

Homily of the Superior General to the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-30; Matthew 10:16-23

We all need a guiding star in life. As St. Vincent grew older, more and more that star became simplicity. “It is the virtue I love most,” he stated. “It is my gospel.” Simplicity is love of the truth, even passion for it. “I am the way and the truth and the life,” Jesus says. “No one comes to the Father except through me” — through the Truth. “Those who act in the truth, walk in the light,” Jesus declares. “The truth will set you free,” he assures his followers.

So I encourage you today, in the footsteps of St. Vincent, make truth your guiding star as Directors of the Daughters of Charity.

St. Vincent loved the saying in today’s gospel. In fact, he uses it in the second chapter, fourth paragraph of our Common Rules. He tells us:

Jesus, the Lord, expects us to have the simplicity of a dove. This means giving a straightforward opinion about things in the way we honestly see them, without needless reservations. It also means doing things without any double-dealing or manipulation, our intention being focused solely on God. Each of us, then, should take care to behave always in this spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple, and that he conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to little ones.

Let me reflect with you for a few moments on this first virtue of the Congregation. What is its meaning for those who exercise the service of Director of the Daughters of Charity?

1. Jesus is saying first of all, “Speak clearly and simply.” Do so humbly and with great charity, but *speak* the truth. Let your *yes* mean *yes* and your *no* mean *no*. I encourage you to do this as Directors of the Daughters. Speak simply in the council meetings of your province. Speak simply in your contacts with individual sisters, when they seek spiritual direction from you. And in order to be an effective Director yourself, I encourage you to speak simply with your own spiritual director. My experience is that at times many of us are afraid to express our own truth. We hesitate to talk about our sexuality and celibacy, our struggles, our hopes, our fears, our dreams, our weaknesses. Jesus calls us today to speak clearly and simply.

I know, of course, that that is difficult, but it is one of the great challenges that faces us today. Can we be simple in our own lives? Can we help create a communal environment among the Daughters of Charity in which they constantly speak the truth with love?

2. Jesus is also encouraging us to *witness* to the truth. He is saying: “Let your life match your words.” “Let your Vincentian charism shine out through your life.” “Let the truth set you free.” I encourage you today to call the sisters to witness to the truth that is at the heart of our missionary vocation.

- Call them to go wherever in the world the needs of the poor are crying out, rather than hold on tightly to the security of a place or a job that they like or even the friends or people who appreciate them so much.
- Call them to live with one another in community as friends who really love each other.
- Call them to share their own material possessions with the poor and to stand with them in their struggle for justice.
- Call them to witness to forms of love that are more lasting than sexual union, rather than to focus on sexual relations as if they were the only way of loving.
- Call them to discern the will of God with their sisters, to listen well, rather than to dominate or claim a personal monopoly in knowing God’s will.
- Call them to renounce immediate gratification for the sake of more important communal goals, rather than seek solely what is pleasing in the here and now.
- Call them to spend time genuinely in prayer rather than to feel they must always be “doing something.”

In other words, call them to be authentic. Urge them to make their words and their life be one as Daughters of Charity.

3. Jesus encourages us, finally, to *practice* the truth. He says to us: “Do the works of justice and of love.” In the context of Matthew’s gospel, what “practicing the truth” means is clear. It means living in solidarity with the poor, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, searching for the causes of their poverty and trying to eradicate them through educational

programs, health care programs, human development programs. It means sharing God's word with them and inviting them to his Eucharistic table. And today, when there is so much violence, it means being a peacemaker and teaching others to be peacemakers too. "*Do* the works of justice and peace," Jesus says to us. Of course, the Daughters of Charity are very good at this. Doing the works of justice and charity lies at the heart of their vocation. But I encourage you as Directors to help them renew those works. Urge them to focus again and again on the Document of the Assembly of 1997 as it calls them to find the new poor, the refugees, the women, the children who are the poorest of the poor in today's world and to serve them with effective love.

So, my brothers, the Lord lays out before us today this challenging saying: "Be simple as a dove." Speak the truth. Witness to it. Practice it. Live it fully. If the truth shines out from you, then your words will be good news for the sisters, your lives will be good news, your works will be good news. How I want to encourage you in this today! Animate the sisters to love the truth deeply, to live it authentically, and to make it real in works. Then you and they will be a sign in the world that Jesus is really alive among us.

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