

REPORT OF THE SUPERIORESS GENERAL OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY

SR. EVELYNE FRANÇ

Dear Father Gregory, dear Fathers and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission.

It is a joy for me to welcome you to the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity today, on this solemnity of the apostles Peter & Paul, a date which is certainly special for some of you.

We, the Daughters of Charity of the six international Communities who make up this great house, we are happy to welcome you for the celebration of your 41st General Assembly just begun, and whose theme 'Creative fidelity to the Mission' promises pertinent debate and important decisions.

Permit me to pause for some moments to consider the context and the place of your gathering, marked by Providence. You are celebrating your Assembly in the midst of a jubilee year in Paris, the city where Saint Vincent and Saint Louise worked and laboured so much. Everything here speaks of them, everything reminds us of their heroic achievement, that of an immensely creative charity, in a missionary spirit without frontiers. In a word, the context of your Assembly is itself a challenge, a call to revive charity and mission, to reproduce the daring, the creativity and the holiness Vincent and Louise lived (cf. VC n. 37).

As for the place which you have chosen for your work, the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity, — it is the Blessed Virgin's house, a sanctuary of grace and of mercy for a world parched and thirsting for love. I am convinced that you have been impressed to see how many hundreds and hundreds of pilgrims are daily received there by a team of lazarist Fathers, of laity and of Daughters of Charity. These pilgrims crowd around Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. She invites them to come to the foot of the altar, to listen to the voice of the Lord, to gather up all the graces which her Mother's hands discretely distributes to them, like so many beams of love.

We ask Mary's intercession for the Congregation of the Mission. We ask her to accompany the unfolding of your Assembly, your debates and decisions: that she encourage your initiatives and projects, that she help you remain listening to the Holy Spirit, and respond to

the prompting to transmit to the poor messages of love and hope, as the living expression of your fidelity which strengthens and renews itself in depth, making itself creative for the mission.

I would also like to invoke the year of the priest which has just ended with such solemnity in Rome, which you have lived with joy, united to the Holy Father and to all the Church. Our prayer has closely accompanied you and we have thanked the Lord for the inestimable gift of the priesthood and asked for all of you abundant blessings in the exercise of your ministry.

Permit me now to rapidly develop two points: an act of thanksgiving, and a prayer

Great and wonderful are your works, O Lord (Rev 15:3)

I borrow from the book of the Apocalypse this verse to express our gratitude, our admiration and thanksgiving for all that the Company has received and continues to receive from the successor of Saint Vincent and from the priests of the Congregation of the Mission.

Yes, Great and wonderful are your works, O Lord!

Today, as it is six years since your General Assembly in Rome, I am given the opportunity to thank the Lord who lovingly watches over our Company. It is appropriate to quote the recommendations which Saint Vincent gave, on 7 February 1660, a few weeks before the death of Saint Louise, to Father Jacques de la Fosse, to encourage him to take care of, and today we would say “**accompany,**” the Daughters of Charity: “The action of God to bring to birth the little Company made use of our activity: and you know that the same things which God makes use of to bring things into being, he also uses to preserve them.”

All through her life, it is important to recall, Saint Louise showed with a holy insistence her desire that the Company of the Daughters of Charity would remain under the authority of Saint Vincent. She also ardently desired that the Daughters of Charity would receive the spiritual help of the Fathers of the Congregation of the Mission.

And so, since the beginning of the Company, we have been enriched and supported by the help of the successors of Saint Vincent, the Superiors General of the Congregation of the Mission, and of our brothers in Saint Vincent. How could we not show our gratitude?

Allow me to speak first of all to Father Gregory, to thank him for his close and cordial accompaniment, for his frequent visits to the

sisters, linked to the visits made to his confreres, and even to the most distant corners of the Company (for example the Cook islands) to support and encourage them to live with joy and fidelity their vocation as Daughters of Charity.

I would also underline the great availability of the Director General, the Superior General's permanent representative to the Company, his untiring devotion to the mission of favouring fidelity to the charism.

In the same way I speak on behalf of the Sisters to thank the provincial Directors, the faithful fellow workers with the Visitatrices and the councillors in their respective Provinces. All of them are grateful to them for the Vincentian dynamism which they bring to the Provinces and for their delicate attention to the spiritual journeying.

It is also a joy for me to thank all the Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of the Mission who work together in many ways for the formation of the Sisters, whether through the preaching of the annual retreat, monthly or quarterly days of reflection, the sessions and other activities which help us live the gift of the vincentian charism.

Yes, great are your works, O Lord!

After thanksgiving, here is prayer, that of the psalmist:

Lord, strengthen the work of your hands! (Ps 137:8)

The experience of graces received pushes us to desire and ask of the Lord with great confidence that he bring to completion the work he has begun in the Company. The living witness, burning with an often discreet love, given by so many many saintly Sisters, who through the whole length of our history, have spread the perfume of charity through a simple and humble service of the poor, realized with joy and gentleness, respect, compassion and devotion, fills us with admiration.

The Company is called to serve in a state of charity, and in a state of mission. Charity and mission are inseparably united. Charity without mission is inconceivable, and mission without love makes no sense. Charity is fully completed in mission. Mission is nourished by charity. Right through this jubilee year we have been exploring together, you and we, with the rest of the Vincentian family, this duality and have deepened it.

In order to respond with an ever new fidelity, today as yesterday, to this call to live, in a state of charity and mission, we count on your

support. We know that Saint Vincent, speaking to his Confreres and to the Daughters of Charity, liked to underline to the one and to the other, that direct acts of service and evangelization could not be separated. He wished that, you and we, be open to these two dimensions of our vocation, presenting them to us as complimentary.

We count on your service of animation, and of spiritual accompaniment, of collaboration in formation, of energy and of missionary dynamism, to revitalize our charism in order to respond to the challenges of the present which prepare the Company of the future. For the Lord speaks to our hearts of the suffering and the abandonment of so many many persons wounded by life, silent and left unnoticed in the great whirlwind of our noisy civilization, which is media exposed to the extreme, which never dwells long on the true causes of poverty.

We hope to work even more closely with you in the ministry of vocations, a ministry in which we wish to be creative and dynamic, inserted into the pastoral care of the diocesan Church, a ministry capable of attracting young people to Christ, and of showing them the beauty of the Christian life, of Vincentian service, the joy of giving one's life in love, as Vincent and Louise did.

We are well aware that *"The mission of consecrated life and the vitality of Institutes depends, certainly, on the active fidelity with which the consecrated religious respond to their vocation, but that their future is linked to the fact that other men and other women generously accept the Lord's call"* (VC n. 64).

We are ready for collaborative work, tighter, more intense, as brothers and sisters, inheritors of a charism entrusted to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise for the good of the Church and of humanity, a charism which is our responsibility.

As with Our Lord, there cannot be any poverty which is foreign to us, to you or to us (cf. C. 11a) and, from him, we can learn to welcome with love the poor, the little ones, to look with mercy and to serve the weak, the despairing, and to lift up again those who are fallen.

Co-inheritors, we follow Jesus Christ in the way Saint Vincent and Saint Louise followed him; we are called to be experts in charity and in mission. Could we try to promote a network of charity which would regroup, gather and multiply our strengths in favour of our most disinherited brothers and sisters, in the framework of the wider Vincentian family of course, but in a particular way between ourselves?

This would constitute a gift for the Church and the world of today, three hundred and fifty years after Saint Vincent and Saint Louise

returned to God, having left an evangelical harvest of love for the disinherited, of attention to the little ones and of works of charity and of mission of an incredible breadth.

Our world needs new apostles of charity and of mission who speak to the poor of the God of Love, who make visible his face as merciful Father, as liberator and as defender of the oppressed.

Do you think that we could imagine new forms of collaboration, new ways of presenting the Vincentian charism to the Church and to the world, being more daring in the service of the poor?

How good it would be to act together, in a more intense way, for the promotion and the dignity of the poor, respect for human rights, the defense and care of life, the ministry of the family, work for justice and peace, solidarity with the whole human family, supported by the social teaching of the Church!

Could we imagine together what Saint Vincent and Saint Louise would do today to run to put out so many fires, those of suffering and of pain, which disfigure the human landscape of the world and transform it into a planet where misery is visible here and everywhere, for sadly poverty has no geographical frontiers?

Finally, dear Fathers and Brothers, I wish to tell you that the Daughters of Charity are waiting and expecting from you that you help us let ourselves be transformed by the Spirit, as our last General Assembly asks of us.

It is a little more than a year since we celebrated it in this very place. I am certain that the walls which surround us are the silent witnesses of the joyful experience so strong in the action of the Holy Spirit which all the Visitatrices and delegates lived.

Count on the prayer of the Company which is asking the Holy Spirit to be in the midst of you, as for a new Pentecost. We are happy with your presence among us.

May the Lord bless you, may Mary accompany you!

Translation: ADRIAN EASTWOOD, C.M.