

Intervention of Superior General in the Synod of Bishops

My name is Robert Maloney. I am the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity. Both are Apostolic Societies founded by St. Vincent de Paul. I am speaking in my own name.

In 1643, the Queen of France named Vincent de Paul to the Council of Conscience, a body lead by Cardinal Mazarin. One of its principal tasks was to recommend the names of persons who might be bishops. In an environment of great political intrigue, Vincent labored hard for ten years for the reform of the clergy and the naming of active pastoral bishops. Mazarin, who had much more political criteria for filling vacant sees wrote in his secret diary that Vincent was his enemy. After a decade, Mazarin succeeded in having Vincent removed from the Council, but Vincent carried on a steady correspondence with deeply committed, reforming bishops, encouraging them.

As I read the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which is filled with hope, I see that it is impossible for a bishop to carry out the huge list of tasks laid before him. So I ask myself, if Vincent de Paul were alive today, what priorities would he place before bishops today? I suggest to you two:

1. Be a father and a brother to the poor in your diocese (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 141). Make the Church's preferential option for the poor shine out like a beacon of hope in your person. Go out to Jesus yourself in the person of the poor. In the day of judgment this is the principal criterion by which you, and all of us, will be assessed. "When I was hungry, you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink" (Mt 25:35). So I urge you, be a father, even a brother, to the poor. Let your diocese be a place where the Church really is the Church of the poor. Awaken the concern of its members, the wealthy especially, that they might work with you in the service of the poor. Bring together young and old, men and women, clergy and lay, rich and the poor themselves in the service of the most needy. Pray with the poor. Eat with the poor. Plan with the poor, so that they might have a voice in their own future. Celebrate the Eucharist with them. Share the word of God with them. Communicate to them your own conviction that the Kingdom of God is here and that it is for them. And since women and children are almost always the poorest of the poor, stand at their side in their struggle for basic human rights. Be a father and a brother to the poor of your diocese.
2. Be a father and brother to the priests of your diocese (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 86). Be able to say to them, as Jesus says to his apostles in John's 15th chapter (15:15): "I call you friends." Most of all, listen to them. Be a minister of God's healing, encouraging word to them. Pray with them,

both at the Eucharist and in other forms of quiet, meditative prayer. Eat with them. Relax with them. Offer them rich initial and ongoing formation. Plan with them. Formulate with them how the parishes of your diocese and the diocese as a whole might launch creative, effective projects in the service of the poor. Be a father and brother to your priests.

When Vincent de Paul died in 1660, the preacher at his funeral stated: “He transformed, so to speak, the face of the Church.” My dream is that these same words might be written as the epitaph of every bishop here and throughout the world. “He transformed the face of our local Church. He was a father and brother to the poor and a father and brother to his priests.”

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
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