters of Charity who, although they don’t have vows to sustain them for the present, are, nevertheless, in that state of perfection, if they’re true Daughters of Charity*” (CCD IX, 13).

In 1640, the Daughters of Charity did not really have Rules and had not made vows yet; moreover, when they would make them, the vows wouldn’t be perpetual but renewed annually. Nonetheless, Vincent insisted on the state of perfection that they should maintain. We will see that this “perfection” is not a state to attain for oneself as in the case of religious but is a means to reach a greater objective, which is the mission and the service of those who are poor and sick.

Still in this first conference, Vincent de Paul explained this perfection: it’s necessary to leave “*father, mother, possessions, and the hope of establishing a household. This is what the Son of God teaches in the Gospel;*” it is also necessary to obey, “*renounce ourselves.*” Why? We already know, it is because Jesus taught it; a Daughter of Charity follows Jesus, and by following Him,

she becomes a daughter of God: *“To be Daughters of Charity is to be daughters of God, daughters belonging entirely to God; for whoever is in charity is in God and God in her. We must do God’s will in its entirety”* (IX, 13-14). It is thus necessary to be a disciple of Jesus, and it is in following Jesus, in doing what He did, acting in a charitable way and accomplishing the will of His Father that one is a true Daughter of Charity. In other words, a Daughter of Charity is a daughter of God by being missionary like Jesus is missionary of the Father, which Vincent explained as he continued the conference: *“To be true Daughters of Charity you must do what the Son of God did when He was on earth... He worked constantly for His neighbor, visiting and healing the sick and instructing the ignorant for their salvation.”* We note that the Daughters of Charity are not limited, like most of the hospital sisters of that time, to the corporal service of the sick but must dedicate themselves to their instruction. We can recognize here the two-fold *diaconia* of charity and proclamation. What is striking is the grandeur of a Daughter of Charity’s vocation, emphasized by a skillful play of contrast: *“You, poor village girls and daughters of workmen, have the happiness of being among the first women called to this holy ministry.”* Here we have St. Paul’s pair of strength and weakness: it is in human weakness that God reveals His strength. Thus, from the humblest condition on the seventeenth-century social ladder, *“poor village girls and daughters of workmen,”* God lifts up the greatest of vocations, that of following Christ unconditionally in His mission with those who are poor and sick. To instruct the ignorant, God does not call the learned, but girls who are themselves ignorant, who therefore will not be the heralds of their own message but be a medium of the Word that God has placed in them. This ministry is almost unheard of in the history of the Church: *“Since the time of the women who served the Son of God and the Apostles, no Community has been established in God’s Church for this purpose”* (IX, 14).

In the second conference on the vocation of a Daughter of Charity (July 19, 1640, CCD IX, 16-23), Vincent intended to help them

Reflection on the ministry of the Daughters of Charity

discover “*God’s plan*” for their Company (IX, 17). He expanded on the aspects already mentioned in the first conference, starting from the beginning of the Rules: “*The Company of the Daughters of Charity is established to love and serve God, and to honor Our Lord their Patron and the Blessed Virgin,*” then “*to serve the sick poor corporally by supplying them with all they need; and spiritually by seeing that they live and die in a good state*” (IX, 18). The second quote indicates the means to fulfill the vocation of loving God. In particular, Vincent developed at length the theme of love of God and the means to “*love God above all things*”: giving themselves entirely to Him and doing His will in imitation of Jesus Christ “*who did nothing except from the motive of the love He had for God His Father*” (IX, 18). Let’s take a moment to consider the spiritual care of the sick, an essential task of the Daughters of Charity: care of the sick for their healing must be done for love of God. Vincent found support for his reasoning in Saint Paul’s hymn to charity (1 Cor 13). Corporal care could not be enough, even if it is done out of love of God: charity demands tending to patients’ relationship with God when it is wounded. If one cares for an “*enemy of God,*” how can this requirement be met? Is one really guided by charity in caring for God’s enemies? Or should one only care for His friends? Vincent took a different approach: “*among those whom you may serve, there will be many who are God’s enemies because of the sins they have been committing for such a long time and the ones they will perhaps want to commit after their illness, if you don’t try to change them from being God’s enemies to being His friends by true penance*” (IX, 19). The Daughters of Charity’s mission is to turn “*God’s enemies*” into “*God’s friends,*” to collaborate with God in His reconciliation with wounded humanity. Charity creates a profound unity between the corporal care of sick people and their spiritual service. There is no real charity if one is content to care just for patients’ illnesses or physical wounds; love of God necessitates holistic care of persons. A Daughter of Charity’s vocation is thus to care for patients corporally and also spiritually. We have already seen Vincent raising the ministry of the Daughters of

Charity to the level of the history of the Church; here, he went beyond this level and evoked God's eternity: "*from all eternity, God's plan for your establishment has been that you honor Him by doing your utmost in the service of souls to make them friends of God... doing so even before concerning yourselves with their physical care*" (IX, 19). We see here the great importance of the mission of the Daughters of Charity, desired from all eternity by God to continue His work in the world. It is not exaggerating to say that, like the Vincentian Missionaries and with them (as we will see later), the Vincentian Sisters collaborate in God's act of creation by helping to recreate the wounded relationship between people and Himself.

This Company, conceived from all eternity by God, nonetheless did not come out of thin air; its beginning took the form of a young woman from Suresnes who might have remained an isolated phenomenon if she hadn't captured the attention of Saint Louise de Marillac. We will not make a detailed study of the conference on the virtues of Marguerite Naseau (July 1642, CCD IX, 64-66), but we will point out what demonstrates that this "*poor, uneducated cowherd*" constitutes the archetype of the Daughters of Charity.

Many elements of this conference show Vincent's conviction that Marguerite was a sort of "incarnation" of God's will. She "*had almost no other teacher or schoolmistress but God,*" was "*moved by a powerful inspiration from heaven,*" without "*any other assistance except Divine Providence,*" etc. These expressions reveal a real prophetic figure. In all the tasks that she undertook, Marguerite was guided by no one other than God's will, and Divine Providence took care of her: "*She herself told Mlle Le Gras [Louise de Marillac] that one time, when she hadn't had any bread for several days but hadn't told anyone of her distress, she found, on her return from Mass, enough food to last her for quite a long time*" (IX, 65). This is a clear illustration of Jesus' Gospel call to not worry about what you will eat the next day nor how you will accomplish the mission but to trust in God's

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love. Like the poor widow of the Gospel, she “*gave away all she had, depriving herself even of necessities,*” and her work bore fruit because the young men whom she supported during their studies “*are now good priests*” (IX, 66). This is an illustration of the perfection that the Daughters of Charity should have, a perfection that has nothing to do with a personal desire to be virtuous but with conformity to God’s will so that the mission might bear fruit. This life in relationship with God makes her the archetypical Daughter of Charity, disciple of Jesus Christ and daughter of God. Such is the Incarnation that continues in the world when God inspires men and women to follow the example of His Son and makes those who continue His mission His brothers and sisters. In his conference, Vincent de Paul described how she learned to read with a primer while watching over the cows, asking men to tell her how to pronounce letters; he then described how the call of Providence impelled her to teach young people, going “*from village to village... accompanied by two or three other young women she had instructed*” (IX, 65) and how, “*as soon as she heard that there was a Confraternity of Charity in Paris for the sick poor, off she went, driven by the desire to be involved in this ministry*” (IX, 66). The instruction of youth and the service of the sick are the two primary tasks of the Daughters of Charity, and it was a simple uneducated cowherd, impelled by God’s will, who invented this ministry. Louise de Marillac’s shrewd and inspired eye allowed her to detect God’s hand in this undertaking and to continue it through the Company of the Daughters of Charity.

2 – The Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission and those of the Company of the Daughters of Charity

The Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission begin with the presentation of the mystery of the Incarnation, and the whole program of the Congregation is summarized in the first sentence: “*We read in Sacred Scripture that Our Lord Jesus Christ, sent on earth for the salvation of the human race, did not begin by teaching; He began by doing.*” Jesus “did”

by “*integrat[ing] fully into His life every type of virtue*” and “*taught*” by preaching and instructing His Apostles and disciples. The Congregation of the Mission “*wants... to imitate Christ the Lord,*” seeking to practice His virtues, to “*preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas*” and to “*help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry*” (I, 1).

The first article of the Rules of the Daughters of Charity reads, “*The principal end for which God has called and assembled the Daughters of Charity is 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.*” We might note that, in contrast to the Priests of the Mission, who “*want*” to imitate Christ, God “*called and assembled the Daughters of Charity,*” exactly as Jesus “*called and assembled*” the college of Apostles. It is thus more evident that the Company of the Daughters of Charity exists because of the will of God. The purpose of the Company is “*to honor Our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and model of all charity,*” and this is what was missing in the mission of the men’s congregation. The Daughters of Charity do what the Missionaries could not do – heal the sick corporally and spiritually – as Saint Vincent wrote to his confrere Jacques de la Fosse in a letter dated February 7, 1660.

This letter is Vincent de Paul’s response to one from Jacques de la Fosse, since lost, in which he asked why the Vincentian priests should take on the spiritual direction of the Daughters of Charity and not that of other nuns. After mischievously replying that the Daughters of Charity are not in fact nuns, Vincent reminded him of the importance for the Congregation of the Mission of works of charity and the corporal and spiritual service of the sick; this is why the Congregation had established Confraternities of Charity; he then reminded him how Jacques de la Fosse himself “*thought [accomplishing this task] would be the death of*” him. After mentioning the good done for the service of those who are poor by the Confraternities of Charity, particularly those of Paris,

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Saint Vincent demonstrated the importance of the Daughters of Charity who “*have become, in the order of Providence, a means God has given us to do by their hands what we cannot do by our own in the corporal assistance of the sick poor, and to say by their lips a few words of instruction and encouragement for their salvation*” (CCD VIII, 278). In other words, the Daughters of Charity are desired by God and given to the Congregation of the Mission to fulfill the tasks that it cannot do. This clearly shows to what extent the responsibilities of the Priests of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity are the necessary complements for the continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ in the history of humanity, in particular in the holistic service of those who are poor and sick.

We should take a closer look at the word “means,” which seems to subordinate the Daughters of Charity to the Congregation of the Mission. In reality, it is more of a rhetorical device, a “*captatio benevolentiae*,” to convince Jacques de la Fosse of the Vincentians’ duty to spiritually accompany their companions in ministry. This accompaniment aims to “*help them in their own advancement in virtue so that they can carry out well their charitable works.*” Like nuns, the Daughters of Charity strive for perfection, but unlike them, this perfection has its own end, which is the mission: “*So then, there is this difference between them and nuns: the latter have for their end only their own perfection, whereas these Sisters are devoted, like us, to the salvation and comfort of their neighbor.*” “*Like us*” is not a mere detail; it nuances the “means” mentioned earlier: “*If I say with us, I will be saying nothing contrary to the Gospel but something very much in conformity with the practice of the primitive Church, for Our Lord took care of some women who followed Him*” (VIII, 278). We again find Vincent writing the Daughters of Charity into a fundamental role in the history of the Church, presenting them as the heirs of the women who followed Jesus. The Daughters of Charity are thus not a simple “means” for the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission; they are their companions in the mission, in accordance with God’s will.

To conclude this very brief survey of a few conferences, letters and documents of Saint Vincent de Paul, we can say that the Daughters of Charity were established to follow and imitate Jesus Christ in His mission of the evangelization of the sick poor, to care for them not only corporally but also spiritually, in conformity with their condition as daughters of *charity*. They must work to heal the sick, not only in their bodies, but above all by helping them to repair their wounded relationship with God, particularly by offering them the instruction they lack and encouraging them to lead a life of charity. As Daughters of Charity, they are daughters of God, sisters of Jesus Christ. Through their proximity with those who are sick, the Sisters are able to accomplish a work that is necessary and complementary to that of the Vincentians. Vincent de Paul probably would not have recognized this equal complementarity of the missions of men and women in a single ministry of the service of those who are poor if Louise de Marillac had not constantly inspired and spurred him. The foundation of the Ladies of Charity with lay women living in the world generally as wives and mothers, of the Congregation of the Mission with priests and brothers living in community and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity with consecrated women (although not nuns) was the common work of a man and a woman, Vincent and Louise, who, in an authentically fraternal relationship, mutually enriched each other with their faith life and their own sensibilities.

3 - What can we conclude for our era?

In founding the Confraternities of Charity and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac were not focused on “giving women a place” in the Church. Rather, a necessity and a logical conclusion impelled them to employ the appropriate means in the work of charity. It was observing Marguerite Naseau that inspired Louise de Marillac. Strictly speaking, it was this “simple cowherd” who invented the Daughters of Charity; Vincent and Louise simply reproduced the ministry inspired in her by God, her only teacher,

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as Vincent said in his conference. Similarly, today, we must observe and study, in our time and not just in a more or less mythical past, by what means the love of God takes flesh in our world and which prophets and prophetesses continue, quite often without realizing it, Jesus Christ's mission of healing wounded humanity. Perhaps it is not necessary to invent new ministries; it suffices to make the effort to recognize those that God shows us.

Perceval PONDROM, CM
Seminarian

Province of Cameroon

Testimony about a community activity demonstrating fraternity

“In a society that tends to reduce everything to flat uniformity, where injustice gives rise to divisions and hostility, in a world torn and aggressive, ensure that the witness of fraternal life and community will never be lacking!”

(Pope Francis)



*News from
the Provinces*

These words from the Pope bring out the challenge of facing the many crises afflicting our modern world. Strengthened by all the experiences lived in community after the example of Christ to serve those who are poor, we can say with the psalmist, “How good and how pleasant it is when Sisters dwell together as one” (cf. Ps 133:1).

This life of fraternal communion is nurtured by the efforts of all nine native and missionary Sisters who make up our local community.

In order to maintain a joyful atmosphere so each Sister might flourish in her vocation, we have activities on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual and annual schedule, to which we strive to keep as much as possible.

Here is an example of our community life during a community outing to the city of Douala.

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During the last quarter of 2020, we learned that the health of Father Albert Atching, CM, was declining. We unanimously decided to visit him at the local community of the Priests of the Mission in Douala and set the date from Friday to Sunday so that we could have a community outing at the same time.

The eve of our trip, we called Father Albert to inform him of our visit; he told us that he was hospitalized but would be delighted to see us.

Upon our arrival in Douala, we first went to greet the Vincentian Fathers; we had planned to go see Father Albert at the hospital afterwards. However, to our great surprise, we saw Father Albert there, standing up to greet us. He had asked the medical staff for permission to return home because “foreigners” were coming there, including nurses who would be able to continue to care for him.

His confreres told us how much the news of our visit had caused a great improvement in Father Albert’s health. We were really very happy to see his joy despite his suffering.

The nurse then provided the necessary care while others talked with him or prepared the meal. Each of us made herself useful in line with her abilities, and that provided a little joy for the entire community, tested by this difficult situation. “Yes, see how they love one another, these brothers and sisters!”

The next day, we visited the various touristic sites of the city of Douala, a time of relaxation and even of communal witness through our joyful presence in the streets of the city.

We then went to the house of one of the Sisters of the Province because we knew that her mother was ill. The mother was happy to see us, sensing the presence of her daughter through us. It was yet another way for us to live fraternity beyond the local community.

Of course, we sometimes have tensions, misunderstandings, failures in mutual support, etc. in our local community. We are well aware that, even in the first Christian communities, there were lively discussions, contradictions and even conflicts... nonetheless, the Church of Christ did not stop growing since fraternity can overcome all sorts of tensions and misunderstandings; it invites sharing, making concessions and daring to practice reconciliation. This is what we try to live together in order to support each other in our discipleship of Christ.

As a sort of conclusion, we would like to emphasize the importance of prayer life, listening to the Word of God and review of life, our life and the life of those who are poor. These are vital supports for practicing charity, first among ourselves, as well as around us.

Local community in Dschang

Province of Madrid-San Vicente

**Experience of fraternity,
dream of communion**

Building fraternity by creating bonds of communion among Sisters and lay people was one of the objectives from our 2014 Provincial Assembly. Based on that objective, we developed a Shared Mission Plan entitled “*Committed and responsible for the charism*” with 4 lines of action:

- 1 – progress in identification with the charism: “*we are more,*”
- 2 – foster shared reflection: “*let us dream together,*”
- 3 – cultivate apostolic friendships: “*let us be community,*”
- 4 – live out the Vincentian commitment: “*let us make choices with conviction.*”

The third line of action led us to a “dream of communion” and the formation of groups made up of Sisters and lay collaborators for sharing our faith together and reflecting on educational themes but also for praying and holding monthly meetings locally and annual gatherings on a Provincial level.

During the 2018-2019 school year, we began new groups called “Vincentian Communities” in different service areas and sites.

Several members of these Vincentian Communities shared their experience of fraternity.

A SHARED DREAM

“Reflecting on the charism we’ve received means reflecting on an immense gift to open each day.”

After entering the Company on September 8, 1982, I was taught by my formators during the initial years of my vocation to love our charism, have a sense of belonging to the Company and participate actively in it.

“And that, Sisters, was the beginning of your Company. As it wasn’t then what it is now, there’s reason to believe that it’s still not what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it” (CCD IX, 194).

With God’s grace, the seed sown in those first years grew, and I was led to share this “gift” with the people whom I encountered in my daily service. This is why sharing the charism and living a shared mission are a grace and blessing for me that make me happy. God fills my life with meaning and the desire to share it with my brothers and sisters.

I began the shared mission at Santísima Trinidad Intermediary School in Villalba with someone steeped in the Vincentian charism. Educated in the school where she taught, she was asked to be the education coordinator. What a beautiful experience I had with her! Six years of sharing life and the charism, united in a single mission at the service of teachers, students and their parents.

The third line of action of the Provincial Shared Mission Plan invites us to cultivate apostolic friendships, to create bonds of communion in faith that make us friends in Christ and friends of Christ.

In this context, the formation of Vincentian Communities was a very important step and a dream of communion proposed by our

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Province. I wanted to collaborate in this dream by offering this opportunity to lay people in Santísima Trinidad school. Thus, as members of a single family, laity and Sisters, we shared the best of ourselves with the desire of forming a community making us “*friends in Christ and friends of Christ.*” We began on the feast of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal; with the Virgin Mary at our side, we were assured of her protection. Once a month, we gathered to pray, share and reflect together to respond to the gift the Lord has placed in our hands. The gatherings concluded with a fraternal meal.

At the end of my service in that school, I was sent to San José Intermediary School in Valdemoro, where I was able to continue this dream. I shared administration of the school with a lay woman; one as principal and the other as education coordinator. We worked together to seek what was best for the school. Once again, I invited the teaching and other staff to form a Vincentian Community in which we could reflect, share our life and mission and pray together.

The pandemic forced us to halt our in-person meetings, but we continue to remain united in another way, by praying, being involved and advancing in our commitment to living the charism together.

Sister Maria del Camen Gómez Pérez
San José Intermediary School in Valdemoro (Madrid)

A DREAM OF FAITH AND UNITY

“*All who believed were together and had all things in common*” (Acts 2:44) reflects well my feeling about the group that we created in the school where I work. Faith is our backbone. I have always thought that, as Christians, we should not isolate ourselves, and that it is fundamental to be united in order to progress together towards God. Yes, it is truly important to share our life and faith with others!

Looking back, I realize that the Vincentian Community is part of my life journey. I recognize that nothing happens by chance for God; I was meant to belong to this Vincentian Community.

From my childhood, I had the good fortune of living the Christian faith in my family. I remember praying the rosary, kneeling before the statue of the Virgin Mary with my grandmother seated by the fire. My father was the leader of the group for my First Communion preparation. I can never thank my parents enough for having passed on the gift of faith to me.

As an adolescent, I attended VMY catechesis even though I was not a student at the Vincentian school. Some friends had invited me “by chance” to one of the meetings led by Sister Nélida. As soon as I arrived, I was moved by the quality of their welcome, their trust, their ease in sharing life events and their joy in living their faith. This was my first contact with Saint Vincent.

About thirteen years later, already having begun my own family, “chance” had it that I return to that Vincentian intermediary school as a teacher. The Vincentian charism, which I had discovered earlier, captivated me, and I wanted to let myself be swept up by the passion of Saint Vincent and that of his Daughters for those who are most poor, but I still had much to learn.

Last year, when Sister Carmen presented the Vincentian Communities program to the teachers, I wanted to join, sure that it was the Spirit bringing us together. Here as well, it certainly was not “by chance” that God beckoned to me and invited me to respond to Him.

We began the Vincentian Community at our school, a total of sixteen of us, quite different in age and life experience. These differences were very enriching because the atmosphere in our gatherings was that of respect, listening and mutual affection. I felt heard, respected and understood.

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At each meeting, we pray, share our joys and concerns and reflect based on the Word of God in order to better discern God's will. This helps me to live my faith and some difficult personal situations better. With the perspective of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, we deepen our Christian life and try to put Gospel values into practice to help life to triumph, especially with young people going through difficult situations. The Vincentian Community recognizes its responsibility for a legacy of love to live out in a shared mission with the Daughters of Charity.

But the pandemic came along to temporarily interrupt our life and even our in-person gatherings at school. However, it could not put an end to our dream of unity. Despite social distancing, we remain a solid group and stay connected regularly thanks to WhatsApp. Some colleagues live far from the school, so it is difficult to resume gatherings, but the pandemic cannot break the bonds of friendship that have been created. We eagerly await the day when we will again be able to meet, embrace and share a piece of our life journey and faith journey, all together in our shared mission. I give thanks to God for the opportunity to belong to this Vincentian Community from which I learn so much: faith, commitment, union, fraternity.

Marta Martín Soler
San José Intermediary School in Valdemoro (Madrid)

A DREAM OF SOLIDARITY

For Pope Francis, the word “fraternity” means an extended hand, respect, listening with an open heart. This requires a certain assurance in one's personal convictions.

In this spirit, the Vincentian Community of the Social Services of Madrid was formed as a response to a call, consisting of men and women who work in the Social Services of the Daughters of Charity and who draw inspiration from the same charism.

We feel the need to go deeper into this charism with days of formation, prayer, reflection and sharing of experiences in order to make faith more effective in our work, family and relational life.

One of the foundations of our Vincentian Community is sharing the same passion for Christ and a deep sense of belonging to Him. We are proud to be Christians and to belong to the Vincentian Family, which supports us in living the Gospel authentically in our professional duties.

Coming out of ourselves, creating bonds of solidarity with others, listening to them, accepting them with love, being a community... it is a new life style that touches our personal and professional lives.

This fraternal Vincentian Community responds to our need to pray regularly and to grow in faith together. It also provides for strengthening connections and finding the needed strength to confront the daily challenges of the mission with hope.

Our dream of solidarity thus becomes a reality because living out our professional activity in this family of faith and shared life implies that we commit to sowing hope among all those for whom we are responsible.

Gema Péres Torres
Marillac Association in Madrid

A DREAM THAT FEEDS THE SOUL

Our Vincentian Community is a place of encounter, part of the shared mission among the Daughters of Charity and lay people who live a common charism, the Vincentian charism. We gather monthly to pray, reflect and share a meal.

For me, these gatherings are moments of peace, of personal and spiritual well-being. In the middle of the maelstrom of the week,

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the Sisters open their house to us so we can have an afternoon together for discussion, prayer and the sharing of experiences. All of these times of sharing have allowed me to see the Sisters and my colleagues from another perspective, that of faith. I discovered that, despite our different vocations, our nature is the same, and our faith has the same foundations. I observe that after each meeting, small changes occur in my life, and my hardened heart is gradually converted into a heart of flesh able to believe in LOVE with capital letters, that which transforms people.

I thank the Daughters of Charity for this dream that feeds our soul, for their courage in bringing us together, believing in us and counting on us to keep their charism, our charism, alive.

Pilar Herrero Yudego
La Inmaculada Marillac Intermediary School in Madrid

“To speak of a ‘culture of encounter’ means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life” (Fratelli tutti, 216).

This project, which we hone together and that influences our life style, makes our dream of communion a reality: a dream shared among Sisters and lay people, a dream of unity that helps us to create bonds among us, a dream of faith that brings us closer to Jesus, a dream of solidarity that impels us to carry out our mission of service with those who are most poor with greater enthusiasm and authenticity. Ultimately, a dream that feeds the soul because it helps us to live in peace and to be happier.

“Dreams... are built together” (Fratelli tutti, 8).

Group of Sisters and lay people
Province of Madrid-San Vicente

Province of the Near East
Fraternity in diversity

Since 1950, the Daughters of Charity of the Province of the Near East have been present in Sedfa, Upper Egypt. The local community currently consists of three Sisters from three different continents and cultures (Egypt, Ecuador and Spain). We live fraternity in diversity, which enriches us personally and communally whenever we overcome our differences thanks to dialogue, acceptance of one another as we are and the contribution of each Sister to the common mission.

Our experience of fraternity has gone through *internal* personal and community difficulties as well as *external* ones.

How did we manage, despite these difficulties, to improve fraternal life for the service of those who are poor? We believe that their key word was “*sharing*.”

* *Sharing on the Word of God*. After developing a community formation plan on the Word of God, we studied and shared on the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. This shed light on various situations that we experienced.

* *Sharing on the Constitutions, the Rules and the writings of the Founders*. We reflected together about how to respond to external difficulties in fidelity to our Vincentian spirit. We affirmed, “We are just humble and simple servants.” “*They shall endure willingly and for the love of God inconveniences, contradictions, mockeries, calumnies, and other mortifications which may befall*

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them, even on account of the good they do” (Common Rules I, 7).

* **Sharing the different services asked of us.** We recalled the importance of the conviction that the mission is shared and that each Sister is responsible for her vocation and that of her companions.

* **Sharing prayer and on our faith** helped us to live more intensely in the love of the Lord, present in the midst of His people and of His Church. This led us to have greater trust in Providence, opening ourselves to God’s surprises, for it is the Holy Spirit who shapes us as a community sent on mission.

In the face of difficulties, insults and calumnies, we decided to take up the belt of truth, the shield of justice and the arms of humility, unconditional service and discernment in order to determine how to respond in a given situation.... When those who are poor knock at the door to ask us not to leave them, we should always open our door.

The call of those who are poor invites us to greater fraternity centered on “**OPENING**”:

- **Opening the large courtyard of our house** to children and youth with the “Come play with us” program during the long summer school vacation. The objective is to offer them the opportunity to play and do different activities that allow them to enter into relationship with each other and establish friendships, rather than remain in the street, in front of the television or on the internet.

- **Opening to all Christians.** Parents asked us to open our house to all families, whether they be Orthodox, Evangelical or Protestant, since there is no other place here to gather and entertain children and youth. They committed to organizing events with us and to collaborating so that everyone could have a real *ecumenical experience*.

- **Opening to go forth to** a small Christian village, **Gazira**, not

so far from our house. The inhabitants of this village have been isolated and abandoned for years. They have great difficulty educating their children and enrolling them in school as well as obtaining social and religious assistance. The villagers' welcome moved us. We decided to meet regularly to share life and faith in all simplicity. This allowed for the creation of deeper bonds of fraternity among them and with us: a wonderful experience of social friendship.

- ***With the group of disabled children.*** In our cultural context, parents continue to be "ashamed" of their disabled children and to hide them to avoid villagers' demeaning comments and children's taunting. We freed up a small room so these children could do some activities adapted to their situation. In this way, the young children without prejudices in the day care can meet them and come to know and accept them. The young children's parents progressively accepted that their little ones learn to play with the disabled children and create bonds of friendship with them.

- ***With our Muslim brothers and sisters.*** In our service at the clinic, we practice respect and trust. When they have a serious health condition, we go to their home, and they open not only their house but also their heart to us. We share their joys (births, marriages) and their sufferings (deaths) but also faith in an almighty and loving God. We believe that Christ is present in each one of them. These *relationships of social friendship* evangelize us.

- ***With families.*** In our interactions with them, we want to help them become agents of their own promotion to get out of a situation of dependence. When families request financial assistance, we offer them the opportunity to present a small project that will allow them to work to support their family, simply asking them to account for what they will have done with the assistance: receipts, photos, etc. We have the joy of seeing the fruit of their work: sewing machines, delivery tricycles, *tok tok* (a mode of transportation), small businesses, material for house or building painting... More

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than a relationship of social assistance, we live in fraternity with these families.

This is our experience of building fraternity, not only within our local community, but also in our service and with our neighbors. We give thanks to God, to the Company, to the Province and to each Sister of the local community for the possibility to have such enriching experiences.

Local community in Sedfa
(Upper Egypt)

Province of La Milagrosa Bogota-Venezuela

“When fraternity becomes possible”

Sister Clemencia Rengifo House is a local community of twenty-six Sisters, twenty-three of whom are over 70 years old; the youngest is 45 years old. In the words of the Sister Servant, the local community is the **“rosebush of the Province,”** a garden that is fertile by God’s grace, always alive with its heart beating, trying day after day to make fraternity possible through each Sister’s effort.

Openness characterizes this local community: the door is always open and the table set to welcome younger generations, discerners, postulants, families and friends of our Sisters, Daughters of Charity from other local communities and even other Provinces who come to visit us.

At this period in life, as the weight of the years and health problems make themselves felt more acutely, we are convinced that **this is the time to live our vocation as Daughters of Charity fully.** This is why we strive to favor a deep interior life, prayerful liturgies, celebrations full of affection and joy and a constant attitude of availability, service and welcome.

In this sense, our house has always had a special interest in the groups of collaborators (employees) and nurses who devotedly accompany us. In this family atmosphere, employees participate actively in some of our community activities and liturgical celebrations for feast days, which they enrich with their creativity and joy. All celebrations, all the important moments

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of community life and farewells to Sisters who go to heaven are prepared, celebrated and experienced together.

We also enjoy the spiritual accompaniment of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission, our brothers and chaplains, guided by the Provincial Director who, day after day, share with us the Word of God and the Eucharistic Bread and open the door of God's mercy to us through the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. We can also be nourished by the spirit of our Holy Founders, with the Vincentian mystique and spirituality, so necessary in the twilight of our life.

This year, we celebrate the jubilee of three of our Sisters, three **“branches of the almond tree”** (Jer 1:11), who continue to bloom and announce that, in our personal and community winters, spring comes.

Our Sister Servant's dedication makes fraternity possible, daily weaving a beautiful community fabric consisting of affection, respect and mutual assistance, but also tolerance and the constant commitment to become better Daughters of Charity.

The Covid-19 pandemic shook us deeply. Five Sisters in the Province died, and the local community was not spared as fourteen Sisters were infected, but, thank God, none of them died. This global human tragedy invites us to offer our life even more for our suffering brothers and sisters.

We realize that we were privileged by the human, spiritual and community resources made available to us in this unprecedented situation, and all the potential of the community was immediately set in motion.

Our local community became a “field hospital,” as Pope Francis often says. Three of our Sisters, with the nurses and staff, formed a team that braved infection. Day and night, they went to great lengths to make sure we were wanting for nothing and would get

through the emergency.

The Provincial Curia, for its part, was very attentive to the sick Sisters in the house and to those admitted to city hospitals or clinics for more advanced care. Thanks to the assistance of all, fraternity helped us to recover slowly although the pandemic left its mark on mind and body.

We were in communion with “our Lords and Masters the poor” who experienced this global humanitarian crisis without the necessary care, putting them in very precarious situations to which were added the pain and helplessness of seeing their loved ones die.

We draw several lessons from this humanitarian tragedy:

- *“All things work for good for those who love God”* (Rom 8:28). Covid-19 put us face to face with our own vulnerability and revealed the false securities on which we sometimes build our life.

- In times of crisis and danger, our deep convictions nourish and sustain us: Divine Providence, which never fails us, the protection of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, she who loves and watches over the Company, as well as the strength that we receive from following Christ.

- The role of mediations through which God reveals His love and support: our Superiors, the Priests of the Mission...

- The dedication of medical staff – doctors, nurses, employees – who were the “hands of God” for us. Silently and sometimes at the risk of their life and that of their family, they continued to care for us.

Sisters' Testimonies

- The importance of the mystique of living together and the values of community life like respect, solidarity, attention, little gestures, active listening, tolerance, forgiveness, reconciliation...

It is only with community life nourished by daily prayer, the Eucharist, the sacraments and attentive listening to the needs of our suffering brothers and sisters but also to the events of the world and of the Church that we can respond to Pope Francis' calls from his encyclical *Fratelli tutti: Brothers All*. Despite our vulnerabilities and weaknesses, we are imbued with the Spirit of Him who first loved us and entrusted us with the fundamental and essential task of "making fraternity possible."

Local community of
Sister Clemencia Rengifo Retirement House

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Heart of a Mother¹

This article presents an overview of how Elizabeth Ann Seton encountered Mary, the mother of Jesus, and how she nurtured devotion to the Blessed Virgin in others.



*History of
the Company*

Born into a Protestant Episcopal family in the British colony of New York, Elizabeth and her sisters were raised by a stepmother and paternal relatives. Although their father, Dr. Richard Bayley, had his daughters baptized at Trinity Episcopal parish, he was more interested in medical science than liturgical worship. Betsy Bayley's early religious formation included psalms, hymns and basic prayers of the Anglican tradition. Psalm 23 was Elizabeth's favorite and sustained her throughout her life. Elizabeth's familiarity with the Bible pervades her correspondence and spiritual writings, which her spiritual daughters preserved. Those original documents enable modern readers to glean insights about how Elizabeth understood Mary of Nazareth as a mother and model of virtue:

1. 9.18, Advent & Christmas Meditations, Regina Bechtle, S.C., and Judith Metz, S.C., eds., Ellin M. Kelly, mss. ed., *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: Collected Writings*, 3 vols. (New City Press: New York, 2000-2006), 3a:380. Hereinafter cited as *CW*. "*Ialso will have the heart of a Mother at that Manger.*"

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

- Letters sent to Rebecca Seton, her sister-in-law, during the first months of 1804, describe the initial encounters with Roman Catholicism of Elizabeth Bayley Seton, a recently widowed Protestant in Tuscany.
- Meditations, instructions and reflections written by Mother Seton as the spiritual leader of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s reveal her Catholic heart and Marian devotion. Her last instruction, “*Mary, Our Mother,*” is especially eloquent.

“BY FAITH,” PASSING THROUGH A CURTAIN

In January 1804, Antonio and Amabilia Filicchi invited the young widow Elizabeth Seton and Annina (Anna Maria) to go with them to Florence. That journey was the dawn of her *Ephata*, a religious breakthrough in her faith journey.

Florence’s natural beauty, architecture, art and statuary with Judeo-Christian themes warmed her heart as a wellspring of grace arose within her. *When Elizabeth entered the Marian Basilica of the Most Holy Annunciation, it was probably the first Catholic Church she had ever visited.*

Her familiarity with sacred Scripture enhanced her appreciation of the artistic beauty her eyes beheld. Luke’s account of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) inspired Elizabeth, still an Episcopalian at that time, to reflect on the unique role of Mary.²

“Hail, thou that art highly favored — the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women’... Joyfully did the blessed Spirit announce to the innocent and Holy Virgin the approach of redemption. The first preacher of the Gospel was an Angel...

2. 8.24, “Annunciation,” Extracts from Rev. George Henry Glasse, *Contemplations on the Sacred History* (1798), *CW*, 3a:84-85. Elizabeth Seton selected extracts from this author and added included her own insights in copies she made.

*The blessing announced to the highly favored Mary diffused its gracious influence on all the world... Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy [Spirit]. O God, who can partake of thee and not be happy.”*³

As a woman of faith and a mother, Elizabeth understood the sacredness of carrying and nurturing new life. The loss of loved ones was not foreign to her either. Knowing motherly joy and sorrow influenced Elizabeth to bond with Mary as a mother.⁴ Maternal love became Elizabeth’s prism of faith.

During her visit to the Basilica of the Most Holy Annunciation, Elizabeth was awed by its Baroque decoration. Kneeling in the closest vacant pew, she yielded to her grieving heart and wept, lamenting her absence from the consolation of familiar worship *“in the house of my God.”*⁵

Elizabeth noticed that *“old men and women, young women, and all sorts of people [were] kneeling promiscuously about the Altar as inattentive to us or any other passengers, as if we were not there... everyone... so intent on their prayers and Rosary that it is very immaterial what a stranger does.”*⁶ Such anonymity consoled Elizabeth and permitted her to mourn the unfulfilled hopes of the Setons’ voyage and the death of her beloved husband. She had stored storms of sorrow behind an inner barricade that separated her aching heart from the Source of solace.

The next day, visiting the Basilica of Saint Lawrence, *“a sensation of delight struck”* her *“forcibly.”*⁷ As she approached the altar *“formed of all the most precious stones, marbles, etc... ‘My Soul does magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,’”* –

3. Ibid., 1:84.

4. Ibid.

5. 2.10, Florence Journal to Rebecca Seton, [January 1804], *CW*, 1:283.

6. Ibid., 1:283-284.

7. Ibid., 1:285. Luke 1:46-47.

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the first verse of the Magnificat – “*came in[to] [her] mind with a fervor which absorbed every other feeling,*”⁸ echoing Mary of Nazareth.

Then, at the Church of Santa Maria Novella, a single painting among all the works by great artists engaged Elizabeth’s full attention: *Il Desposizione (Lamentation of the Dead Christ)*. Elizabeth identified with the Sorrowful Mother of Jesus, relating to her loss in a uniquely personal way. The image of Mary receiving the lifeless body of her Son was embedded in her imagination.⁹

A DISCERNING HEART

After their return to Livorno, Elizabeth occasionally attended Mass with Amabilia at Saint Catherine of Siena Church. Since Elizabeth was not familiar with Catholic liturgical practices, she began to ask questions about Catholicism, first out of curiosity, then for clarification and information. When the Filicchi explained the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, Elizabeth reacted emotionally and tried to hide her tears by covering her face.¹⁰

During their visit to the Marian sanctuary of Montenero, Our Lady of Grace, an incident occurred which distressed Elizabeth. In response to the ill-mannered interjection of a person kneeling nearby, Elizabeth automatically bent lower in reverence, thinking to herself, “*They discern not the Lord’s body.*”¹¹ This *Ephata* moment of grace marks the start of Elizabeth’s serious reflection on the Catholic faith,¹² a reflection that the Virgin Mary would accompany. Grief-stricken and homesick, Elizabeth wrote, “*I am a Mother — so the Mother’s [the Mother of Jesus] thought*

8. *Ibid.*, 1:285-286

9. Giovanni Battista Naldini (1535-1591), an Italian painter in a late-Mannerist style, active in Florence, created this painting in 1572.

10. Cf. 2.11, Florence Journal to Rebecca Seton, 28 January 1804, *CW*, 1:289.

11. *Ibid.*, 1:291.

12. *Ibid.*, 1:290-291

came — also how was my GOD a little babe in the first stage of his mortal existence in Mary? But I lost these thoughts in my babes at home, which I daily long for more and more.”¹³ Sorrow weighed heavily on Elizabeth’s heart astir with grace.

Well-qualified to accompany persons inquiring about the Catholic faith, Filippo and Antonio Filicchi provided sound explanations to Elizabeth’s queries. After one such conversation, Filippo urged Elizabeth to “*pray and inquire*.”¹⁴ Initially, Elizabeth responded lightheartedly. However, after reflection and prayer, she asked God for the grace to enlighten her *discerning heart* about religious truths.¹⁵

“**BE OUR MOTHER**”

As a magnet attracts ferromagnetic materials, Elizabeth’s personal devotion to Holy Communion as an Episcopalian developed into her belief in and adoration of the Real Presence in the Eucharist as a Roman Catholic.

She described for Rebecca Seton, her sister-in-law, her powerful attraction to the Blessed Sacrament. “*The other day in a moment of excessive distress, I fell on my knees without thinking when [a procession of] the Blessed Sacrament passed by, and cried in an agony to God to bless me if he was there, that my whole Soul desired only him.*”¹⁶ One can imagine Elizabeth rising and pacing about the room as she wrestled with confusing feelings. Unexpectedly, her gaze fell upon “*a little prayer book of Mrs. Filicchi,*” which was open to the *Memorare*.¹⁷ Elizabeth prayed it, in what may have been her first formal prayer seeking Mary’s intercession:

13. Ibid., 1:290

14. Ibid.

15. Cf. Ibid. Alexander Pope (1688-1744), *The Universal Prayer*: “*If I am right, thy grace impart/Still in the right to stay;/If I am wrong, oh teach my heart/ To find a better way.*”

16. 2.11, op. cit., 1:292.

17. Ibid., 1:292-293.

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“...begging her to be our Mother, and I said it to her with such a certainty that God would surely refuse nothing to his Mother, and that she could not help loving and pitying the poor souls he died for, that I felt really I had a Mother which you know my foolish heart so often lamented to have lost in early days.”¹⁸

Having been a motherless little child, now a widowed mother, Elizabeth added poignancy to her description of the *Memorare* for Rebecca. “*From the first remembrance of infancy, I have looked in all the plays of childhood and wildness of youth to the clouds for my Mother, and at that moment it seemed as if I had found more than her, even in tenderness and pity of a Mother — so I cried myself to sleep in her heart.*”¹⁹

MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

To help Elizabeth pass the long days as she waited to return to New York, Filippo Filicchi gave her Saint Francis de Sales’ book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*. The text piqued Elizabeth’s interest. She read, reflected and wrote to Rebecca Seton, “*How many times I was on my knees from strong impression of its powerful, persuasion begging our God to make me so and so.*”²⁰ Elizabeth’s maternal heart must have warmed when she read his advice about Mary:

“*Honor, revere, and respect the Blessed Virgin Mary with a very special love; she is the Mother of our Sovereign Lord, and so we are her children. Let us think of her with all the love and confidence of affectionate children; let us desire her love, and strive with true filial hearts to imitate her graces.*”²¹

18. Ibid., 1:293.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 1:289.

21. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part II, 16:52, *How the Saints are United to Us*, accessed 7-30-3021 at <https://www.catholicspiritual-direction.org/devoutlife.pdf>.

The centrality of Our Lady in salvation history impressed Elizabeth, who referred to Mary as “Mother of the Church.” This title of “Mother of the Church” would be officially proclaimed by Pope Paul VI during Vatican II.²² In our day, Pope Francis has proclaimed “*Mary, the Mother of Evangelization*”: “*With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of the people... She is the Mother of the Church.*”²³

JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Filippo Filicchi thought that Saint Francis de Sales’ chapter *Counsels to Widows* might be particularly useful for the twenty-nine-year-old widow Elizabeth.

*“A devout widow should chiefly seek to cultivate the graces of perfect modesty, renouncing all honors, rank, title, society, and the like vanities; she should be diligent in ministering to the poor and sick, comforting the afflicted, leading the young to a life of devotion, studying herself to be a perfect model of virtue to younger women. Necessity and simplicity should be the adornment of her garb, humility, and charity of her actions, simplicity, and kindness of her words, modesty, and purity of her eyes, —Jesus Christ crucified the only Love of her heart.”*²⁴

Francis de Sales had known Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. This passage including the characteristic virtues of the Daughters of Charity and the phrase often used by Louise, “*Jesus Christ Crucified,*” reflects not only mutuality of minds and hearts but primarily the action of Divine Providence.

“MY JOYFUL HEART”

22. *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), ch. 8:1, 53

23. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), 284.

24. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part III, 40:118. *Counsels to Widows.*

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In June 1804, Elizabeth returned to New York and soon began a heart-wrenching discernment of the “*true church of Jesus Christ*”; it was only after she entered it that she could speak of her “*joyful heart*.”²⁵ She wrote Archbishop John Carroll, first bishop of Baltimore, for consultation and explained her situation.²⁶ “*As the Mother and sole parent of five children [I] have certainly pleaded with God earnestly, and I may strictly say, incessantly as it has been the only and supreme desire of my Soul to know the Truth.*”²⁷

Ten months later, on March 14, 1805, Elizabeth was received into the Catholic Church by Father Matthew O’Brien, pastor of St. Peter’s Church, the only Catholic church in New York City. Recalling events one year later, Elizabeth wrote Antonio Filicchi that she had celebrated in her soul “*the Anniversary of our most dear Mother,*” the Blessed Virgin, and had the “*delight and joy of... [her] First Communion*” on March 25, 1805.²⁸ Elizabeth received the sacrament of Confirmation from Bishop Carroll on Pentecost, May 25, 1806, and informed Antonio that she had “*added the name of Mary to the Ann Elizabeth which present the three most endearing ideas in the world — and contain the moments of the Mysteries of Salvation.*”²⁹ Thereafter, Elizabeth usually abbreviated her signature as “*MEAS*” (Mary Elizabeth Ann Seton). Echoing Mary’s consent to the angel’s request, a leitmotif of knowing and doing God’s will appeared in Elizabeth’s writings, for example, “*My soul is bowed to his Will.*”³⁰

The Sulpicians of St. Mary’s Seminary invited Elizabeth to Baltimore to begin a school for girls. Soon they also wished to establish an apostolic community of women, modeled on the Company of the Daughters of Charity, cofounded by Louise de

25. 3.20, Elizabeth Seton to Rev. John Cheverus, [after 25 March 1805]. *CW*, 1:346.

26. Established in 1789, Baltimore is the first episcopal see of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States.

27. 3.6, Elizabeth Seton to Bishop John Carroll, [26 July 1804], *CW*, 1:316.

28. 4.14, Elizabeth Seton to Antonio Filicchi, 25 March 1806, *CW*, 1:402.

29. 4.19, Elizabeth Seton to Antonio Filicchi, 28 May 1806, *CW*, 1:408

30. 4.76, To Cecilia Seton, [n.d.], *CW*, 1:512.

Marillac and Vincent de Paul in Paris in 1633. In order to fulfill its mission to serve impoverished persons, the community in the United States would likewise have “*no other monastery than the houses of the sick or the school rooms, no other cell than a hired room, no other chapel than the parish churches, no cloister but public streets or hospital rooms.*”³¹

The Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s would not be bound by public, perpetual vows but fulfill their Baptismal consecration by annual vows renewed on the feast of the Annunciation. Before the foundation of the congregation, Elizabeth wished to consecrate herself to God and pronounced private vows of charity and obedience for one year before Archbishop Carroll on March 25, 1809, in the *chapelle basse* of St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore. At that time, the Archbishop gave Elizabeth the title *Mother Seton*.

“EVERYTHING IN MARY IS GRACE”

Filippo Filicchi wrote a lengthy treatise on Catholicism for Elizabeth to study. In his discussion on sacred art, he wrote, “*Images of Jesus Christ, of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and those of the other Saints, ought to be kept... and reverence paid them.*”³² Mother Seton hung two beautiful oil paintings, *Ecce Homo* and *Mater Dolorosa*, in the chapel in Emmitsburg.³³ A large, wooden carving of the Crucifixion, featuring the women at the foot of the cross, also hung prominently.

Mathias O’Conway, an educator, linguist, and interpreter in Philadelphia, was among the first parents to entrust their daughters to Mother Seton for education, and his eldest daughter, Cecilia O’Conway, was the first to join Mother Seton. In 1811, Mr. O’Conway gave the Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s a large oil painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

31. A-12.3, Rule of 1812, *CW*, 3b:500.

32. A-8.27, Filippo Filicchi’s Exposition of the Catholic Faith for Elizabeth Seton, *CW*, 3a:587.

33. *Christ in Agony* and the *Sorrowful Mother*.

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Religious art inspired the Sisters as they recited the rosary, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and other prayers. Likewise, Mother Seton used **sacred art** and religious pictures in her religious instructions for day scholars and boarding pupils at St. Joseph's School. At the core of Mother Seton's instructions was this lesson: "*The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God — secondly, to do it in the manner he wills it — and thirdly, to do it because it is his will.*"³⁴ Isn't this Mary's response: "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word*"?

For the education of the students, Mother Seton sought to reflect **Mary's "patience with life,"** recognizing that "*tenderness... is the language children best understand.*"³⁵ She encouraged Marian devotion and taught her pupils and Sisters to imitate and model themselves after Mary:

*"Our best honor to Mary is the imitation of her Virtues — her life a model for all conditions of life — her poverty, humility, purity, love — and sufferings!"*³⁶ *"What a model! Everything in Mary is grace."*³⁷

"HAPPY THE EARTH"

In her reflection on the **Assumption** of Mary (1813), Mother Seton penned, "*The glory and happiness of the Catholic Church to sing the praises of Mary — the striking proof [that] she is the true Spouse of Christ since she [the Church] best loves, honors and cherishes her whom Jesus Christ himself so much honors, loves, and cherishes.*"³⁸

34. 9.9, Mother Seton's Last Writings, *CW*, 3a:255.

35. Archives Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise [APSL], 1-3-3-3:42; 6.70, Elizabeth Seton to Catherine Duplex, [4 February 1811], *CW*, 2:173.

36. APSL, 1-3-3-3:42.

37. 9.1, Instructions on Religious Life, *CW*, 3a:220.

38. 11.9, Assumption (1813), *CW*, 3b:18.

After *acknowledging Mary's Immaculate Conception*, Mother Seton wrote, "*We in the Eucharist [are]... [also the] living tabernacles*" of Jesus.³⁹

She contemplated *Mary's pregnancy with Jesus*. "*Jesus, nine months in Mary, feeding on her blood. O Mary! These nine months — Jesus on the breast of Mary, feeding on her milk — how long — must have delayed the weaning of such a child!!!*"⁴⁰ In her last instruction, Mother Seton reflected on *motherhood*. "*What child does not love its Mother — the mother of our Eternity — Mother of our redemption — We honor her [Mary] continually with our Jesus. His nine months within her — what passed between them? She alone knowing him, he her only tabernacle! Mary and Joseph at Bethlehem — the hidden life, the flight, the trail of her humility to bid him and direct him.*"⁴¹ Similarly, Louise de Marillac, also a mother, had written, "*The Son of God took a human body in the womb of the Blessed Virgin.*"⁴²

Mother Seton closed her reflection on the Assumption, "*How happy the Earth to possess her so long — secret blessing to the rising church and mediation for us — the beginning of Eternity.*"⁴³ She expressed her "*Joy to be [among] Catholics — Zeal for the honor of Mary — pleasing Jesus much by pleasing her in faithful service of love, prayer, and... especially by continual remembrance and imitation of her Virtues. [It would be] in vain to wear the outward sign of her children on the heart, without the virtues of meekness, purity, and charity.*"⁴⁴ Likewise, Louise exhorted her spiritual daughters to "*take Our Lady as the model for [their] daily lives and bear in mind that the best way to honor*

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. APSL, 1-3-3-3:42.

42. A. 14, (Thoughts on the Incarnation and the Holy Eucharist), Louise Sullivan, D.C., trans., ed., *Louise de Marillac: Spiritual Writings*, (New City Press: New York, 1991), 785. Hereinafter cited as *SW*.

43. 11.9, *CW*, 3b:18.

44. Ibid.

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her is by imitating her virtues."⁴⁵

Mother Seton exclaimed, "*The best prayer to Mary — Ave as the word of the archangel... our Mother the church — Mary the first Sister of Charity on Earth!*"⁴⁶

“HEART OF A FRIEND”

Mother Seton habitually jotted notations in books. In the space beneath a prayer to the “Queen of Apostles,” she penned a petition for Father Simon G. Bruté, her spiritual director and dear friend: “*Most Blessed Mother and Queen of Apostles... O Benign Mother, be his guide and consolation through the dangers of this life. Obtain for him the plenitude of the apostolic spirit.*”⁴⁷

Appreciating the maternal bond between the Blessed Virgin and Jesus *as a channel of grace*, Mother Seton also sensed Mary’s role of mediation as from a friend who genuinely cares about the well-being of others and deserves honor. “*Mary returning our love to JESUS for us, our prayer passing through her heart with reflected love and excellence — Jesus delighting to receive our love embellished and purified through the heart of Mary, as from the heart of a friend... How can we honor the mysteries of our Jesus, without honoring Mary in them all?*”⁴⁸

Towards the end of her final illness, Mother Seton told those gathered around her bedside, “*I never felt more sensibly the presence of our Dearest than since I have been sick; it seems as if Our Lord or his Blessed Mother stood continually by me, in a corporeal form, to comfort, cheer, and encourage me, in the different weary and tedious hours of pain.*”⁴⁹

45. M. 33, (Devotion to the Blessed Virgin), [n.d.], *SW*, 786.

46. APSL, 1-3-3-3:42.

47. 11.40, Queen of Apostles, *CW*, 3b:57.

48. APSL, 1-3-3-3:42.

49. Charles I. White, *Life of Mrs. Eliza A. Seton*, (1853), 439.

Shortly before her death, Mother Seton imparted her adieu with deep faith and a grateful heart: “*I am thankful, Sisters, for your kindness to be present at this trial. Be children of the Church; be children of the Church... Be united as true Daughters of Charity should be... Keep your rules.*”⁵⁰

On January 4, 1821, Mother Seton peacefully entered eternity at 2 o’clock in the morning. After her death, Father Bruté wrote this testimony: “*I truly believe her to have been one of those truly chosen souls... O how deeply impressed was she with the greatness of God!*”⁵¹ At her canonization on September 14, 1975, Pope Paul VI declared, “*Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton is a Saint!*”⁵²

Conclusion

Led by the Spirit of God, Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton breached barriers and gracefully overcame much adversity as a wife, mother, widow and spiritual leader. She who would be called Mother Seton had the happiness of encountering Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and therefore nurtured genuine Marian devotion in her pupils and the Sisters of Charity. For Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, motherhood was the prism of her faith and her Marian devotion — *Ephata!*

Sister Betty Ann McNEIL
Daughter of Charity

50. A-7.268, Account by Rev. Simon Bruté, of Elizabeth Seton’s Last Days, January 1821, *CW*, 2:764-270.

51. APSL, Provincial Annals (1816-1821), 7-8-1: 207-208.

52. Canonization of Elizabeth Ann Seton, Homily of the Holy Father Paul VI, 14 September 1975.

The Daughters of Charity's devotion to the Sacred Heart

1 - Devotion to the Sacred Heart in the 17th century

Saint John's Gospel describes the foundational event that inspired devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: "*One soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out*" (Jn 19:34). It specifies that this happened so that the scripture passage might be fulfilled: "*They will look upon him whom they have pierced*" (Jn 19:36-37). Only Saint John describes for us the lance that pieced Jesus' side, revealing Jesus' heart's immense love for humankind. Looking upon Him whom they have pierced, we contemplate the ever-open Heart of Jesus.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart began in the Middle Ages during the Crusades. The first specific indication is found in the 13th century sermon called "Mystical Vine," attributed to Saint Bonaventure. It reads:

"O how good and pleasant a thing it is to dwell in thy heart, O most good Jesus! Thy heart is a goodly treasure; it is a heart that is precious... Who would not love a heart so wounded? Who could forbear to respond to a heart so loving?"

The whole essence of devotion to the Sacred Heart lies in these devout lines from Saint Bonaventure, known as the "Seraphic Doctor." Although the first heralds of worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus were Saint Bernard and Saint Bonaventure, the devotion did not really spread until the 17th century. In 1672,

the Feast of the Sacred Heart was celebrated in France for the first time. The feast was promoted by Saint John Eudes, who in 1671 would publish his work entitled *Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*.

Prior to him, Saint Francis de Sales often meditated on the Gospel passage, “*Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves*” (Mt 11:29). His writings, letters and homilies bear the indelible seal of his devotion to the divine and human Heart of Jesus. The works that our Founders and first Sisters read most – *Treatise on the Love of God, Introduction to the Devout Life* and *True Spiritual Conferences* – refer to this devotion, sometimes with a simple allusion, other times with extended spiritual lyricism.

On April 24, 1610, as Baroness Jane Frances de Chantal was preparing to leave for Annecy for the official foundation of the Order of the Visitation, Francis de Sales wrote her as in a prophetic vision:

“We are about to embark for the haven of grace and consolation. This morning I thought about these words from the Gospel: ‘Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, for without me, you can do nothing.’ It is my opinion that we no longer remain in ourselves and that in heart, intention and trust, we will dwell forever in the pierced side of the Savior, for without Him, not only we cannot but we could not, would not do anything. Everything ‘in Him,’ everything ‘with Him,’ everything ‘through Him’. Everything, Him.”

The emblem of the Order of the Visitation is the Heart of Jesus. On the walls of some convents of the Visitation, we find advice from the Founder: “*The Religious of the Visitation... have the incomparable privilege and grace of bearing the name of Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus... Humility and gentleness are the particular spirit of your institute, established*

The Daughters of Charity's devotion to the Sacred Heart
on the golden foundations of charity, humility and gentleness, and as first and principle lesson, this beautiful phrase of Our Lord, 'Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.'”

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise learned devotion to Jesus' Heart at the school of Saint Francis de Sales. In *Introduction to the Devout Life*, we read:

*“Suffer meekly those small injuries, those little inconveniences, those inconsiderable losses which daily befall you; for by means of such little occasions as these, managed with love and affection, **you will gain His heart entirely, and make it all your own...** to serve Him well, not only in great and high things, but in those that are small and low; since by the one as by the other we may ravish His heart with love”* (Chapter XXXV).

Treatise on the Love of God affirms:

“[Prayer] is secret, and the intercourse between God and the soul which it fosters is appreciable only to those who practice it. The language of lovers is one unintelligible to all but themselves... But where love is spoken, words are needless, as well as all other external means of communication... nothing else than a conversation by which the soul carries on a loving intercourse with God through which to attain full union with Him... Its very silence is eloquent” (Book VI, chapter 1).

In *True Spiritual Conferences*, he says, *“I assure you, my daughters most beloved of our common Master, that you will enflame His Heart by being faithful to all the practices of your Rules, for they are by no means the work of men but of the Holy Spirit”* (Fragment B).

Not long afterwards, a Visitation Sister, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, had mystical revelations in which she received the mission of spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart.

In 1674, she announced that Jesus wanted to be honored in His Heart of flesh. Jesus asked the faithful to receive Him frequently in the Eucharist, especially the first Friday of each month, and to observe a devotional holy hour honoring the Sacred Heart, as a Guard of Honor.

In 1675, during the octave of Corpus Christi, the saint had a vision called the “great apparition” in which Jesus asked that the Feast of the Sacred Heart be celebrated each year on the Friday following the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, in reparation for the ingratitude of men for His redemptive sacrifice on the cross. After Margaret Mary’s death in 1690, the devotion became popular and spread throughout France and in other European countries, taking the forms that she had indicated:

- Devotion of nine first Fridays dedicated to the Sacred Heart, with a sense of reparation;
- Recitation of the litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus;
- Devotion of the Guard of Honor.

In 1765, the Feast of the Sacred Heart was celebrated in all the dioceses of France for the first time. Pope Pius IX approved this devotion on May 8, 1873; twenty-six years later, on July 21, 1899, Pope Leo XIII recommended that all the bishops of the world celebrate this feast during the octave of the feast of Corpus Christi.

2 - Our Founders’ devotion to the heart of Jesus

While Saint Francis de Sales influenced devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus with his *Treatise on the Love of God*, Saint John Eudes, founder of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, known as the Eudists, also contributed greatly to advancing this devotion in France. He wrote the *Office and Mass in honor of the Hearts*

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of *Jesus and Mary* for his members. The Eudists even built the first church in honor of the two Hearts, recognizing that it was a special devotion. Undeniably, the books published by Saint Francis de Sales and Saint John Eudes spread devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and worship in His honor.

Saint Vincent and Saint Louise were drawn to the principal idea of Saint Francis de Sales: “**God is God of the human heart**” (*Treatise on the Love of God*, Book I, chapter 15). They recognized in these apparently simple words the mark of the spirituality of a great teacher and bishop, later declared doctor of the Church. When the Bishop of Geneva met Saint Vincent de Paul in Paris in 1618, he entrusted him with the spiritual care of the convent of the Visitation in Paris, Annecy and other cities as far as Torino. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise said that they received special favors through the intercession of Saint Francis de Sales, who died on December 28, 1622. Saint Vincent supported his process of canonization and was a witness for it.

Pope Alexander VII beatified Saint Francis de Sales in 1661 and canonized him in 1665. Declaring him Doctor of the Church in 1877, Pope Pius IX said, “*He sowed the seeds of devotion to the Heart of Jesus with his book Treatise on the Love of God.*” In 1923, he was declared the patron of Catholic journalists by Pope Pius XI.

Saint Louise’s undated writing *On the Pure Love we have Vowed to God* (A. 27, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 827-830) begins with Jesus crucified and includes ideas and expressions from Saint Francis de Sales, who developed the doctrine of “*pure love*” in his *Treatise on the Love of God*. Louise was twenty-five years old when this work was published; she met Saint Francis de Sales in 1619 and assiduously read his works, both on her own initiative and on Saint Vincent’s advice.

When Louise de Marillac brought together the first Daughters of Charity on November 29, 1633, she wanted to imbue them with devotion to Jesus' Heart. The majority were "good village girls," robust and endowed with great patience but illiterate and sorely in need of spiritual formation. Therefore, even before officially gathering them under her roof, she spoke to Saint Vincent about her desire to have an image of the Lord of Charity for their religious education.

In the early days of the Company, between 1633 and 1636, Vincent de Paul promised Louise de Marillac that he would "*send for the painter*" to produce an image with the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the Daughters of Charity. The image called "The Lord of Charity"¹ was painted by Charles Le Brun, engraved by Pierre Daret and printed in 1640 in the shop of Antoine Hérault, who was close to two Ladies of Charity (the wife of Chancellor Seguier and Madame Goussault, who would both help to pay for the printing). It represents Christ standing on a cloud, on which is inscribed, "*The Charity of Jesus Christ urges us,*" taken from Saint Paul (2 Cor 2:5). In the background, the Daughters of Charity care for the needy in a hospital, and Christ protects them.

This holy card was distributed to all the Sisters to teach them to contemplate the Lord of Charity and see Him in persons who are poor. It was copied by Louise and then by early Superioresses General several times.

For Louise de Marillac, the purpose of these images was to encourage the young hospital Sisters to develop piety and devotion to the Sacred Heart. The Foundress thus frequently

1. Woolley, Alexandra. « Le Seigneur de la Charité : une image de Charles Le Brun pour les Filles de la Charité » ["The Lord of Charity: an image by Charles Le Brun for the Daughters of Charity"] in *Bulletin du Centre de Recherche du Chateau de Versailles* [Newsletter of the Research Center of Versailles Castle]; Court societies in Europe, 16th-19th century. *Nouveaux regards sus Charles Le Brun* [New Perspectives on Charles Le Brun], 2015.

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insisted with Vincent that holy cards be printed to help the Sisters to imitate Jesus and the saints pictured on them. Before the foundation of the Company, Saint Vincent wrote to Saint Louise, “*I am delighted with the employment of those good young women and commend your desire to give them a painting*” (L. 43, CCD I, 70-71). The letter dates to 1630 when Marguerite Naseau and a small group of her friends had just come to Paris.

To satisfy Louise’s request and sustain her enthusiasm, Vincent de Paul wrote her on January 28, 1640, “*Enclosed is a picture that was printed at the Charity. You are the first one to whom I am sending any. It was a painter who had it engraved; it cost him eighty ecus*” (L. 421, CCD II, 14). The growth of the Company and its extension to different corners of the kingdom prompted him to find a way to provide the image of the Sacred Heart to all the Sisters to motivate and strengthen them in their gift of self to Christ in the person of the poor.

On Pentecost 1642, Louise de Marillac herself designed the seal of the Company with Jesus’ Heart in the background and the modified quote from the painting of the Lord of Charity: “*The Charity of Jesus crucified urges us*” (cf. 2 Cor 2:5). The seal of the Company and the Lord of Charity painted by Saint Louise reflect her devotion to the Sacred Heart and her desire that this devotion be a source of contemplation in the Company: “*They will look upon him whom they have pierced.*” Saint Vincent, convinced that it is possible to grow in gentleness to make one’s heart like that of Jesus, exclaimed in one of his conferences, “*God... asks first for the heart and, after that, for the work*” (CCD X, 108).

On March 25, 1646, Vincent wrote to Louise, “*I have seen that beautiful painting. Tomorrow the Church will celebrate the feast of the Incarnation. I hope to say Mass in sight of it tomorrow, since that seems more fitting to me than today. Is it for your oratory or for the children’s?*” (L. 793a, CCD II, 628). The first

ecclesial approval of the Company by the Archbishop of Paris took place in 1646. It is significant that this is the time that Saint Louise painted the Lord of Charity, on the model of Charles Le Brun's engraving, in order to emphasize the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In my opinion, it presents to the Church the source and model of the Daughters of Charity.

Saint Vincent returned to the teaching on Jesus' gentleness and humility of heart on different occasions. On August 19, 1646, he spoke about mutual respect and gentleness. *"Is anything more pleasing to Him than respect and gentleness, which are the virtues of the Son of God? As you've said so well, He himself taught us this. 'Learn from me,' He said, 'for I am gentle and humble of heart.' That is, dear Sisters, learn from me that I am respectful and gentle because by humility He means respect, for respect proceeds from humility"* (CCD IX, 211).

On November 11, 1657, explaining the Rules concerning the service of the sick, Vincent said, *"Do you remember our dear Sisters who have gone to God? ... They were seen serving the sick charitably and conversing with them humbly and graciously. Remember that, Sisters. It's the lesson of Our Lord: 'Learn of me,' He says, 'that I am gentle and humble of heart'; for you'll do no good if you act otherwise"* (CCD X, 270).

Saint Louise had great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On more than one occasion, when she wrote to the Sisters, she closed with this expression: *"I greet you all and am in the love of Jesus Crucified, my very dear Sisters, your humble sister and servant"* (Spiritual Writings, L. 224, p. 180; L. 166, p. 196). Meditating on the parable of the sower, she wrote, *"As I meditated on the Gospel of the Sower, I realized that there was no good soil in me. Therefore, I desired to sow, in the heart of Jesus, all the actions of my heart and soul in order that they may grow by sharing in His merits. Henceforth, I shall exist only through Him and in Him since He has willed to lower Himself to assume human*

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To foster sisterly charity during recreation, Louise wrote, "During this time of recreation, reflect on the eternal joy that you will have in heaven if, on earth, you love God and your neighbor as He has commanded you. To help you practice the love you owe your neighbor, remember when you are together that the bond of union among you is the Blood shed by the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ" (Spiritual Writings, M. 69, p. 804).

When she wrote to the Sisters caring for the foundlings, she concluded her letters by entrusting them to the Heart of Jesus Crucified, poured out for the abandoned children needing the loving affection of the Sisters' hearts. "I greet you all, Sisters, in the love of the heart of Jesus Crucified, and I am, my very dear Sisters, your very humble sister and servant" (Spiritual Writings, L. 239, p. 250).

3 - Devotion to the Heart of Jesus in the Company

After the death of the Founders, the Sisters would continue to invoke the Sacred Heart of Jesus as source and model of charity. During the third period of six years of Sister Mathurine Guérin's generalate at the end of the 17th century, the first *Manual or Formulary of Prayers of the Daughters of Charity* was published. It included the litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the prayers that the People of God prayed to His Divine Heart. This devotion continued in the Company over the centuries.

The manifestation of the Miraculous Medal to Saint Catherine Labouré in 1830 encouraged the devotion since the Sacred Heart of Jesus appears on the back side united to that of His Mother Mary. In 1840, another Daughter of Charity, Sister Justine Bisqueyburu, was graced with the apparition of the green scapular, on the back of which appears the Immaculate Heart of Mary, pierced by a sword. A few years later, on July 26,

1846, in Troyes, the Lord appeared to Sister Apolline Andriveau (1810-1895), entrusting her with the mission of disseminating the scapular of the Passion of Our Lord and the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Father Jean-Baptiste Etienne, Superior General, communicated in his January 1, 1848, circular letter that he had obtained approval of this devotion for the entire Vincentian Family from Pope Pius IX.

As we have seen, a series of events occurred over the course of the 19th century that fostered a more intense practice of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Company. In a February 14, 1881, circular letter, Father Antoine Fiat, Superior General, asked the Daughters of Charity throughout the world to have great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in accordance with the teachings of Saint Louise de Marillac and the recommendations of the Church. He asked Sister Servants to consecrate local communities and works, including those served and collaborators, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to hang an image of the Sacred Heart in their local community. He also invited all Sisters entering the Company to enroll in the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus consists in offering a selected hour of the day to unite one's occupations with the offering of Christ to the Father for our salvation and to offer it "in reparation" for one's sins and those of the world. Over time, practicing this "hour of guard or of presence" accustoms us to feeling the presence of Jesus in our life.

On March 13, 1863, the Association of the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart begin in the Visitation convent in Bourg-en-Bresse (France), some 100 km (60 miles) from Paray-le-Monial where, 200 years earlier, Marguerite Mary Alacoque had her revelations. It is hardly surprising that, two centuries later, Visitation Sister Marie du Sacré-Coeur Bernaud was inspired to found the Guard of Honor after a vision inspired by the lament of the Lord, "I

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looked for compassion, but there was none, for comforters, but found none" (Ps 69:21). To dwell in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sister Marie du Sacré-Coeur decided to bring together a group of people who took hour-long turns dedicating themselves to love and reparation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The symbol of the Association is a sort of clock, at the center of which is found the Heart of Jesus pierced by the lance; it is encircled by twelve stars for the hours of the day, and each star holds the name of a member who has chosen that hour to accompany Jesus.

To become a member of the Association of the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart, one must:

- Enroll in a center of the Association: in any Visitation convent or associated community.
- Choose an hour of the day and, in the secret of one's heart, offer it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in one's actions, thoughts and words, so that they might be right and just.
- During this hour of presence to the Heart of Jesus, unite oneself to His offering to the Father and console His Sacred Heart.
- Neglecting this practice is not a fault under the pain of sin. Love is what is important in the Guard of Honor.

Today, it is a Public Association of the Faithful, erected by the Apostolic See. Any Catholic can belong to the Guard of Honor. The twenty-nine martyred Spanish Sisters beatified in the Year of Faith and all the Daughters of Charity at that time were members of the Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart, in compliance with the decision of the Superior General, Father Antoine Fiat.

The Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart and the Daughters of Charity

In his February 14, 1881, letter, Father Antoine Fiat expressed his desire that the Daughters of Charity belong to the Association for this hour of presence to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On that same

date, Pope Leo XIII granted special indulgences to members of this Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart. From that time forward, the document of admission to the Company was membership in the Guard of Honor, signed by the Provincial Director or Visitatrix.

As daughters of the Church, the Sisters followed the indications given by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Annum Sacrum* (May 25, 1899) that esteemed that all of humanity should be consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On June 11, 1899, Leo XIII consecrated the whole world to the Sacred Heart.

The Guard of Honor has its origins at Calvary, where Jesus, on the cross, had His Heart pierced and opened by the soldier's lance, a Heart that is always alive but continually wounded by our sins. Members model themselves on the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint John and Saint Mary Magdalene who were "the first Guard of Honor" at the foot of the cross.

At the end of the 19th century in the *Formulary of Prayers* revised by Father Fiat in 1896, the Company adopted the act of consecration of the Guard of Honor and the formula for enshrining an image of the Sacred Heart in each house. In the local communities of Daughters of Charity, just like in family homes, an image of the Sacred Heart was hung as a sign of redemptive love and divine protection.

Throughout the world, leaders of Catholic countries consecrated their nations to the Sacred Heart. On May 30, 1919, Spain was consecrated to the Sacred Heart by King Alfonso XIII. Soon afterwards, the Shrine of the Great Promise was built in Valladolid where Blessed Bernardo de Hoyos, SJ, received the apparition of the Sacred Heart. After the 1936-1939 war, construction was completed on the National Expiatory Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on Mount Tibidado in Barcelona, encouraged by Saint John Bosco.

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We should note that Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque was not able to witness here on earth the veritable triumph of her hopes for liturgy and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was in 1765, seventy-five years after Margaret Mary's death, that Pope Clement XIII granted the Bishops of Poland permission to say the Office and the Mass of the Sacred Heart. In 1856, Pope Pius IX extended the feast to the universal Church.

Although all the Popes proceeded with great caution and took their time with the approval of the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Superiors General Jean-Baptiste Etienne and Antoine Fiat advised the Daughters of Charity to practice devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and prescribed it in their *Formularies of Prayers*: first Fridays, litany of the Sacred Heart, personal and community consecration and the Association of the Guard of Honor.

Down through history, the Sisters have had an intense devotion to the Sacred Heart. The images, paintings and sacred objects featuring the Sacred Heart that are found in displays and the Vincentian Museum bear witness to this along with the dedications on them by individuals and charitable institutions, recognizing the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the source of the Daughters of Charity's dedication to those who are poor and in need in our world.

Sister Maria Angeles INFANTE
Daughter of Charity

Our fidelity to the Lord depends on our willingness to serve.

“Jesus inaugurates a reversal:

He overturns the criteria
about what truly matters.

The value of a person does not depend any more
on the role they have,
the work they do, the money they have in the bank...

No, greatness and success in God’s eyes
are measured differently: they are measured by service...

If we want to follow Jesus,
we must follow the path
He Himself traced out...

And we know this often costs,
because ‘it tastes like a cross.’”

Angelus, September 19, 2021

