

Sunday Mass Homily for JMV Moderators

Paris, 20 July 2014

My brothers and sisters in Jesus and Saint Vincent:

As you know, we live in an era of instantaneous communication. The digital age has created so many possibilities to be in contact, going well beyond anything imagined in years past. In our time together here, I am sure you have already posted pictures on social media sites and sent text messages to family, friends, and colleagues in 'real time' to tell them what you are doing and how the experience is affecting you. It is amazing how quickly we can communicate today.

But stop and ask yourself: are we really communicating? If so, what are we saying? I know how important quick messaging is in travel, as well as its crucial role in emergencies. That is not what I mean. Today, I am referring to communication that leads to communion, creating in us a deeper appreciation of both the message and the messenger. It allows us to reflect on what we have heard or seen, and to respond in a relational way. It best expresses who we are, and honors the sacred in the other. Here, as the moderators of Vincentian Marian Youth, we see the depth and richness it brings us as disciples of Jesus and followers of Vincent.

However, today's Scripture readings show us two crucial things about real communication: its true meaning and value, which is wisdom, and the ancient method from Jesus' day that still instructs and inspires us; namely, the parables. They are truly a gift that keeps on giving. Let me focus first on the true meaning and value of communication in the Scriptures we share today.

The first reading from the book of Wisdom tells us of a God who communicates by words and deeds, one who is mighty in power, majestic but also deeply involved in the lives of His people. We are told, *"There is no god besides you who have the care of all. Your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all"* (Wis. 12; 13:16). Wisdom shows us a God who tempers justice and judgment with mercy and compassion. In the Old Testament, we often find the phrase "the fear of God". While today that phrase, 'fear of God' can have negative connotations, in the richness of the language of that era, to have a fear of God meant to acknowledge and celebrate God's awesome power and might. Wisdom is God's gift to humanity; to be sought constantly and valued above human achievements and abilities.

The example par excellence in both wisdom and communication is Jesus. There is a constant congruency between his words and deeds.

Jesus shows us true communication begins in communion with the Father, filtering out in words and actions that reflect God's glory and goodness. It brings joy, peace, insight, consolation, challenge, and commitment to live the Gospel and to build up the Kingdom of God. By his words and actions, Jesus affirms the inner dignity of the human person as the center of any formal or informal means of communication.

This is where parables come in. They are Jesus' concrete, practical way to communicate, using ordinary images and ideas of the day to teach discipleship and to make real the Kingdom of God. At a time when the Israelites yearned for a political, military, or royal reign, the parables of Jesus communicate the power and presence of God to his people. These homespun stories allow us to think, reflect, and pray about who we are, how we live, and what we can become.

At first glance, the three parables in today's Gospel may seem disjointed, or thrown together. A good way of summarizing them lies in three words: "**Weeds, seeds, and wheat**". Yet, the real meaning of these parables can be found in what I call the three P's: **patience, providence, and perseverance**. Each parable has something important to say about your role as a moderator of the Vincentian Marian Youth.

The first parable, '*weeds among the wheat*' is about developing the virtue of **patience** instead of applying a hasty solution to a problem. In this parable, weeds threaten the existence of wheat, a valuable commodity in Jesus' day. When confronted with this, the first reaction is impulsive, perhaps even reckless: get rid of the bad weeds, even if the wheat is destroyed. Then find and punish the one who did this bad deed. It is an understandable and all too human reaction!

Yet, the farmer realizes that patience is necessary. Despite the presence of weeds, wheat can still be harvested. **A good end to a bad start is possible, if one is patient and willing to look to the solution instead of being consumed by the problem.** In this parable, Jesus also asks us to come to grips with the wheat and weeds in the field of our lives, and allow him to patiently purify us. Having allowed the Lord to do so with us, we can then be patient with the 'weeds' of others.

Providence is a powerful word. It calls us to remember that God is in charge, and that our ideas, plans, and actions should be conformed to his will. Belief in divine Providence means that we allow God to be God and not let our ego or human needs take the place of the Lord's plan. The second parable of the mustard seed is a perfect example of our need for divine Providence. It reminds us that any effort we make, no matter how insignificant, if done so with God's grace, can bear fruit. So often only God may know the results of our labors. But if we plant seeds of prayerfulness, hope, service, and integrity, divine Providence will do the rest. This mustard seed parable is a call to trust and letting go, so God's Providence may complete what we begin.

The final parable is about **perseverance**. Waiting for yeast to turn into leavened bread is no quick, easy matter. Much care is needed when formulating ingredients, kneading the dough, and the actual baking. And once done, the whole time-consuming effort must start up again. Yet, once successfully completed, the smell and taste of fresh bread is one of life's great pleasures. This parable shows us when we do not readily achieve the end sought; perseverance is still God's gift, bestowed on us through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus. Thus, no matter how simple or complex a task, no matter how tedious or exciting a duty, whether our efforts are appreciated or taken for granted; when we persevere, we witness to the Vincentian charism.

I have sometimes wondered why Matthew used so many of Jesus' parables in his Gospel. In the other Gospels, Jesus often speaks simply and directly. But Matthew gives us a good insight when he tells us, "He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: *'I will open my mouth in parables; I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world'*" (Mt. 13:34-35). Jesus knew that his people needed stories and personal examples so they could strive to be more in their lives; to console and support them in times of trouble; to drive them into deeper discipleship by identifying with the parable; but most of all, to bring them hope and healing in a world filled with pain, poverty, and random, ruthless violence.

Vincentian Marian Youth is a living example of how **patience**, **Providence**, and **perseverance** can all come together for the common good. Think of the patience St. Catherine Laboure showed throughout her life. After having had the singular honor of a vision and dialogue with Our Lady, St. Catherine labored for decades in a ministry of service to the elderly, living in quiet obscurity. Reflect on how the Providence of God has transformed Vincentian Marian Youth, first known as the *Children of Mary* in Europe, to an international organization witnessing to the Church and our charism on almost every continent in numerous countries. Give thanks for the perseverance of so many past members and moderators of the VMY who first inspired and motivated you to become involved in this great work of God.

As we celebrate the Eucharist together, we know Christ is truly present to us in his Word, sacrament, and in our community of faith, devotion, and service. We give thanks in realizing that Vincentian Marian Youth is truly a work of the Holy Spirit, aided by the intercession of Mary, our Mother, and graced by Saints and Beati of the Vincentian Family. These were and are our first teachers and moderators in the ways of sanctity and service. May they help us to become living parables of **patience**, **Providence**, and **perseverance**.