

Heart

ON FIRE...



APOSTOLIC REFLECTION
with
SISTER ROSALIE RENDU

by
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and
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DEDICATION

In gratitude to

Sister Louise Sullivan, DC

for igniting the heart of the

Vincertain Family

with the spirit of

Sister Rosalie Rendu

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION

This is a book of Apostolic Reflections honoring the spirituality and life of Sister Rosalie Rendu, Daughter of Charity. Apostolic Reflection is a sharing together of events and situations that occur in the service of those in need in order to discern more clearly what God is asking of us. This practice serves as the spiritual foundation of our Vincentian service to those who are poor.

It is important that during this process each participant share his or her thoughts and feelings in order to allow the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to speak through us, to inflame our hearts and to animate our service to those who are poor.

St. Vincent taught us that God speaks to us through our experience, through events and people. But to hear what God is telling us, it is necessary to remember, pray and reflect on what has happened.

Apostolic Reflection Process:

PRAY:

Take the words of Scripture to heart.

REFLECT:

Read about the events and people in Sister Rosalie's life.

LISTEN:

Ponder the words of Sister Rosalie.

SHARE:

Discuss an event from your service to those living in poverty.

CONSIDER:

Take into account what graces has been stirred up.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION

with

SISTER ROSALIE RENDU

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Introduction



A Friend of the Rich and the Poor

As a casual observer watched the funeral procession passing by with thousands of people following, she wondered what dignity had died, probably a government official. The date was February 9, 1856.

No, this was not a state dignitary, this was a 70 year old Daughter of Charity and the procession numbering some 40,000-50,000 people consisted of the blind, the lame, beggars—in a word, the very Poor to whom Sister Rosalie had devoted her life.

Because she was a great collaborator, many state officials and religious leaders were mingled among the poor people of Paris. Today, on this occasion, there was no distinction of social status, wealth and poverty. Every person was one in honoring this humble woman who gave so much for the sake of a better society and life, especially for the Poor. Sister Rosalie was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honor and it was placed on the simple wood coffin bearing her body. A military honor guard surrounded her catafalque.

The funeral procession passed through the streets in a quarter of the city called the Mouffetard district. This district was affectionately known as Sister Rosalie's "diocese," a much blighted, disenfranchised area where she worked so tirelessly for so many years. Those who witnessed her cortege passing through her "diocese" were there to honor Sister Rosalie for all that she had come to mean in their lives. Shops and factories were closed; workers left their jobs; government offices were closed and people left their homes so that all could come together for this extraordinary outpouring of love and gratitude.

Armand de Melun described the crowd as one of those multitudes that can neither be counted nor described, every profession; an entire people with its rich and its poor; its intellectuals and its workers; everything in it that was most illustrious and most obscure; all mixed in together, all mingling and expressing in diverse manners and different words the same sorrow and the same admiration.

Her death card read:

**THE CHARITY OF
JESUS CHRIST CRUCIFIED
URGES ME**

Jeanne Marie Rendu
in religion Sister Rosalie.
Died 7 February 1856
in her 70th year.

She was the eye of the Blind
the foot of the Lame
Mother of the Poor
support of the Orphan.
She saw only God and Charity
in everyone and everywhere!

Montparnass Cemetery

The procession, preceded by the cross (forbidden by the French Revolution, but which was permitted to be on public display because of the occasion) found its way to the church of Saint-Médard where the Funeral Mass was celebrated. After the Mass, the same procession proceeded to Montparnasse Cemetery where Sister Rosalie was to be buried in a plot alongside her faithful companions, other Daughters of Charity who had also given their lives over to Jesus Christ in the person of the poor.

When the ceremony at the gravesite ended, the Mayor, Monsieur Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, who had been her friend and collaborator for 40 years, spoke to the mourners:

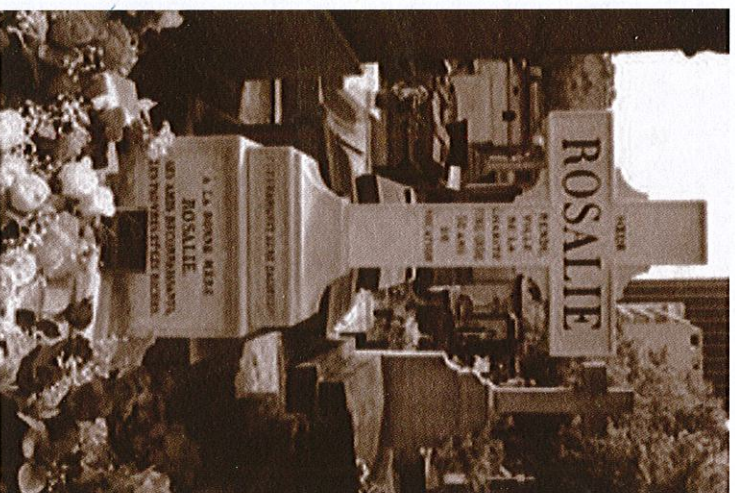
“This is neither the time nor the place to recount her very full life. A single phrase sums it up—born for the world, she lived in charity. A worthy Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, she wore the habit of her Order in such a way that, difficult as it may appear, she made it still more respected and loved by the people.”

Following the mayor’s discourse, the mourners left the cemetery to return to their elegant homes or miserable hovels, their hearts heavy with the thought that Sister Rosalie, who for 54 years, had been an integral part of their lives, would no longer be with them. Some could not even bring themselves to leave her even after the gates were closed. They remained outside the gates praying to her.

Flowers on Sister Rosalie Rendu’s grave

Months later, because the crowds continued to visit and place flowers on her grave, her remains were transferred to a place closer to the entrance to the cemetery so that the crowds, continuing to come, would have better accessibility to pray to their friend and mother. This outpouring of respect and affection from all levels of society and religion speaks to Rosalie’s great gift, her ability to unite all those who share her Vincentian vocation of the service to those who are poor.

For over a hundred and fifty years, and to this day, flowers are placed daily on Sister Rosalie’s grave in prayer and petition. The cross on the grave bears this inscription:



Sister
ROSALIE
Rendu
Daughter of Charity
54 years Vocation
To our good mother
Rosalie,
her grateful friends,
the poor and the rich.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION I

To See the Face of Christ

PRAY

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me... Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.”

(Matthew 25: 31-46)

REFLECT:

To See the Face of Christ

Sister Rosalie lived the heart and soul of Vincentian Spirituality as captured in the grace of finding the face of Christ in the poor. Indeed, Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac transmitted into the hearts of their followers the words of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.”

On November 9, 2003, at the beatification of Siste Rosalie Rendu, Pope John Paul II said:

“In an era troubled by social conflicts, Rosalie Rendu joyfully became a servant to the poorest, restoring dignity to each one by providing material help, education, and the teaching of the Christian mystery. Her charity was inventive. Where did she draw the strength to carry out so many things? In her intense prayer life and the continuous praying of the Rosary, which she never abandoned. Her secret was simple: **to see the face of Christ** in every man and woman, as a true Daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul.”

A Heart on Fire

Throughout her life, and after, the words “light” and “fire” have frequently been used to describe Sister Rosalie. Vincent de Paul said, “If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame.” Sister Rosalie was a light of hope in the darkness of despair. All her love for God, for those who were poor and those who were rich, for her friends and collaborators, **came from her heart on fire.**

LISTEN:

The words of Blessed Rosalie Rendu:

“Serve well those who are poor and always address them with much kindness. If you do not act in this manner they will insult you. The ruder they are, the more dignity and respect you must have. **Remember that our Lord is hidden behind those rags!**”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to those who are poor that, like Sister Rosalie, put “your heart on fire.” How did you:

- see the face of Christ “hidden behind those rags”?
- feel your heart on fire bringing “hope in the darkness of despair”?

CONSIDER:

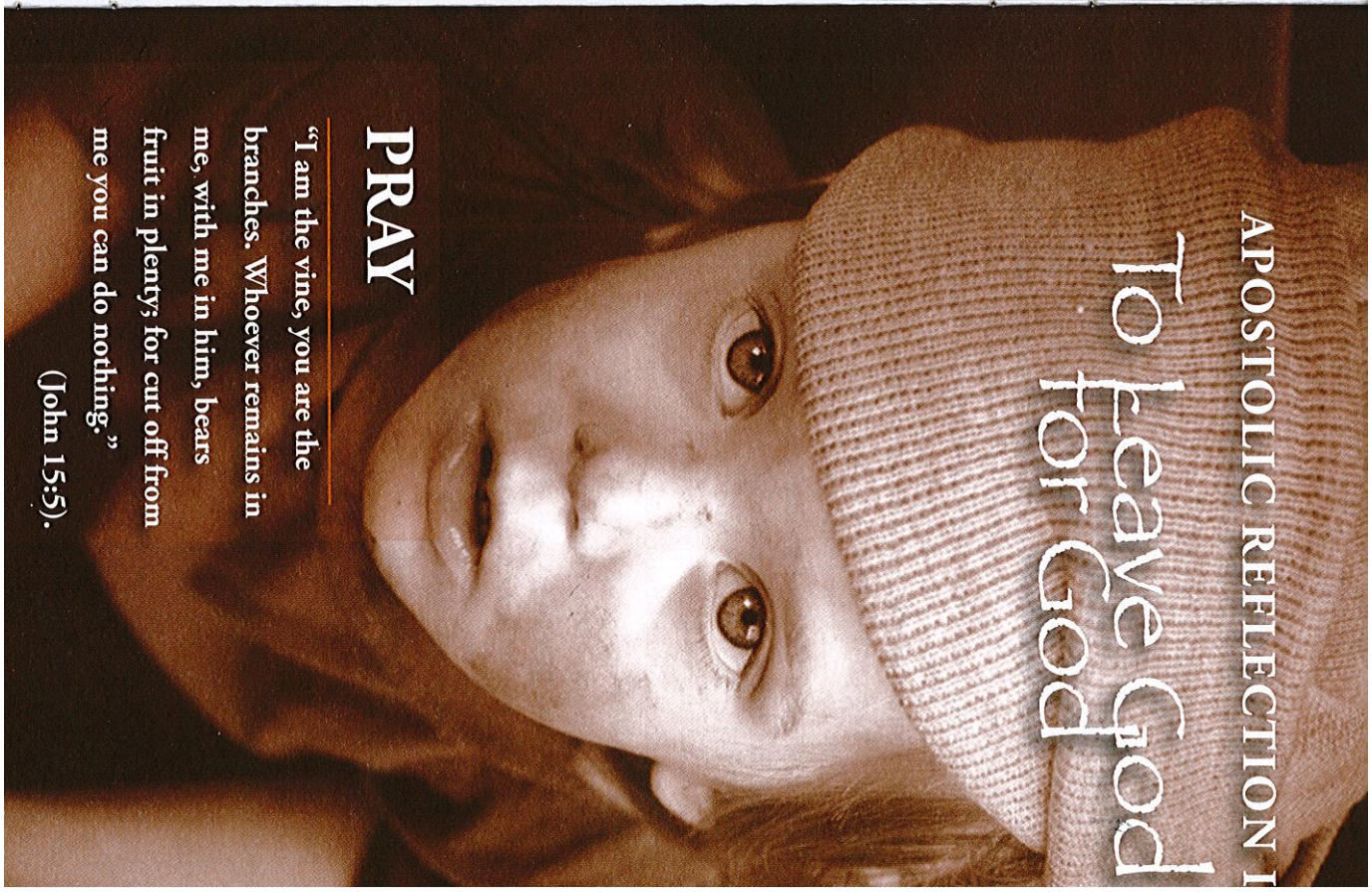
How was God present in your listening and sharing during this

Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Christ, full of mercy, your love embraces everyone. Through your death and resurrection you call us, in faith, to the same mercy and compassion to those we encounter every day. May our eyes always see the poor, the lonely and neglected as your sons and daughters, totally loved and cherished by you. Grant us the ability to bring hope to all we serve, in your name. Amen.



APOSTOLIC REFLECTION I To leave God for God

PRAY

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.”

(John 15:5).

REFLECT:

“Never have I prayed so well...”

It is easy to lose the person behind the amazing catalog of Sister Rosalie Rendu's accomplishments in the service of those who were poor. The inner person tends to disappear behind the person of action. Often, apostolic zeal clouds the examination of other equally important qualities and virtues, but looking deeper we find that the grace of our Vincentian charism is rooted in our call to become “Contemplatives in Action”, uniting prayer and action.

Every day, in all kinds of weather Sister Rosalie crisscrossed the streets and alleyways of the Moufferdard district. With her rosary in her hand and a heavy basket on her arm, she hurried her steps for she knew someone was waiting for her! Sister Rosalie walked with her God. She would speak to God of this family in distress as the father had no work, of this elderly person who was dying: **“Never have I prayed so well as in the streets,”** she would say.

Action and Contemplation

For Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac and their followers, achieving the necessary balance between prayer, action and community was a constant challenge and struggle, because of the crushing needs of those whom they were called to serve. Yet attaining this balance was the essential quality of their spirituality and their vocation.

Vincent and Louise had learned from experience just how difficult it is to keep one's priorities straight. Vincent wrote to one of his conferes, “God demands first the heart, then the work.” Over and over, Vincent would tell the Daughters of Charity: “If it's time for prayer and you hear poor persons calling for you, mortify yourselves and **“leave God for God,”** even though

you must do your utmost not to omit your prayer, for that's what will keep you united to God.” And so Vincent with conviction would say, “If you go to the poor ten times a day, ten times a day you will find God there.”

LISTEN:

The words of Sister Rosalie Rendu:

“One night I dreamed that I stood at the judgment seat of God. God received me with great severity and was about to pronounce my sentence when, suddenly, I was surrounded by an immense crowd of people carrying old boots, shoes, and hats. They presented all these things to God saying: ‘She was the one who gave us all these things.’ Then Jesus turned to me and said: ‘Because you gave all these second-hand clothes in my name, I open heaven to you. Enter for all eternity.’”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to those who are poor that, like Sister Rosalie, united action and contemplation. How did you find that you also:

- “never prayed as well as in the streets”?
- “left God for God”...finding him in the poor?

CONSIDER:

How was God present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, keep our hearts open to our neighbor, especially the poor. By loving them we are loving you. Give us the grace of the awareness of your abiding Presence and lead us in the direction of your heart. So that we can willingly “leave God for God.” Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION III

A Network of Presence and Charity

PRAY

“The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many as they are, are one body: and so it is with Christ. It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit.”

(1 Cor. 12:12-13)

REFLECT:

A Network of Personal Presence

Sister Rosalie worked for the poor by using all the help the State and society could provide but she also created at the grass-roots level, against all odds, an irreplaceable **network of personal presence**. She had a genius for calling forth from all who approached her, the wealthy and generous people gave not only of their resources but of themselves in personal service. They joined her other dedicated collaborators to try to improve the lot of the inhabitants of the district.

Sister Rosalie, indeed, belongs to every branch of the Vincentian Family as her friend and collaborator Armand de Melun described:

“A great number of charitable persons shared the quarter’s streets and sometimes even its housing.. Often in these large buildings, filled from cellar to attic with poor persons, there would be a Daughter of Charity dressing a wound on the ground floor, a Lady of Charity on the second floor reciting last prayers with a dying person, while a young man from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul comforted a poor family living in the attic by bringing a week’s supply of bread and teaching catechism to a child.”

A Network of Charity

Sister Rosalie would be the first to admit that she could never have accomplished all that she did without collaborators. She was able to touch so many lives because of the vast **network of charity** that grew up around her. Sister Rosalie was its heart and guiding spirit. Nearly everyone who approached her, either to receive or provide assistance, became a valued part of her charitable enterprise. The misery that surrounded her was so great that it easily challenged all the resources she had at her disposition. With this expansion came an ever-increasing demand for collaborators. Indeed, her genius for col-

laboration may well be the most significant challenge that she presents to us today.

LISTEN:

The words of Blessed Rosalie Rendu:

“There are many ways of providing charity. The assistance of money or assistance in-kind that we give to the poor will not last long. We must aspire to a more complete and longer lasting benefit: study their abilities, their level of instruction and try to get them work to help them out of their difficulties.”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to those who are poor that, like Sister Rosalie, resulted from collaboration. How have you:

- created a network of “Personal Presence”?
- established a network of “Charity”?

CONSIDER:

How was God present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, we thank you for the great gift of friendship and collaboration that allows us to welcome into our lives those whose gifts and vocation lead them in service to those who are poor. Give us the grace to walk together hand in hand with our brothers and sisters who live in poverty, creating a network of presence and charity. Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION IV

Love is Inventive to Infinity

PRAY

After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his cloak back on and reclined at table once more. He said to them: “Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet—I who am Teacher and Lord—then you must wash each other’s feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do.

(John 13: 12-15)

REFLECT:

Creativity and Daring

The desperate needs of the poor in the Mouffertard area, especially women and children, captured the heart of Sister Rosalie. She searched for ways to respond to the ever growing demands of the poor. This demanded **creativity**, because resources were extremely limited, and **daring**, since some of her methods were yet unproven and elicited reticence and even opposition. Often, Sister Rosalie was even misunderstood by her Superiors in the Community as they felt that she took too many risks.

In 1844 Sister Rosalie saw that babies of women who had to work if their families were to survive were left without any reliable care, and so she opened a Day Nursery run by the Daughters of Charity, to provide care for newborns while their mothers worked. This was a new concept and it met with opposition from the very beginning. This resistance centered around two points. The work was seen as encouraging mothers to neglect their duties to their children, and as posing a health hazard by having babies so close together in one place.

Sister Rosalie was undeterred as she considered the first objection without merit as the babies were in the nursery only when their mothers were at work. To the second objection she pointed out to her critics the contrast between the healthy appearance of children of the nursery and the sickly bodies of the infants huddled in the squalor of their family's miserable lodgings. She welcomed the children and saw to it that they were clean and cared for, but money was always in short supply and therefore the Ladies of Charity were instrumental in assisting Sister Rosalie in procuring funding for the day nursery.

Love is inventive to infinity

Another important project of Sister Rosalie was the “*Ouvroir (Work)*” Program. Over and over she sought assistance for young women and widows. In creating ways to serve the needs of the poor, Sister Rosalie knew that Vincent de Paul had taught that

“**Love is inventive to infinity.**” And so in 1849, she turned her attention to the eleven-to-fourteen-year-old girls who had completed elementary school but whom she judged too young and too ill-equipped to enter the work force. For them, she expanded the concept of practical training which became a prelude to the “Schools of Domestic Science.”

LISTEN:

The words of Rosalie Rendu:

“There is something that is choking me, and takes away my appetite...the thought that so many families lack bread.”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Sister Rosalie, is “inventive to infinity.”

How have you been:

- “creative” in serving the needs of the poor?
- “daring” in beginning new works?

CONSIDER:

How has God been present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, you gave Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac the courage to find ways through unexpected difficulties to better serve those abandoned by society. Sister Rosalie followed their example, using all of her creative gifts to assure that those who are poor were well taken care of. Grant us this same “inventiveness to infinity” to go beyond the norms and restrictions we always seem to encounter. We ask this for the continued well-being of those we serve. Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION V

The Charity of Jesus Crucified Urges Us

PRAY

“The love of Christ impels us who have reached the conviction that since one died for all, all died. He died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised up....In all we do we strive to present ourselves as ministers of God, acting with patient endurance amid trials, difficulties, distress....Conducting ourselves with innocence, knowledge and patience, in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love.”

(2 Cor. 5:14-15; 6:4-6)

REFLECT:

The Suffering Christ

As a Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie was formed in the charism of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac as a servant of those who were poor. This is the spirituality that formed her heart and soul, and this is what she burned into the hearts of the Ladies of Charity and into Frederic Ozanam and the founding members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

In suffering, which seemed to increase rather than diminish with the passage of time, Rosalie found strength in her love of God, particularly the **suffering Christ**. She understood the need to remain united to Jesus Crucified, as she wrote:

“Let us support one another on the way of the Cross and let us walk in the footsteps of our Divine Master. Following His example, let us carry our Cross with courage and confidence in His infinite Mercy.”

By uniting her sufferings to those of Jesus Crucified, Sister Rosalie was imitating Louise de Marillac who created the motto of the Daughters of Charity. It bore the image of Jesus Crucified surrounded by the words of Saint Paul as she had modified them, “the Charity of Jesus *Crucified* Urges us.” Indeed, the love of Jesus crucified will send us, urge us, push us, compel us, as it did Sr Rosalie, to serve those who are suffering and destitute.

Contemplate the Crucified Lord

The Vincentian Family see the crucified Lord every day in the hungry, homeless, neglected, abused, addicted, and those suffering from racism and discrimination. But it is easy for the world to forget them. The challenge is to recognize the disfigured, crucified Lord, and to raise the consciousness of others to their plight. The **contemplation of the crucified Lord** cannot remain merely a pious exercise; nor can it be simply a meditation on a past event. The Lord lives on in his members. He is crucified in individual persons and in suffering peoples.

One of the great gifts of Sister Rosalie was her ability to recognize Christ in the face of the suffering and to mobilize the energies of others to join her in the service of those living in poverty. To aid the most abandoned she gathered together rich and poor, women and men, clergy and laity. She knew that the crucified peoples bring salvation to us, as we labor to take them down from the cross.

LISTEN:

The words of Sister Rosalie:

“Be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you bring them.”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Sister Rosalie, gave you a deeper understanding of suffering. How have you:

- been “urged, pushed, compelled” to serve those who are poor?
- seen the crucified Lord?

CONSIDER:

How was God present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

O Christ crucified, your love extends beyond the limits of our imagination. Your death provided us the fullness of life. May this awareness urge and compel us to love without measure all our brothers and sisters, especially those whom we serve. We ask all of this in faith and commitment. Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION VI

Love One Another

PRAY

“I give you a new commandment: Love one another; such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know that you are my disciples: your love for one another.”

(John 13:34-35)

REFLECT:

Inviting and Mentoring

Sister Rosalie Rendu, was known as the “Apostle of the Mouffertard district.” The founding members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul did not have any direct experience in serving the poor that lived in abject misery; huddled together in squalid hovels, and they needed guidance and support. And so they went to Sister Rosalie. She accompanied these young men on their first steps in visiting those who were poor in their homes, which they had chosen as their goal of the Conference of Charity. The reluctant collaboration and guidance would, along with the influence of Emmanuel Bailly, transform the Conference of Charity into the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The Daughters of Charity’s House of Charity was an excellent place for the young men to begin their service in the Vincentian spirit. Sister Rosalie **invited** and welcomed these eager young men with open arms, her heart filled with joy. She would often repeat to her Sister companions, “Oh, how good these young people are, oh, how good they are.” But she did not simply refer families and supply vouchers for food or clothing. She **mentored** them with her heartfelt convictions on the manner in which each poor person was to be served. It was to follow the commandment of Jesus to love one another, in the spirit of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac.

Apostolic Reflection

The founding members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, who were young intellectuals from the Sorbonne, these elite in law and medicine, placed themselves at the school of this humble Daughter of Charity whose own formal education was limited indeed. Her name opened the doors of the hovels of the desperately poor inhabitants of the Mouffertard district. Because her “beloved poor” trusted her, they trusted them. When their home visits were over, the students returned to her little parlor to recount what had happened and to receive her advice and encouragement. Well before Vatican II, Sister Rosalie and her young collaborators were practicing “**Apostolic Reflection**,” a sharing

together of events and situations occurring in the service of those in need in order to discern more clearly what God was asking of them.

LISTEN:

The words of Rosalie Rendu:

“God has already touched your heart, or you would not be giving up your precious free day to serve the poor. And, because you see Christ in his poor, I know you will approach each one you visit with humility as His servant. Always remember, that if we had been through the hardships they have had to meet—if our childhood had been one of constant want—perhaps, we too, would have given away to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter.”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Sister Rosalie, taught you how to love and serve those living in poverty. How have you:

- invited others, especially young people, to serve the poor?
- mentored others in the Vincentian spirit?

CONSIDER:

How was God present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, you gifted the world with people deeply committed to love and serve you in the person of the poor. These dedicated members of the Vincentian Family grace the homes and lives of poor persons with their presence and caring hearts. Bless each of us, Lord, and make our commitment to invite and mentor more people to carry on the work of serving the poor with the ingenuity and determination of Sister Rosalie Rendu. Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION VII

To Hunt Down Poverty

PRAY

“But a Samaritan who was journeying along came on him and was moved to pity at the sight. He approached him and dressed his wounds, pouring oil and wine as a means to heal. He then hoisted him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, where he cared for him... Then Jesus asked, ‘Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the man who fell in with the robbers?’ The answer came, ‘The one who treated him with compassion.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Then go and do the same.’”

REFLECT:

Servant of the Poor

Sister Rosalie dedicated her life to be a **servant of the poor**, in the spirit of Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac. When she arrived in the Mouffetard district, it was made up, almost exclusively, of large working class families. At that time, the word ‘worker’ was a synonym for ‘poor’ and this poverty becomes a misery, a lack of the strict necessities of life, the moment there is the shortest layoff from work. Moreover, working conditions were deplorable. The work day was 12 hours or more. Men frequently died young, leaving their families in complete destitution. Illness or unemployment yielded similar pain and suffering.

The district was one of the most neglected areas of Paris, and the lives of the people that Sister Rosalie was called to serve were “day workers, laundresses, street cleaners, menders of clothing, heavy workers in factories, rag pickers, and wandering merchants.” They were caught in low-paying jobs, and usually had a number of children, so the family burden was great. Unhealthy housing and the lack of food, even the bare necessities, often led to disease. The high cost of bread was a heavy burden on families and led to malnutrition.

Hunt down Poverty

When Sister Rosalie arrived at the House of Charity there was a pharmacy, a depository for clothing and household linens, and a free school for children. The sisters were responsible for the distribution of medicines, teaching school, and visiting the sick in their homes. But, during Sister Rosalie’s era, two revolutions in 1830 and 1848 wreaked havoc on the quarter, bringing commerce and industry almost to a halt.

Sister Rosalie’s heart was filled with compassion for the abandoned poor that surrounded her, and she would say “We must **hunt down poverty** in order to give humanity its dignity.” And so, over the years she expanded the works to include the Day

Nursery for newborns; the Day Shelter for children who were too old for the nursery and too young for school; the *Quinn* (Work) Program providing practical training for girls eleven to fourteen years old; the Patronage a social center for boys; the Orphanage; and the Shelter for the Elderly. She indeed, hunted down poverty and gave dignity to all those whose lives she touched.

LISTEN:

The words of Blessed Rosalie Rendu:

“There is something that is choking me, and takes away my appetite... the thought that so many families lack bread.”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Sister Rosalie, gave you ears to hear the cries of the poor.

How have you:

- hunted down poverty in order to give dignity to the poor?
- have created new ways to bring people out of poverty?

CONSIDER:

How God was present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God, give us hearts to love the poor and creativity in helping them to come out of poverty. Open our minds and hearts so that we might stand at their side and assist them to change whatever unjust structures keep them in poverty. Help us to hunt down poverty and enable us to be brothers and sisters to them, friends who walk with them in their struggle for fundamental human rights. Amen

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION VIII

Justice and Charity

PRAY

“Do not exasperate the down-trodden: delay not to give to the needy. A beggar in distress do not reject: avert not your face from the poor.”

(Sirach:4)

REFLECT:

“Too many needs and not enough rights”

The Revolution in 1848 was rooted in the social conditions of the day and influenced, at least in part, by Christian social thought. By the time that the tragic events of the Revolution occurred, Sister Rosalie had already become a symbol of charity in the midst of turmoil. The conditions in which those who were poor lived and worked had become intolerable. The dedication of numerous Catholics in the spread of charitable works, including Frederic Ozanam, Armand de Melun and other members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, had brought many closer to the Church.

In the newspaper, *Le Correspondant*, Frederic Ozanam urged Catholics to adopt a preferential option for the working class and to support movements toward democracy. The factors leading to revolt were in place: governmental scandal and economic collapse that left 750,000 workers unemployed while prices rose. Troubled by what he saw around him, Frederic wrote: “We must look after people who have **too many needs and not enough rights**”.

The Power of Gold...Power of Despair

Sister Rosalie, Frederic Ozanam and the other members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, witnessed the injustice of the working conditions of the poor, and they became their advocates. After the revolution, the first issue of a newspaper entitled, *L'Ère Nouvelle*, “The New Era,” was published and Frederic wrote:

“The problem that divides men and women in our day is...whether society will be only a great exploitation to the profit of the strongest or a consecration of each individual for the good of all and especially for the protection of the weak. There are a great many men and women who have too much and who wish to have more; there are a great many others who do not have enough, who have nothing and who are willing to take if someone gives to them. Between these two classes of men, a confrontation is coming, and this

menacing confrontation will be terrible: **on one side, the power of gold, on the other the power of despair.**”

LISTEN:

The words of Blessed Rosalie Rendu:

“Serve well those who are poor and always address them with much kindness. If you do not act in this manner they will insult you. The ruder they are, the more dignity and respect you must have. We must not make them wait. An hour lost from their work is one less loaf of bread for a hungry family.”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Sister Rosalie, taught you that the poor have too many needs and not enough rights. How have you:

- witnessed the need for “justice and charity”?
- seen the confrontation of the “power of gold...and the power of despair”?

CONSIDER:

How God was present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, there is so much injustice in our world today, causing unparalleled poverty and sickness. Many in our society have, consciously or unconsciously, turned their backs on the suffering people of the world. Please, Lord, guide the hearts of governments and citizens to work together to end the inhumane treatment of their brothers and sisters. Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION IX

Our Vincentian Vocation

PRAY

“It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure, so that all you ask the Father in my name he will give you. The command I give you is this, that you love one another.”

(John 15: 16-17)

REFLECT:

To set people's hearts ablaze

Sister Rosalie indeed gave herself totally to God and her “beloved poor” and she knew in her heart and soul that God had called her and sent her to serve those living in poverty.

Vocation is a “call,” a personal summons from God, inviting the person to embark upon a specially chosen work. The grace of a Vincentian Vocation is therefore rooted in the call by God to a ministry of service to those who are poor in order to bear witness to Jesus’ compassionate love.

St. Vincent de Paul said:

“It is our vocation... **to set people's hearts ablaze**, to do what the Son of God did, to set it aflame with his love. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him. I must love my neighbor as the image of God and the object of this love.”

A Sign of Boundless Hope

Sister Rosalie had a deep understanding that our Vincentian Vocation called us to an intimate desire to participate personally and directly in helping the poor by personal contact and by the gift of one's heart and friendship, in community with others. Fr. Robert Maloney, CM challenges us with these words:

“I encourage all the members of the Vincentian Family to give themselves wholeheartedly to the Church's preferential option for the poor. Whatever choice in life others make, ours is for the poor. Today, therefore, I ask each one to find the way to best touch the lives of the poor... we should honestly identify the way in which our life and works will have a real effect on the poor, the most abandoned, in society.

We have a wonderful vocation! We are called to live among the poor as **signs of boundless hope**, with profound confidence in the Lord's presence, his love, his creative

power. I urge all the members of the Vincentian Family to rekindle the fire that the Lord's Spirit has already ignited within us."

LISTEN:

The words of Rosalie Rendu:

Sister Rosalie taught that the essential attributes of our Vincentian Vocation are to:

- love and serve Jesus Christ in the person of those who are poor and suffering
- give service that is at one and the same time "physical and spiritual"
- live in charity and union among ourselves in order to support each other for the service of those who are poor.

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that made you realize, like Sister Rosalie, that God had called you and sent you to the poor. How have you:

- discovered that you had a Vincentian Vocation?
- been a sign of boundless hope to the poor?

CONSIDER:

Reflect how God was present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, we have many models who follow your unwavering charity: Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Rosalie Rendu and Frederic Ozanam. May we always be grateful for our Vincentian Vocation as we give witness to these great saints by setting our hearts on fire in order to respond to your call to be a sign of boundless hope for the poor. Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION X

Our Vincentian Heart

PRAY

"I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned; the flames shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel your Savior."

(Is 43:1-3a)

REFLECT:

An Experience that Proved Contagious

Sister Rosalie devoted herself to reconciling the different classes of society and to working for the recognition of each person's dignity. She recognized only two categories of people: those who need to receive help and those who can, and above all need to give it. In bringing together two worlds that wished to ignore each other, Sister Rosalie in a simple but extraordinary way, was able to promote **an experience that proved contagious**.

Armand de Melun, who had a family fortune which precluded the necessity of earning a living, was introduced to Sister Rosalie in 1837. Reflecting on the transforming effect of this encounter on his life, he described his excitement, mingled with trepidation, as he discovered the unknown world of the poor which was just a few streets away from the Sorbonne where he had spent three years studying law:

"Until then, I had never visited a person living in poverty. I knew only those who held out their hand to me on the street, and until now I left it to the Bureau of Public Assistance and the Houses of Charity to know them and to take care of them. I put a few francs in the collection in my parish and gave a few centimes, not many, to the beggars of whom I was highly suspicious..."

Transformed by the Poor

And then he entered the world of Sister Rosalie and she sent him out on the very first day to visit families who were living in misery. He acknowledged that he was uncomfortable at first. However, once he was with these "good people" for a time, sharing himself with them and especially listening to their stories, it became difficult for him to leave. He soon found himself returning several times each week to walk the streets and visiting the families he was coming to know not as "the poor" but as fellow human

beings struggling with the joys and sorrows of their existence while trying to hold on to a glimmer of hope. Armand became an active member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul for the rest of his life. Indeed, **the poor transformed him and gave him a Vincentian heart.**

LISTEN:

The words of Blessed Rosalie Rendu:

"Pray to our Good God to grant me the spirit of faith which will strengthen me in my weakness and give me the courage to make the sacrifices that He asks of me. They are never-ending. The means to grow in virtue are not lacking."

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Sister Rosalie, provided an experience that proved contagious. How did you:

- feel when you first began to serve the poor?
- find that the poor have transformed your life?

CONSIDER

How God was present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, you redeemed us through the death and resurrection of your Son, but somehow we have messed it all up. We need to stop and take a long look at our current situation and proceed to make real change. Give us the courage to love the poor, so that our hearts can be transformed into Vincentian Hearts. Amen.

poor. It enables people themselves to engage in the identification of the root causes of their poverty and to create strategies, including advocacy, to change those structures which keep them in poverty. Systemic Change requires transforming attitudes.

LISTEN:

The words of Rosalie Rendu

“There are many ways of providing charity. The assistance of money or assistance in-kind that we give to the poor will not last long. We must aspire to a more complete and longer lasting benefit: study their abilities, their level of instruction and try to get them work to help them out of their difficulties.”

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Sister Rosalie, called you to be an advocate for the poor.

How have you:

- become a “voice for the voiceless”?
- engaged in Systemic Change by helping to identify the root causes of poverty?

CONSIDER:

How was God present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, give us courageous voices to speak for those who are voiceless. Give us the grace to transform the lives of those living in poverty by going beyond providing food, clothing and shelter in order to find and change the root causes of poverty. Together with the poor, may we end poverty. Amen.

APOSTOLIC REFLECTION XII

Act Justly, Love Tenderly

PRAY

“This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.”

(Micah 6:8)

REFLECT:

Listening to the Signs of the Times

Sister Rosalie knew that we are called to follow Christ in the very terms with which Jesus opens his public ministry in the Gospel of Luke: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord." (Luke 4:18)

Are we willing as Sister Rosalie, to hear the cries of the poor, of the most oppressed: the women and children, who are often the poorest members of society; those discriminated against because of race, color, nationality, religion; the AIDS victims, who are often shunned by their families and by the physically healthy, those on the "edges of life," the helpless infants and the helpless aged, who are unable to speak up themselves?

Are we alert, "in listening to the signs of the times," especially to the increasing gap between the rich and the poor and the repeated call for justice made by the Church.

Hearts are Touched by Listening and Sharing

Today, more than ever before, people feel the need to love and to be loved. The paradox of our modern society, intoxicated by ever more sophisticated means of communication, is this: the poor are not so much people who have nothing as people who have nobody with whom they can share. By visiting those living in poverty, especially in their homes, respect is given and hearts are touched by listening and sharing.

The Vincentian Family

There are millions who watch pictures of poverty on our television screens and feel generous towards the poor. Their reaction, so often, goes no further than feeling. The **Vincentian Family**,

however, imitates Jesus in that we are not content to feel generous, but we show our generosity at a particular time and place.

It is a gift from God that we are able to love people who are disfigured by the effects of poverty and injustice, and who are often so unattractive in their poverty.

LISTEN:

The words of Rosalie Rendu:

Sister Rosalie taught that the Vincentian vocation is rooted in the virtues of:

- Humility, simplicity, charity
- Gentleness, compassion, respect and devotion
- Selflessness and mortification

SHARE:

Choose an event from your service to the poor that, like Rosalie, helped you to touch hearts by listening and sharing. How have you:

- heard the call to justice in the "signs of the times"?
- realized people need to love and be loved?

CONSIDER:

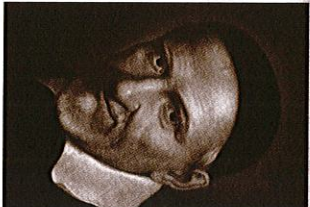
How was God present in your listening and sharing during your Apostolic Reflection:

- What has been stirred up in you?
- What resolutions might this call forth in you?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus Christ, we are grateful for your constant intercession for us, a poor and fragile people. Keep us aware that today people, more than ever, simply need to love and to be loved. Please give us the grace to act justly and to love tenderly. Amen.

THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY



St. Vincent de Paul

The Vincentian Family consists of all the Associations or Congregations whose apostolate is inspired by the Vincentian charism of service to those who are poor and destitute. The Vincentian Family is a worldwide, living reality. A countless number of men and women live and breathe the spirit, tradition, and spirituality of the one whom people call the *Father of the Poor: St. Vincent de Paul*. The following constitute some of the branches of the Vincentian Family:

The Ladies of Charity:

In 1617, St. Vincent founded the Confraternities of Charity in Charillon, France by organizing the lay women in the parishes to: "honor Our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy Mother and to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually." Their motto is "To serve rather than be served" and currently there are almost 250,000 Ladies of Charity, also known as the AIC (International Association of Charity), serving in 42 Countries throughout the world.

The Congregation of the Mission (CM):

In 1625, St. Vincent founded his community of priests and brothers to evangelize the poor through words and works, especially the poor people in the countryside through missions to the people, and the formation of the clergy. Their motto is "He has sent me to evangelize the poor" and currently there are about 4,000 missions of priest and brothers serving in 80 Countries throughout the world.

The Daughters of Charity (DC):

In 1633 St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac co-founded the Daughters of Charity to "consecrate their lives to God and to live in community in order to dedicate themselves to the service the poor." Their motto is: "The charity of Jesus crucified impels us" and there are 26,000 Daughters serving in 80 Countries throughout the world.



St. Louise de Marillac

After the French Revolution, the Vincentian Family experienced a significant renaissance through the founding of :

The Sisters of Charity (SC):

In 1809, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, using the Rule of St. Vincent, founded the Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg, Maryland, and they quickly spread throughout the United States. In 1850 the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg joined the Daughters of Charity in France. The Sisters of Charity of New York, Cincinnati, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, South Carolina, Kansas, and New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in Canada, formed separate Congregations. The Sisters of Charity in the North America belong to a Federation representing 13 Religious communities representing over 4000 members.

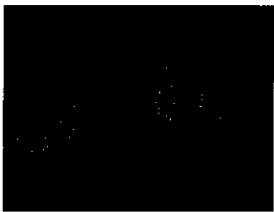


St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

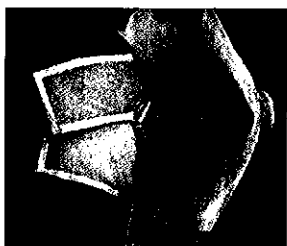
The Society of St. Vincent de Paul:

In 1833, Frederic Ozanam, along with his companions, founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Sister Rosalie Rendu, DC mentored the founding members in the

spirit of St. Vincent and is considered to be a co-founder of the Society. Its purpose and vision is "to follow the Vincentian spirituality of finding Christ in the poor by unfolding the world in a network of charity." The motto of the Society is: "No work of Charity is foreign to the Society." Today there are about 650,000 members serving the poor in 132 Countries world-wide.



Blessed Frederic Ozanam



Blessed Rosalie Rendu, DC

Missionary Cenacle Apostolate:

In 1909 Father Thomas Augustine Judge, C.M., born in South Boston, Massachusetts, August 23, 1868, and ordained a priest of the Congregation of the Mission May 27, 1899, pioneered the lay apostolate in the United States and founded two missionary congregations of Religious: the Missionary Cenacle Apostolate (lay missionaries); Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity (Sisters); Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity (priests and Brothers); and the Blessed Trinity Missionary Institute of vowed laity.

ASSOCIATIONS IN THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY

The Vincentian Family also includes the Associations or Organizations whose apostolate are inspired by the gift of the "Vincentian charism." The following are some of these organizations:

Vincentian Marian Youth (VMY):

In 1835, the first Children of Mary Association was organized and it received Pontifical Approbation in 1847. This lay youth group has as its purpose: "1) To form members to live a solid faith following Jesus Christ the Evangelizer of the poor; 2) To live and pray like Mary, with simplicity and hu-

mility; 3) To arouse, animate and sustain the missionary spirit of the association, especially through missionary experiences to those who are poorest and to youth." This organization is now called "Vincentian Marian Youth" and it is undergoing a great renewal throughout the world.

The Miraculous Medal Association (AMM):

In 1847, the Association of the Miraculous Medal was formed at the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris. The members Association wear the Miraculous Medal and they spread devotion to Mary as the model of Christian living and the sanctification of its members, especially through service to the poor.

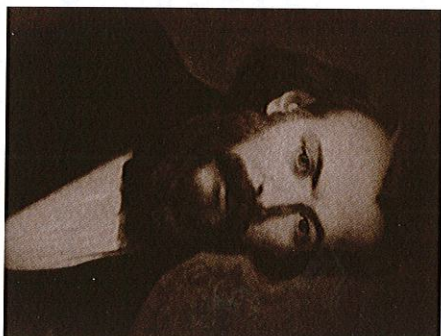
Vincentian Service Corps (VSC)/Vincentian Mission Corps (VMC):

In 1983, the Vincentian Service Corps was begun by the Congregation of the Mission in New York City, and similar volunteer groups are now sponsored by the Daughters of Charity and other Provinces of the Vincentian Priests. The Vincentian Service Corps/ Vincentian Mission Corps provide young adults with a year experience of living in community and working with poor in the spirit of St. Vincent and St. Louise.

Lay Vincentian Missionaries (MISEVI):

In 1999, the Lay Vincentian Missionaries came about from the heart of the Vincentian Family. It's goal is: "to foster, facilitate, sustain and coordinate the missionary presence and work of the laity in the missions in the world confided to or animated by the Vincentian Family. This association assists young lay men and women, single and married, who want to spend several years of their lives in a foreign mission.

In Commemoration of the
200th Birthday of Frederic Ozanam



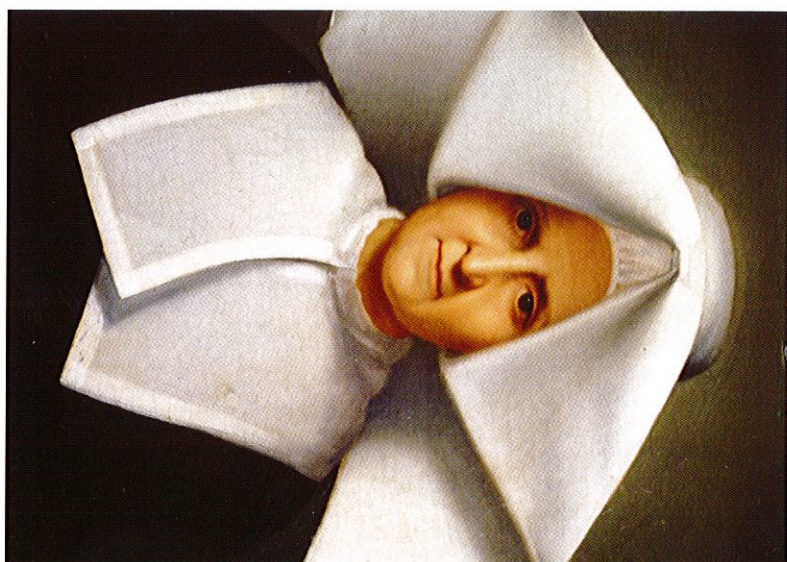
Frederic Ozanam
1813-1853

Sister Rosalie Rendu
mentored and inspired the spirit and charisma of
Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac
into the hearts of
Frederic Ozanam and the Founding Members
of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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Sister Rosalie Rendu

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Chicago: Vincentian Studies Institute (2006)

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