

# Celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Death of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac

Vincentiana Editorial Board

## **1. PROCLAMATION OF THE JUBILEE YEAR**

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009 the Superior General, Father G. Gregory Gay, wrote a circular letter to all the members of the Vincentian Family (VINCENTIANA, 53<sup>rd</sup> Year, N. 3, May-June 2009) announcing the Jubilee Year (September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and continuing until September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010) to commemorate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our Founders, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac. It was proposed that “Charity and Mission” be the theme for this year. Then Father General pointed out certain objectives and formed several commissions whose members began to work: the Heritage Commission, the Projects Commission, the Celebration Commission, the Secretariat Committee, the Finance Committee.

## **2. CELEBRATION OF THE JUBILEE YEAR**

### **a) The work of the Commissions:**

#### *The Heritage Commission*

The Heritage Commission, after rejecting the first idea of an International Symposium which would necessarily be limited to a reduced number of participants, opted to stir up the interest of all the members of the Vincentian Family in a reflection on the spiritual heritage that they have received from their Founders and in turn to look at the repercussions that their mission could have on the present day situation in which the Vincentian Family, in creative fidelity to the charism that they have received, desires to renew itself in the spirit of the Founders. In order to facilitate this process the Commission created twelve

reflection/dialogue papers that were published in English, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Polish and were made available to everyone on the website that was created specifically for the celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary: <http://famvin.org/anniversary>

### ***The Projects Commission***

This Commission was asked to formulate a specific initiative that would involve all the branches of the Vincentian Family in a project on behalf of the poorest of the poor. This Commission was also asked to insure that said initiative would fit into a framework of systemic change. At the beginning of 2009 the Commission presented several possibilities to the leaders of the Vincentian Family who decided to accept a micro-financing project in Haiti.

In April, 2009 the Projects Commission had specified the ways in which they would carry out their task. As they reflected on ways to expand collaboration with this project they created a web page that appeared on March 4, 2010 and led to the first contributions from the Vincentian Family. This site is located at: <http://famvin.org/anniversary/en/haiti/project-in-haiti>

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, [famvin.org](http://famvin.org) presented a video in English, Spanish and French in which Father Robert Maloney, CM explained the ways in which the Vincentian Family and each one of its groups and members could collaborate in the reconstruction of Haiti by creating and/or contributing to the creation of loans for small businesses and/or consuming their products, thus helping the people of Haiti to move forward in the reconstruction of their economy. Also people were able to create scholarships for the children of Haiti. The video in English can be viewed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWC7IE8nirU>

Zafen is an experienced and first-rate community of lenders/contributors who believe in the power of businesses to promote sustainable economic development in Haiti. Zafen allows people to support sustainable economic development projects in Haiti by financing businesses of various proportions, thus providing employment opportunities for people who live in some of the poorest conditions in the world. These contributions allow the people of Haiti to create work, to encourage sound business practices and to point the way to self-sufficiency to women and men who are engaged in the establishment of new businesses.

The micro-finance project of Zafen for Haiti was created by four organizations: the International Vincentian Family, De Paul University (Chicago, the largest Catholic University in the United States), Fonkoze (an alternative bank in Haiti that offers services to people who are poor and that currently has 200,000 clients), and the Haitian Hometown

Associations Resource Group (a group that allows Haitians living outside the country to contribute to the social and economic growth of their country of origin). In the most recent statement that was published on the internet, it was reported that in the first nine months of operation more than \$276,000 has been obtain for 460 projects in 97 businesses and organizations throughout Haiti. At the Zafen web site one will find a description of the programs, the evolution of the projects and ways to collaborate with this program: <http://zafen.org>

### ***The Celebration Commission***

From the time of their first meeting the members of this commission decided to limit themselves to preparing two events which would involve the whole Vincentian Family. It was left to the national, regional and/or provincial coordinators to organize their own celebrations. The first event that this Commission organized was held in Paris on the feast of Saint Louise and the second event was held in Rome on the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul and marked the closing of the Jubilee Year.

In order to allow for the greatest number of participants to journey to Paris and Rome it was decided to hold the one celebration in the cathedral of Paris on March 14, 2010 and the other celebration in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome on Saturday, September 25, 2010.

The Commission was charged with obtaining a plenary indulgence from the Holy See for all those faithful who physically or spiritually participated in the celebration in Paris or Rome.

### ***The Secretariat Commission***

This Commission was asked to create a web page that could be integrated into the web site for the Vincentian Family (<http://famvin.org>). The purpose of this site was to provide a space where general and regional information could be communicated and where formation materials could be posted that would enrich our reflection as well as the celebrations that took place in the different places where the Vincentian Family is involved in ministry. The website was created in French, English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Polish and can be found at: <http://famvin.org/anniversary>

An issue of *Vincentiana* (52<sup>nd</sup> Year, N. 5, September-October 2009) was dedicated to the study of the relationship between Vincent and Louise who were animated by the same love and collaborated with one another in order to make the love of God more visible among the poor. *Vincentiana* also published a supplement to its second edition in 2010...

an edition that contained a life of Saint Vincent (based on his writing and sayings) that was written by Father Bernard Koch, CM. *Vincentiana* will also publish a bibliography that was compiled during 2010 and this will complement the bibliography that was produced in 2009 and published in *Vincentiana* (54<sup>th</sup> Year, N. 1, January-March 2010).

This Commission was also requested to prepare a pamphlet on the Vincentian charism that could be distributed worldwide. The Commission wanted to commit the whole Vincentian Family to this project and wrote a letter to the leaders of the different branches inviting them to send photographs that illustrated various ways in which the charism and the ministry of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise was being lived at the present time... photographs that the leaders felt should be included in the pamphlet. The idea was to highlight the collaboration of countless men and women from every continent who are united by the same charism and able to express this charism in a variety of concrete and specific ways (an expression of creative fidelity to the Holy Founders).

The fruit of this work and collaboration has been the publication of a manuscript that is almost sixty pages in length and very original in its presentation. The pamphlet, which is entitled *Mission and Charity*, has two faces, that is, one can begin to read from one angle and then continue the reading from another angle, turning the book around. The decision to produce the book in this form is explained in the preface: *This book can be opened beginning with Saint Vincent or Saint Louise but regardless of where one begins one always discovers the same mission of charity. Mission and charity with its countless facets and different activities give a distinctive mark to the diversity in unity of the Vincentian Family. If one begins with Saint Vincent or Saint Louise one will always arrive at the same reality that is presently being lived by us, their children: God fills our hearts with his love and enables us to grow in such a way that we are able to express our solidarity through action on behalf of the poor.* The photographs that are ordered by geographical area are a unique presentation of the Vincentian reality. It was intentional to not point out if the text that accompanies the photograph is taken from the writing of Saint Vincent or Saint Louise because the words that are written in this manuscript are an expression of the pure and passionate love that would have allowed either of the two Founders to sign their names beneath the text. This pamphlet has been published in ten languages and should be seen as a family album in which every member of the Vincentian Family can find themselves and recognize themselves reflected in this work.

## **b) The Jubilee Year in France**

As expected, the Vincentian Family in France took much interest in the Jubilee Year. Many Vincentians understood that remembering the life and the work of our Founders was a golden opportunity to renew their vocation and to make these two “giants of charity” known to the People of God. This was certainly the idea that guided the various commissions as they moved forward in their work.

Activities were programmed on a regular basis throughout the Jubilee Year. For example, on the second Sunday of each month a different aspect of the life of our Founders was presented in the Miraculous Medal Chapel (their Christology, their spirituality, the discovery of their vocation, the charitable foundations, etc.). Thousands of pilgrims from France and other parts of the world brought to their homes the message of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise.

Young women and men also participated in the Jubilee Year. From November 2009 to August 2010 six sessions were held in which young people were able to reflect on the life and the spirituality of these holy Founders and then able to reflect on their own vocation and were offered the opportunity to participate in a spiritual retreat.

We want to mention some other activities and so we highlight the following:

- October 2009: a weekend of reflection was offered to the Daughters of Charity and the Missionaries of the Congregation. During this time the participants were able to reflect on their Vincentian vocation and on the different ways to renew themselves in their vocation. This gathering was open to all the French speaking countries.
- On March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the Eucharist was celebrated in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Paris and presided by Cardinal André Vingt-Trois. This celebration, which was organized by the Celebration Commission, was televised by KTO, the broadcasting company of the French Episcopal Conference. In his homily the cardinal spoke about the charitable dimension of Saint Louise and at the same time highlighted the fact that her spirit and message is most valid for people of the twenty-first century. The cardinal spoke with conviction and clarity and did not hide his great esteem for the sons and daughters of Saint Louise and Saint Vincent. The Vincentian Family filled the cathedral and almost a hundred Vincentian Missionaries (the majority of them, French) concelebrated this solemn Eucharist which was definitely one of the highlights of this Vincentian Jubilee Year.
- On April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010 the Vincentian Family made a pilgrimage to Folleville. About 2,000 people journeyed to this place where Saint

Vincent discovered his vocation of evangelizing people who were poor. This was a most joyful day and the participants were able to celebrate the Eucharist together in this holy place.

- May 14-15, 2010 a colloquy was held at the Berçeau. A significant group from all the branches of the Vincentian Family reflected on Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac and the meaning of their life and work for the twenty-first century. There was much interest in the various presentations that were made which also created a profound and animated dialogue. The presentations were: Father Phillippe Molac, a priest from the Company of San Sulpice, *The Theological Formation of Vincent de Paul, the foundation for his charitable mission*; Father Jean-Pierre Renouard, a specialist in Vincentian spirituality, *The Congregation of the Mission*; Ms. Laurence de la Brosse, president of the AIC, *The commitments of the AIC and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in present day France*; Patrick Lefeuvre, *Society at the time of Saint Vincent de Paul*; Sister Evelyne Franc, DC, Superior General of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, presented the Company of the Daughters from the perspective of their identity and their present vision. Michel Camdessus developed the theme, *The contemporary world's search for meaning*. At the same time Father Yves Bouchet, CM animated these sessions with his voice and his guitar. In fact, this singer-author offered an interesting recital about Saint Vincent, Saint Louise and the Vincentian charism in today's church and society.

Obviously we are unable to present here all the different activities that occurred in France. There were many celebrations, many oral and written reflections, opportunities to gather together for prayer which cannot be detailed here because of a lack of space. But we are confident that all of these different activities contributed to the renewal and the deepening of our Vincentian vocation. Only the Lord knows the impact of all of this.

### **c) The Closing of the Jubilee Year in Rome**

The closing in Rome was open to the whole Vincentian Family and in fact, Vincentians from throughout the world participated in this event which was also marked by the celebration of the Vincentian Family in Italy.

### **The campaign: “*Water, a drop for life*”**

During the year 2010 the Vincentian Family in Italy was involved in promoting a campaign under the very suggestive title: *water, a drop for life*. The objective of this campaign was to raise funds for the construction of wells in arid places. This campaign also provided the means to remain attentive to the urgent needs of those people who are poor and enter into solidarity with these people by assisting them.

### ***Exposition of documents in Naples***

On the occasion of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, the Archivist Association in Campania, in collaboration with the Provincial Superiors of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity organized an exposition of documents that detailed the history of the Vincentian Family in Naples and in Southern Italy. The documents showed the primary activities that were developed by the Vincentians in the course of history: educational works and charitable works for the poor and those living on the margins of society.

The exposition was divided into two parts. The first part referred to the important patrimony that is located in the Provincial House of the Congregation of the Mission in Naples and which is funded by various sources. The documents that were exhibited covered the period from 1668-1937 and explain the activities that were developed by the Missionaries from the time of their arrival in Naples. The second part was dedicated to the material from the provincial archives of the Daughters of Charity in Naples. The Daughters came to this region in 1834 at the request of the Vincentian Missionaries. The documents that were exhibited covered the period of 1845-1913 and give witness to the commitment of the Daughters of Charity as they engaged in countless charitable and social activities.

The initial work and the organization and the mounting of the exposition was entrusted to Antonella Gugliucci and Giuseppina Raschella, representatives of the Archivist Association in Campania.

### ***Meeting of the Vincentian Family in Rome***

The coordinator of the Vincentian Family had prepared an intense three day program that was developed and carried out to the satisfaction of everyone. This meeting, in fact, served as a platform for the solemn closing of the Jubilee Year on the occasion

of these special anniversaries which were celebrated throughout the world with various initiatives and concrete projects on behalf of people who are poor.

The meeting began on Friday, September 24<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am with the celebration of the Eucharist that was presided by Cardinal José Saraiva Martins, Prefect-emeritus of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. This Mass was celebrated in the Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, a very short distance from the Saint Peter's Square. Many priests (the majority of whom were priest of the Congregation of the Mission) concelebrated the Eucharist.

Professor Simona Negruzzo opened a series of interventions on the theme **Charity and Mission** with her presentation that was entitled, *France during the Great Century*. She was followed by Father Luigi Mezzadri, CM (*A New Way of Being Priest: Saint Vincent and the Priesthood*), Father Nicola Albanesi, CM (*Christ, the Rule of the Mission*). After a brief recess a video on Vincentian charity was viewed by the participants which was then followed by a presentation of Professor Yvonne zu Dohna (*The Poor in Art*), Professor Giuseppe De Rita (*A New Culture of Charity: The Poor, my Burden and Sorrow*), Father Erminio Antonello, CM (*The Church: The Body of Christ, the Home of the Poor*), and Father Landousies, CM (*A New Way of Speaking About God to People: Saint Vincent and Evangelization*).

On Saturday, September 26, the following made presentations: Bruna Zarri (*Women in the XVII Century*), Marina Costa (*Saint Vincent, Saint Louise, Vincentian Volunteers and the new Challenges of Poverty*), Sister Evelyne Franc, DC (*Saint Louise: Spiritual Guide*), and Father Luigi Nuovo, CM (*Saint Louise, Saint and Organizer of Charitable Works*). At five in the afternoon the participants in this meeting joined with those who had gathered together for the solemn concelebration of the Eucharist in Saint Peter's Basilica, an event that was organized by the International Commission for Celebrations during the Jubilee Year.

At 9:00am on Sunday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, Father Gregory Gay, CM, Superior General, celebrated Mass at the Augustinianum. After Mass Father Corpus Delgado, CM spoke about *Saint Louise and Devotion to the Holy Spirit*. At noon the participants prayed the angelus with the Pope in Saint Peter's Square. The words that the Holy Father spoke on this occasion can be found on page 35 of this edition of *Vincentiana*.



### ***Solemn Concelebration at the Vatican***

The official closing celebration of the Jubilee Year was prepared by the Celebration Commission and began at 5:00pm on Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup> with a procession to the altar. The Eucharist was presided by Franc Cardinal Rodé, CM, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. More than one hundred fifty priests (the majority of whom were members of the Congregation of the Mission) from Italy and others part of the world concelebrated the Eucharist. Thirty-five Spanish Vincentian Missionaries traveled to Rome for this celebration.

The Mass was celebrated on the altar of the chair and the faithful from all parts of the world filled the nave of the Basilica. A group of people, who were ill and in wheelchairs, were positioned in special places that had been reserved for them.

The *Observatore Romano* of September 26 echoed this celebration with the following words: *Charity and Mission are two sides of the same coin because to love the Lord means that one also loves with the same intensity one's sisters and brothers, especially those sisters and brothers who are poor. This was highlighted this afternoon in the Vatican Basilica by the cardinal-prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Franc Rodé, in his homily on the occasion of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint Vincent de Paul and his primary collaborator, Saint Louise de Marillac. Calling to mind the example of these holy Founders, the Vincentian cardinal recalled that: to be Vincentian today means that we continue to follow Christ, the evangelizer of the poor and thus continue Jesus' mission; it means that we are missionaries who inflame the hearts of people with a lifestyle of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal. In this sense a Vincentian ought to have something more than mere knowledge of the poor: true Vincentians know Christ and place Christ at the center of their lives; they know Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and the other Vincentian saints; they know the poor. Vincentians allow themselves to be evangelized and changed by the poor and they work and labor on behalf of the poor. Above all else, Vincentians are totally for God and for the service of the people.*

## *Homily of Cardinal Rodé*

**Franc Cardinal Rodé, C.M.**

*Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life  
and Societies of Apostolic Life*

***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the poor*** (Luke 4:18).

*Evangelizare pauperibus missit me.*

These words of the Lord place us at the very heart of our celebration today. These words resounded time and time again from the soul and the lips of Vincent de Paul. These same words resound and indeed ought to resound from the lips and the heart of every Vincentian who follows Vincent's path. We have gathered here this afternoon to celebrate an act of thanksgiving on the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint Louise de Marillac and Saint Vincent de Paul. The beginning of this Jubilee Year was celebrated in the place where these saints lived and today we are participating in the closing of this Jubilee in the Papal Basilica which preserves the most ancient memories of the Church and, beginning with that of Saint Peter, guards the bodies of so many martyrs in the *very heart of the Catholic Church: a vibrant heart, thanks to the Holy Spirit who always keeps it alive.*<sup>1</sup> As sons and daughters of Vincent and Louise we place ourselves on the uninterrupted line of pilgrims who throughout the centuries have come here to pray before the tomb of Peter, who have come here to prolong his profession of faith: *You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God* (Matthew 16:16). This is Peter's profession of faith, the unbreakable faith of the Church, the faith that animated Vincent and Louise. This is also our faith.

We are here this afternoon to repeat our hymn of thanksgiving, to sing with the psalmist: *Lauda anima mea Dominum* (*Let my soul praise the Lord*). **Thank you** for having given us Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, two geniuses of charity and two athletes of holiness... **thank you** for having given them to the world and to each one of us. **Thank you** for the countless sons and daughters who have followed the example of our Founders and have embraced the invitation *ad evangelizare pauperibus* (*to evangelize the poor*). The thanksgiving that is raised up to the Lord profoundly moves us as we see the fruitfulness of the Vincentian charism in the Church. This afternoon countless sons and daughters of Vincent and Louise have gathered together here with

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Address on the occasion of his Visit to Saint Peter's Factory, March 14, 2007.

the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity in order to give thanks to the Lord. We are part of a family that is composed of more than 300 groups, institutes and movements that participate in the same charism and have chosen to consecrate themselves to the apostolate to the poor whom they recognize as *their lords and masters*<sup>2</sup>. All of you in positions of leadership of the different branches of the Vincentian Family and all who are members of this spiritual family and are united in love: love of God and love of the poor, allow me to extend to all of you, a warm and fraternal embrace. I especially want to greet and thank the superior of the Congregation of the Mission, Father Gregory Gay and the superioress of the Daughters of Charity, Sister Evelynne Franc, and together with them the leaders of the International Association of Charity and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

This Jubilee Year has emphasized two key words: *charity* and *mission*. The Holy Father in his letter to the Superiors General highlighted this reality: *placing this Jubilee under the sign of charity and mission you have desired to rightly reveal something at the very heart of the heritage you have received*<sup>3</sup>. Charity and mission have been the hinges of the life and action of Vincent and Louise, cornerstones that they wanted to leave to us and which were expressed in their first works: *The Confraternities of Charity*, *The Daughters of Charity*, and *The Priests of the Mission*.

A famous and illustrious group of personalities became outstanding in France during the 1600's. In literature (it is enough to recall here Corneille, Racine and Molière), in philosophy the *côgito* of René Descartes and the *Pensées* of Pascal: *What a difference there is between knowing God and loving God*<sup>4</sup>. This was the century of Richelieu and Mazarin and the countless intrigues for power. This was also the century of Saint Francis de Sales, Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, Jean-Jacques Olier and the grater orator, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet.

But the XVII century was also a time of spiritual and material misery. Vincent de Paul wrote to Pope Innocent X and as he described the situation he asked for the Pope's intervention: *Confident of your paternal affection, with which you graciously hear and receive all your children, even the least, dare I also make known to you the very pitiful state of our France, which is most deserving of compassion. The royal house is divided by dissensions, the people are split into various factions; cities and provinces are ruined by civil wars; farms, cantons, and towns*

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<sup>2</sup> CCD IX, 97; SVP IX, 119; SVP.ES IX, 125.

<sup>3</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and the Superioress General of the Company of the Daughters of Charity*, June 14, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> BLAISE PSACAL, *Pensieri*, 280.

are destroyed, ruined, and burned. The farmers cannot harvest what they have sown and no longer plant anything for the coming years. Soldiers do as they please; the people are exposed not only to their thefts and pillaging, but also to murder and all kinds of torture. Most of the country people are perishing of starvation if not by the sword. Not even priests escape the soldiers' hands; they are treated with inhuman cruelty, tortured and killed. Young women are raped, and even nuns are victims of their lust and fury. Churches are profaned, plundered, and destroyed; those left standing are, for the most part, abandoned by their pastors, so the people are deprived of the sacraments....<sup>5</sup>

In light of this situation Saint Vincent prepared himself to evangelize the poor. He said to his missionaries: *So, our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people's hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love.*<sup>6</sup> *What do we have to desire but that it may burn and consume everything. My dear confreres, let us reflect on that, please. It is true then, that I am sent not only to love God but to make Him loved. It is not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor does not love Him.*<sup>7</sup>

Our mission is to inflame the hearts of people. *Charity and mission are two sides of the same coin: love God and make God loved by other people; to love the Lord and to love one's brothers and sisters; affective and effective love: Let us love God, my brothers, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.*<sup>8</sup> *To be a Christian and to see our brother suffering without weeping with him, without being sick with him!*<sup>9</sup> *That is to be lacking in charity; it is being a caricature of a Christian; it is inhuman; it is to be worse than animals.* Vincent did not hesitate to say that the Church had greater need for apostolic men than for contemplatives: *The Church... has a great need for evangelical men who work to purify, enlighten, and unite her to her Divine Spouse.*<sup>10</sup> Vincent wrote to Claude Dufour, a missionary who wanted to abandon the Company in order to enter the Carthusians: *the apostolic life does not exclude contemplation but encompasses it and profits by it to know better the eternal truths it must proclaim. In addition, it is more helpful to our neighbor, whom we are obliged to love as ourselves and consequently to assist in a way solitaries do not.* Vincent

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<sup>5</sup> ANTONIO SICARI, *Santi nella carità discepoli, amici di Vincenzo de Paoli*, ed. Jaca Book, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> CCD XII, 215; SVP XII, 262; SVP.ES XI, 553.

<sup>7</sup> CCD XI, 32; SVP XI, 40; SVP.ES XI, 539.

<sup>8</sup> CCD XII, 222; SVP XII, 271; SVP.ES XII, 561.

<sup>9</sup> CCD III, 204; SVP III, 202; SVP.ES III, 181.

<sup>10</sup> CCD III, 344; SVP III, 246-247; SVP.ES III, 320.

invited the missionaries to be Carthusians in their houses and apostles outside them<sup>11</sup>.

We often run the risk of being Christian in name only, or worse, of being Vincentian in name only because we lack a continual union, a back and forth movement between contemplation and action, because we have forgotten to kneel before the Father and prepare ourselves with the sweat of our brow. In our apostolate we often lack knees, arms and sweat. It is true that there are different ways of speaking about spirituality. Our spirituality is one of incarnation, a spirituality of service and not one that seeks refuge in the world of the spirit in which everything is perfect and pure but rather a spirituality that recovers its original character of life according to the Spirit. We discover that our spirituality is rooted in daily life, with its hardships and tensions, with its delights and disappointments, thus revealing sound spiritual paths — personal and community spiritual paths — paths that are filled with life and mystery.

In order to remain firm in this spirit and in order to persevere, Saint Louise invited the Daughters to a great love: *I desire all of them to be filled with a great love which will immerse them so sweetly in God and so charitably in the service of the poor that their hearts will no longer have place for so many thoughts which endanger their perseverance. Courage then, my dear Sisters! Seek only to please God by faithfully observing His commandments and evangelical counsels because the goodness of God has deigned to call us to this. This should lead us to observe our Rules exactly but also cheerfully and diligently. Serve your masters with great gentleness*<sup>12</sup>.

Thus the center of the life of our Founders is Jesus: his incarnation and mission. *Jesus Christ is our father and mother: he is our everything*, are the surprising words of Saint Vincent. Again he stated: *The primary objective to which God has called us is that of loving our Lord Jesus Christ... if we distance ourselves even a little from the thought that the poor are living members of Christ, we diminish within ourselves charity and gentleness*. Vincent did not encourage people to lose themselves in God but rather to consume themselves for God and in God. In fact charity is born from an undistracted attention to the reality that we are united to Christ, living and recognized and loved. According to his biographers, *Jesus* was the last word that Saint Vincent spoke before he died. Also in the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity we read: *Christ is the rule of the Daughters of Charity. They endeavor to follow*

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<sup>11</sup> LOUIS ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul*, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1993, Volume I, page 124.

<sup>12</sup> *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*, New City Press, Brooklyn, New York, 1991, p. 75.

*Him as Scripture reveals Him to them and as their Founders perceived Him: Adorer of the Father, Servant of His Loving Plan, Evangelizer of those who are poor*<sup>13</sup>. Christ is essential. With our hearts in Christ and with Christ's heart we can regenerate the will to love the poor, *our lords and masters*<sup>14</sup>. This is the mission that Vincent entrusted to Louise and through Louise was entrusted to all the Daughters: *Go, therefore, Mademoiselle, go in the name of Our Lord. I pray that His Divine Goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toil and finally, that he may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works*<sup>15</sup>.

This is a demanding path, one that reveals all our weaknesses: our faltering faith, the difficulties that our communities encounter in welcoming all persons, the weariness from our charitable activity that does not allow us to interpret the events of life nor enables us to live a life that is unified. The difficulties that often surround an attempt to understand a world that is changing and the harshness of the confrontation with the world has given rise to feelings of ineffectiveness in our activity and this has led to frustration in many communities of religious men and women. More and more frequently this weariness leads to activism, the result of an anxious and fearful generosity of individuals closed in upon themselves or communities too focused on their own activities, plans and initiatives.

We know that difficult times arise when we fail to ground ourselves in that which is essential, when we do not allow the grounding to become more profound, and it is then that fervent prayer is necessary so that the Holy Spirit might once again descend upon us and fill our daily activity. These are the times when the words of the Lord Jesus should resound in our hearts: *Take courage, I have conquered the world* (John 16:33).

The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission ask us to remain in a continual state of renewal, faithful to the gospel, attentive to the signs of the time, opening up new ways and using new means adapted to the circumstances of time and place<sup>16</sup>. This continual state of renewal ought to be above all else a work of the Spirit: the Spirit continually makes us new creatures who are able to provide concrete and durable responses to the urgent demands of our time.

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<sup>13</sup> Constitutions and Statutes of the Company of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, C. 8.

<sup>14</sup> CCD XI, 97; SVP IX, 119; SVP.ES IX, 125.

<sup>15</sup> CCD I, 64-65; SVP I, 73-74; SVP.ES I, 135-136.

<sup>16</sup> Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission, #2.

Pope Benedict writes: The Christian's program — the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus — is "a heart which sees." This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.<sup>17</sup> The Lord gave Vincent and Louise hearts that were big, vast and ample,<sup>18</sup> and in their hearts they were able to embrace all men and all women. Saint Vincent told the Missionaries: If we can do nothing of ourselves, we can do everything with God. Yes, the Mission can do anything because we have in us the seeds of the omnipotence of Jesus Christ. That is why no one can excuse himself on the grounds of his powerlessness; we will always have greater strength than is needed, especially when the occasion arises; for, when it does, a man feels like a completely new man<sup>19</sup>.

From the time of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise until today, many things have changed, but the demand for love today is just as real as it was in the seventeenth century, perhaps even more real. The accelerated changes that characterize the world in which we live and the repercussions that this has on our way of thinking about life, the human person and the religious dimension of the person... all of this demands that each one of us and every Christian community become ever more aware of this situation. How can the voices of these two saints find echo in the present world, ever more secularized and focused on itself and in the midst of an unprecedented world crisis, a crisis that is moral, cultural, economic, and spiritual? In a world in which people live as though God did not exist *there is a sort of fear of silence, of recollection, of thinking of one's own actions, of the profound meaning of one's life. All too often people prefer to live only the fleeting moment, deceiving themselves that it will bring lasting happiness; they prefer to live superficially, without thinking, because it seems easier; they are afraid to seek the Truth or perhaps afraid that the Truth will find us, will take hold of us and change our life*<sup>20</sup>. How can Vincent's and Louise's lived experience of God be useful to us? In what way can we, as Vincentians, continue to be worthy children of our Founders?

To be Vincentian today means that we continue to follow Christ, the evangelizer of the poor and that we place Jesus and his mission in a central position in our life. To be Vincentian today means that we are missionaries who inflame the hearts of people with a lifestyle of simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification and zeal<sup>21</sup>. To be Vincentian today means that we are Carthusians in our homes and

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<sup>17</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Deus caritas est*, #31b.

<sup>18</sup> CCD XI, 192-193; SVP XI, 203; SVP.ES XI, 3, 122.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience*, August 25, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Constitutions and Statutes of Congregation of the Mission*, #7.

apostles outside the home. To live the Vincentian spirit is to live as the Son who has been given to us as a model: the same total love, a love that day by day becomes a word of trust, a gesture of mercy, an attitude of awareness and gratitude, a commitment that shares the concerns of the search for meaning and freedom that so many desire. This love opens the door to a definitive life beyond the realms of death.

A Vincentian ought to have something more than mere knowledge of the poor: true Vincentians know Christ and place Christ at the center of their lives; they know Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and the other Vincentian saints; they know the poor<sup>22</sup>. They allow themselves to be evangelized and changed by the poor and they work and labor on behalf of the poor because *charity cannot remain idle*.<sup>23</sup> To be Vincentian means that our hearts are filled with imagination because *Charity is inventive to infinity*<sup>24</sup>. Vincentians kneel down and use their arms and the sweat of their brow. Above all else, Vincentians are *totally for God and for the service of the people*<sup>25</sup>.

Saint Vincent frequently said that charity is a *fire* that inflames people<sup>26</sup>. Through the intercession and the example of Vincent and Louise and all the Vincentian saints, let us allow ourselves to be enflamed with this love. I conclude with the words and the exhortation of Saint Louise, asking God to bless all our undertakings: *Please continue to serve our dear masters with great gentleness, respect, and cordiality, always seeing God in them*<sup>27</sup>.

Translation: CHARLES T. PLOCK, C.M.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, *Andate in tutto il mondo! Predicate il Vangelo ad ogni creatura. La spiritualità missionaria di San Vincenzo de Paoli*, a cura di S. Angiuli, Edizioni Vincenziane, Napoli.

<sup>23</sup> CCD XII, 216; SVP XII, 264; SVP.ES XI, 4, 444.

<sup>24</sup> CCD XI, 131; SVP XI, 142-148; SVP.ES XI, 3, 65.

<sup>25</sup> CCD XII, 357; SVP XI, 402; SVP.ES XI, 3, 281.

<sup>26</sup> CCD XI, 203; SVP XI, 216; SVP.ES XI, 132.

<sup>27</sup> *Spiritual Writings of Louise de Marillac*, p. 421.