

# 4

## HOMILIES

### Opening Homily

G. Gregory Gay, CM

27 June 2016

#### Readings:

*Amos 2:6-10, 13-16*

*Matthew 8:18-22*

For these past 12 years as Superior General, I have spoken with you on many different occasions. Each year I have written an Advent and Lenten message and I have addressed letters to you and to all the members of the Vincentian Family on significant feast days and on other important days in our history. There is not much that I could say that you have not already heard. Therefore, today, in my penultimate homily as Superior General, I would like to continue to do that which I have attempted to do during my time as Superior General, namely, I want to encourage and animate you, the Missionaries of the Congregation, to give witness to this Church that goes forth.

Is not that what Jesus did? In today's gospel, Jesus responds to various individuals who want to follow him. Jesus makes it clear that such a commitment will demand sacrifice and also will limit their availability to engage in other activities. In other words, there is a certain unconditional nature implied in Christian discipleship and, therefore, one must avoid allowing family ties and other obligations to distract one from proclaiming the Good News.

*Go forth, Jesus says, go forth and proclaim the Gospel; feed the hungry, give drink to those who are thirsty, clothe the naked, care for the infirm, visit those imprisoned, welcome the stranger into your midst, provide for the poor, the widows and orphans (cf. Matthew 25:31-46).*

*Go forth, Jesus says, go forth and proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, and proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord (cf. Luke 4:18-19).*

*Why are you still standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus has been taken up from you into heaven. Therefore, go forth, and proclaim the good news that Jesus is in your midst (cf. Acts 1:11).*

Did not Vincent do the same? God is telling us, Vincent said, *set out, you Missioners, set out! What? You're still here, and there are poor souls waiting for you, whose salvation depends perhaps on your preaching and catechizing!* (CCD:XI:121).<sup>1</sup> *Go to visit a chain gang, you'll find God there. Look after those little children, you'll find God there ... You go into poor homes, but you find God there* (CCD:IX:199).

Did not Frederic Ozanam do the same? *Let us go forth and look after the people who have too many needs and not enough rights, who demand with reason a fuller share in public affairs, security in work and safeguards against poverty ... Let us go forth and climb the stairs to the poor person's room, let us sit by their bedside and feel the same cold that pierces them, let us listen as they share the secrets of their lonely hearts and troubled minds.*<sup>2</sup>

Go forth, however, is not an end in itself. In fact, going forth is the first step in a lifelong process of developing a more intimate relationship with God and of strengthening the bonds of solidarity with our brothers and sisters, with our lords and masters, with all of creation.

What more, then, does this going forth involve? Since the time that Robert Maloney was Superior General, we have become involved in various international missions. While this has been a recent development in the Congregation, nevertheless we can trace its roots back to the time of Vincent de Paul who sent the Missionaries to Madagascar, Ireland and Scotland, Poland, Italy, Tunis, Algiers. Yes, we are a Congregation composed of individual provinces, but we are first and foremost an international congregation, and that reality characterizes the way in which we go forth.

<sup>1</sup> *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 XI, p. 121; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, CCD:XI:121.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Banard, *Ozanam in his Correspondence*, translated by a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Ireland, Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, Dublin, 1925, p. 279.

What else does this going forth involve? This fundamental stance of our Congregation means that you and I are willing to get involved in the daily life of those people who are marginalized and living on the peripheries of society. We do not, however, act or minister alone. Rather we go forth and minister as members of a large Vincentian Family. We go forth and minister from a systemic-change approach. That is why I have taken the time to dialogue with the larger Vincentian Family in all my visits to the different provinces. I have absolutely no doubt that as a Vincentian Family we have the potential to transform the world. Furthermore, I have become more grounded in that conviction as a result of my conversations with you, as a result of my awareness of the reality that we journey along a common path, as a result of sharing the Word and breaking Bread with you.

Let us continue to break the Bread and share the Bread during this celebration of the Eucharist and let us also break that same Bread as we encounter Christ in our brothers and sisters who are marginalized and living on the peripheries of society.

## Retreat Homily

Bishop Varghese Thottamkara, CM

3 July 2016

**The Missionary mandate of all Christians.**

**Saint Thomas the Apostle: one of the first missionaries as a model**

In the gospel today, we have the story of the sending out of 72 disciples. This is unique. All the Gospels mention the 12 disciples and their subsequent commissioning by Jesus to go out and continue his mission. However, it is only Luke who makes a reference to sending out 72 disciples and there must be a reason for this. Jesus says that the harvest is great and there are not enough people to do the necessary work. Likewise, Luke wants to tell us that the mission of Jesus is not only carried forward by so-called experts (such as priests and religious), but that evangelization is the responsibility of every believer in Jesus. This belief is very much in tune with what Vatican II taught us. When speaking of the laity the Council Fathers noted that it is the right and duty of every baptized person to preach the gospel.

The fulfillment of this mission is done by each person in varied ways. Even in the time of Christ, and later in the apostolic era, we find all types of people participating in different ways in the mission of Christ. There were people who brought disciples to Christ. There were people who carried the sick to Jesus so he could touch and heal them (Luke 5:18). There is the boy who brought the five bread and two fish (John 6:9). There were women who cared for Jesus and even those who financially assisted him (Luke 8:2-3). Yet, despite their varied roles, all shared in the mission of Jesus. Here we should remember the insight of Saint Paul: we are different parts of the same body with different functions (1 Corinthians 12:12f.).

The reason for sending the 72 is mentioned by Luke as a lack of sufficient workers (v. 2). More than ever, we experience this reality today. There is a lack of sufficient priests and missionaries entering

and being ordained to the ministerial priesthood. So those who can and want to exercise more fully their Christian vocation by putting themselves at the service of the kingdom should be encouraged. We are perhaps in a time where more emphasis should be given to this dimension and we need to encourage more Christian faithful to participate in the call to proclaim the gospel. Thus, empowering the laity is very relevant today. As Vincentians, we are called to intensify our efforts of collaboration with different branches of the Vincentian Family – including the laity – so that evangelization is carried out effectively.

In today's Gospel, the instructions on requirements and the mission of the disciples is quite explicit. Since we are called to be missionaries, let us have a look at them. They are being sent out as lambs among wolves (v. 3). What does it mean? It calls for the virtues of gentleness, mildness, meekness, and humility so necessary in a missionary. The missionary does not go as a conqueror, but as a humble servant. So the attitude of a servant is expected from a missionary. This is very much in tune with the mind of Saint Vincent.

**Simple lifestyle (v. 4):** This is another important missionary virtue, enabling one to place all trust and security in the Lord alone. Saint Vincent looked upon this as depending on the Providence of God, by which the missionary puts all his trust in the Lord, holding on to Him as his only security. Once this is practiced, the missioner is totally free to proclaim the gospel.

**They are to be bearers of peace (vv. 5-6):** A missionary is one who has received and experienced the peace of the Risen Lord and transmits it to everyone he meets. A personal experience and possession of the peace of the Lord should be reflected in the missionary by his presence, words, and actions. He should bring peace to the people whom he meets. A disturbed person, one who is in internal turmoil, cannot preach the gospel effectively. Saint Vincent insisted that we cannot give what we do not have. So we are reminded that we are to be bearers of peace.

**Contentment is another virtue required of a disciple (v. 7):** to be content with the given condition and convenience, including food and accommodation, is a virtue essential to being a missionary and keeping the missionary spirit alive in community life. Those not content, who look for greater comforts that impede them from concentrating fully on the mission, focus more on themselves than on proclaiming the gospel, thus giving counter witness to the poor.

The disciples are asked to show concern for the needy and proclaim the Kingdom (vv. 8-9): A missionary has to be concerned with the poor and the needy as Jesus showed his preferential option for the poor. The proclamation of the gospel also means working for justice and peace. The gospel message becomes tangible to the poor through justice, peace, and mercy, which are the virtues of the Kingdom. In this extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, we are encouraged by Pope Francis to be apostles of mercy, which Saint Vincent also has given us as a legacy. So the proclamation of the gospel and works of justice and mercy have to go hand in hand.

Even if rejected, they are to continue the proclamation (vv. 10-11): Rejection and denial are part of the life of a missionary. A disciple is not greater than the master. Hence, rejection and denial should not discourage and disappoint a missionary, for his reward is God alone. Like Saint Paul, he should consider himself as privileged to suffer for the Lord and continue the mission.

They are not to be overenthusiastic with success, for the only thing that is of importance is being members of the Kingdom (vv. 17-20): Overenthusiasm in success and dejection in failure are not fitting for a missionary. A true missionary should look to doing God's will and leave success and failure to the Lord. What is important is that he works for the Lord. The Lord brings fruits from it in his own time.

Today, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, we are celebrating the feast of Saint Thomas the Apostle, one of the first missionaries of the Church sent by Jesus himself. As Saint Thomas is considered the Apostle of India, his feast is celebrated as a solemnity in my native land. There are many who depict Saint Thomas the Apostle as a person of feeble faith due to his insistence on seeing the Risen Lord. A closer look at the events makes us understand that it was the ardent desire of Thomas to experience the Risen Lord. "My faith in the Risen Lord should not be based on what others say but I too want to personally experience him." This desire he put in his own style of adamant words, "*I will not believe unless I put my finger into his nail prints.*" Jesus understood this clearly; that is why he heeded to his obstinacy, appeared again, and fulfilled his desire.

Thomas was to be a missionary who went out to the ends of the earth to proclaim the gospel. I must acknowledge that I stand here today to proclaim the gospel due to the missionary efforts of Saint

Thomas in India. The basic quality for a missionary should be his personal encounter and experience of the Risen Lord. It is not enough for a missionary to know about the Lord through books, but he should know him through his personal encounter and intimacy with the Lord. This is the lesson Saint Thomas teaches us. Do we have that earnest desire to encounter and experience the Lord in our personal life? We cannot give what we do not have. We cannot teach what we do not know. We cannot preach what we are not convinced of on a personal and interior level.

We also find the apostolic zeal of a missionary in Saint Thomas: "Let us go and die with him!" Thomas expressed an earnest determination to follow Jesus even unto death! Indeed, Thomas did die for Christ. This is the resolve and determination a missionary should possess. It is a virtue Saint Vincent recommended for the Congregation of the Mission, as it calls confreres to be totally loving and self-giving without counting the cost. Saint Vincent said that, "If charity is a fire, zeal is its flame. If love is the sun, zeal is its ray." Let us pray, my dear confreres, that the members of this General Assembly be filled with charity and zeal to inflame the whole Congregation. Amen.

## Homily for the Election

G. Gregory Gay, CM

5 July 2016

### Readings:

*Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13*

*Matthew 9:32-38*

This morning's gospel makes us aware of our special vocation, namely, to follow Christ evangelizing the poor. We all know that that goal is attained when we make every effort to clothe ourselves in the spirit of Christ, when we engage in the process of evangelizing the poor and when we collaborate in the formation of the clergy and the laity (Constitutions, # 1).

Today, however, this reminder with regard to our vocation and mission takes on greater significance because, in a very brief period of time, we will begin the process of electing a Superior General and his Council. We have already spent some time reflecting on the words that refer to the Superior General as the center of unity and the source of spiritual animation and apostolic activity (Constitutions, # 102).

In this morning's gospel, as the crowd of people interacted with Jesus they were amazed because they had never seen anything like that which they had just experienced. At the same time, as Jesus gazed upon the crowd, his heart was moved with compassion because they were troubled and abandoned.

The reaction of the crowd to Jesus and Jesus' reaction to the crowd highlight two characteristics that we might all hope to find in the next Superior General.

First, an ability to excite and create enthusiasm and joy in the members of the Congregation of the Mission, as they go forth to proclaim the good news to those most abandoned and forgotten. We

would hope that such excitement and enthusiasm is also created in all those men and women who are part of this magnificent Vincentian Family.

There is no doubt that the process of going out to the peripheries and engaging in the process of evangelization on behalf of those most in need presents many, many challenges. Do we not want the words of Pope Francis to be found on the lips of all the members of our provincial and international leadership teams: *How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction (Evangelii Gaudium, # 261).*

Therefore, when we engage in that process as members of a team, when we look for ways to be creative in our approach to ministry, when we share our experience of finding Christ in the midst of “our lords and masters,” then all of this should in itself create a new enthusiasm. We would all hope that our next Superior General would encourage us in all these different endeavors, would excite us by his own approach to his ministry, and also would create in us a certain amazement at the wonderful deeds that God is doing in the midst of this beloved Congregation.

The second characteristic that is highlighted in today’s gospel is that of boundless compassion. The gospels, the writings of our Founders, as well as our Constitutions and the writings of our past and present Vincentian scholars – all of these describe in great detail a way of life for which we are held accountable.

The gospels place before us the Beatitudes. Vincent de Paul exhorts us to practice in all our affairs the five characteristic virtues of humility, simplicity, gentleness, mortification, and zeal. Our Constitutions tell us that there are no more powerful or more suitable means to enable us to engage in the process of evangelization on behalf of the poor than those of the evangelical counsels. The vow of stability seals us with a uniqueness as Vincentians, gives meaning to the other three vows, and enables us to minister all the days of our lives on the peripheries, in the midst of our sisters and brothers who are poor, in the midst of all the new forms of poverty that marginalize countless numbers of men and women.

The gospels and our Foundational Documents present us with a way of life – a way of life that, with the grace of God, should give a Christian and Vincentian significance to everything that we do. We

also know, however, that at different times in our lives we will all fall short of the mark. Therefore, our Superior General should not only be one who can continually challenge us to live up to the commitments that we have made, but also should be able to express compassion when we stray from the flock.

Now, as we gather around the table of the Lord, as we are nourished by the Word and the Body and the Blood of Jesus, we pray for that wisdom to know God's will for our Congregation at this precise moment of history, to know who will be the best to help us all respond to the cries of the poor, cries that grow louder with the passing of each day.

## With the Vincentian Family

**Tomaž Mavrič, CM**

**24<sup>th</sup> Successor of Saint Vincent de Paul**

**10 July 2016**

It is with great joy and thankfulness to God that I would like to extend my warmest greetings to all the members of the different branches of the Vincentian Family in the USA, as well as to extend my warmest greetings to all the members of the Vincentian Family around the world! It is with deep trust in Providence that we can look with much hope to the future, as the charism we try to live as members of the Vincentian Family in today's world is so much a "sign of these times."

Inspired and accompanied by Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal; Saint Vincent de Paul, the Evangelizer of the Poor; the many Blessed and Saints of the Vincentian Family; and so many wonderful members of the Family living around the globe, who, in today's world, are wonderful examples and mentors of how to incarnate the Vincentian charism, we have all the necessary tools to actively participate in the building up of the Kingdom, making this world a better place.

We recently officially ended within the Vincentian Family "The Year of Collaboration." It was a year of great blessings. We grew in the awareness of how important and essential it is to collaborate with each other within the individual branches, as well as within the Vincentian Family on the local, national, and international levels. We discovered in our brothers and sisters the many gifts that God has given to every single individual in his/her own ways and shapes. We saw the positive outcome of sharing our talents and gifts in a concrete project or undertaking, by being much more effective in its goals and producing much more lasting fruits. We got to discover new branches and members of the worldwide Vincentian Family, whose updated information was added to the list that presently numbers more than 225 different branches of men or women of different religious congregations or members of the different lay groups or associations. In many ways, this was possible by the hard work of the members of

the newly founded international Vincentian Family Office located in Philadelphia, USA.

The membership of new branches to be added to the worldwide Vincentian Family is far from over. In different parts of the world, we keep discovering new congregations, groups, associations, as well as individuals, who presently still do not belong officially to a specific branch, but who live the Vincentian charism in a concrete and active way. It is my hope and wish that more and more individuals and entire groups, associations, religious congregations will join the Vincentian Family.

It is our common mission entrusted to us from Jesus himself on behalf of the poor. A wonderful symbol that speaks so strongly of collaboration or support within the Vincentian Family is a puzzle, whose pieces are made up of different colors, shapes, and sizes. When placed together, they make a beautiful picture!

But collaboration within the different branches of the Vincentian Family needs further growth. We need to avoid any individualism in our service to the poor, on a personal level, as well as on the level of a concrete branch, in order to build the Kingdom together as a Family. This is the only way forward and the way for effective and lasting results. It is the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul and Vincentian spirituality that makes of us, his followers, members of the same Family.

The five virtues that are so much a part of Vincentian spirituality: simplicity, humility, meekness, giving up of oneself to bring concrete resolutions as an offering to Jesus and the poor, and zeal, shape our lives to protect us against the different temptations and attractions of the world where people live as if God did not exist, as if Jesus were an irrelevant figure in the history of humanity, where everything turns around oneself, not having time for the brother and sister next door, or the countless persons around the world who are suffering and waiting and hoping to be helped. The five virtues are like a chain that makes our life grow in holiness, enclosing ourselves more and more in Christ. Simplicity leads us into humility, humility into meekness, meekness makes us stronger at giving up of oneself so as to bring at different times of our life journey concrete things and resolutions as an offering pleasing to God, and that makes us, in the end, grow in zeal, putting us on fire for the mission entrusted to us by Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor.

In the first reading, the Fifth Book of Moses tells us that the commandment or commandments are not so far away from us as to be impossible to reach and follow, but they are, in fact, at the reach of our hands, they are inside us, in our heart. It is for this reason that the more our heart is filled with Jesus' Spirit, the more the commandments will be easier to incarnate in our own life.

In today's Gospel, the parable of the Good Samaritan ends with words: "go and do likewise." It is an invitation, a call, and an urgency to keep walking in the steps of Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor.

As members of the large Vincentian Family, by deepening our collaboration, as well as by deepening the five Vincentian virtues, we can look with much hope to the future to be able to fulfill, as best as we can, the mission entrusted to us.

## Homily – Closing Eucharist

Tomaž Mavrič, CM

15 July 2016

After a long and intensive preparatory road on personal, communitarian, provincial, and international levels, leading us to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, the delegates from all the provinces of the Congregation gathered at DePaul University in Chicago from 27 June to 15 July 2016. Sharing, discussing, and deepening the materials prepared by the Preparatory Commission, they came at the end to witness the birth of the final document of the 42<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission that will show us, the members of the Congregation, the path to follow in the next six years. I would like to thank the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit for accompanying and leading us throughout the Assembly!

It was because of God's presence and mercy that we were able to bring such a monumental undertaking, organizing a General Assembly, to a close. That leaves us with very concrete signs of hope, faith, love, zeal, and with the invitation to be prophetic witnesses in what we say and do.

In light of next year's celebration of the 400 years of the Vincentian Charism, the theme of the General Assembly was "400 Years of Fidelity to the Charism and the New Evangelization." We bring back to our provinces, vice-provinces, regions, communities, and to each confrere individually, concrete lines of action, concrete commitments to incarnate in them in the next six years and beyond.

At different moments during the Assembly, in different shapes and forms, we heard of the thirst for deepening our own Vincentian call, to be able to fulfill the prophetic call Providence had placed in front of us. Allow me to name two sources that synthesize our Vincentian Spirituality, our Vincentian way: the Common Rules and the Constitutions and Statutes.

There are two chapters that I would like to invite us to read in the light of what was shared during the Assembly: the tenth Chapter of

our Common Rules on “Spiritual practices used in the Congregation” and the fourth Chapter of Part II of our Constitutions on “Prayer.” It is this foundation, this source, that will make our commitments, our lines of action, which together we worked so hard to articulate into a final document, a lasting reality.

Saint Vincent de Paul, in the 12<sup>th</sup> and last Chapter and the 14<sup>th</sup> and last point of our Common Rules, urges us, in order that they be rooted in our mind and heart, to have the Common Rules always with us and to read them every three months. It is my invitation and my deep wish that every one of us, every confrere of the Congregation of the Mission will, alternatively on a regular basis, read one article or point of the Constitutions and Common Rules every day. Three holy books always need to be with us wherever we are or wherever we go: at home, on a trip, on vacation: the Bible, the Breviary, and the Common Rules and Constitutions.

As together we embark on a six-year journey as members of the “Little Company,” as Saint Vincent de Paul loved to call it, where better for us to start this journey than in the Chapel of the Apparitions on Rue du Bac in Paris at the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, as well as in the Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul at our Motherhouse on Rue de Sèvres in Paris, asking Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, as well as Saint Vincent de Paul, to intercede for the Little Company and for the worldwide Vincentian Family. It is to these two places that I will make a pilgrimage, in the name of all the members of the Congregation of the Mission. Before traveling to Rome, I will celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday, 14 August, in the Chapel of Saint Vincent de Paul and Monday, 15 August, in the Chapel of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. I will place all our dreams, hopes, and desires into the hands of our Heavenly Mother and our Founder, so we might understand and follow Providence, Jesus’s plan for us for the journey on which we are embarking.

Let’s keep dreaming, but let’s dream together. If one person dreams alone, the dream remains a dream; if we dream together, the dream becomes a reality.