

FEATURE

Meeting of Provincial Directors for the Daughters of Charity

Opening Mass for Directors of the Daughters of Charity

2 July 2012

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My brothers In Christ and St. Vincent:

I am grateful to gather with you as we pray, reflect, listen, and learn about ministry to the Daughters of Charity, a ‘foundational’ work of Saints Vincent and Louise. Indeed, from the start, it was their intention that the Company of the Daughters of Charity should be imbued with a Vincentian spirit. The great responsibility to communicate the charism has been entrusted to us, the Little Company of St. Vincent de Paul. Your presence here continues over three and a half centuries of a chain of service to nourish and challenge Daughters of Charity in their vocation.

As you know, our meeting theme is “*Animating, Accompanying, and Forming Daughters of Charity*”. There’s much ‘food for thought’ in those words, so it is most appropriate we begin and end our time together with the Eucharist. Unless we seek to know and be known by the person of Jesus Christ – the Jesus of Vincent and Louise – and allow Him to animate, accompany, and form us each day, our efforts to assist the Daughters, our confreres, and those we serve will never bear fruit, at least not what Jesus called the “fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16).

The first ‘feast day’ reading from Corinthians is a one familiar to us all. I usually focus on Paul’s juxtaposition of the worldly “wise, powerful, and of noble birth” with the “foolish, weak, and lowly” disciples of

Jesus. But it is meant to be more than a lesson in humility. Paul is telling us that the true efficacy of our endeavors is not found in worldly measures of success, but in another standard; namely, that of “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”. It is a challenging, and I daresay, a discomfoting path to seek in today’s world.

However, in rereading the text, I also noticed two important words: ‘calling’ and ‘chose’. Paul reminds us that discipleship is not a job to be done, or a task to be tackled, but a mysterious calling to unite us with Christ. The unique call Jesus made to Paul, Vincent, and Louise was to follow Him, the suffering servant, the crucified one, not a triumphant Messiah. Both Vincent and Louise discovered this as their lives evolved from being an ambitious cleric and a lady of means. They found themselves ‘chosen’ by God to do something they could not have done on their own.

One result of their being called and chosen to follow Jesus was the founding of the Daughters of Charity, that which draws us together for these two weeks. Vincent’s own musings belie this reality: “*Who would have ever thought there would be Daughters of Charity? I did not think of it. God thought of it for you*” (SV, 14 June 1643, IX Conf. A-5). Given their size and scope, I believe your ministry as directors is a most important one to advancing our charism.

Why, you may ask? As Directors of the Daughters of Charity, you assist in the ineffable work of animating, accompanying, and forming the largest single group of women of a Society of Apostolic Life in today’s Church. As seen in their Constitutions, it was the intention of both Founders that your administrative tasks be minimal to allow you to focus on spiritual, pastoral, and apostolic ways to transmit our Vincentian charism. You call their leadership, – the Visitatrix, her council, and the Sister Servants – to be what Jesus is in today’s Gospel: glad tidings; first to each other, and to the poor. You help the Daughters to “proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord”.

So what should our focus be in this meeting time? As a strategy, I suggest three simple words beginning with ‘R’: reflect, react, and re-integrate. These days give us ample opportunity to ponder your individual role as a director, but also the communal ideals and challenges you all face in animating, accompanying, and forming today’s Daughter of Charity.

First, **reflect**. I urge you to take time in these busy days to reflect on the gifts and graces of your Vincentian vocation. Often, in meeting the demands of being a director, we press on doing the “harvest work” of the Lord and fail to spend enough time with the “Lord of the harvest”. In these days together, take time to reflect on your own Vincen-tian vocation, and allow the daily scriptures, the Eucharist, and the writings of our Founders to enrich and strengthen you.

Secondly, **react**. In large meetings such as this, we have great opportunities to interact and exchange information. Formally, this happens in presentations carefully crafted for you. But this meeting provides opportunities for informal discussion, or 'networking' as we say in the USA. If you are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with this word or idea, recall that Vincent de Paul, our founder, was a great 'networker', and we still benefit from the fruit of his labors today!

Lastly, **re-integrate**. When a meeting such as this ends and we return to our homes, the tendency can be to put our notes and observations away on a shelf for later reference. Due to the demands of being a director, the new insights, ideas, and possibilities are also put aside. I urge you to make at least one resolution in each of the three ways to animate, accompany, and bring formation to the Daughters of Charity you serve as their director.

On our own, our efforts can seem feeble, or piecemeal. That is why we gather for this Eucharist today and every day. With Jesus' help and the intercession of our Holy Founders, we are reminded it is the "spirit of the Lord" who enlivens and enables us. Like Vincent and Louise, we have been called by God and chosen by the Congregation to be bearers of the Vincentian charism of charity. Let us look with gratitude and hope on that challenge. Like the Daughters, may we all seek "steadfast union with God, so that in the midst of the world... we might be witnesses to the love of Christ" (DC Constitutions, # 12).