

FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Letter on the Feast of the Miraculous Medal

To the members of the Vincentian Family

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ dwell in your heart today and always!

A short time ago I received a letter from a Daughter of Charity who wanted to share with me her thoughts with regard to the manner in which we, as a Vincentian Family, might respond to Pope Francis' call to pray for peace in Syria and for peace throughout the world... doing this through means of our historical heritage, the Miraculous Medal. As I read her letter I felt that the Holy Spirit was touching my heart. I asked this Sister to do some further thinking and to develop her idea and to send it to me so that I could share it with the Vincentian Family on the occasion of the feast of the Miraculous Medal. In this letter you will find her idea that I whole-heartedly support, and that I recommend to you for your reflection and practical application.

As I stand before the statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and the image of the crucified Christ (images which are probably found in every Vincentian chapel and church), I see a reflection of what is happening in our world. Almost everywhere we are able to perceive the presence of evil: the power and domination of money, human trafficking, sexual abuse, extortion, modern forms of slavery, and so many different forms of violence, including war. Evil has become so noisy and loud that it makes people afraid. Once again we see repeated the scene that occurred at the beginning of time when Adam said: *I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself* (Genesis 3:10).

Today, men and women are also afraid of God. They fear God's demands, and willingly accept the seductive and enticing proposals of the Evil One, even though they know that those proposals are deceitful and lead to enslavement. The narration of the events surrounding creation as found in the book of Genesis is not simply a description of sin. We also find there the promise of hope for humankind! Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal is a concrete expression of that hope because in her we discover a woman who is clothed with the sun and who crushes the head of the serpent. This image assures us that God always has a solution for our situation.

At times I am in awe before reality: throughout the world we will find reproductions of distinct and beautiful images of the Virgin, but the image of the *Virgo Potens* with the globe in her hand... that image is part of our Vincentian Family heritage. The image of the *Virgo Potens* crushing the head of the serpent who roams the earth is a powerful symbol. We do not fight with just human means as we confront evil in all its clever and powerful forms. We are also provided with the “modest” means of God and are invited to trust in God’s assistance. This is an urgent demand, and I pray we may open ourselves to this blessing of God that is offered to all of us.

During the apparitions to Saint Catherine that occurred on November 27, 1830 in the rue du Bac in Paris, Our Lady presented her role in the plan of salvation. In the first image, Our Lady is standing on the globe. Beneath her feet is the serpent whose skin is green with yellow blotches. In her hand is a golden globe with a small cross.

Saint Catherine noted the green color of the serpent with yellow blotches: this serpent has crawled through the whole earth. Those colors provide the serpent with a good disguise and therefore, it can difficult to recognize the presence of evil in our life.

Fr. J. Eyler, CM, in his book “Mary and her Medal”, stated that when we analyze the content of the apparitions of the Virgin that have been recognized by the Church, we should not simply focus on the words that were spoken. The words were accompanied by movement and symbolic gestures which reveal the teaching that should be the real focus of our attention.

In a dialogue with Sister Dufés, Catherine described her first vision: *The Virgin had the globe in her hands. I had never seen this image before!* Sister Dufés understood the meaning: *This is about the mystery of the Mother, Queen of the Universe. The Virgin guards the world and brings it to God as an offering.*

In the second image, the Virgin appears with rings of precious jewels and her hands are extended over the earth while the jewels emit luminous rays that are extended over the earth. *The beauty and brightness of the rays are the blessings that are bestowed on those who request such blessings. The jewels that emit no light are the blessings that people forget to request.* Catherine added: *She made me understand that we will experience joy when we request her intercession. Mary is gracious toward all those who ask for her blessings and rejoices in being able to bless us.*

A sort of oval picture formed around Our Lady. At the top of this image, written in gold, were the words: ***O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!*** Then Catherine heard a voice that said: *have a medal made according to this model; those who wear it with confidence will receive abundant blessings.*

The gift of the Medal is a magnificent gesture of confidence. It is a great sign of God’s goodness. It is also a call to collaboration that

respects the dignity and the freedom of the human person. God sent the Immaculate Virgin bearing in her arms countless blessings so that we, who are deceived by the evil one, might see the path of salvation that is illuminated before our very eyes. Mary helps us to discover the astuteness of evil She has received the mission to crush the head of the serpent. Men and women, through their own effort, cannot free themselves. Yet while God respects our freedom God also requests our collaboration. The words inscribed on the Medal call us to prayer. This is our contribution to collaboration. Those who accept the Medal and confidently recite the words inscribed on it will receive many blessings through Mary's intercession. She does not impose on us any blessings that we do not request.

In 1830 during the dialogue that took place on the nights of July 18-19 the Blessed Virgin referred to many things that would be fulfilled in due time. It is important to refer back to those words in order to obtain the strength and the light to confront the present situation. The Blessed Virgin's words are tender and encouraging: *I myself will be with you. I will always watch over you and grant you many graces. The moment is coming when the danger will be great. It will appear that all is lost. There, I will be with you! Have confidence. You know of my visit and the protection of God and that of Saint Vincent for the two communities. Have confidence! Do not be discouraged!*

How good to hear those words. Nevertheless, Mary places one condition on her words: our fidelity. We can think that those promises were made in light of the difficult times that resulted from the French Revolution but, in fact, those words have been given to both Congregations and therefore refer to both Congregations everywhere and at every time.

In his circular letter of September 8, 1843, Father Étienne wrote: *We ought to recognize the clear intervention of the Immaculate Virgin who has given us such extraordinary signs of her love. Through her powerful intercession before God she has seen to it that our two spiritual families did not perish in the calamities and upheavals that God utilized in order to bring about a renewal of the faith.*

Throughout our history, the Vincentian Family has often experienced the help of Mary Immaculate. She will also help us now if we ask her. The Miraculous Medal is a great gift and a treasure that has been entrusted to us but this gift and treasure is to be shared with everyone. Thus the Medal has been distributed throughout the world, but in our family the Medal is the source of special devotion and esteem.

At this time we are concerned about the future of humanity and we experience the need to respond to the call of Pope Francis to pray for peace in Syria and throughout the world... to pray so that conflicts are resolved through dialogue and not on a battlefield. We can respond to

this call in the spirit of the great mystery that has been given to us, and therefore, I invite our Vincentian Family: Let us be united in the prayer that Our Lady, the Mother of God and our Mother, has given to us. Each day let us frequently repeat those words: ***O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you!***

Let us pray to the *Virgo Potens* for our sisters and brothers who are suffering. She understands the meaning of suffering: the cross, the letter "M", the heart of Jesus and Mary... these signs that appear on the medal are indeed very eloquent.

The Vincentian Family is very large and spread throughout the world. If from all parts of the world this prayer is lifted up on high, then the Virgin will guide our troubled world toward God. This simple prayer can be said by everyone wherever they may be: at work, driving, in the fields, in a hospital, when serving a poor person... in fact, the prayer can be said with that poor person.

Let us become as magnanimous, diligent and creative as our Holy Founders. Let us allow ourselves to be guided by the Immaculate Virgin and become involved in the struggle against evil. Let us spread devotion to the Miraculous Medal and, as the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity did when the medal was first made, let us teach people to say that brief but powerful prayer. Let us meditate on the mysteries that God has entrusted to our Congregations and let us engage in collaborative action on behalf of the world's salvation.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.

Superior General