



PRAYER ACCORDING TO SAINT VINCENT

1. PREPARATION

In his explanation about the method of prayer, Vincent de Paul described those first moments: *It is very important to place ourselves firmly in the presence of God, for the very gist of meditation depends on it; once that is done, the rest falls into place* (CCD:XI:359)¹. Here we are also referring to the experience of the psalmist who when speaking with God, stated: *Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly* (Psalms 5:4)².

1 All references to the writings of Vincent de Paul are taken from: Vincent de Paul, *Correspondence, Conference, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-13b), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11-12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-13b); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014. These references will be inserted in the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XI:359).

2 All Scripture references are taken from: *Africa Study Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation.



Obviously, in order to attain any benefit from mental prayer, it is necessary to guarantee a certain degree of silence in which the voice of God can be heard in a clear and powerful manner: *keep silence until after meditation the next day so that this recollection, which will appear exteriorly, may foster the conversation of your hearts with God* (CCD:IX:6-7). Here our Founder seemed to refer to those words that are found in the *Imitation of Christ: In silence and quiet the devout soul goes forward and learns the hidden things of the Scriptures* (Book I, chapter XX, #6)³.

On various occasions, Vincent insisted on the importance of retiring for the night at an appropriate hour. One was to get the necessary sleep so that one could awake with a good disposition on the following day. Vincent also recommended praying the following words upon awaking: *My God, I adore you! O Lord, I give you my heart, grant me the grace never to offend you, but to do your will in all things* (CCD:X:480).

According to Vincent, there are two forms of preparation: a) a proximate preparation, made immediately before the beginning of morning meditation; b) a remote preparation that is done the night before and consists of reading the points of meditation for the

following day and sleeping with a *good thought* about the suggested theme. Vincent stated: *Go to bed modestly and fall asleep with a good thought. This will be an easy way for you to remember God when you awake, and your mind will be better disposed to make your morning meditation* (CCD:IX:7). The following procedure is to be followed during the time of remote and immediate preparation for prayer.

PLACE ONESELF IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

One is to allow oneself to be enlightened, comforted and inspired by the loving presence of God so that *Our Lord can speak heart to heart* (CCD:X:471). One should then make an act of faith, for example, *I believe my God is here* (CCD:X:473)

Vincent reminded the Sisters: *Always begin all your prayers with an act of the presence of God ... even though you do not see God, faith teaches us that his holy presence is everywhere ... permeating everything, even the very depths of our heart* (CCD:IX:4).

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³ Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, translated by Reverend Wilian Benham and accessed at: <http://www.orthodoxebooks.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/The%20Imitation%20of%20Christ%20-%20Thomas%20Kempis.pdf>



When addressing the members of the Congregation, Vincent stated: *the practice of placing ourselves in the presence of God is growing little by little among us, and with the help of God, such a practice will become habitual. How many people in the world never lose sight of God's presence*⁴. From the perspective of Vincent de Paul, the practice of placing ourselves in the presence of God leads us to live our life in a manner that is inspired by the conviction that we are always in the presence of One who loves us and accompanies us with love and mercy. The Apostle Paul reminds us of that same reality when he states: *In God we live and move and exist* (Acts 17:28).

Vincent referred to Saint Francis de Sales, from whom he borrowed the method for mental prayer and stated: [St. Francis says] *we can place ourselves in the presence of God in four ways: contemplating him in the Blessed Sacrament, reflecting on the joy of seeing God adored in heaven, affirming the reality that God is everywhere,*

and affirming that God is present in those persons who allow themselves to be captivated by his love.

A prayer, that is found in the spiritual writings of Louise de Marillac, can also serve as a source of inspiration during this initial moment of prayer: *I adore you, O my God, and recognize that you are the author of my existence. Because of the love I owe you, I abandon myself entirely to your holy will in my life. Although I am filled with powerlessness and reasons for humiliation on account of my sins, I trust in your mercy. I beg you, because of the love you have for your creatures, to send the assistance of the Holy Spirit so as to produce the full effect of the plan which your holy will has had, from all eternity, for my soul and for all souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ* (SWLM:691 [A.1])⁵.

⁴ Translator's Note: this article was written in Portuguese and the references are made to the Portuguese text, which does not correspond to the Spanish or English text. I was unable to find the referenced text. The closest I came was a text that referred to the will of God, not the presence of God: *this practice of doing the will of God; gradually it will take hold of us and become a habit ... we will finish by being at home with it and always energized by. How many people never lose sight of God* (CCD:XII:136)

⁵ All references to the writings of Louise de Marillac are taken from: Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writing of Louise de Marillac*, edited and translated from the French by Sister Louise Sullivan, DC, New City Press, Brooklyn, New York, 1991. These references will be inserted in the text using the initials [SWLM] followed by the page number, followed by number of the letter or the number of the writing and or manuscript, for example, (SWLM:691 [A.1]).

ASK FOR THE GRACE TO PRAYER WELL

We can reach out to God because God has first reached out to us (1 John 4:10), revealing his saving love, calling us to participate in his life and instilling in us a desire to encounter him as the ultimate meaning of who we are. Therefore, prayer is a gift that should be lived. From that perspective, Vincent recommended that we should ask for the grace to pray well and should do so with the certainty that *we cannot have a good thought without the grace of God* (CCD:X:473).

Here we are speaking about disposing ourselves to prayer, allowing our minds and hearts to move toward God and placing ourselves confidently and willingly in the hands of God. We ask for divine assistance and open ourselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit, “our internal teacher” with a traditional prayer or similar words.

The following words, which Vincent prayed during a conference to the members of the Congregation, would be most appropriate: *O Savior, you know what my heart wants to say; it turns to you, fountain of mercy; you see its desires; they tend only to you, they aspire only to you, they want only you. Let us*

say to him often, “teach us to pray”; give us, Lord this gift of meditation; teach us yourself how we should pray. This is what we ask of him today and every day with confidence --- great confidence --- in his goodness (CCD:XI:208-209).

In this same line of thought, Vincent counseled the Sisters to invoke the intercession of the Blessed Mother, of one’s patron saint, and/or guardian angel as a stimulus to prayer (CCD:IX:335; X:473). Faith assures us that we participate in the communion of saints. On an anthropological level, no one is an island and that is even more true on a spiritual level: *We are always surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith* (Hebrews 12:1), men and women who preceded us in serving the Lord and who inspire us to focus our gaze on our faith.

RECALL OR SELECT A THEM

After prayerfully reading a biblical text or reflecting on a mystery or virtue or Christian maxim, select a theme for meditation: *«After having asked Our Lord to give you the grace to learn how to pray well, apply yourselves interiorly to the points that are read, as we have said. O Savior, give me the grace of entering*



into this holy practice. Sisters, if you make your prayer well, what will you not receive from God as a result (CCD:X:461)?

Special attention should be given to the humanity of Christ, that is, his life, his mission and his teachings (CCD:XII:113; X:575). Allowing oneself to be surprised and inspired by Jesus' words and example. Vincent told the Sisters: *recall the mysteries of the life and passion of Our Lord so that you can take one now, and another at some other time, as topics for your prayer (CCD:X:457)*. Vincent was particularly fond of meditating on the gospel that the Church proposed for liturgical celebrations, especially the gospel proposed for feast days: *on feast days it would be well for you to meditate on the gospels that are read at that time (CCD:IX:27)*. In his Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis renewed the Ignatian invitation to engage in a loving contemplation of the Gospel as a presupposition to all missionary activity: *The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit*

which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others (Evangelii Gaudium, #264)⁶.

Among the values and attitudes that were lived and communicated by Jesus, some are particularly significant for our Vincentian spirituality, such as, radical following of Jesus (Mark 8:27-35; Matthew 8:18-27), communion with the Father (John 8:25-29, 15:9-16), passion for the Kingdom and the call to conversion (Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 13:18-23), confidence in Providence (Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 11:1-4), compassionate and effective charity (Mark 6:30-44; Luke 10:25-37), preferential option for the poor (Matthew 25:31-40; Luke 4:14-21), commitment to freedom (Luke 10:28-31; John 10:14-18); love of the truth (Mark 12:28-34; John 8:25-32); seat of justice (Mark 2:1-12; John 8:1-11), availability to serve (Mark 10:35-45; Luke 7:11-17), zeal for the mission (Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 9:1-6); formation of disciples (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 10:1-11), humility and simplicity

⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, accessed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html



(Luke 9:46-48; 17:7-10); gentleness and firmness (Mark 10:17-22; Matthew 11:28-30), joy and gratitude (Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 1:46-56), openness to the spirit (John 7:37-39; 14:15-26), the cross and resurrection (Mark 10:32-34; Luke 24:13-35).

Flexible and insistent on the use of the proposed method, Vincent suggested that when and where it was possible, the points to be considered during the time of meditation should be read aloud, thus facilitating the process of meditation. This was most important in light of the fact that some of the Sisters were unable to read and had little experience with spiritual matters: *a Sister should be appointed to say aloud, after the points of the next morning's meditation have been read, what is to be done to make the reading more understandable* (CCD:X:474)

Vincent, inspired by the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, reminded his followers that at the initial stage of meditation, the imagination can help one to pray well (CCD:IX:3-4). Thus, as our Founder emphasized, we are dealing with an additional resource (useful but not indispensable to meditation) which relies on understanding and the will and is illuminated by faith. Some examples: (a) when placing oneself in the presence of

God, one might imagine being with Moses in the Tent of Meeting where God spoke to him *face to face, as one speaks to a friend* (Exodus 33:11) ... one might also imagine being a guest, eating with the Blessed Trinity (as suggested in the famous icon of Andrei Rublev who depicted the scene narrated in Genesis 18:1-15); (b) when asking for the grace to pray well, one might imagine reclining on Jesus' chest like the beloved disciple at the time of the Last Supper (John 13:22) or imagine sitting at Jesus' feet, like Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who allowed herself to be formed by the words of the Master (Luke 10:39) or imagine being part of that group who gathered around Jesus in order to listen to his teaching (Mark 2:2); (c) at the time of choosing a theme, one might imagine being one of the persons described in the scene that one has chosen for meditation. All of this is intended to help one avoid distractions and focus during the time of prayer.

Vincent even suggested that the Daughters might contemplate the images on holy cards: *It would also be well for you to keep handy some pictures of the mysteries on which you meditate. While looking at them, think, "What is that? What does that mean?" And in that way*



your mind will be opened (CCD:IX:335). It should also be mentioned that Vincent spoke about the practice of a woman (Saint Jane Frances de Chantal) who contemplated the image of the Blessed Mother and was thus, able to make resolutions: *For a long time, a lady I knew had the practice in all her meditations of contemplating a picture of the Blessed Virgin. First, she would look at her eyes and then say in her own mind, "O beautiful eyes, how pure you are! You never did anything but glorify God. What purity is apparent in your holy eyes! How different from mine, by which I have so often offended my God! I don't want to give them so much liberty any longer but, on the contrary, I will accustom them to modesty"* (CCD:IX:26-27). When speaking about those unable to read, in addition to contemplating images, the Founder suggested that they would do well to meditate on the gospels that are read on feast days ... Vincent stated: *I have known people who could neither read nor write, yet made their prayer perfectly well* (CCD:IX:27). Vincent also stated that when meditating on the passion, they could focus their eyes on the crucifix (CCD:IX:28).

With his admirable sense of practicality, Vincent continually recommended reading a chapter of the New Testament on a daily basis. When he spoke to

the members of the Congregation, he stated:

We have to have great devotion to being faithful to reading a chapter of the New Testament and, in the beginning, to produce acts of adoration, adoring the word of God and his truth: of entering into the sentiments with which Our Lord pronounced them, and consenting to these truths; of resolving to put these same truths into practice. For example. I will read, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' and will resolve and give myself to God to practice this truth on such and such an occasion. Likewise, when I read, 'Blessed are the meek,' I will give myself to God to practice gentleness. Above all, we have to be careful not to read by way of study, saying, 'This passage will help me with a certain sermon,' but read simply for our own growth. We must not be discouraged if, after reading something several times for one month, two months, or six months, we are not moved by it. It will happen that one time we will have a little glimmer of light, another day a greater one, and an even greater one when we need it. One word alone is capable of converting us (CCD:XI:102). There is no doubt that Vincentian spirituality, in its very origin, is profoundly rooted in the fertile and solid ground of the Word of God.





III. THE BODY OF PRAYER

In an attitude of recollection, one meditates on the chosen theme (mystery, virtue, maxim) in order to discover its deepest meaning. Vincent understood the risk of reducing mental prayer to an intellectual or speculative exercise. In reality, the prayer proposed by Vincent harmonizes reason and emotion and thus creates prayerful, thinking and active people. It was for this reason that Vincent exhorted his followers to not lose sight of the presence of God and to follow the three steps of his "little method" (CCD:XI:265ff). In other words, through mental prayer, one enters into an affective dialogue with the Lord, inclining the heart to the demands of Jesus' word. Through mental prayer, God clarifies the understanding, inflames the will, takes possession of the heart and soul, inspires attitudes and prompts commitments

Vincent described some of the specifics of his method of prayer: *Mental prayer is made in two ways: one by understanding, and the other by the will. Prayer of understanding occurs when, after hearing the reading, the mind is reawakened in the presence of God and then is occupied with seeking to know the meaning of the mystery proposed, in seeing the lesson proper to it, and in producing affections of seeking good or avoiding evil. And although the will produces these acts, this is still called prayer of understanding, because its chief function, which is the search, is done by the understanding, which is occupied primarily with the subject put before it. This is ordinarily called meditation. Everyone can make it, each according to his or her ability and the inspiration God gives* (CCD:IX:330).



Understanding creates the possibility of becoming more and more aware of the content of meditation and the will stimulates the search for that which is good, true, just, necessary, beautiful ... or as Saint Augustine expressed in his letter to Proba: *the effect following upon prayer will be excellent in proportion to the fervor of the desire which precedes its utterance*⁷. From this integration of understanding and will arises the practical resolution which enables the individual to concretize that which the Lord has inspired.

From the outset, meditation must always be aware of the demands of our vocation and mission, aware of the demand to confront the reality, the hopes and the concerns of those who are poor. Vincent proposed that the Sisters make their resolutions in light of the activities that they will be engaged in during the day. In his conference of August 2nd, 1640 Vincent spoke about fidelity to mental prayer and stated: *you should not pray in order to have exalted ideas, ecstasies, and raptures --- which are more harmful than useful --- but only to perfect yourselves and make you truly good Daughters of Charity. So, your resolutions should be something like this, "I am going to serve some poor persons; I will try to go to them with a simple,*

cheerful attitude to comfort and edify them; I will speak to them as if they were my lords. There are some persons who seldom speak to me; I will put up with it; I have the habit of saddening a Sister on such and such an occasion; I will not do it. She sometimes displeases me; I will bear with it. One Lady scolds me, another finds fault with me; I will try not to fail in my duty and will show them the honor and respect I owe them. When I am with a certain person, it is nearly always harmful to my perfection; as far as possible, I will avoid that situation." I think that is how you should make your meditation (CCD:IX:26). Again on August 16th of the same year, Vincent spoke about the same theme and stated: *Direct your resolutions toward the day's activities, especially those that will help you tend to perfection and the fulfilment of your Rule, the better to honor God in your vocation* (CCD:IX:30). Prayer that is rooted in reality will always take into consideration the challenges of the mission.

7 St. Augustine, Letter to Proba, accessed at: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102130.htm>



1ST STEP: NATURE

Reflect on the topic: What is it? What does it suggest to me? In what does this mystery consist, virtue or maxim? What addiction is presented here that I should avoid?

Formulate convictions on the subject, in light of the Word, of the Fathers of the Church, of the living tradition, of Saint Vincent's intuitions, of the Vincentian heritage, etc. Without firm convictions, the spiritual experience becomes fragile and inconsistent. Here, in a more decisive way, operates the understanding or intelligence of the person praying, that wise and reverent thought, which is directed towards the mystery of God. "Meditate on what has been read, ponder what the author is saying, and consider the object of the points you have for meditation." (CCD 10, 474 / SV 10, 590).

Example [Jn 15, 9-17 / Conference of Saint Vincent on Charity (CCD 12, 213-225 / SV XII, 260-276)]

Charity consists in welcoming the love of God that makes us capable of loving our neighbor with the intensity of the compassionate and operative love of Jesus Christ.

2ND STEP: MOTIVES

Engage with courage: What are the reasons that encourage me to

live this mystery, to seek this virtue or maxim, to assume this attitude, to avoid this vice?

Convince yourself of the value of the matter in question, such as the need to integrate it into your life and to search for it constantly (in that which refers to what is good or virtue) or to avoid it (if it is bad or a vice). Here, the prevalence is of the will or of the heart, that of the deep feelings and longings that energize existence. It is a question, then, of illuminating the conscience, inflaming the will and awakening the affections, uniting thoughts and desires in view of the goal to be reached, "since the will follows the light of understanding and is led to do what's suggested to it as good and desirable." (CCD 11, 360 / SV XI, 406). Given this, Vicente clarifies: "The second point is that, after having recognized clearly the virtue or the vice to which the subject of your meditation tends (for, if it's a virtue, the goal of prayer is to get you to practice it; or, if it's a vice, to root it out), you may see the reasons for embracing the one or avoiding the other." (CCD 10, 474-475 / SV X, 591).

Example (Jn 15. 9-17 / Conference of Saint Vincent on Charity (CCD 12, 213-225 / SV XII, 260-276)]

- The best way to correspond to the love of God is to develop the capacity to love that He has given us.
- Loving is the grace and challenge of the Christian life. It is what best configures us to the person of Jesus Christ, the



model that signifies being truly human.

- It is the dynamic principle of our participation in the construction of the Kingdom and in the transformation of reality.

THIRD STEP: MEANS

3rd step: Make a resolution:

What can or should I do to bring an inspiration received in prayer into my everyday life?

I should make a Practical resolution that allows the one praying to taste the mystery, to assimilate the virtue, to practice the maxim, to assume a value or attitude, to avoid and destroy completely an evil or vice, in view of the mission and the community. It is convenient to adopt only one resolution per day, with the possibility of taking it up as many times as deemed appropriate (cf. CCD 9, 12 / SV IX, 13). Do not be content with generic resolutions, which do not address concrete situations. St. Vincent warns us: *"Still, it's not enough to make a resolution if you don't seek some means of putting it into practice. So, when you take the resolution either to avoid a vice or practice a virtue, you have to say to yourselves, Very well! I'm determined to do that, but it's very hard to practice. Can I do it on my own strength? No, I can't, but with the grace of God, I hope to be faithful to it, and for that purpose I have to make use of a cer-*

tain means." (CCD 10, 460 / SV X, 572). At this point are included the resolutions and commitments, the breaking apart and reassembling, the efforts and improvements that the person proposes in order to persevere in the good and avoid everything that is contrary to the good. It is the moment that "Affective love must pass to effective love," (CCD 9, 466 / SV IX, 593). Thus, the practical resolution is presented as an expression of the desire for continual conversion, and is to be lived with the practice of justice and charity.

Saint Vincent warns his confreres, in the aforementioned Repetition of Prayer of August 10, 1657: *"it doesn't suffice to have good affections, we must go further and be motivated to take resolutions to work seriously in the future for the acquisition of the virtue, proposing to ourselves how to put it into practice and doing acts of it. This is the crux of the matter and the benefit to be drawn from meditation."* (CCD 11, 360 / SV XI, 406).

Example (Jn 15.9-17 / Conference of Saint Vincent on Charity (CCD 12, 213-225 / SV XII, 260-276)]

- Bring myself closer to the poor, exercising in myself gratuitousness, listening, compassion and availability.
- Discover creative and adapted forms of intervention in the reality in which I act, combin-



ing charity and mission, service and evangelization, human promotion and proclamation of the Kingdom.

- Invest in the development and execution of projects that correspond to the real needs and aspirations of the people involved in order in order to cooperate in changing the structures.

In the conference that he addressed to the Daughters of Charity, on November 17, 1658, Saint Vincent summarized his method of prayer in this way: *"Seeing the virtue, you know the esteem you must have for it. And because we can't see good as good without being prompted to love it, or know vice as vice without detesting it, if you're faithful to this practice God will grant you the grace to know and love virtue; and thus you'll say, 'How beautiful that is! How good it is to love to obey! How good it is to serve poor persons in the spirit a good Daughter of Charity must have!' As soon as you finish this second point, go on to the third, which consists of the resolutions."* CCD 10, 483-484 / SV X, 603).

In this third step, it can also be useful to highlight a word, phrase or verse that, taken up again throughout the day, motivates and illuminates the resolution.





III. CONCLUSION

Saint Vincent himself instructs us: " In closing, let's thank God for the lights and graces He has granted us during meditation, and for the resolutions He has inspired us to take; let's also ask Him for His help so that we may be able to put into execution as soon as possible whatever we have proposed to ourselves to do." (CCD 11, 361 / SV XI, 407).

In this last moment of Mental Prayer (MP), we are invited to dive deeper into God and feel the divine life pulsating within us. True experience of contemplation, generator of commitment and hope.

The MP aims at an experience of contemplation, the fruit of the encounter between the grateful love of God and the thirsty and trusting openness of prayer. In contemplation, the person simply savors the presence of God, abandons himself completely in his hands, flies free and happy in the breadth of the Mystery that surrounds him. And the mature fruit of that experience is the ability to see people, the world, and yourself with the eyes of God. In the end, as Pope Francis recalls: "Here we see that intercessory prayer does not divert us from true contemplation, since authentic contemplation always has a place for others." (EG 281). And he adds: "When evangelizers rise from prayer, their hearts are more open; freed of self-absorption, they are desirous of doing good and sharing their lives with others." (EG 282).

In the perspective of Saint Vincent, a true mystic, contemplation is presented as a gift from God and, at the same time, as a result of a mature spiritual life. This is how he defines the experience of contemplation, in the context of one of the Daughters of Charity, the same as that of May 31, 1648: "In this the soul, in the presence of God, does nothing but receive what He gives. It doesn't act and, with no effort on the part of the soul, God himself inspires it with everything it may be seeking, and much more. Haven't you ever experienced this sort of prayer, dear Sisters? I'm sure you've done so very often in your retreats, when you've been amazed that, with no contribution on your part, God himself filled your mind and imprinted on it knowledge that you never had." (CCD 9, 330 / SV IX, 420). The naturalness with which Vincent spoke of contemplation is an unequivocal sign that he himself was having that experience (cf. CCD 9, 330s / SV IX, 420s, CCD 9, 322 / XI, 409, CCD 13, 160 / XIII, 143). The intuitions and the prayers that arose spontaneously in his talks are indications of this reality (cf. CCD 9, 336 / SV IX, 428, CCD 11, 321 / XI, 357). In explaining the first chapter of the Common Rules to the members of the Congregation of the Mission, on October 13, 1658, the founder reflects:

" Oh, if we only had a vision incisive enough to penetrate a little into the infinity of His excellence, O my God, what lofty sentiments

we'd take away from it, brothers! Like Saint Paul, we'd say that eyes have never seen, nor ears heard, nor the mind understood anything like it. God is an abyss of gentleness, a sovereign, eternally glorious being, an infinite good that embraces all good;" (CCD 12, 94-95 / SV XII, 110).

- THANK GOD FOR THE PRAYER.

Savoring the presence of God who spoke to our hearts and inspired us with resolutions and purposes, let us tell him of our joy and gratitude for the possibility of experiencing Him present and active in our personal, family and community life, as well as in the events of history. It is convenient, therefore, to conclude the journey of the PM by addressing ourselves directly to the one who spoke to our hearts and created new dispositions within us, granting us his enlightenment and thanks.

Commenting on the Rules of the Daughters of Charity, at the conference of October 13, 1658, founder: "You've seen the beauty of virtue, and have taken your resolutions. You still have to thank God for the grace He has given you of making your prayer, Sisters, which is the greatest grace God can give to Christians, and therefore to Daughters of Charity. What greater favor could Our Lord give a soul than to allow it to speak to and communicate in-



timately with Him? So, it's very reasonable to thank God after having made this prayer. And who gave you the grace to make it? Wasn't it God? You must, then, thank Him warmly for it. And those who pray without thanking God for having banished the darkness from their mind, enlightened them to see the beauty of virtue, and kindled their will to practice it, lack a very necessary element for making their prayer properly." (CCD 10, 460 / SV X, 572).

- REVIEW THE RESOLUTION.

Let the assumed resolution pass into the memory of the heart. It would not be wise to multiply resolutions or unfold a resolution into many particulars. On the contrary, it is worth summarizing it in order to facilitate memorization and implementation. Let us not forget, it is most important to take only one resolution at a time.

The Vincentian tradition provides for the exercise of the Particular Examination, usually done around noon (see CCD 10, 485-486 / SV X, 605-606). Before God, briefly, the person takes up the resolution born of PM, in order to expand desire and stimulate creativity. At night, before going to bed, the General Examination should be done, in the perspective of a life

review to prepare for conversion, persevere in good and avoid evil. Saint Vincent did not fail to explain the meaning of this exercise, speaking to the Daughters of Charity, at the conference of August 16, 1641: "And as for your examination, be faithful. Know that it must be done on the resolution taken in the morning prayer. Thank God if, by his grace, you have practiced your resolution or ask forgiveness if, due to negligence, you have failed "(SV IX, 43).

Saint Vincent spoke of two forms of Examination: "The first by seeing whether you've been faithful to the resolutions made at morning prayer (...) For example, there's a virtue I need (...) Or it may be made in another way, which is to try to discover the particular failing to which you're most inclined in order to correct it." (CCD 10, 485 / SV X, 605). It concludes, citing an example to encourage not only mortification, but also the practice of virtue contrary to vice, which must be corrected: "'What did I resolve to do this morning at meditation?' If, for example, it was to mortify impatience, for example, you'll say, I'm in the habit of being impatient with my Sister; how did I act?' And if you see that you've practiced patience when the occasion arose to be annoyed and you weren't, thank God; if not, then beg for forgiveness and impose a penance on yourself. For you see, it's impossible to correct



a vice properly if you're not exact in that."(CCD 10, 486 / SV X, 606).

- OFFER GOD THE RESOLUTION.

As without God we are nothing, we can do nothing, we do not want to do anything, we close the journey of the PM, asking the Lord to help us bring to fruition all that we assume in his presence. "After that, dear Sisters, offer your resolutions to God; give Him back what you just received from His Goodness. (...) We have a great need to put our resolutions into practice, which we can't do without the grace of God, (CCD 10, 460 / SV X, 573).

The holy founder will also say, inviting his Sisters to cooperate with the grace of God: "But, Sisters, all our resolutions are nothing without grace. That's why we really have to ask God to give us strength and set to work courageously." (CCD 9, 12 / SV IX, 13).

Saint Vincent himself taught the Sisters a prayer that is very conducive to this final moment, as it corresponds perfectly to the spirit of PM: "Yes, my God, I'm determined to begin to practice those good things you taught us. I know I'm weak, but with Your grace I can do all things, and I feel confident that You'll help me. I implore you by the love that prompts You to teach us Your holy Will, and I beg you to give us the strength and courage to live them.' (CCD 9, 10 / SV IX, 10).

ADDENDUM

The repetition or sharing of prayer, so strongly recommended by Saint Vincent to the Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity (cf. CCD 9, 304-305 / SV IX, 386, CCD 11, XI, 575).

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