

VINCENTIAN CONTEMPLATION

The Face in the Faces

Meditations of Fr. Salvatore Farì CM

Introduction

My thanks to Superior General Fr. Tomaz Mavric and his Council for inviting me to spiritually accompany the members of the Mission Congregation from January to April 2024 on a journey of faith and love in preparation for the 4th centenary of the founding of the Mission Congregation.

The Superior General, in his homily at the opening celebration of the 4th centenary of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, stressed the importance of revitalising three dimensions of our Vincentian spirituality "*the prophetic dimension* which from the grace of the Spirit of God who is 'above us' comes to listening to the cry of the poor and the readiness to care; *the synodal dimension* which sees the overcoming of individualism for a community journey and action; *the missionary dimension* whose authenticity comes from a deep spirituality, from an intense communion, from closeness and friendship with Jesus".

The proposed spiritual journey, which will be translated into French, English and Spanish, leads us to revitalise the prophetic, synodal and missionary dimension from the perspective of Vincentian contemplation. There are four stages in our walk together:

January 2024

Vincentian missionaries, experts in contemplation
Closeness to God, empathy towards others, care for creation

February 2024

Vincentian Missionaries and the Path of Beauty
The beauty of good works

March 2024

Vincentian missionaries following the divine Samaritan
With the healthy rhythm of proximity

April 2024

Clothed in the Spirit of Jesus Christ
The clothes of the missionary disciple

As an icon for the spiritual path I have chosen *The Transfiguration* by the well-known Italian painter *Raphael* (you can download it from the internet and print it out) on which we will meditate in February 2024. The path will end in April with a community prayer.

I wish all of you brethren a good contemplative-vincentian journey.

Prayer

(at the beginning of each meeting)

Lord, we thank you that you have gathered us into your presence to make us listen to your Word: in it you reveal your love and make your will known to us.

Silence in us any voice other than yours and lest we find condemnation in your Word read but not received, meditated upon but not loved, prayed but not cherished, contemplated but not realised, send your Holy Spirit to open our minds and heal our hearts.

Only thus will our encounter with your Word be covenant renewal and communion with you and the Son and the Holy Spirit, blessed God for ever and ever.

Amen.

Prayer

(at the end of each meeting)

O God, origin of true freedom, you want all men to constitute one people free from all slavery; you who now bless us with this time of preparation to commemorate the 4th centenary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission, open our hearts, so that in a continuous conversion we may be free from all that prevents us from putting on Jesus Christ, and full of apostolic zeal we may dedicate ourselves more and more each day to the evangelisation of the poor.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Vincentian missionaries, experts in contemplation

Closeness to God, empathy towards others, care for creation

The third document in the quadrilogy offered to us by the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in the Year of Consecrated Life, after *Rejoice* and *Behold* is *Contemplate. Letter to Consecrated men and women in the footsteps of Beauty*.

The central theme of the Letter is indeed, as the subtitle states, Beauty, but above all the importance of discerning and following its traces; it is therefore a theme that revolves around *following*. We must, therefore, dwell on and deepen the terms *contemplation* and *beauty* because, if in common language contemplation recalls a situation of staticity, in biblical language and in the way it is interpreted by the Vatican Dicastery it recalls, on the contrary, a strongly dynamic experience, a journey, precisely, of following after Beauty.

1. Structure of the Letter: The body of the Letter (it has a precise biblical framework; it unfolds, in fact, keeping one's gaze fixed and straining one's ear to the *Song of Songs*) is structured in three parts framed by a prologue and an epilogue: Seeking /Dimorare/ Form. To these are added a small section of questions for reflection in each community (taken from the texts of Pope Francis) and a very short reflection and prayer dedicated to Mary.

2. Style of the Epistle: on the whole, the Epistle seems to follow the same style as the *Canticle*: a series of paintings, frescoes that follow one after the other, paintings that portray the same subjects, the same story even if seen from different angles, emphasising different dynamics each time. Each painting, including the prologue and epilogue, is introduced by a verse from the *Canticle* and an opening section entitled "Listening", in which one listens to the Word of God. This section is then followed by reflection embodied in the dynamics of consecrated life.

3. Content. I would like to present the contents of the document not by following the individual parts, this would take too long. Instead, I would like to dwell on some of the nodes and stimuli the document offers us. Starting with three questions: what does it mean to contemplate? What is beauty? How can we follow Beauty?

- a) *What does it mean to contemplate?* From the very first lines, the letter clarifies what contemplation is by starting from an analysis of the present time. Ours is a time of: disenchantment, dis-agreement, non-sense, bewilderment. Man no longer finds his happiness, that is, his full realisation, in God, and runs the risk of stopping his gaze on what is not full, definitive, but is if anything a more or less pale trace of fullness. To contemplate, in common parlance, means to look intensely and with admiration and transport at something or someone that absolutizes our attention. Let us think of when we 'contemplate' nature: there is something that enraptures us, albeit momentarily, because it takes us beyond the colours, the majesty, the beauty, it drives us - as the book of Wisdom says - to seek out and meet the author of Beauty. This contemporary man seems to have lost. To contemplate means to point our gaze, our heart, back to God. Here emerges the task of the Vincentian disciple, who is or should be an expert in contemplation. The letter asks all consecrated persons to be contemplatives. Where? There where we are: "Life itself, such as it is, is called to become the place of our contemplation. Cultivating the interior life should not generate an existence that lies between heaven and earth, in ecstasy and enlightenment, but a life that in humble closeness to God and in sincere empathy towards our neighbour creates and realises in history a purified and

transfigured existence" (n.6). Consecrated life is an experience of *following*. We live immersed in the same hopes, joys and anxieties as the people of today, but we have the claim to say that we walk in the midst of it all by following Christ. But to follow someone, we cannot and must not lose sight of him, ever; therefore fix our hearts (in the biblical sense) in him. That is why contemplation is an aspect, perhaps the pinnacle of love; and that is why the *Song of Songs* becomes a kind of 'contemplation manual'. Two verbs seem to sum up the dynamics narrated in the Song of Songs: *seek* and *dwell*. They describe the beginning of the love experience and its fulfilment, and this never once and for all, but a story that is continually renewed as a gift.

"I have sought the beloved of my heart" / "I clasped him tightly to me and will not leave him until I have brought him to my mother's house". Between these two moments, the desire and its fulfilment, there is the whole human story: feeling the need for the other, desiring his presence, seeking him without being able to find him in the deep night, the struggle, the suffering, the encounter, the mutual contemplation, the union, the intimate communion. And this in the *Canticle* does not take place outside the world, but in the world. "At the root of the Christian's life is the fundamental movement of faith: walking towards Jesus Christ in order to centre one's life in him" (n.11)

- b) *What is Beauty?* It is precisely in this dynamism that the theme of beauty is placed: both the woman of the Canticle and the man admire each other's beauty and say to each other: How beautiful you are my friend... how beautiful you are my beloved... We too are called to dwell in Beauty, but what beauty? That of Christ, who is the most beautiful among the sons of man, on whose lips grace is spread (Ps 44), but who is also the servant who has neither appearance nor beauty to attract our gaze, nor splendour to feel delight in him. Despised, refused of men, who knows suffering as one before whom we cover our faces (cf. Is 53:3). Am I in contradiction? No says the letter quoting a text from Augustine: "An ugly and deformed Jesus? A Jesus more handsome and graceful than any other man? Yes, two trumpets sound differently, but with one and the same Spirit blown within... Do not give up hearing both, try instead to listen to them and understand them" (cf. n.21). The Beauty in which we are called to dwell, like the branch joined to the vine, is a beauty that wounds, that wounds us (nos. 25-29), that then recreates, that recreates us (nos. 30-32). *Beauty is God's signature in our lives and in the life of the world* (n. 44).
- c) *How to seek this beauty, how to dwell in it?* "How do we train our eyes and hearts to savour beauty as a mystery that envelops and involves?" (no. 43). How to educate and how to educate ourselves in a word to contemplation? The letter in its last part insists on the necessity of formation that must take place in the style of beauty, in the proximity of mercy, in the space of creation.
1. *In the style of beauty:* Putting the Word of God and the Eucharist back at the centre. The letter invites us to care for and foster the mystagogical dimension, which is an "eminently Christological action, since the Christian's intelligence alone and liturgical rites and gestures alone are not enough to understand the mystery and participate in it" (n. 48). To immerse, as happened in baptism, our life in the paschal mystery: to feel, to see, to walk, to live within the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection, because it is only in the veiled beauty of the cross that the attitude to the contemplative life is nourished (n. 49). Because 'it can happen that even our gaze as consecrated men and women loses the ability to recognise the beauty of the Paschal Mystery: the disarmed and defenceless composure that appears on the face of the brothers and sisters who are familiar to us, as on that of the Christians rejected by history whom we meet in our diakonias of charity' (n. 49).
 2. Contemplative life can and must feed on the *proximity of mercy*. There is a passage from *Evangelii gaudium*, here taken up by the Dicastery that is really very strong: "In a civilisation

paradoxically wounded by anonymity and, at the same time, obsessed by the details of the lives of others, shamelessly sick of morbid curiosity, the Church needs a gaze of closeness to contemplate, to be moved and to stop in front of the other as often as necessary." (EV 169). Reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan.

3. Finally *in the dance of creation*. Our common home, our earth is continually defaced, it is a constant assault on its life. Yet even in creation God's beauty is revealed, just think of the many psalms that celebrate God's glory through the wonders of creation. We must learn again to inhabit this house, to care for it, and what is even more beautiful, as the letter says, to dance, to let creation dance and let us dance with it.

How do we verify ourselves on all this? A small final section is devoted precisely to verification through a series of questions and provocations by Pope Francis.

The document closes with two small pages just dedicated to Mary, Hail woman clothed in the sun. Mary is the one who more than any other contemplated the mystery of God and lived truly immersed in the mystery. Mary is the type of the Church, she is the model of the Church to look to.

Vincentian Missionaries and the Path of Beauty

The beauty of good works

In our culture often marked by a materialistic and atheistic vision, where some live as if God did not exist, others live dissociating faith (religious experience) and life, consecrated life is called to arouse the desire for beauty that is not ephemeral aestheticism, nor a letting oneself be instrumentalised and subjugated by the attractive fashions of consumer society.

John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, recalls that "consecrated persons, every day, are engaged in a journey of purification that leads them to be Christian persons, an extension in history of a special presence of the risen Lord. This spiritual journey is qualified by the Fathers of the Church as philochalia, that is, love for divine beauty, which is the irradiation of divine goodness" (VC 19); and again "thus consecrated life becomes one of the concrete traces that the Trinity leaves in history, so that men and women may experience the fascination and nostalgia for divine beauty" (VC 20).

The mission of Vincentians is to reach out to people to help them encounter beauty, to encounter the Beautiful! This beauty, so special and unique, of the "son of man" is revealed both on the face of the "Beautiful Shepherd" and on that of Christ transfigured on Tabor and, at the same time, on the One who lost, suspended on the Cross, all bodily beauty: the Man of Sorrows. It is the Beauty that is fulfilled in pain, in the gift of self without any return for self.

Another place where the beauty that saves is manifested is in charity.

To Peter, who, enraptured by the light of the Transfiguration exclaims: "Master, it is good for us to remain here" (Mk 9:5) is addressed the invitation to return to the roads of the world, to continue to serve the Kingdom of God: "Come down, Peter; you wished to rest on the mountain: come down; preach the Word of God, insist on every opportune and importunate occasion, rebuke, exhort, encourage using all your patience and teaching ability. Work, toil much, accept also sufferings and torments, so that, through the candour and beauty of good works, you may possess in charity what is symbolised in the whiteness of the Lord's garments" (VC 24).

"The search for divine beauty impels consecrated persons to care for the divine image deformed in the faces of brothers and sisters, faces disfigured by hunger, faces disillusioned by political promises, humiliated faces of those who see their own culture despised, faces frightened by daily and indiscriminate violence, distressed faces of minors, faces of offended and humiliated women, tired faces of migrants without a worthy welcome, faces of the elderly without the minimum conditions for a worthy life. Consecrated life thus shows, with the eloquence of works, that divine charity is the foundation and stimulus of gratuitous and active love. St. Vincent de Paul was well convinced of this when he pointed out this programme of life to the Daughters of Charity: "The spirit of the Company consists in giving yourself to God to love Our Lord and to serve him in the person of the materially and spiritually poor, in their homes and elsewhere, to instruct poor young girls, children, in general all those whom divine Providence sends you" (VC 75).

Significantly, the evangelist Mark links the account of the transfiguration with that of the healing of the possessed epileptic "And when they came to the disciples, they saw around them a great crowd..." (9:14-29).

I propose a beautiful image: *The Transfiguration* by Raphael, the great Italian painter. In this beautiful work, Raphael also depicts the episode of the healing of the possessed epileptic.

Raphael paints Jesus in the upper part of the painting in the transfigured condition, wearing white robes, surrounded by light in a sort of divine suspension, with his hands raised in a gesture of prayer and his eyes turned upwards in a gesture of welcome towards the Father, who makes his voice resound. In the lower part of the composition, the episode of the epileptic boy is illustrated. As bright as the upper part of the painting is, so substantially dark is the lower section.

On the lower left side are the other nine Apostles, who have not ascended the mountain. They look at the boy, or point at him, or even point at the transfigured Jesus. Opposite them are the relatives of the young boy, who is supported by his father. All of them look at the Apostles, almost expressing the parent's statement: 'I told your disciples to drive him away, but they did not succeed'.

A female figure is painted in the centre, looking at the apostles and pointing to the boy. Initially it was supposed to be the boy's mother; Raphael later changed his mind, replacing her with Mary Magdalene, Lazarus' sister. It could also be a depiction of faith, necessary to obtain the boy's recovery. By relating the two scenes, Raphael intends to suggest that the link between the two episodes can be grasped in the fact that both feature a father and a son: a father who loves his son and a beloved son.

Raphael draws attention to the two 'unigenites'. Jesus and the boy, in fact, are the only ones in the entire painting to have their eyes turned upwards, in a gesture that almost unites them despite the diversity of the drama. In that boy tossed by an evil spirit, thrown into fire and water to be killed, Jesus in some way recognises himself, when on the cross he too will be tossed by the power of evil and cast into death. That is why the Gospel story also has the flavour of resurrection: while everyone believes that the boy is now dead, Jesus "took him by the hand, made him stand up and he stood" (Mk 9:27).

The beautiful face of the Lord refers to the beautiful face of the brothers.

Like Jesus, we Vincentians are also called to perform beautiful works (Mt 5:16), luminous and harmonious revelations of the spiritual personality, expanding outwardly the inner light, thus offering reasons for life and hope to those who lack them or are in danger of losing them.

Our Vincentian vocation is a vocation to beauty! It is a way of love! The command "Be holy, for I, the Lord, am holy" (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16), is now inseparable from the other: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). Beauty (*philocalia*) challenges the ugliness of self-enclosure, self-centredness, *philauty*; it challenges the sadness of those who do not open themselves to the gift of love, like the rich young man who "went away sad" (Mt 19:22).

Beauty must characterise our relationships, to make the church a community in which fraternal relationships are truly lived, inspired by gratuitousness, mercy and forgiveness; in which no one says to the other "I have no need of you" (1 Cor 12:21), because every wound to communion also disfigures the beauty of the one Body of Christ.

Our lives tell us that 'believing in Him and following Him is not only true and right, but also beautiful..., we do not love except what is beautiful,' says St Augustine; it is necessary that formation in the *via pulchritudinis* be included in the transmission of the faith' (EG 167).

Our life as Vincentian missionaries is a real therapy for our society so that it may recover its beauty, provided that it is: against materialism and secularism a visible and credible sign of God's presence and love (*Confessio Trinitatis*); against exalted individualism and selfishness a sign of authentic fraternity (*Signum Fraternitatis*); against poverty in all its many forms, a service of charity and solidarity with humanity (*Servitium Caritatis*).

We look to Mary, the one who, from her immaculate conception, most perfectly reflects divine beauty. 'All beautiful' is the title with which the Church invokes her. This is how the Liturgy makes us pray in the Preface of the Mass to the Virgin Mary, Mother of beautiful love: "We praise you O God and glorify you for the ineffable beauty that shines in the blessed Virgin Mary. Beautiful in her conception, free from all stain of sin and all wrapped in the radiance of your grace. Beautiful in her virginal birth, in which she gave birth to her Son, splendour of your glory, our brother and saviour. Beautiful in the passion of Christ, impregnated by his blood, as a meek lamb united to the sacrifice of the meekest lamb, bestowed with a new maternal mission. Beautiful in the resurrection of the Lord, with whom she reigns glorious, sharing in his triumph.

3

Vincentian missionaries following the divine Samaritan
With the healthy rhythm of proximity

In the Bull for the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis recalled that the Second Vatican Council was inspired by the Parable of the Good Samaritan, recalling the words of Paul VI at the conclusion of the Council: 'We wish rather to note that the religion of our Council was principally charity... The ancient story of the Samaritan was the paradigm of the spirituality of the Council... A current of affection and admiration was poured out by the Council on the modern human world. Reprove errors, yes; for that demands charity, no less than truth; but for people only recall, respect and love. Another thing we should note: all this doctrinal wealth is directed in one direction: to serve man. Man, let us say, in all his conditions, in all his infirmities, in all his needs'.

We Vincentians who are following Him, the divine Samaritan (VC 83), are called to have a contemplative gaze that qualifies our mission especially where old and new frailties ask to be accompanied with the salutary rhythm of proximity (EG 169).

Let us allow ourselves to be guided by some reflections on the parable of the Good Samaritan, which questions us on the meaning of "who our neighbour is", and also of "who he is to be considered", and urges us to realise that happiness is found "more in giving than in receiving", as Jesus himself put it (Acts 20:35).

Luke 10:25-37

Who is my neighbour?

From the perspective of the Pharisee, bound to a social and religious milieu distinct from others, it is a genuine question of interpretation to establish who is the 'neighbour': the doctor of the law in fact asks Jesus who deserves to be loved.

Jesus recounts an exemplary story with different characters displaying different reactions; he then ends with an evaluative question: "Which of these three do you think was next to the one who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (10:36). The doctor of the law must compromise and judge. But the question posed by Jesus turned the way he saw the matter upside down and led him to admit that the important thing is to be able to love. The question is not: "Who deserves to be loved by me? Who is my friend?" Instead, it must be rephrased like this: "Whose neighbour am I? Whom am I capable of loving? Whom do I make myself close to? Whom do I treat as a friend?".

Based on the proposed story and the question put to him, even though he does not appreciate the Samaritan character, the doctor of the law is forced to admit that he is the positive role model. He replied: "He who had compassion on him" (10:37a). Literally, one should translate: 'He who had mercy on him'. Jesus said to him: "Go and do likewise" (10.37b).

The goal of the parable has been achieved: the recipient has understood and shared Jesus' message. We therefore return to the initial verb ("what shall I do?") and the conclusion of the first part ("do this and you will live"). The present imperative of "do", however, follows the present imperative of "walk": precisely in the narrative context of the journey, Jesus invites the doctor to also set out in a habitual way, to become capable of seeing in the other a friend to love.

"He took care of him"

In the biblical account, the Samaritan's appearance and his initiative are placed in stark contrast to the indifference of the priest and the Levite who, in the act of seeing and passing by (on the other side), become the icon of one who decides to live proximity within his own group, within his fellow men, but does not foresee or consider it right to become close to those who do not fit into the canons of a certain affinity, whether spiritual or cultural.

The two passers-by signify the image of a Church that pronounces on the law by becoming an ethical agency, but does not live the soul of the law, it is an image of a Church that pronounces on daytime events, leaving the night of the doubt of the sacred to the solitude of the individual.

The needs of man on the side of the road continually challenge us, and we cannot pass by and we cannot stay to discuss or to watch: 'We are not allowed,' wrote Pope Francis to the participants at the 38th Meeting of CL in 2017, 'to look at reality from the balcony, nor can we remain comfortably seated on the couch watching the world pass before us on TV.'

The Samaritan, almost by a play of contrasts, seems to recount what the other passers-by might have been: he is the limpid figure of a proximity that does not decide what to do with the other on the basis of its own position and plans, but allows the advent of the other to broaden its horizon, transform and enrich its coordinates, and for this reason "he came near to him" and immediately "bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine into them" (Lk 10:34a).

There is an immediacy, a readiness of action that can only come from within: no hesitation, no fear, no calculation. One can well imagine that the Samaritan's journey had a very precise destination, perhaps linked to work requirements: well, one can read in him no difficulty in temporarily abandoning his travel plans to become close to that man who clearly needed him, as he would have needed other passers-by.

The Samaritan's journey towards the interiority of the needy is encapsulated in v. 34: that "he took care of him", an abstract expression in itself, becomes the concrete sum of all the attention that the needy person receives. This caring is the mark of a welcome that is not synonymous with a task, a problem to be solved, but is equivalent to the choice of taking concrete responsibility for the fate of the other, of entering into his or her living space, whatever this choice entails.

Caring is exactly the opposite of passing over, it means accepting to meet and to be met, it means establishing a relationship with the other in which it is not enough 'to do something for him or to offer him goods, (but it is necessary) [...] to take on his presence, letting it redefine the authentic direction I give to my life, its meaning, its value.'

Caring for another, especially when that other is in an objective situation of need, then means caring for a person. Every concrete gesture, be it even a piece of bread or a bed to sleep on, is not morally good in itself, but becomes so 'only when it expresses the acceptance of the person'.

This Gospel story offers the "criterion of measurement", that is, "the universality of the love that turns towards the needy person encountered 'by chance' (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever he or she may be" (DCE 25). Alongside this universal rule, there is also a specifically ecclesial requirement: that "in the Church itself, as a family, no member should suffer because he or she is in need".

The programme of the Vincentian disciple, learned from the teaching of Jesus, is a heart that sees where love is needed, and acts accordingly (DCE 31).

Let our commitment as Vincentian missionaries be to follow Christ who "still today, like the Good Samaritan, comes to every man wounded in body and spirit and pours over his wounds the oil of consolation and the wine of hope" (*Roman Missal*, Common Preface VIII).

4

Clothed in the Spirit of Jesus Christ
The clothes of the missionary disciple

Surrexit Dominus vere. Alleluia, alleluia.
Surrexit Christus hodie. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

P. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

T. Amen.

G. Dearly beloved, as we prepare for the 4th Centenary of the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, we wish to give praise to the Lord for having called us to the Christian and Vincentian life, we wish to renew our membership of the Congregation of the Mission whose end is to *follow Christ who proclaims the Gospel to the poor. This end is realised when the brothers and communities, faithful to Saint Vincent, strive with all their strength to clothe themselves with the spirit of Christ in order to attain the perfection appropriate to their vocation* (C 1).

In this prayer we will remember the baptism that associated us to Christ, dedicated us to him, to the point of being transformed into him; we will then listen to the Word of God and to our founder Vincent de Paul, who still speaks to us today and shows us the clothes to wear in the evangelising mission.

Commemoration of Baptism

From the letter of St Paul the Apostle to the Galatians 3:27

For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ

SAINT VINCENT SPEAKS TO US (SVit, XII, 224-225)

Another way of renouncing ourselves is "*spoliare veterem hominem et induere novum*", that is, to strip ourselves of the old man and clothe ourselves with the new. To this end we say every day while dressing for Holy Mass: *Undress me, O Lord, of the old man and clothe me with the new*, etc. Brothers, let us do this when we try to get rid of our passions and imperfections, *Undress me, O Lord*. He who is in filth cleans himself. I am full of pride: I get rid of it by doing acts of humility; and in this way I strip myself of old habits. As I remedy my past neglect and combat my present lassitude, what do I do? I purify myself of the old leaven that corrupts the whole dough and give new life to my actions, by the vigilance and upright intention with which I do them. To thus commit oneself for the whole of one's life, not only to correct oneself of vices and bad inclinations, but also to conform one's behaviour and actions to the new man, Our Lord Jesus Christ, is to continually strip oneself of the old Adam and clothe oneself with the new. Truly, *Undress me, O Lord, of the old man and clothe me with the new*.

P. In baptism our parents gave us a name. By that name He knows us and calls us.

Each person says his or her name out loud.

P. And now we renew our renunciation of sin and our faith in God.

Do you renounce sin to live in the freedom of God's children?

T. I renounce.

Do you renounce the seductions of evil so as not to be dominated by sin?

I give up.

Do you renounce Satan, the origin and cause of all sin?

I give up.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

I think.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, died and was buried, rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father?

I think.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the flesh and eternal life?

I think.

This is our faith. This is the faith of the church. And we glory in professing it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

G. Everyone approaches the baptismal font, dips their right hand in the water and then marks themselves with the sign of the cross. At the end, then, the white robe is introduced into the liturgical assembly, which, while expressing the splendour of the life attained in Christ and the Holy Spirit, announces the condition of the transfigured in divine glory. The president of the celebration presents the white robe to the assembly with these words:

**You have become a new creature,
and you have clothed yourself with Christ.
This white robe
be a sign of your new dignity:
helped by the words and example of your loved ones,
bring it without blemish to eternal life.
Amen.**

Surrexit Dominus vere. Alleluia, alleluia.
Surrexit Christus hodie. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

The clothes of the missionary disciple

1

Revived ... of the spirit of Jesus Christ

From the letter of St Paul the Apostle to the Romans 13:14

Instead, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not allow yourselves to be caught up in the desires of the flesh.

SAINT VINCENT SPEAKS TO US (SVit, XII, 107)

"And in order that this Congregation may attain, by the grace of God, the end it has set itself, it must, as far as possible, clothe itself with the spirit of Jesus Christ" (RC I,3) ... We have said that both the coadjutor brothers and the priests are equally obliged to seek their own perfection; ... The rule says, therefore, that in order to do all these things and to work towards one's own perfection, it is necessary to clothe oneself with the spirit of Jesus Christ. O Saviour, O brothers, how important it is to clothe oneself with the spirit of Jesus Christ! This means that in order to perfect ourselves and help the people fruitfully, to serve the clergy well, we must do everything to imitate the perfection of Jesus Christ.

LET'S REFLECT (*Evangelii gaudium*, 89)

Isolation, which is a version of immanentism, can be expressed in a false autonomy that excludes God and yet can also find in the religious a form of spiritual consumerism within the reach of its morbid individualism. The return to the sacred and the spiritual quest that characterise our age are ambiguous phenomena. But more than atheism, today we face the challenge of adequately responding to the thirst for God of many people, so that they do not try to quench it with alienating proposals or with a Jesus Christ without flesh and without commitment to the other. If they do not find in the Church a spirituality that heals them, liberates them, fills them with life and peace, and at the same time calls them to communion in solidarity and missionary fruitfulness, they will end up deceived by proposals that neither humanise nor give glory to God.

PRAY TOGETHER from Ps 93

The Lord reigns, he is clothed with majesty: he is clothed with strength.

The world is stable, it cannot waver.

Stable is thy throne

from everlasting,

from eternity thou

art.

They raised the rivers, Lord, they

raised their

voice, they

raised the rivers their roar.

More than the roar of rushing waters,

more powerful than the waves of the sea,

powerful on high is the Lord.

Jubilate Deo omnis terra, servite Domino in laetitia.

Alleluia, alleluia, in laetitia. Alleluia, alleluia, in laetitia.

Replenished ... with the spirit of the Gospel

From the letter of St Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians 4:24

Clothe the new man, created according to God in righteousness and true holiness.

SAINT VINCENT SPEAKS TO US (SVit, XII, 108)

One must be filled and moved by the spirit of Jesus Christ. In order to understand this, one must know that his spirit is diffused in all Christians who live in a Christian manner. Their actions and works are permeated by the spirit of God, and it is thanks to his spirit that he has raised up the Society, and you see this well. And it is according to this spirit that it must behave. In fact, it has always loved the Christian maxims and wanted to clothe itself with the spirit of the Gospel, to live and work like Our Lord, so that his spirit may shine in the whole Company and in each missionary, in all its works in general and in each one in particular.

LET'S REFLECT (*Evangelii gaudium*, 10)

The proposal is to live on a higher level, but not with less intensity: "Life is strengthened by giving it away and weakened in isolation and ease. In fact, those who make the most of life's possibilities are those who leave the safe shore and become passionate about the mission of communicating life to others". When the Church calls for evangelising commitment, she is simply pointing Christians to the true dynamism of personal fulfilment ... Let us recover and increase the fervour, "the sweet and comforting joy of evangelising, even when it is necessary to sow in tears [.....] May the world of our time - which seeks now in anguish, now in hope - receive the Good News not from evangelisers who are sad and discouraged, impatient and anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives radiate fervour, who have first received in them the joy of Christ".

PRAY TOGETHER from Ps 30

Listen,

Lord, have mercy on me,

Lord, come to my aid!".

You have changed my lament into dance, you have

stripped me of my sackcloth,

you have clothed me with joy,

That my heart may sing to thee, without being silent;

Lord, my God, I will thank thee forever.

Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum!

Laudate omnes gentes, laudate Dominum!

Revived ... of humility

From the First Letter of St Peter the Apostle 5:5

Clothe yourselves all with humility towards one another, for God *resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*.

SAINT VINCENT SPEAKS TO US (SVit, XI, 2)

Let us strive to acquire humility, for the more humble one is, the more charitable he will be towards his neighbour ... As soon as we are empty of ourselves, God will fill us with himself, for he does not tolerate emptiness. Let us therefore humble ourselves, brothers, thinking that God has set His eyes on this little Company for the service of His Church, even if we can call a handful of men, poor by birth, by knowledge and by virtue, the dregs, the rubbish and refuse of the world, the Company. I pray to God, two or three times a day, that he may annihilate us if we are not useful to his glory.

LET'S REFLECT (*Evangelii gaudium*, 288)

There is a Marian style in the Church's evangelising activity. For every time we look to Mary we come to believe in the revolutionary power of tenderness and affection. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, who do not need to mistreat others to feel important. Looking at her we discover that she who praised God because "he overthrew the mighty from their thrones" and "sent the rich back empty-handed" (*Lk* 1:52, 53) is the same one who provides domestic warmth to our quest for justice.

PRAY TOGETHER from Ps 104

Bless the Lord, my soul!

You are so great, Lord, my God!

You are clothed in majesty and splendour,

Wrapped in light like a mantle,

you who stretch the heavens like a curtain,

You build on the waters your lofty dwellings, you

make the clouds your chariot,

you walk on the wings of the wind,

Make the winds your messengers

and the lightning your ministers.

Laudate Dominum, laudate Dominum,
omnes gentes, alleluia!

Revived ... of tenderness

From the letter of St Paul the Apostle to the Colossians 3:12

Chosen by God, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves therefore with sentiments of tenderness, goodness, humility, meekness, magnanimity.

SAINT VINCENT SPEAKS TO US (SVit, XII, 271)

It is proper to love to bring about an interpenetration of one another's hearts and to feel what they feel ... Ah! How much tenderness there was in the Son of God! They call him to see Lazarus. He goes. The Magdalene rises and moves towards him weeping. The Jews follow her and they too weep. They all begin to weep. What does Our Lord do? He weeps with them, so tender and compassionate is He. It is because of this tenderness that he came down from heaven: he saw men deprived of his glory, he was moved by their misfortune. We too must be moved with compassion for our afflicted neighbour and take part in his sorrow.

LET'S REFLECT (*Evangelii gaudium*, 88)

In the meantime, the Gospel always invites us to run the risk of encountering the face of the other, with his physical presence that challenges, with his pain and his demands, with his contagious joy in a constant body to body. Authentic faith in the Son of God made flesh is inseparable from self-giving, from belonging to the community, from service, from reconciliation with the flesh of others. The Son of God, in his incarnation, invited us to the revolution of tenderness.

PRAY TOGETHER from Ps 132

Arise, Lord, to the place of your rest,
you and the ark of your power.
Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness
and let thy faithful rejoice.
For the sake of thy servant David,
reject not the face of thy anointed one.

Veni Sancte Spiritus, tui amoris ignem accende
Veni Sancte Spiritus, veni Sancte Spiritus.

Revived ... of charity

From the letter of St Paul the Apostle to the Colossians 3:14

Above all these things clothe yourselves with charity, which unites them perfectly.

SAINT VINCENT SPEAKS TO US (SVit, XI, 359)

Do you know the reason why Our Lord wanted his disciples to go two by two? Here it is. Having recommended that they should exercise charity towards their neighbour, and since there can be no neighbour unless there is at least a second person, that is why he sent them out two by two, so that they might both continually exercise charity towards each other; and if one fell down, there was the other to lift him up; or if one was tired and exhausted, the other would encourage him in his labours. O brothers, how admirable is the action of God!

LET'S REFLECT (*Evangelii gaudium*, 176-177)

To evangelise is to make the Kingdom of God present in the world ... Now I would like to share my concerns about the social dimension of evangelisation precisely because, if this dimension is not duly explicated, there is always the risk of disfiguring the authentic and integral meaning of the evangelising mission. The *kerygma* has an inescapably social content: at the very heart of the Gospel is community life and engagement with others. The content of the first proclamation has an immediate moral repercussion whose centre is charity.

PRAY TOGETHER from Ps 132

I will bless all his crops,
I will satisfy his poor with bread.
I will clothe his priests with salvation,
his faithful will exult with joy.
There I will make a power sprout for David,
I will prepare a lamp for my anointed one.
I will put his enemies to shame,
while his crown shall flourish upon him'.

Bonum est confidere in Domino,
bonum sperare in Domino.

CONCLUSION

SAINT VINCENT SPEAKS TO US (SVit, XII, 371)

These vows are a new baptism. They do in us what baptism did. In baptism we are freed from Satan's bondage, made children of God, and given the right to heaven. It is the same thing that is sought with vows. Therefore a person who wants to be perfect is not satisfied with being baptised and having, by baptism, renounced the devil, his works and vanities; but he also sells his possessions, renounces pleasures and honours. Now we, by God's mercy, are in this state. How many reasons do we have to thank him!

P. Together we renew our adherence to Him

I, N.N., in the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary, vow to God to devote myself faithfully to the evangelisation of the poor throughout my life in the Congregation of the Mission, following Christ the Evangeliser. I therefore make a vow to God of chastity, poverty and obedience, according to the Constitutions and Statutes of our Institute, with the help of God's grace.

P. And now let us pray the prayer that instructs us in relationship: it makes us feel like children and brothers!

Our Father ...

P. O God, for the evangelisation of the poor and the formation of the clergy, you have enriched St Vincent de Paul with apostolic virtues: grant that we, imitating him as our teacher, may feel impelled by charity to continue in the world the mission of your Son, who is God and lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Blessing

Singing in San Vincenzo

