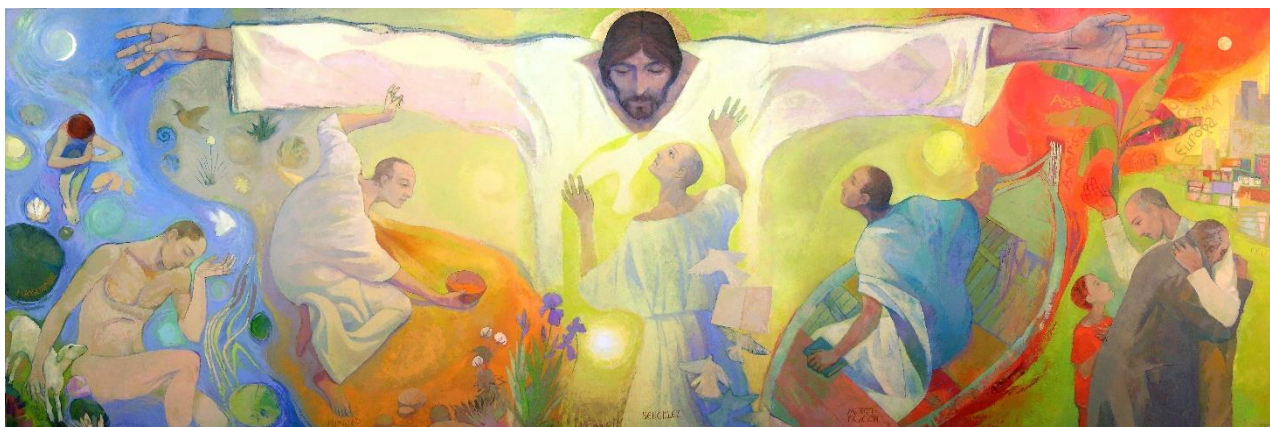


# 1. Vincentian spirituality: a missionary, synodal, and prophetic spirituality



We want to live the celebration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission (2025) as a privileged occasion to revitalize our missionary, synodal, and prophetic identity, following the path laid out by the Church and assumed by our 43<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly (2022). To this end, there is nothing better than to begin by reflecting on the spirituality that supports and identifies us as heirs of the Vincentian charism.

## 1. SEE – A contemplative look

There is no need to return to a rigorous definition of Vincentian spirituality. We know that it is a Christian lifestyle inspired by the spiritual journey of Saint Vincent de Paul. It is an appropriate way of following Jesus Christ, clothing oneself in his spirit of charity to accompany him in his mission of evangelizing the poor and of forming clerical and lay evangelizers. This is how Article 1 of our *Constitutions* clearly summarizes it. This is, in fact, our path of sanctification, the purpose of our presence and action in the Church and in the world, our identity card.

There are, of course, different ways of interpreting Vincentian spirituality, emphasizing this or that dimension that characterizes it. However, no interpretation can take for granted the foundation that gives it evangelical solidity, mystical depth, ecclesial relevance, and apostolic vitality. We refer to the dynamic identification with the person of Jesus Christ, contemplated in the mystery of his incarnation, considered in his unconditional surrender to the Father, followed by his generous dedication to the poor, and served in the least of his brothers and sisters. By the way, Saint Vincent asked, *what love can we have for Him if we don't love what He loved!* (CCD XIIIb, 434).

According to our Founder, without reference to Jesus Christ, without an ongoing relationship with him, without the continual and renewed disposition *to love what he loved*, there can be neither charity nor mission worthy of those names. The heart of Jesus overflowed with *love for the Father*, whose will was the food of his life and the reflection of his actions (cf. John 4:34; 5:19), and with love for the poor, to whom he recognized that he was sent and with whom he wanted to identify himself in a radical way (cf. Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:40). It was precisely in this way, filled with passion for the Father and compassion for the poor, that Jesus of Nazareth entrusted to his disciples the continuation of his saving work (cf. Luke 10:1f; Mark 16:15). Vincentian spirituality involves us directly in the mission of the Son of God: *“Yes, Our Lord asks us to evangelize the poor; that’s what He*

*did, and what He wants to continue to do through us” (CCD XII, 71).* From this essential core, which is the person of Jesus Christ himself—whom we encounter in the Gospel, in the Eucharist, and in the poor—the constitutive elements of Vincentian spirituality are outlined: trust in Providence, the search for and fulfillment of God’s will, the integration of evangelization and service, fraternal life in community, the virtues that define us, the living out of the evangelical counsels, etc.

## **2. JUDGE – A lucid discernment**

Once the foundations of the missionary spirituality received from Saint Vincent de Paul have been laid, we can speak of his prophecy for the Church and the world of today. This can also be considered in various ways, as long as we maintain the link with his above-described identifying core. In general, when we speak of Vincentian spirituality, we emphasize its operative aspect, its active or practical dimension, its impulse toward action. There is no doubt that this aspect is legitimate and indispensable. However, it is not licit to isolate it from its source, from its mystical wellspring, from its contemplative dimension, from its foundational inspiration. To do so would be to devalue the content of the experience that Vincent de Paul transmitted to us and to debase the legacy he left us. The 43<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly wanted to remind us very opportunely that *“our spiritual life integrates and animates our community and missionary activity, which are essential to our Vincentian identity. Therefore, we commit ourselves “to put on the Spirit of Christ” and rediscover the contemplative dimension of our Vincentian spirituality as we strive constantly to be faithful to prayer, the vows, and our Vincentian virtues.”*

A merely functional, pragmatic, and arbitrary vision of Vincentian spirituality would be mistaken for reductionism, would atrophy its potentialities, and would not allow it to radiate all the inspiration it bears, as if it were a spirituality of pure immanence. In this case, the most we could discover in it would be a motivating ideal for praxis, but not its denser evangelical substratum, what it possesses that is most essential and stimulating: a path of configuration to Christ, sent by the Father to evangelize the poor; a call to an authentic experience of God-Love at the heart of life; a response to the deepest concerns of the human being; a path of holiness and a school of charity at the same time; a mystical breath capable of depositing the virtues and values that ennoble and qualify our living, coexisting, and acting; a horizon of meaning that illuminates the journey of existence with the rays of faith; a hope that extends far beyond history and opens us to the promising future of eternity. This is a spirituality that can nourish, revitalize, and encourage us in all stages and situations of life, even in the midst of the inevitable crises that beset us, as well as when we lack the strength necessary for more intense and extensive commitments and activities.

In an era like ours—marked by serious psychological disorders and interpersonal breakdowns, as well as fractured by political polarization, ideological extremism, religious fundamentalism, and ecclesial dissensions—the prophetic relevance of Vincentian spirituality is revealed in its *dynamic balance*, in its humanizing potential, in its capacity to harmonize realities that could seem distant or even antagonistic, realities that touch closely the main dimensions of our life (affective, ethical, spiritual, apostolic, communitarian, intellectual, etc. ), such as: truth and goodness, contemplation and action, coherence and flexibility, audacity and prudence, firmness and gentleness, silence and speech, trust and promptness, discernment and decisiveness, proclamation of the Gospel and care for life, spirit of faith and critical awareness, depth and practicality, realism and hope, humility and magnanimity, personal closeness and structural change, seriousness and good humor, etc. In fact, these pairings point to remarkable traits of Vincent de Paul’s human profile, which

translated into his balanced way of living and acting and which were frequently echoed in the advice and recommendations he gave to his followers.

Various teachings of Saint Vincent make explicit the balance that characterizes the spirituality with which he enriched the Church. It is worth mentioning here the well-known relationship that he establishes (using the intuition of Saint Francis de Sales) between affective love and effective love, that is, unitive love for the Lord and offering love for our neighbor in need, which, in reality, is but one and the same love, learned from Jesus Christ (cf. Mark 12:29-31; John 10:17): *“a heart that loves Our Lord can’t endure His absence and has to hold fast to Him by this affective love, which produces effective love. For the first doesn’t suffice ...; you must have both. Affective love must pass to effective love, which is to be engaged in the works of the Charity and the service of poor persons, undertaken with joy, courage, fidelity, and love”* (CCD IX, 466). Along the same lines is Vincent’s conviction about the integration between contemplation and action, because the former must precede the latter as the sap that strengthens it: *“The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones. Nothing is more in conformity with the Gospel than to gather light and strength for our soul in meditation, reading, and solitude on the one hand, and then to go out and share this spiritual nourishment with others. This is to do as Our Lord did, and His Apostles after Him”* (CCD XI, 33). The Founder’s insistence sounds like a paraphrase of the Gospel, which places the following of Jesus between the mountain of intimacy with the Father and the plain of contact with human wounds and concerns (cf. Luke 6:12-19). We also can recall Saint Vincent’s recommendation on the relationship between the decisive lucidity required by principles and the judicious flexibility suggested by their applications: *“When I said that you must be unwavering as to the end and gentle as to the means, I am describing to you the soul of good leadership, and one without the other spoils everything”* (CCD II, 403). One could cite many other examples revealing the good sense of the man of discernment who was Vincent de Paul.

### 3. ACT – A renewed commitment

In the panorama of synodality to which Pope Francis invites us, a well-consolidated Vincentian spirituality stimulates the *vital syntheses* that we need so much to maintain or recover the human, spiritual, relational, missionary, ecclesial, and social balance that we need so much. This implies not closing oneself in to irremediable unilateralism that imposes ideological visors and engages in belligerent polemics, nor going astray by evasive spiritualism or by practices of mere convenience, both equally harmful. The present times call for a *unifying spirituality* of dialectical accord, capable of harmonizing contemplation and compassion, transcendence and solidarity, historical liberation and eternal salvation, always having Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. Finally, the discernment that precedes and accompanies a Vincentian spirituality of equilibrium translates into a *serene and lucid vigilance, prayerful and active*, that knows how to identify, in the light of faith, the opportunity offered by each moment and the posture recommended by each situation. Moreover, the Pope’s words give us a key to understanding the prophecy that radiates from Vincentian spirituality: *“Spirit-filled evangelizers are evangelizers who pray and work. Mystical notions without a solid social and missionary outreach are of no help to evangelization, nor are dissertations or social or pastoral practices which lack a spirituality which can change hearts”* (EG 262).

#### For reflection:

1. **On the personal level:** in my daily life, do I seek in Vincentian spirituality the balance I need to live my missionary vocation with consistency and enthusiasm?

2. **On the community level:** do we encourage among ourselves a deeper assimilation of our spirituality through prayer, meditation on the Gospel, practice of discernment, sacramental life, encounter with the poor, and solid formation?
3. **On the provincial level:** are the priorities we establish and the objectives we pursue inspired by an adequate understanding and a suitable application of the constitutive elements of Vincentian spirituality?
4. **On all levels:** do we allow ourselves to be inspired and challenged by the prophecy of Vincentian spirituality toward a more radical experience of faith, a more generous missionary dedication, and a more coherent fraternal and ecclesial communion?

### In conclusion...

## Beatitudes of Vincentian Missionaries

1. Blessed are *those who are called to follow Jesus Christ, evangelizer of the poor*, because, clothed in his spirit, they will proclaim his message and continue his work of love.
2. Blessed are *those who do not lose the sense of God's presence and trust in his Providence*, because, in the discernment of each day, they will discover and fulfill his will.
3. Blessed are *those who dedicate themselves to evangelize and serve the poor*, with words and deeds, because they will make the seeds of the Kingdom germinate in the soil of history.
4. Blessed are *those who work to form the clergy and laity*, awakening in them a yearning for holiness and a missionary passion, because they will help the Church to carry out her mission.
5. Blessed are *those who strive to maintain harmony between contemplation and action*, because they will live the vocation they have received with authenticity and enthusiasm.
6. Blessed are *the simple*, because, loving the truth, they will be upright and transparent in their living, speaking, and acting.
7. Blessed are *the humble*, because, recognizing that all good comes from God, they will not seek themselves and will learn to be ever more generous and available.
8. Blessed are *the gentle*, because, cultivating serenity and constancy, they will moderate their impulses, will treat everyone with cordiality, and will be ready to forgive.
9. Blessed are *the mortified*, because, embracing the cross, they will resist adversity, will renew their vigor, and will persevere in the good begun until the end.
10. Blessed are *the zealous*, because, burning with charity, they will devote themselves with enthusiasm and creativity for the good and salvation of their neighbor.
11. Blessed are *those who make themselves chaste* for the sake of the Kingdom, because, with an undivided heart, they will be able to love God and their brothers and sisters with greater freedom and tenacity.
12. Blessed are *those who embrace poverty*, because, finding in God their supreme wealth and free from attachments, they will be in solidarity with the neediest.
13. Blessed are *those who know how to obey* freely, because, renouncing self-sufficiency, they will accept together the inspirations and impulses of the Spirit of the Lord.

14. Blessed are *those who lead a fraternal life in community*, for in communion and dialogue they will support one another in fidelity and bear witness to charity.
15. Finally, blessed are *those who dedicate the short time of their lives to love and serve* by following Jesus, because they will live eternally with the One who chose them and sent them.