

# Frederic Ozanam: His Piety and Devotion

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When Frederic Ozanam is canonized a saint, it will not be because he was the principal founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, nor because he was an outstanding professor in the lecture halls of the Sorbonne, University of Paris, nor because he was an excellent author, but because he practiced virtue in an heroic degree and lived in fidelity to God's grace (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church #828). Men and women are declared saints by the Church because of their holiness, not for their accomplishments. They took the dual commandment of love seriously and put that dual commandment of love into practice to an heroic degree. After all, holiness is the perfection of charity. Being the founder and an active member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, being a brilliant professor in the lecture hall, being an exceptional author, all contributed to Frederic Ozanam's holiness of life, but each one by itself did not make him a saintly person.

Each one of us has been called to holiness of life. As St. Paul says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." (1 Thes. 4:3). All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church #2013 or Lumen Gentium #40). Sanctification is God's way of preparing us for eternal life in heaven. In this life, we are much like athletes whose performance in competition depends upon how well we have mastered our skills in daily practice. Certainly this is the teaching of St. Paul.

In order to reach perfection, we use the strength dealt out to us by Christ's grace, so that ... doing the will of the Father in everything, we may wholeheartedly devote ourselves to the glory of God and to the service of our neighbor (cf. Lumen Gentium #40). These words from Vatican II say much to Vincentians; they could have been written by St. Vincent de Paul himself.

Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II reminds us that:

"The call to holiness is rooted in Baptism and proposed anew in the other sacraments, principally in the Eucharist." (Christifideles Laici, #16)

Frederic Ozanam heard the call of holiness; he knew that call and the challenge to grow in the divine life which he had received when he was baptized. He pursued holiness first as a single male, then as a married man and father of a family. Frederic understood that unity with Christ Jesus depended on his willingness and readiness to choose Him at progressively deeper levels whether it be daily or during each stage of his existence. Frederic was a man of exceptional piety throughout his entire life.

Frederic was a man of passion. He was a lover \_ of God, of his parents and siblings, of his wife and daughter, of fellow Vincentians, of study and teaching, of the truth, of poverty and the poor. He burned with the fire of passion; it kept him involved; it kept him properly motivated in all facets of his life and ministry.

From the very foundation of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, it was the intention of Frederic Ozanam that membership in the Society would promote sanctification of its members. Frederic firmly believed that the mutual respect and true friendship among members would help in imitating, emulating and deepening intimacy with their Divine Model, Jesus Christ, especially by living out His mandate of loving one's neighbor in the

person of the poor and abandoned (cf. Manual of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, opening paragraphs).

The Society was seen, therefore, as a valuable means, an efficacious instrument for advancing in holiness of life because it gave members the opportunities for personal prayer and putting their faith into action by the exercise of compassionate charity toward their fellow human beings in whom Jesus Christ dwells.

Frederic says:

"The leaders of such associations should be holy, in order to draw down God's grace. That is why I, who am so wicked and so weak, often ask myself how I can venture to represent such a large number of good young men" (Baunard, p. 130).

While holiness is the goal of the Society, perfection certainly has never been a condition for membership. The Society is made up of struggling pilgrims \_ men and women, humbled by their weaknesses, but desirous of growing in holiness of life through prayer and charity (cf. Manual of the Society, opening pages).

We will now look at several components of Frederic's life which contributed to his holiness.

## **Spiritual Life**

Frederic was a man of prayer who loved the Church. If we had no other way to prove that, his letters would be enough. He writes:

"... I look at Catholicism in perhaps a more absolute way: I see formula as necessary to Christianity, just as Christianity seems to me the necessary formula for humanity. I believe the Church to be above the things of this world, but I recognize her right to mark out for herself the boundary of her intervention and power.

I also believe worship to be the expression of faith, the symbol of hope, the earthly result of the love of God. For that reason I practice it as much as I can and according to the best habits given me from childhood, and find in prayer and the sacraments the needed sustenance for my moral life amid temptations of a consuming imagination and fantasizing world" (Letter, #77, July 21, 1834).

Frederic goes on to say:

"Being a Christian, I glory in belonging to no other school than that of truth. Which is the Church ... I live by my faith, which I have from my God, and by my honor which I have from my parents. You will allow me to defend the one and the other" (Baunard, p. 63).

Frederic's spiritual growth and progress was slow, gradual and challenging. He had the burning desire to do better in his prayer life, for greater devotion in receiving the sacraments and a deeper commitment to help others. He received the sacrament of

confession and communion frequently, which was unusual for that time in the French Church. The last remnants of the heresy of Jansenism were still making their effects felt in the spiritual life of 19th century France, Jansenism which St. Vincent de Paul so rigorously opposed and fought.

Amelie Ozanam wrote of her husband:

"I never saw him wake up or fall asleep without making the sign of the cross and praying. In the morning he read the bible, in Greek, on which he meditated about half an hour. (Frederic called this his `daily bread'). In the last years of his life, he went to Mass every day for his support and consolation. He never did anything serious without praying. Before leaving for his course, he always got on his knees to ask God for the grace of saying nothing which would attract public praise to himself, but of only speaking for the Glory of God and the service of the truth" (Frederic Ozanam, Paris, p. 128).

Frederic's sentiments of Jesus were those of complete surrender, absolute confidence and total filial tenderness. He gave the Lord his life.

One of the indications of Frederic's seriousness to advance in the spiritual life was the fact that he had a spiritual director. He was Father Marduel, a priest originally from Lyon, but then living in Paris. Fr. Marduel was a very popular spiritual director and had for his directees a vast array of the famous and ordinary of Paris; Fr. Marduel was simple, wise, well-informed, prudent and a man of deep prayer and devotion. He was a most appropriate director for a man like Frederic.

Under the priest's direction, Frederic found available time for meditation and prayer even with his many responsibilities.

Frederic told his mother that Fr. Marduel "is the only intimate spiritual advisor that I have, the only one who, in kindness and wisdom, can take the place of father and mother" (Baubard, pp. 39-40).

Frederic was very hard on himself. The world thought him to be great; he saw himself as very little. The world thought him to be good; he saw himself as unworthy. He believed that he owed his status in life to hard work and the grace of God. He had no opinion of his genius; it was not a source of strength but of weakness. All this sounds as if it were coming from the lips of St. Vincent de Paul and his teaching on humility. Frederic was a man of deep humility in imitation of his patron, Vincent. Frederic saw humility as a hallmark virtue for every Vincentian and for the Society in general.

Although Frederic was hard on himself, he was soft toward his neighbor. His heart was tender and soft with compassionate love for God's poor and abandoned (cf. Baubard, pp. 342-43).

When founding the Society, he said to his fellow Vincentian Le Taillandier, "We must do what is most agreeable to God. Therefore, we must do what Our Lord Jesus Christ did when preaching the Gospel. Let us go to the poor." "The blessing of the poor is the blessing of God" (Baubard, p. 65).

To what degree must we love Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. Frederic says, "Even to martyrdom" (Baunard, p. 97). "The world has grown cold, it is for us Catholics to rekindle the vital fire which has been extinguished" (Letter #90, February 23, 1835).

These words of Frederic remind us of St. Vincent's words:

"It is our vocation to set people's hearts ablaze, to do what the Son of God did, who came to light a fire on earth in order to set it ablaze with His love" (SV, Conference #207, May 30, 1659).

Frederic says:

"It is for us to inaugurate the era of the martyrs, for it is a martyrdom possible to every Christian, to give one's life for God and for one's brothers, to give one's life in sacrifice is to be a martyr. It is indifferent whether the sacrifice be consummated at one moment, or whether slowly consuming, it fills the altar night and day with sweet perfume. To be a martyr is to give back to heaven all that one has received, health, life, our whole soul. If it is in our power to make this offering, this sacrifice. It is for us to select the altar to which we shall dedicate it..." (Letter #90, February 23, 1835).

St. Vincent says:

"May it please God, Fathers and Brothers, that all those who wish to join the Company enter it with the thought of martyrdom in mind with the desire to suffer martyrdom in it and to devote themselves entirely to the service of God ... is there anything more reasonable than to give ourselves to Him who has so generously given Himself for us all such as we are? (SV Conferences #159 and #170 to C. M.).

Frederic Ozanam practiced what he believed. His life was the life of a martyr \_ slowly consuming. He gave back to heaven all that he had received. He made the sacrifice; he chose his altar.

"Let us aid one another, my dear friend, by example and advice. Let us strive that our trust in grace may equal our distrust of nature. Let us be strong even in suffering, for weakness is the malady of the times. Let us remember that we have already lived a third of our existence, and that we have lived by the goodness of others; we must live what is left, for the good of others. Let us do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hand (Letter #160, October 5, 1837).

Suffering was part of that sacrificial offering of himself to God. His frail health was his constant cross. In his later years, he would experience intense pain. His attitude changed from one of hope for full recovery to one of resignation and acceptance.

On April 23, 1853, Frederic's fortieth birthday, he composed his last will and testament. In summary fashion, he gives us the credo of his life. He speaks not only beautifully of suffering, but gives us a glance at the depth of his spirituality.

"I know that I have today completed my fortieth year, more than half my life span. I know that I have a young and beloved wife, a charming daughter, fine brothers, a second mother, many friends, an honorable career; my work has

progressed to the point where it can serve as a basis for the undertaking that I have dreamed of for a long time. Yet, I find myself stricken with a severe and persistent illness, which only hides a state of extreme fatigue. Must I forsake all the good things that you, my Lord, have given me? Could you not be satisfied with only part of the sacrifice? Which of my prized possessions should I immolate: my literary pride, my academic ambitions, even my research projects which perhaps were undertaken more to satisfy my pride than out of a real zeal for truth? If I sold half of my books and gave the money to the poor, and if, limiting my activities to my professional duties, I spent the rest of my life visiting the poor, teaching the apprentices and the soldiers, would you, O Lord, be satisfied? Would you let me grow in years to enjoy the sweet company of my wife and complete the education of my child?

That perhaps is not what you want! You do not accept such offerings based on self-interest; you reject my sacrifice. It is my life that you are requesting. At the beginning of the Book, it is written that I must do Thy will. So I said: "Here I am, O Lord!" (Bunard, p. 386).

Amelie enveloped Frederic in her love and tenderness but, in her heart, she had come to realize that he only was getting worse physically and that it was only a matter of time. Frederic knew it as well as indicated by his words in his last will and testament.

During the remaining months of his life when he was seeking to establish the Society more extensively in Italy, he said to the conference in Florence:

"Oh, How many times, overwhelmed by some interior pain, worried about my badly strengthened health, full of sadness, I entered the house of a poor man entrusted to my care, and there, upon the sight of so many wretched people, more deserving of pity than I, I reproached myself for my discouragement, I felt stronger against pain, I thanked this unfortunate man who had consoled and fortified me through the observation of his own miseries! And how since then, wouldn't I have loved him more?" (Bunard, pp. 343-4).

These words are truly inspiring, and words to remember as we visit the homes of the poor and sick!

Frederic Ozanam, founder of our Society of St. Vincent de Paul, was indeed an extraordinary individual, a man of many talents, a man of outstanding holiness. But another remarkable quality of his character was his equilibrium, the balance, which he maintained in his life. Besides the time and energy he needed for the ordinary human necessities of life, there was his professional career of teaching (which, after all, supported him financially and, after marriage, supported his wife and daughter as well), his ministerial life primarily with the Society, his writing and publication, his social life with family, friends and colleagues, and his spiritual life. Frederic was able to hold all these components in balance.

At a recent meeting of pastors, the issue of balance was discussed in some detail. How difficult it is to keep balance in one's life as an ordained or unordained minister of the Gospel. It is easy to fall into the trap of becoming so engrossed in one's ministerial life that other areas of life suffer great negligence, e.g., health, relationships, prayer, etc.

Frederic Ozanam attained what so many search for: balance in our lives. An image for Frederic could well be that of an exceptional juggler who can keep all kinds of objects in

the air at the same time. These things have different shapes and sizes and colors; but he has them all going at the same time.

Frederic was a magnificent juggler. While he held everything in balance, while he was a man of equilibrium, we must remember that he did not give equal percentages to each segment. Maintaining balance in one's life does not mean that one's family or community gets 20%, one's work gets 20%, one's ministry with the Society gets 20%, one's social life gets 20%, one's personal needs get 20% \_ all adding up to 100%, the totality of time in a day or week.

That is one way to have balance: to divide up one's time in equal portions, but that is not the human reality. Ordinarily \_ humanly \_ certain things demand varying percentages, greater amount of time and attention; there are primary considerations in our life which are more important than others. And, of course, certain things will call for more attention and time than other things will do according to circumstances and unforeseeable demands.

For example, sometimes the family needs our undivided attention and our available time, or our employment will, or our health will call for radical changes in our life, suddenly and uncompromisingly. This is seen in the life of Frederic Ozanam, particularly during the last years of his life when his health became so frail.

How Frederic could manage his life so well. How he could move so quickly and effectively from one area to another and give his complete attention and concentration to that matter at hand!

## **Providence**

One of the prime characteristics of the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam is their belief in and adherence to Divine Providence. They saw God's plan operative everywhere. They trusted that God was truly providing for them, always acting in their lives and in the lives of others \_ that God's will was being accomplished.

There is such a close connection between doing the will of God and following God's providence. We see this in Vincent's letters. He writes:

"O Monsieur, what a happiness to will nothing but what God wills, to do nothing but what is in accord with the occasion Providence presents, and to have nothing but what God in His Providence has given us" (SV III, 188).

We must "will what Divine Providence wills" (SV VI, 476) is one of the ways St. Vincent combines the two. "Perfection consists in so uniting our will to God's that His will and ours, properly speaking, form only one will and non-will" (SV XI, 318).

Vincent believed that God was truly the author of the Ladies of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity and all the good that he had done in the service of the poor.

Frederic writes to Mr. Emmanuel Bailly, the first president of the Society:

"Beyond doubt Providence does not need us for the execution of its merciful designs, but we need it and it promises us its assistance only on the condition

of our efforts ... carry on the work begun and work for its propagation and consolidation" (Letter #135, October 22, 1836).

Frederic says a year later:

"Our little Society of St. Vincent de Paul has grown large enough to be a providential fact" (Letter #160, October 5, 1837).

St. Vincent writes:

"Grace has its moments. Let us abandon ourselves to the Providence of God and be very careful not to run ahead of it .... and let us put our feet only on the paths Providence has marked out for us" (SV II, 453).

Frederic writes:

"Let us pray for each other, my very dear friend, let us be on our guard against our troubles, our grieves, our very lack of confidence. Let us walk simply in the path where a merciful Providence leads us, content to see the stone wherever we are to place our foot, without desiring to see the length or the windings of the way" (Bauard, p. 131).

St. Vincent says:

"A consolation Our Lord gives me ... to believe that by the grace of God, we have always tried to follow and not to anticipate Providence which knows how to conduct all things so wisely to the end Our Lord destines for them" (SV II, 456).

Frederic writes:

"Those weekly evening meetings are one of the greatest consolations Providence has left me" (Letter #169, February 7, 1838).

When Frederic was only 17 years old, he wrote:

"I hold that Providence here directs the arm of temporal power, and Providence has its own ways" (Letter #11, May 5, 1830).

Later he wrote:

"My future I leave in the hands of Providence. I shall accept willingly whatever place he will be pleased to assign me to, however lowly it may be. It will be always noble, if it be filled worthily" (Bauard, pp. 89-90).

"You see that I, too, have scruples and must spurn them in order to accomplish the will of Providence as Providence allows me to see it" (Letter #308, April 30, 1841).

Frederic has beautiful and inspiring thoughts on the role of Divine Providence in his life. He writes to his wife, Amelie:

"Three years ago, when the success of my teaching was uncertain, I did not falter, I did not listen to dictates of self-interest: I sought in my career knowledge only. I believe that it was God who thus inspired me, and made me act with a confidence that was foreign to my weak character. Then Providence led you into my path, and I offered you the sharing of a life poor, for long and perhaps obscure, but sanctified, ennobled by the cultivation of all that is beautiful: I offered you solitude far from all belonging to you, but with the tenderness of a heart which had never belonged to anyone but you" (Letter #515, October 13, 1843).

Frederic writes to his close friend François Lallier:

"Each day, revealing numerous merits in her who is mine, increases my debt to Providence..." (Letter #331, June 28, 1841)

It may well be running the risk of being too simplistic to say, then, that the Vincentian concept of Divine Providence can be summarized in several key phrases:

"We must will what Divine Providence wills.  
Grace has its moments.  
Let us abandon ourselves to Providence.  
Do not run ahead of Providence.  
Do not run behind Providence.  
Follow Providence on the path it leads without desiring to know its length or windings."

### **The Blessed Virgin Mary**

Frederic died on September 8th, the Feast of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It was an appropriate day for his death, because of Frederic's devotion to Mary. It was he who pushed for placing the Society under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin, shortly after the founding of the Society. It was also decided to celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception with special devotion. The Hail Mary was added to the prayers of the weekly meeting of the Society.

The shrine of Notre Dame de Fourvière, on the hill overlooking the city of Lyon, always held a special place in the prayer of Frederic. He had great devotion to the Mother of God. It was here at the foot of the altar of Our Lady's shrine at the age of 21 that he resolved to sanctify himself through greater sacrifice. He wrote: "I placed my intentions under the auspices of our Divine Mother, trusting for the rest to my good will" (Bauard, p. 98).

The dread of cholera in September 1835 hovered over the city of Lyon. It was advancing within ten miles of the city limits. A large crowd gathered at the Shrine of Notre Dame de Fourvière to chant the penitential psalms. Frederic says:

"God has for the second time glorified His Blessed Mother and consoled our poor city; the hand which threatened to crush us, for the second time, extended to bless us. The name Notre Dame de Fourvière no longer brings a sneer to the lips of the impious man, who cannot help thinking that, possibly, he owed his life to her protection" (Letter September 23, 1835; Bauard, p.108).

Frederic wrote to a member of the Society:

"My dear friend, may each one of us, as he increases in years, increase also in friendship, piety and zeal to do good! May our whole life be passed under the patronage of those to whom we have dedicated our youth: Vincent de Paul, the Blessed Virgin, and Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (Letter #157, August 21, 1837).

Frederic saw much of the Mother of God in his own mother, Marie. She, like Mary, was a gentle woman, a devoted mother and wife. Frederic remembers how his mother prayed for him when he was in danger of death at age seven, and he remembered how he survived the ravage of typhoid fever at the time when he was left to the mercy of God. The Ozanams were convinced that it was truly a miracle due to the intercession of St. Francis Regis, the French Jesuit saint to whom they had a special devotion. When Frederic's daughter was born, he and Amelie named her Marie after his mother and the Mother of God.

In January 1853, in hope to recover his failing health, Amelie took Frederic to Italy. In mid-July, they settled in a home at the foot of Montenero on the outskirts of Livorno. There is a famous shrine there dedicated to Our Mother of Grace. Frederic and his family prayed there for his recovery. This was the same shrine where St. Elizabeth Ann Seton prayed during her stay in Livorno.

Two months before his death, Frederic wrote to his brother, Charles, from Burgos, Spain:

"Ah! Blessed Virgin, my Mother, what a powerful Lady you are! And in return for your poor house in Nazareth, how your divine Son caused beautiful houses to be built for you. I have know of many beautiful ones, from Notre Dame of Cologne to Saint Mary Major and Saint Mary of Florence to Notre Dame of Chartres. It was of little moment to have at your service the Italians, the Germans and the French. But here the Spanish, who pass for the least able workers in the world, leave their swords and become masons so that you will also have a home among them. Good Virgin, you who have obtained these miracles, obtain also something for us and our people. Strengthen this fragile and shattered house of our bodies; make the spiritual structure of our souls ascend into heaven" (Letter November 18, 1852 as found in Paris, p. 128).

## **Marriage**

Monsignor Helmut Moll, of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, writing in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano* (#35, August 30, 1995), said that the time is right to declare more married couples as saints, especially given the heroic virtues needed to keep modern marriages together. "Staying together in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, shows an heroic degree of virtue."

The Vatican is looking for couples "whose love never faded, whose promise of mutual fidelity was never broken and who unmasked such solutions as 'trial marriage' or 'limited marriage'."

Frederic married the girl of his dreams, Amelie Soulacroix, on June 23, 1841, in the Church of St. Nizier, Lyon. Frederic was twenty-eight; Amelie was twenty. Frederic's parents were both deceased by then. His brother, Alphonse, a priest, witnessed the marriage.

Frederic's other brother, Charles, the doctor, assigned. Frederic trembled as he placed the ring on Amelie's finger. He said:

"I could hardly contain my tears, tears of joy as they were. And, I felt the divine benediction descend upon me as I heard the words of consecration" (Letter #331, June 28, 1841).

Frederic wrote to his close friend, François Lallier, in the same letter:

"Since the five days that we have been together, I have allowed myself to be happy. I count neither the minutes nor the hours. I have lost all track of time. What does the future matter? Happiness in the present is eternity. I have found heaven" (Letter #331).

Frederic never stopped singing his praises of Amelie or speaking of his love for her. He writes:

"Come, then, my well-beloved, my dove, my angel, come into my arms, against my heart, come bringing me yours so pure and generous; come and God bless you that after two years we love each other a thousand times more than on the first day!" (Letter #515, October 13, 1843).

He also spent quality time with their daughter, Marie; he taught her how to read. When Marie was two and a half, Frederic and Amelie took her with them to visit the poor on the Rue Mouffetard. She helped to give out small items to the poor, including toys from her own playthings to the children. Her parents were teaching her at a very early age to learn how to share!

Remember, he was a man of passion. Do you know of any husband who gives his wife flowers every month on the anniversary of their marriage? Frederic never forgot to give Amelie flowers on the twenty-third of each month, including August 23rd, on his death-bed.

And Amelie adored Frederic. She took the best care of him all their married life. As a daughter of an educator, she had a solid understanding of what it meant to be a professor in an institution of higher learning. When Frederic's health began declining, on the advice of his doctors, Amelie took him to Italy with the hope that the warmer climate and friends would revive him and lift his spirits. Incidentally, while there, and in bad health, Frederic still helped to found several conferences of the Society, especially in cities which had resisted their establishment. The man of passion could not overlook any opportunity to activate the Society for the alleviation of the poor.

The days in Italy were relatively peaceful. Amazingly much of his pain had subsided, but it would not last. Frederic received the Sacrament of the Sick. The priest encouraged Frederic not to fear the Lord. Frederic replied:

"Why would I fear him? I love Him so much!" (Bauard, p. 403).

Frederic fell into a coma. He came out of it infrequently. When he did open his eyes, it was to say a brief prayer, to squeeze Amelie's hand or to thank those who were taking care of him.

On September 8, 1853, he spent a peaceful day. His face reflected an unusual serenity. Toward evening, his breathing gradually became labored and louder. He opened his eyes, looked at those around him, and cried in a loud voice: "My God, My God, have mercy on me" (Baubard, p. 403). Frederic breathed his last.

### **Frederic, A Man for the Third Millennium**

Frederic Ozanam speaks to every Christian man and woman on the brink of the third millennium. He exemplifies what is most noble of the human spirit. Frederic fulfills the ideals set forth by Vatican II, particularly those found in the Decrees on the Church, the Lay Apostolate and the more recent *Christifideles Laici*. Frederic models those words of St. Paul, "I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

Frederic's spirituality is the spirituality that appeals to the full range of humanity: from the ordinary Christian person on the streets of a bulging city to the extraordinary person in the halls of academia or in the offices of one of the major corporations in the world.

His spirituality fulfills the dual commandments of Jesus: "love God and love your neighbor as yourself." Frederic combined these into one mandate of love, after his patron, St. Vincent de Paul. For Frederic, as for Vincent, love was love; there was one love. The human person's quest has to be a lover of one's fellow human being in imitation of Jesus, Love Incarnate. Frederic's spirituality followed the famous principle of St. Vincent: "Let us love God, let us love God, but let it be with the sweat of our brows and by the strength of our arms."

Frederic's dream was to be an apostle and martyr. In a sense, he realized that dream in his short life of loving service to humankind, although, in humility, he would never had admitted it.

But the fact remains: Frederic was an apostle \_ one sent forth \_ to alleviate the spiritual and material misery of his less fortunate brothers and sisters. He was sent by God for the service of truth. He wrote, spoke and taught the truth; he was one of the leading apologists of the Church of his day. Frederic was a martyr \_ a witness \_ to the Son of God's compassionate love for the poor and abandoned. Frederic echoed the words of St. Vincent: The poor are our masters.

Why should Christians in the third millennium be interested in or inspired by the life and spirituality of Frederic Ozanam?

Like St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and St. Louise de Marillac (two other imitators and followers of the person and spirituality of St. Vincent), Frederic Ozanam was not the recipient of apparitions, audible locutions, or supernatural phenomena associated with the higher degrees of contemplative prayer. Nor was Frederic an active agent of miracles or unexplainable events. Here, again, Frederic was matching his patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

Frederic was ordinary in the sense that he was a man of faith who truly believed and lived that belief \_ and expressed the love of God in compassionate love to God's poor, abandoned and forgotten.

The spirituality of Frederic Ozanam is that of the person in the pew who burns with the desire to love God and neighbor and who, also, wants to put into practice that love. The

spirituality of Frederic Ozanam is that of prayer and action, each supporting and fostering the other. The spirituality of Frederic Ozanam is the spirituality of humility, simplicity, mortification, meekness and zeal for souls. The spirituality of Frederic Ozanam is that of the Good Samaritan, the person who ardently practices the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The spirituality of Frederic Ozanam is the spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul who believes and recognizes that it is truly Jesus in that person of the poor before him. For Frederic, the poor person was the Risen Jesus; for Frederic, the poor person was the sacred image of the God whom he did not see, "and not knowing how to love Him otherwise shall we not love Him in your persons?" (Letter #137, November 13, 1836). The spirituality of Frederic Ozanam is the spirituality of compassion without judgement.

### **Citations**

- 1) All references to LETTERS follow the numbering of Letters in the French Critical Edition: *Lettres de Frédéric Ozanam*.
- 2) All references to BAUNARD are found in *Ozanam in His Correspondence* by Msgr. Baunard. I do not know if the English translation follows the original French edition in its pagination. My references are to the English translation.
- 3) References to "Paris" are found in "Frederic Ozanam," translated from the French into English by Mary Ann Garvey Hess. *Cahiers Ozanam*, January to June 1974, Paris.
- 4) All other citations are specified, e.g., *Lumen Gentium*, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Christifideles Laici*.
- 5) References to St. Vincent's conferences are found in "Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents, Paris, 1920-1925.

