

Homily of the Superior General at the General Assembly of the Vincentian Marian Youth

July 27, 2015

Evangelized, We Evangelize!

My brothers and sisters in Jesus and St. Vincent;

It is good to be together in Salamanca for the Vincentian Marian Youth General Assembly. Our theme *“Evangelized, we evangelize!”* is most appropriate, for it reminds us that we are about a great work—the very one begun by the Son of God when he was here on earth. In Paris, through the appearances of Our Lady to St. Catherine Laboure at the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal, we find the first stirrings of what it means to be an evangelizer. In confiding the details of the apparition of Our Lady to her, St. Catherine told her director, Fr. Aladel that “The Blessed Virgin wishes to give you a mission. You will be the founder and the director of a Confraternity of the Children of Mary.” Two centuries later, we see the effects of that first fervor in the Vincentian Marian Youth Association which is present in 66 countries with over 100,000 members.

However, we do not gather to view statistics or hear impressive reports from regions or local councils, but to reflect and act on how we may evangelize in the way of Jesus and St. Vincent de Paul, through the intercession of Our Blessed Mother. The International Statutes state it simply:

“The members of the Association commit themselves to following Christ. They discover Mary in the Gospel, as model of all believers, accepting in faith the presence of God in her Son Jesus, listening to and acting on his word. Likewise, they see in Mary, Mother of the Lord, the inspiration that helps them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to walk through life in faith and with an effective charity that generates justice” (No. 5, *Nature*).

The Vincentian Marian Youth Association is a movement of the heart, mind, and will, calling forth a personal commitment to give witness to one’s faith in Jesus Christ. You act together as members of a prayerful and serving community as you reach out to those in need.

This Eucharist, a key moment in our General Assembly, is a graced time for us to reflect on what it means to both evangelize and to be evangelized.

Our Scripture readings present a stark contrast in the ways we can witness to a revealed faith. In the first reading from the Book of Exodus, the Israelites, God's chosen people whom he rescued from slavery, behave in a most troubling way. After communicating with God to mediate on their behalf, Moses returns and finds his people worshipping an idol. They have so easily forgotten the God who gave them life and freed them. Moses' brother Aaron, acting in his place, rationalizes their idolatry. "Let not my Lord be angry. You know how prone these people are to evil. They said to me 'Make us a god to be our leader; as for the man Moses who brought us out of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him'" (Ex. 32:21-23).

It is amazing to see how shortsighted and ungrateful the Israelites appear to be, sacrificing all God has generously given them for the relief of a temporary distraction. Despite God's personal intervention on their behalf, the Israelites refused to live up to their covenant as God's chosen people. They turned away from God. Their actions are the 'antithesis' of evangelization.

But before we judge the Israelites any further, let us stop and reflect on our own personal salvation history. How many times have each of us ignored or neglected the call of Christ to be his disciples? How often have we put our own personal projects or interests before discerning what the Lord is calling us to do? How often have we neglected prayer, worship, and service in the name of Jesus and Mary to do what seems more pleasurable or convenient? In today's world, idolatry has many other subtle forms than the golden calf the Israelites worshipped in the desert.

That is why today's Gospel is so encouraging. Jesus shares two short, well-known parables: the growth of the mustard seed and the yeast with leavened bread. Both parables have the same theme: God's strength and power takes our small, singular efforts and transforms them in accord with his plan. Out of our humble, hidden efforts can come great works of grace if we accept the challenge of being evangelizers in word and deed. The theme of for the JMV General Assembly is not a clever play on words, but a creed for life: "***Evangelized, we evangelize!***" That was the reality the apostles and early disciples encountered after Jesus' Resurrection. Those who denied and deserted Jesus in his Passion were welcomed back into the fold when they affirmed Christ as the center of their lives. Those who were cowardly were filled with the Holy Spirit and became courageous evangelizers and servant-leaders forming the first Christian communities.

How does this reality touch our lives today? Once again, I refer to our International Statutes:

“Through our birth in the Family of St. Vincent de Paul, it is inspired by the Vincentian charism, and makes evangelization and service to the poor distinctive characteristics of our presence in the Church. Its members commit themselves to be missionaries, witnessing to the love of Christ by word and work” (No. 5, *Nature*).

For St. Louise de Marillac, it was her “Pentecost experience” that led her to become a convinced believer in Jesus Christ in order to serve the poor. In our time together at this Assembly, we must prayerfully and joyfully discern the Lord’s presence and seek the help of Mary our Mother to find ways to evangelize and share the Good News. It is in the two-fold dynamic of proclamation and action that we grow in our discipleship with the Lord Jesus.

Whether or not we have a similar “Pentecost experience” to that of St. Louise is not for us to decide. Ultimately, conversion and inner transformation are the work of God. As St. Vincent discovered, God’s handiwork is subtle and gradual, often manifested in our Lords and Masters, the poor. This is why our time together is crucial. As a community with a common cause, we can pray, reflect, and discuss how to evangelize and inspire others to do the same. Use this time well!

The “idols” and “golden calves” of our modern era will always try to draw us away from what the Lord Jesus is calling us to do with the intercession of his Mother Mary. United in this Eucharist by the love of Jesus and Mary, we pray for the strength to accept the challenge of evangelization. Pope Francis said “To evangelize is to make the Kingdom of God present in our world” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, No. 176). As leaders of the Vincentian Marian Youth, let us strive to “go beyond ourself to make our life a gift to humanity as prophets and witnesses of God’s love, committing ourselves to give testimony by words and actions” (International VMY Triptych: <http://www.secretariadojmv.org/jmv/en/about-us/international-vmy-triptych/>).