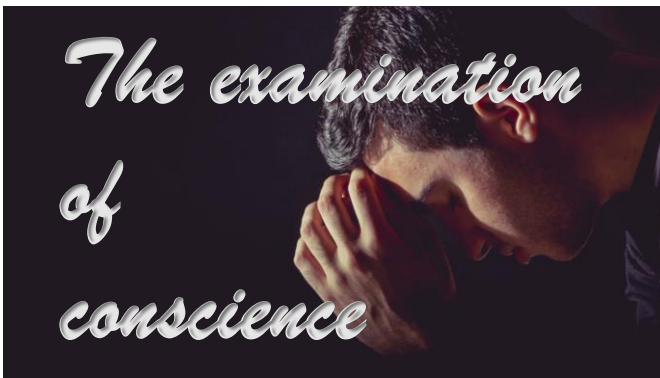




"If we don't know what's going on in our hearts, "we are like animals that don't understand anything, they go ahead by instinct... but we are not animals, we are Children of God, baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is why it is important to understand what has happened today in my heart. May the Lord teach us to always, every day, examine our conscience."

(Pope Francisco - 04/09/2018)



On April 17, 2025, God willing, we will be celebrating the 400th anniversary of the date in which the di Gondi's established a contract in which they donated, to Monsieur Vincent de Paul and his first collaborators: Anthony Portail, M. Belin, Francis de Coudray and John de la Salle, a financial pension to found and support a society, called the

Congregation of the Mission, to take care of the evangelization of the rural poor on a permanent basis.

"Put on the spirit of Jesus Christ" is the motto chosen for all the activities of this celebration that we will prepare during the three years from April 17, 2023 to April 17, 2025. We are aiming at a very high goal, but it is a way of calling us to return to our roots. It is our most sincere wish to prepare ourselves for this celebration by examining ourselves to see if we

are being today "what we have to be". This will also help us to focus on what we have to do.

In order to touch rock bottom, we propose to begin with an intense "examination of conscience" according to the Vincentian tradition. Examining one's conscience is always the best way to prepare oneself for prayer, meditation, discernment and the execution of God's will in our lives. St. Vincent considered that the Examine is one of the "golden keys" to grow in the spiritual life. Aware of the thought of St. Augustine¹, St. Vincent recommends to everyone to do it several times a day, something that he himself practiced assiduously. Although he seems to direct this practice only to confession and communion, he does not stop there; our holy founder also envisioned a wholistic conversion that leads to a personal and community commitment in favor of charity towards the poor that trends toward the transformation of society with the poor in mind.

Pope Francis' advice is along the same lines: "A very valuable tool for getting to know oneself is to make an examination of conscience every day. See what went through my heart that day. This good habit consists in calmly rereading everything we experienced during the day, recognizing what seduces and deceives us, and distinguishing it from what is really important and good for us. This patient interior work helps us to integrate all the dimensions of our life and to live authentically in the presence of God" (Pope Francis. Wednesday, October 5, 2022).

As a reinforcement to the preparation for the celebrations of this jubilee triennium, we want to remember and follow the advice of St. Vincent de Paul about the need to "see oneself as in front of a mirror" in which "the soul can notice its own imperfections and defects", but also its positive traits. "... we are fragile, we are sinners and we also have the temptation of the spirit of the world." But we cannot lose hope, says Pope Francis: "In this spiritual struggle, in this war of the spirit, we must be victors like Jesus".

Coordinating team

¹ *"It is an obligation to constitute yourself as your own judge, to hear yourself, debate yourself and not hide yourself in the intended interior silence, if you do not hear his word it means you lack sincerity with yourself and you have more interest in not hearing it." (San Augustine)*

1.- It is from God...

I never thought of it! God is the one who has done it all. Men have had no part. As far as I am concerned, when I think about the way in which God wanted to give rise to the company in his Church, I confess that I do not know what part I have had in it, and that everything I see seems to me to be a dream. . All this is not human, but from God!

(CONFERENCE OF MAY 17, 1658 No. 103 [180, XII, 1-14])

Knowing, loving and doing the will of God

is decisive for the revitalization of our Vincentian identity. Today and always it has been a real challenge to know the will of God and even more to love it and practice it in daily life. But there are moments of lucidity in our life, in which the Holy Spirit puts before us the assurance that we are on the right path of God's will. This is what happened to Vincent de Paul and we will now celebrate this with such joy:

"...He discovered, in fact, the pressing need to evangelize the poor while he was ministering in Gannes and, on January 25, 1617, in Folleville. And this was, according to his own testimony, the origin both of his own vocation and of the Congregation of the Mission.

Finally, when in the month of August of the same year, he founded the "Charities" in Châtillon-les-Dombes to help the sick deprived of all resources, he understood and exposed the intimate relationship that exists between the evangelization of the poor and the service provided to them. His spiritual

experience gradually took shape in the contemplation and service of Christ in the person of the poor. Furthermore, the vision of Christ sent by the Father to evangelize the poor became the center of his life and his apostolic work.

Hearing the challenges of the world and of the society of his time, learning to read in the light of an ever deeper love for God and for the poor oppressed by all kinds of hardship, Vincent felt personally called to alleviate all kinds of miseries.

In the midst of very diverse commitments, he always sought a special dedication to the Mission. Indeed, the first companions he had gathered around himself agreed by contract on April 17, 1625, to attend with him to the evangelization of the country people. They were bound by the Act of Association that they signed on September 4, 1626, to form a Congregation in which, living in community, they would dedicate themselves to the salvation of the poor in the countryside".

(From the Introduction to the Constitutions... Pages 23-25).

Other possible readings...

- * CONFERENCE OF DECEMBER 6, 1658 No.118 [195, XII, 73-94]
- * **LOUIS ABELLY.** "Life of the venerable Servant of God, Vincent de Paul ...", Paris, 1664, chapter VIII (in the edition Spanish of the ed. CEME pp. 55-57). Cf. Tomo. XI Conferencias 4. Pages 698-700. (SV XI, 2-5: Folleville) Pgs. 51: So, if there are among you.... 61... 64: In this vocation....

Personal reflection and examination:

1. *The vocation of Saint Vincent was born from his encounter with God in the poor. Look at your life and the story of your vocation: where and how did you hear God's call to live this vocation? What circumstances or "events" brought you to the CM?*
2. *In what way do you respond today to the Will of God in your life and in your vocation? Where have you followed your own will and not God's?*
3. *In what way does the Lord ask you for an urgent conversion today?*

Our personal reflections can be shared in a moment of community...



Note: R = Reader and A = All

- R. **I, Vincent de Paul**, had never thought of founding a company, nor endowing it with regulations, nor calling it a Mission. *The truth is that I had never thought about it and, if God were not its author, the Mission would seem like a dream to me. Like me, our Father Portail hadn't thought of anything either, as everything came up despite our expectations.*
- A. *One day I was called to confess to a peasant, the best in the village according to the people, but so full of sins, as the peasant said to Madame de Gondi, that he would have been baked in hell if he had not made that general confession....*
- R. On January 25, 1617, the conversion of Saint Paul, Madame de Gondi sent me to exhort the people to a general confession. God blessed the words of this sinner so much, in view of the faith of Doña Margarita, that we could not keep up with confessions or catechism...
- A. *Oh Lord... You who inspire good books for the edification of men, bless our rules and instill in the Mission forgetfulness of sin, distance from the world and union with you².*

² SVP XI/3, p. 330



"Follow Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor"

These words translate well what Vincent de Paul intended when founding the Congregation of the Mission. This end can never be achieved if we do not make a constant and sincere effort to *"clothe ourselves with the spirit of Christ himself (RC 1,3)."* It is the best way *"to acquire a holiness appropriate to our vocation"* (RC XII, 13).

Conversion is a life-long revitalizing process, and consists of *"...emptying yourself to clothe yourself with Jesus Christ"³.* The paradigm of the Evangelization of the poor urges us to a continuous, daily reconstruction of our vocation. We cannot bring the precious gift that God offers to the poor without *"being filled and animated with this spirit of Jesus Christ"*. (Conferences to the CM, 196)

From the 2nd to the 9th numbers of the Constitutions we can find the meaning so profound of the words "clothing ourselves with Christ": their way of making this action dynamic and not static, their insertion and

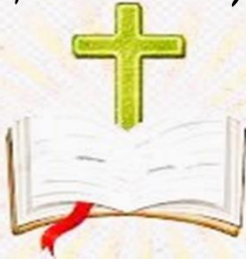
meaning in the Church, those who form it and the end that its members propose, their intense participation in the spirit of Christ, what this spirit comprises, how to reflect the spirit of Christ in the mission, and the permanent need to know in depth the spirit that animates and identifies us.

Pope Francis is calling the consecrated to recognize their first love: *"We are a Church inserted in a heroic people", who know suffering but keep hope alive. With that healthy pride for your people, which invites us to renew faith and hope, we want renew our "yes". How joyous is Holy Mother Church to hear you manifest the love of the Lord and the mission he has given you! How happy she is to see your wish to return always to « your first love» (Ap2,4)! I ask the Holy Spirit to always give you the lucidity to call reality with by its name , the courage to ask forgiveness and the ability to learn to hear what He wants tell us⁴.*

³ Collet , 183 p. Renouard 's 35 .

⁴ Speech by Pope Francis at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, in Maputo, Mozambique. Thursday, September 5 , 2019

Spiritual reading



1.- CONFERENCE OF DECEMBER 6, 1658 No. 118 [195, XII, 73-94]

“The purpose of the company is to imitate our Lord, to the extent that some poor and ruinous people can do it. What does this mean? That he has proposed to conform to him in his behavior, in his actions, in his tasks and in his goals. How can one person represent another, if they do not have the same

features, the same lines, proportions, manners and way of looking? It is impossible. Therefore, if we have proposed to make ourselves similar to this divine model and feel in our hearts this desire and this holy love, it is necessary to try to conform our thoughts, our works and our intentions to his. He is not only the *Deus virtutum* 1, but he has come to practice all the virtues; and since their actions and non-actions were so many other virtues, we have to conform to them trying to be men of virtue, not only within ourselves, but acting externally by virtue, so that everything we do and don't do conforms to this principle. This is how the first words of our rule must be understood”.

2.- CONFERENCE OF DECEMBER 13, 1658 No. 119 [196, XII, 94-114]: “And for this congregation to reach, through the grace of God, the end that it has proposed, it must do everything possible to clothe itself with the spirit of Jesus Christ, as it appears mainly in the evangelical maxims, in his poverty, his chastity, his obedience, his charity with the sick, his modesty, his way of living and acting that he later prescribed to his disciples, his conversation, his daily exercises of piety, their missions and their other occupations towards the peoples. All these things are contained in the following chapters.”



Personal reflection and examination

1. *How hard have I tried to become more like Jesus Christ and live fully the vocation to which I have been called by God?*
2. *Has the practice of the five virtues differentiated my life and ministries from other styles of consecration?*
3. *What virtue(s) have I practiced the most? What virtue(s) do I struggle with the most in my life?*
4. *In what way have my vows become a living expression of my love for God? To what areas of growth in virtues and vows is God calling me? Our personal reflections can be shared in a moment of community...*



- R. What to do?** ... Madame de Gondi gave us the College of Bons-Enfants and I went there with Father Portail, plus another paid priest. When leaving for a mission, from village to village, we would leave the house key in the hands of a neighbor.
- A. I had nothing more than one poor sermon on the fear of God, which I turned around a thousand times, while God took care of the rest. Seeing that God blessed us, many priests joined us and the mission came about.*
- R.** But we had never thought about the mission, nor about the campaigns with the peasants, nor about the seminaries, nor about the Charities, nor about the foundlings... I did not foresee the emergence of these works, and in truth I cannot find any explanation, as Father Portail knows.... As the missionaries increased so much, it was necessary to collect the experiences and draw up a regulation.
- A. Oh Lord... You who inspire good books for the edification of men, bless our rules and instill in the Mission forgetfulness of sin, distance from the world and union with you. Amen.*



Returning to Jesus Christ... returning to the Gospel is revitalizing.

The Church has pointed out in recent times the urgency of returning to Jesus Christ, of returning to the gospel that is the source of knowledge of his life, his words and his works. The centrality of Jesus Christ in the life and mission of Christians, but above all in the life and missions of missionaries, is indispensable. Every disciple has to put the Master at the center of his life, get to know him as much as possible, but above all love him and follow him without limits.

Our missionary vocation comes from Him and is inspired by Him. He is the only model *"on whom we must model all our actions"*⁵. If we seek to revitalize our missionary vocation: *"The risen and glorious Christ is the deep source of our hope [...]. His resurrection is not something of the past ; it embodies a life force that has penetrated the world . [...] That is the strength of the resurrection and each evangelizer is an instrument of that dynamism"*⁶.

Aware of this, the Vincentian missionaries keep in their minds and in their hearts the phrase *"Nothing pleases me except in Jesus Christ"* attributed to Saint Vincent by Abelly⁷. The Vincentian missionaries draw strength from these words to live a fully Christian lifestyle and repeat in our own history the spiritual and practical experience of Saint Vincent.

As Pope Francis has said *"the path of the Christian always is at a crossroads"*⁸: choose to live the lifestyle of Jesus Christ, or live the style of the world turning away from the Gospel. Something that without a doubt St. Vincent would have found disgusting.

It is not easy to adjust our life to Jesus Christ who *"is the rule of the mission and the center of the life and activity of every missionary"*⁹, but this is our prophetic way of living against the current in today's world. Let us pray a lot so that God gives us the grace to focus our lives totally on HIM.

⁵ Conference to the CM, 128

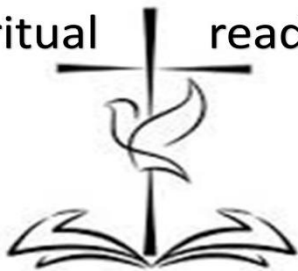
⁶E. G., 275-276

⁷ Abelly I:19

⁸ *The style of the Christian* Thursday , September 13, 2018

⁹ SV, XII, 130; c.5-8

Spiritual reading



1. Conferences to the CM, 28

Consider the most holy dispositions in which the Christian, submissive to the Will of God, spends his life, and the blessings attached to everything he does: he adheres only to God, and God is the one who guides him everywhere and in everything, to that he can say

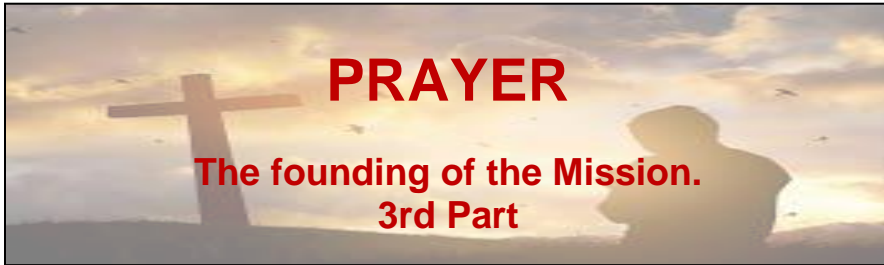
with the Prophet: You take me by the right hand; and you have guided me by your will. (Cf. Ps 73, 23-24) God holds him as if by the right hand; holding on to each other with entire submission to this divine guidance; you will see him tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, the whole week, the whole year, in a word, throughout his life, peaceful and tranquil, zealous tending constantly towards God and always spreading in the souls of his neighbor the gentle and beneficial effects of the Spirit that animates him. If you compare him with people who follow their own inclinations, you will see that his way of acting reflects a bright light, and is always fruitful in results: remarkable progress in his person, strength and energy in all his words. God gives a special blessing to all his efforts and bestows His graces on the plans he undertakes for Him and the advice he gives to others. All his actions are very uplifting.

2. Correspondence. 197 Should not a priest die of shame for claiming a reputation in the service he gives God and for dying on his bed, when he sees Jesus Christ rewarded for his work with dishonor and the gallows? Remember sir, we live in Jesus Christ by the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ by the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and to die like Jesus Christ, we must live like Jesus Christ.

Personal reflection and examination

Personal reflections can be shared in a moment of community...

1. *Have I lived with my eyes and heart fixed on Jesus Christ, the center of my life?*
2. *At what times in my life have I shifted my focus to something other than the life of Jesus Christ?*
3. *How can I “re-focus ” or “ re-center ” my entire life on Jesus Christ?*



R. Finally, in 1628, we begged Pope Urban VIII to endorse with his authority the poor Company of the Mission, inspired by God to Madame de Gondi... But we did not get the permission until 1633, for calling attention to these particularities: not being religious and living in community, professing the evangelical counsels and not being friars, in addition to other details that would be lengthy to enumerate.

A. *My God... Why did you choose the Mission in order that it love the poor with cordial love? Everyone loves in a very fine way and better than us: the Carthusians in solitude, the Capuchins in poverty, the monastic orders with psalmodies...*

R. With what love will we love you when you have a legion of lovers? My brothers, if the Mission is full of love, it must demonstrate it by making people love their neighbor and God¹⁰.

A. *Oh Lord... You who inspire good books for the edification of men, bless our rules and instill in the Mission forgetfulness of sin, distance from the world and union with you... Amen.*



¹⁰ SVP XI/4 p. 553