

## **Homily for the Closing of the Vincentian Month**

Chapel of St. Vincent — Paris, 26 July 2002

*Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Luke 10:25-37*

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My dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are at the close of this beautiful experience and are celebrating the Eucharist here in this Chapel before St. Vincent de Paul. This is a graced time granted to us by God as a gift of his love.

### **The parable**

We have just heard the wonderful gospel parable of the Good Samaritan. It is the parable that best reflects the life and mission of Jesus. He is the Good Samaritan. St. Vincent, following the footsteps of Jesus, deeply integrated the attitudes of the Good Samaritan into his life. He, too, is the Good Samaritan who, in the same way as Jesus, “bent down,” reached out to the wounded man, cared for him and led him to others so that others could also provide care. The wounded man of the parable is symbolic of the millions of poor who have been left on the margins, in every sense of the word, along the road of life.

Brothers and sisters, for three weeks we have reflected upon our Vincentian missionary vocation within the Church and the world. We have also reflected upon our service of accompanying the laity of Vincentian Associations. Men and women who, in looking at the reality of those who are wounded, with faith in Jesus Christ and the manner of St. Vincent, strive to be “the Good Samaritans of today,” men and women who hasten to help the wounded stand up again in order to join in the pilgrimage of humanity as they journey to meet God the Father.

### **A brief look at the scene**

A scribe meets Jesus and asks: What must I do to inherit everlasting life? to live in the fullness of life? The response is direct: You shall love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself. There is still another question: Who is my neighbor? This is a definitive question and by using simpler words it means the same as asking: Whom should I love? Jesus changes this into another question: Which one showed himself to be a neighbor? In this way, he led the scribe and he leads us to ask ourselves: Is my heart open to love? The focus of this parable is

the wounded man. A man went down, a man without a name, without identity, like thousands of people in our world who have no name and no identity. The first two passersby, the priest and the Levite, are associated with institutional religion. Consequently, the parable reveals that if religion is not united to solidarity and justice, it has no meaning. Religion without solidarity and justice has no meaning. The Samaritan “bent down” and this was not only a physical gesture but also an act of profound significance. This implies going down, being with, showing solidarity, closeness, being close even to someone we do not know, even someone whose name we do not know. The Samaritan, in approaching the victim, comes into solidarity with him. The parable shows us that there are different ways to place oneself in life and enter into relationship with others, such as assailants, fugitives, strangers or a person committed to others. Jesus praised only the attitude of the Samaritan and left a very clear message — be a Good Samaritan in life — “Go, and do the same yourself.”

### **The Samaritan, model of the genuine Christian**

Who is the Good Samaritan? This is the person with a free heart, who goes beyond all conventions separating us from one another (labels, social classes, what people say...) in order to come near the wounded. This is the person with compassion, the one moved to pity and solidarity with the situation of the other. This is the person who is willing to become vulnerable because he or she is touched by the injustice toward others and suffers by love. This person takes on the wound of a brother or sister. *He approached him and dressed his wounds.* This is an attitude of nearness of one who discovers the problem, and faced with long and short-term solutions, begins by being present and responding directly and immediately.

... *He hoisted him on his own beast....* The Samaritan gave his own place to the other who was suffering. He touched reality with his own hands and became creative in looking for solutions to change the situation. This assumes being aware that one is on a journey and that personal response requires personal conversion. The Samaritan was moved by the encounter with the poor. If the life of the suffering poor does not cause us to get down from our horse, our service is worthless. Do we let ourselves be questioned?

... *He brought him to the inn where he cared for him ... he took out two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper....* The Good Samaritan understands that the “center of focus” is the wounded person on the side of the road. He knows how to take the focus off himself in order to spend and give of himself for the good of the wounded person. The Levite and priest believed themselves to be their own center of focus. The Samaritan breaks the cycle and the one who was on the margin became his center of focus. The Samaritan discovers God, the center of suffering humankind. He carries out two actions: care and

reimbursement for care. Furthermore, he lives an attitude of offering. He gives himself and spends himself. This is the power of the Incarnation.

*... Look after him and if there is any further expense I will repay you on my way back.*” Conditions of poverty exist because there are also conditions of wealth, but God does not want this. Social-structural sin weighs heavy on the shoulders of humankind, therefore, on our shoulders as well. If we are aware of the reality of suffering along the side of the road, we will not be satisfied to give a sort-term response, but we will creatively look for long-term solutions, as did the Good Samaritan.

### **Called to be Good Samaritans today**

Can we identify with the Good Samaritan? Jesus and St. Vincent invite us to incarnate this attitude, like them and with them. In our service of the laity, we are called not only to “bend down” and care for the wounded but also to help others, the laity, care for the wounded. It is for us to show one another the journey of service. Moreover, we see that God emphasizes the maximum, not the minimum. “He loved to the very end.” To believe in the gospel of Jesus, to be Vincentian, means to know how to go to the very end, to the very end of the journey. Let us go, my brothers and sisters, let us go and do what the Good Samaritan did. Let us go and be witnesses to justice; let us form others in justice and in a commitment to give their life for the poor. That is the mission of the Vincentian missionary and the Daughter of Charity today: to go and do what the Good Samaritan did because there is still much to be done. There are many wounded on the sides of our roads. We must help them get up because we all have the right to travel the path. May Jesus continue to show us the way and may St. Vincent intercede for us.

(Translation: TRANSLATION CENTER – DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY, Paris)