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**SUPERIORE GENERALE**

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**ADVENT LETTER**

“Love is inventive to infinity” and, as a consequence,  
in the Eucharist you find it all

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

In my letter for the feast of our Founder on 27 September 2016, I encouraged us to reflect on Saint Vincent de Paul as a “Mystic of Charity.” From that letter on, based on our Common Rules and Constitutions, we started reflecting about what made Saint Vincent de Paul a Mystic of Charity.

In the Advent letter for the year 2016, we reflected on the “Incarnation” as one of the pillars of Saint Vincent de Paul’s spirituality. In the 2017 Lenten letter, we reflected on the

second pillar of our Founder's spirituality, the "Holy Trinity." In this year's Advent letter, we will reflect on the third pillar of Saint Vincent's spirituality, the "Eucharist."

In the tenth Chapter of the Common Rules, in writing about the pillars of our spirituality and talking about the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity, Saint Vincent suggests that in the Eucharist, you find it all. He writes,

*There can be no better way of paying the best honor possible to these mysteries [the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation] than proper devotion to, and use of, the Blessed Eucharist, sacrament and sacrifice. It includes, as it were, all the other mysteries of faith and, by itself, leads those who receive Communion respectfully or celebrate Mass properly, to holiness and ultimately to everlasting glory. In this way God, Unity and Trinity, and the Incarnate Word, are paid the greatest honor. For these reasons, nothing should be more important to us than showing due honor to this sacrament and sacrifice. We are also to make a great effort to get everyone else to pay it similar honor and reverence. We should try, to the best of our ability, to achieve this by preventing, as far as we can, any lack of reverence in word or act, and by carefully teaching others what to believe about so great a mystery, and how they should honor it.<sup>1</sup>*

In the Eucharist, you find and can reflect, meditate, contemplate, adore, and have a personal encounter with all the stages of Jesus's life from the Incarnation on:

- Jesus in Mary's womb
- Jesus in the manger
- Jesus as a child in Nazareth living with his parents, Mary and Joseph
- Jesus in His three-year mission proclaiming the Good News
- Jesus in His suffering and death on the Cross
- Jesus's Resurrection
- Jesus's Ascension
- The Holy Trinity

This understanding that in the Eucharist you find it all is accompanied by other prophetic and inspirational words, coming from his deepest life experience, "Love is inventive to infinity." One of the best known of Vincent's phrases, he used these specific words while talking about the Eucharist, trying to explain what the Eucharist is, what the Eucharist does, what we find in the Eucharist. Jesus's imagination found this concrete means to be with us always, to accompany us always, and to remain with us always until the end of the world. His Love, inventive to infinity, keeps surprising us today, here and now!

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<sup>1</sup> Common Rules X, 3; cf. CCD XIIIa, 455; Document 117a, Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission (17 May 1658). CCD refers to the series, *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; future references to this work will use, as above, the initials, CCD, followed by the volume number, then the page number.

*Since love is inventive to infinity, after being affixed to the infamous stake of the cross to win the hearts and souls of those by whom He wishes to be loved –not to mention all the other innumerable schemes He used for this purpose during His time spent among us – foreseeing that His absence could cause some forgetfulness or cooling off in our hearts, He wanted to avoid this danger by instituting the Most August Sacrament, in which He is as truly and substantially present as He is in heaven above. Furthermore, however, seeing that, if He wanted to humble and empty himself even more than He had done in His Incarnation and could make himself in some way more like us – or at least make us more like Him – He caused this venerable Sacrament to serve us as food and drink, intending by this means that the same union and resemblance that exist between nature and substance should occur spiritually in each human person. Because love can do and will everything, He willed it thus; and for fear that, if people didn't understand this incredible mystery and scheme of love, they might neglect to approach this Sacrament, He has obliged them to do so under pain of incurring His eternal displeasure. Nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, non habebitis vitam (Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, you will not have life (cf. John 6:53)).<sup>2</sup>*

If we find it all in the Eucharist, then it is there that Jesus speaks to us here and now from His Mother's womb. He speaks to us here and now from the manger as a newborn child. He speaks to us here and now as a child in Nazareth. He speaks to us here and now as the person sent by the Father who went about doing good. He speaks to us here and now from His suffering and death on the Cross. He speaks to us here and now from His Resurrection. He speaks to us here and now from His Ascension. He speaks to us here and now as one of the three Persons of the Trinity. The here-and-now reality of every human being from the time of conception until death is ever present in the here and now of the Eucharist, as the here and now of the Eucharist is present in the here and now of every human being.

*When He instituted the Blessed Sacrament, He said to His Apostles, Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum (cf. Luke 22:15), which means "I have ardently desired to eat this pasch with you." Now, since the Son of God, who gives himself to us in the Holy Eucharist, desired this with such an ardent desire – desiderio desideravi – isn't it right that the soul who desires to receive Him, and of whom He is the sovereign good, should desire Him with all her heart? Rest assured, Sisters, that what He said to His Apostles He still says to each one of you. That's why you must try to stir up your desire by some good thought such as "You desire to come to me, my Lord, and who am I? But I, my God, desire with all my heart to go to you, for you are my sovereign good and my last end." The late Bishop of Geneva used to say that He always celebrated Mass as if it were for the last time, and received Communion as if it were Viaticum. That's an excellent practice and I advise you, as strongly as possible, dear Sisters, to adopt it.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> CCD XI, 131-132; Conference 102, Exhortation to a Dying Brother, 1645.

<sup>3</sup> CCD IX, 265; Conference 31, Holy Communion, 18 August 1647.

Dear confreres, the time of Advent gives us a wonderful opportunity to deepen and fortify this third pillar of our Vincentian spirituality, the Eucharist, this “Love inventive to infinity,” this place where we find it all! To this end, I suggest taking the following steps to bring to life, renew, or deepen the place of the Eucharist in our lives:

- 1) Before the celebration of the Holy Mass, take time in silence to prepare to accompany Jesus on His way to Calvary, the Cross, His Death, and the Resurrection.
- 2) After the celebration of the Holy Mass, take time in silence to thank Jesus for being able to witness and take part over and over again in His Sacrifice, Death, and Resurrection.
- 3) Once a week, have at least half an hour of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament for the whole community.
- 4) Every time we leave the house to go somewhere, stop at the house chapel or church to ask Jesus in the Tabernacle to accompany us where we plan to go, in the service we are called to deliver, in the task we would like to accomplish.

*After adoring the Blessed Sacrament there and offering God the work they are about to do, they will ask Him for the grace of telling the sick poor what He wants said to them on His behalf for their salvation.*<sup>4</sup>

- 5) Every time we come back from somewhere, stop at the house chapel or church to thank Jesus for all His blessings.

*We should also keep up other worthwhile practices customary in the Congregation, such as to visit the chapel immediately before going out and after coming in, greeting Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.*<sup>5</sup>

- 6) During the day, make some short visits to Jesus in the Tabernacle to help renew our inner peace, to recollect our thoughts, to receive a sign or response to questions and doubts that are present in our minds at a particular moment.

*Now, when someone says something rude to you that you find hard to bear, don't answer back, but raise your heart to God to ask Him for the grace to put up with that for love of Him, and go before the Blessed Sacrament to tell your troubles to Our Lord.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> CCD XIIIb, 382; Document 186, Preparing the Sick of the Hôtel-Dieu for General Confession (1636).

<sup>5</sup> Common Rules X, 20; cf. CCD XIIIa, 460; Document 117a, Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission, (17 May 1658).

<sup>6</sup> CCD X, 150; Conference 74, Love of Physical and Moral Sufferings (Common Rules, Article 6), 23 July 1656.

I asked our confrere, Emeric Amyot d’Inville, a missionary in Madagascar, to share a personal reflection on the Eucharist. May his thoughts inspire your own contemplation.

Saint Vincent accorded a very special importance to the Eucharist, both in the spiritual life of his spiritual sons and daughters and in missionary preaching. It must continue to hold this central place for us today. Allow me to share with you some points that seem to me to be of particular importance for our spiritual life and our apostolate today.

This first reflection is directed specifically to priests. I would like to highlight an important and sometimes neglected fact: when we, ministers of the Eucharist, celebrate Mass, we become *one* with Christ, because of our *ministerial priesthood*: Acting in the name and in the person of Christ the head, we enter into the “I” of the only high priest, Jesus. We lend Him our voice, our hands, and our heart so that, saying Jesus’s very words in the first person, “This is *my* body... This is *my* blood,” He changes the bread into His Body and the wine into His Blood. A greater intimacy with Christ then occurs for us, priests, which we must savor every day and which gives a very profound meaning to our priestly identity.

By virtue of our Baptism, all of us, Vincentian priests, brothers, sisters, and laity, are the “faithful of Christ,” to use the Council’s expression. Therefore, because of the *common priesthood of the faithful* that we share, it is up to us all, without distinction, to offer to the Father our life and that of all those around us in union with the Eucharistic offering of Christ. During Mass, at the offertory or even during the elevation, let us take time to unite our life and that of the world and the Church to the offering of Jesus to his Father in order to give Him glory and to receive graces and blessings from Him. This is how our Mass takes on a special human density that is offered to God the Father through Christ.

Without distinction, we, who are faithful, all receive Communion, the culmination of the Mass. The words of Jesus in Saint John’s Gospel, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (6:56), must nourish and guide our thanksgiving after communion to make of it a silent and contemplative moment of loving intimacy with the Christ of whom John said, in his introduction to the account of the Passover meal, “He loved his own in the world and *he loved them to the end*” (13:1b). Christ, who *loved [us] to the end* in His passion as in His Eucharist, which is the memorial of that passion, awaits our love in response to His. This is the time, after communion, to express it to Him in a silent and fervent prayer. Our communion will be as good as our thanksgiving.

Finally, after Mass, far from saying goodbye to Jesus whom we would leave in the silence of the tabernacle, we set off with Him, “remaining in Him and He in us,” to live with Him and in Him our day with its encounters, joys, sorrows, and responsibilities. We go forth with Him to those with whom we live and who are entrusted to our care. We, Vincentians, go out to evangelize the poor, to serve them corporally and spiritually,

to proclaim to them the word of life, and to be at the service of their human promotion “following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor” and in union with Him.

“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit” (John 15:5). This is the objective of the Eucharist and the secret of the spiritual fruitfulness of our life and our apostolate.

May the reflection, meditation, contemplation, adoration, and personal encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist and Blessed Sacrament, Jesus’s inventive love to infinity, where we find it all, help us to prepare for the coming Christmas celebrations as well as for the lifelong mission we are called to fulfill!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tomaž Mavrič, CM'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T' and 'M'.

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General