

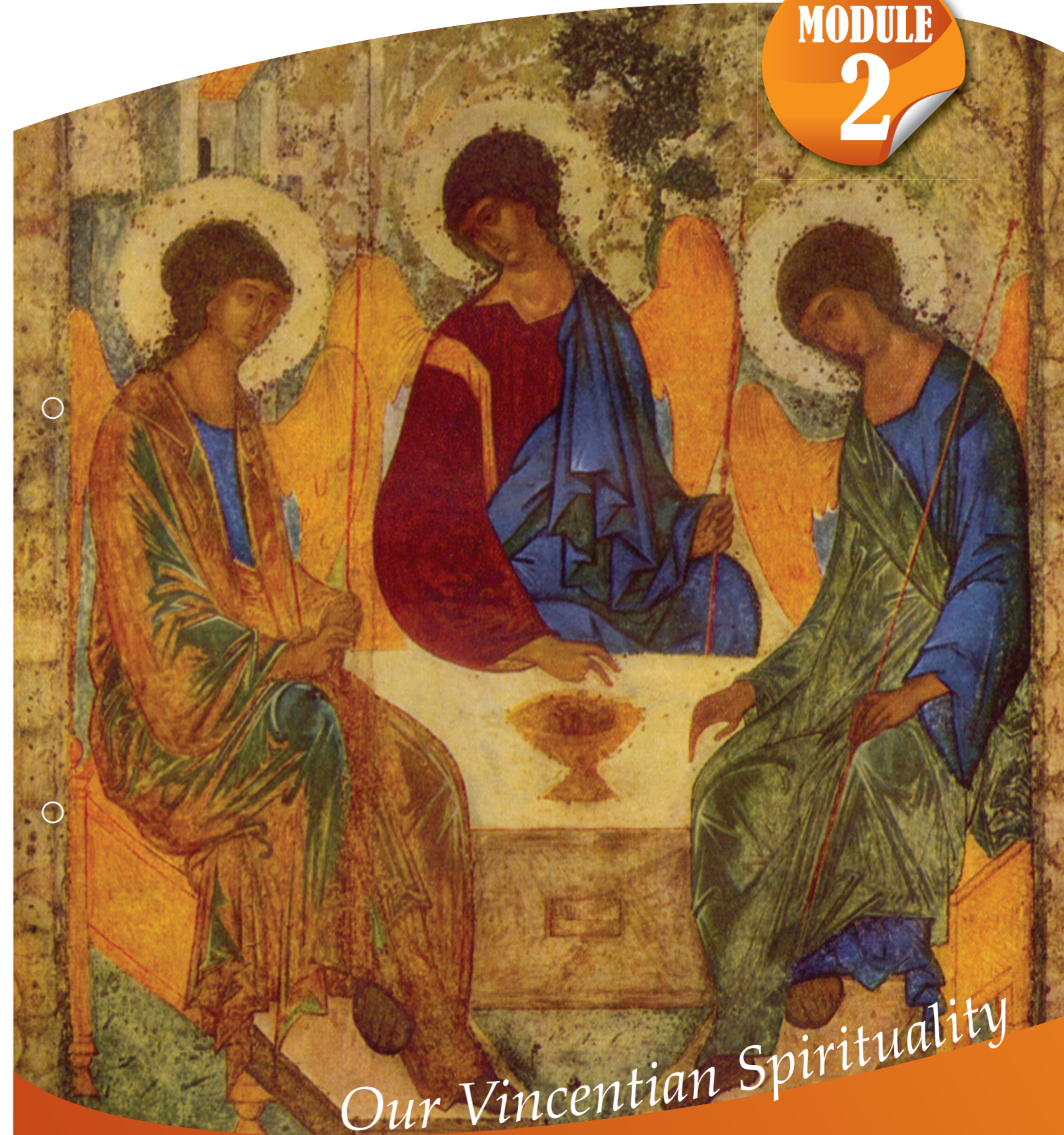


St Vincent de Paul Society

CANBERRA/GOULBURN

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MODULE
2



Our Vincentian Spirituality



Called To Love And Serve
A Formation Programme for Vincentians

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Society of St Vincent De Paul
Canberra/Goulburn

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Called to Love and Serve
A Formation Programme for Vincentians

A FORMATION PROGRAMME FOR VINCENTIANS

BACKGROUND and INSTRUCTIONS for *Called to Love and Serve*

The Modules in *Called to Love and Serve* have been developed from “Serving in Hope” the spiritual formation programme developed by Sr Keiran Kneaves and the St Vincent de Paul Society in the USA. The *Called to Love and Serve* programme is being developed so as to fit our Australian culture and experiences. It is designed for use by conference members, staff and volunteers to deepen our experience and understanding of our Vincentian heritage. The programme consists of six modules:

Module 1: Our Vincentian Call

Module 2: Our Vincentian Spirituality

Module 3: Our Vincentian Heritage

Module 4: Our Vincentian Mission

Module 5: Our Vincentian Rule

Module 6: Our Vincentian Conference

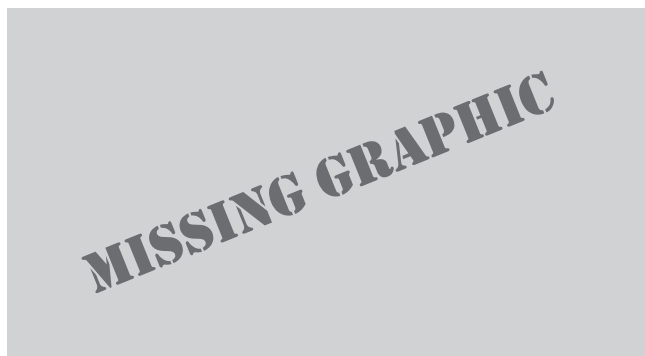
When we are reading the writings of St Vincent, Blessed Frederic and other Vincentians we need to remember that they were people of their time. As we read their writings we need to make a “horizon shift” which enables us to translate what we read into our times and to let go of the things which are time bound. This is a similar process to that used when we read scripture.

The programme has readings to share at meetings and questions for reflection. It would be good to set up a prayerful environment, perhaps with a candle, in order to facilitate reflection. You may also like to start each session with the song *Will You Come and Follow Me*, which is provided. The readings are meant to be shared reflectively and it could be helpful to share the reading among the Conference members a paragraph at a time. A good process to use in meetings is to listen to the reading and then share a word or phrase which struck you. After each person has shared then discuss the questions. Conference members may also find it helpful to reflect on the session before the meeting so that they are more ready to contribute in the meeting.

The further reading is there for your personal reflection and provides an opportunity to explore the topics more deeply.

We hope you find this programme both informative and enjoyable.

VINCENTIAN CHARISM



Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Cor 12:4-7

The word “charism” is from the Greek meaning “favour” or “free gift”. As a genuine gift, it is not earned or merited; it has to be freely given by the giver and graciously accepted by the receiver. “Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.”¹

In the course of his life and ministry, Vincent came to see that his charism – the gift given to him by the Holy Spirit to use for building up the Church – was to preach the good news to the poor and to make the love of God a reality in the lives of the poor. Vincent’s charism was captured in the grace of “finding the face of Christ in the poor.”

Jesus stands at the centre of our Vincentian charism. Jesus’ words, “You will always have the poor with you,” are the centre of the mission of Vincentians. For Vincentians the path to holiness, or wholeness, is intimately connected to the service of persons suffering poverty and disadvantage.

The fire and light of St Vincent’s and Blessed Frederic’s charism is lived out in our actions, by our person to person ministry, by our home visits, and by any other service that we offer to people in need. It is there when we show respect for the dignity and integrity of the poor as we serve in charity and justice.

God’s grace strengthens, supports and energizes the practice of our Vincentian charism which is rooted in the words of Jesus and exemplified in the lives and ministries of St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam.

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 799

The Letter from Pope John Paul II on February 14, 2001, to Mr Jose Ramon Diaz-Torremocha, then President General of the St Vincent de Paul Society states:

The St Vincent de Paul Society represents an outstanding form of Charity that is carried out on all the continents; the service of the poor which, as St Vincent loved to recall is a way of serving Christ. Through its daily commitment, **the Society of St Vincent de Paul is a constant reminder to the Church of its vocation to show Christ's preferential love for its poor.** This vocation fills the Church's life, prayer and action, inviting her to make her own the tender, compassionate look of Christ, who reminds every person of the value of their dignity and their unique place in God's heart.

The spiritual life and the apostolic works, the charism of Frederic Ozanam, (your precursor and example, whom I had the joy to beatify in Paris in 1997) were deeply marked by this contemplation of Christ's face in the poor. Such a spiritual attitude is essential for your apostolic works and for the enthusiasm of your Conferences. I therefore encourage you in your personal contact with the poor always to be witnesses to charity as well as justice, contributing to the individual's overall development, after the example of your founder, Blessed Frederic.

"Love is endlessly inventive." These words of St Vincent de Paul marvellously express the reality in the Church of how the Spirit inspires many charisms, so that Christian communities will be the sign of the infinite tenderness of our Father in Heaven. By making your specific contribution to the mission of the Church, you are helping to build a society that is founded on love and solidarity. You are realizing the deep desire that set the heart of Blessed Frederic Ozanam on fire: to embrace the whole world in a network of charity.

How have you seen and experienced the Vincentian charism being lived in the St Vincent de Paul Society?

MY REFLECTIONS

Further reading



The Spiritual Way of St Vincent de Paul²

A Doctrine in a Life

Vincent was versatile, prolific and humble to such a degree that he eludes all schemes of simplifying his life and classifying him. His originality was not in matters of doctrine, but in life and in experience. Our best chance of grasping the shape of his originality comes from the three areas in which he felt most at ease and was considered a master by his contemporaries: experience, faith and practical wisdom.

Experience

Vincent knew that great ideas, tightly reasoned arguments, beautiful thoughts at prayer and finely tuned phrases in preaching had only relative values. He was one of those who according to Pascal, “judge from the heart, because they choose to approach things from the point of view of values, and are not accustomed to look for the principles involved.” Vincent affirmed this in his own words: “We believe a person, not because he is well informed, but because we consider him good and we love him. Our Saviour himself let his love be known to those whom he wanted to have faith in him.”

The rhythm and steps of the “spiritual way” of Vincent are revealed in these favourite words of his: “It is necessary to give oneself to God...in order to serve the poor.” Action for Vincent consisted in rendering Christ present and letting him act in oneself, in making oneself present to Christ and in acting for him.

Vincent proclaimed the radical priority of action. If being comes before doing, so, living the truth comes before teaching it. Vincent told us: “We must begin by establishing the kingdom of God in ourselves and only then in others... It’s necessary to tend to our interior life. If we fail to do that, we miss everything.

Action in this sense was not merely an expenditure of physical energy or something instinctively satisfying. For Vincent it was the main and perhaps the only way to unite oneself to invisible reality, to God’s will and to God himself. “We have to sanctify our occupations, by seeking God in them and by doing them to find God in them rather than to get them done.” Only this intention of going beyond the visible in our actions gives value to actions.

² Andre Dodin, Vincent de Paul and Charity, 53-61

Faith

Christ lives on, after his death, in the Church which is his living presence in every time and place and the living expression of his Spirit. We might call it the home of Jesus. If this is so, then, just as Jesus addressed himself to the poor, and just as he lived as a poor person, and just as he is represented to us by the poor, so the Church of Jesus is centred on the poor and has to organize itself around them. Like Jesus, the Church, animated by the Spirit of God, must address itself first of all to the poor, who in the eyes of faith are the privileged assistants of God. It is they who open to us the gates of eternity. When we have the faith “to turn the medal over” as St Vincent said, we will see in poor people the living image of the life and death of Jesus.

Without doubt, this life in and through Christ remains hidden and mysterious. Without the detachment and humility which empties us of self, we cannot truly live in Christ nor can Christ act in us. It's in persons empty of self that Christ not only dwells, but acts and bears fruit.

Practical Wisdom

For Vincent practical wisdom, simplicity and purity of intention were all one reality. Vincent appealed most often to three precepts which gave a distinctive character to his life in Christ and in God. The first precept is “purity of intention and singleness of purpose.” Vincent often repeated, “It is necessary to begin with God, to look to God first, to ask for a share in God's Spirit and a share in God's view of things. It is necessary to begin with the things of God. When we take care of God's business, God will take care of ours.”

The second precept expresses and regulates our rootedness in the invisible. When do we know whether the actions which give us to God grasp us totally? The answer is: when they effectively embrace “the extremes.” Affective love must always be coupled with effective love, otherwise it is an illusion. “It is not enough for me to love God,” Vincent proclaimed, “if my neighbour does not love God.” Union with our neighbour is necessary for union with God.

The third precept deals with rules for action. We have to use time and events, to adapt ourselves more deeply to God and literally be in communion with what God does and does not will. For Vincent, then, the heart and soul of genuine action was to be “firm and invariable concerning the goal, gentle and flexible concerning the means.”

Vincent had a gift for presenting his thoughts and sentiments concretely and clearly. He moved effortlessly from reflections to stories about daily life, gracefully weaving the visible and invisible together. More than just calling Jesus to mind, Vincent through his words, introduced Jesus to people and put them in the presence of his mystery among the poor.

Jesus, Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of the Lord's favour.'

Lk 4:16-19



The Christ of Vincent de Paul

The above passage from Luke quotes the social justice mission that God required of the people of Israel, from Isaiah. Jesus then tells the people that this was being fulfilled as they listened. This was Jesus' mission statement. This mission can be summed up in the idea of the hospitality of God³, a hospitality that is specifically extended to those who are poor, outcast or suffer in anyway. This passage of scripture was one that St Vincent used for himself and for those that he inspired, particularly the priests of the Mission. Vincent's vision flows from contemplating this vision of Jesus. Vincent's vision of Christ while not exclusively Lukan, does have a strongly Lukan character.⁴

Vincent told his confreres "Let us look at the Son of God; what a heart of charity He had; what a fire of love."⁵ He also told them that the effect of charity is that "we can't see someone suffering without suffering along with him, or see someone cry without crying as well. This is an act of love, causing people to enter one another's hearts and to feel what they feel."⁶ He tells his confreres that this is the kind of compassion that we saw in Jesus.

Vincent also told the Daughters of Charity that

Sisters, you should know that there are two kinds of love: one is called affective, and the other, effective. **Affective** love proceeds from the heart. The person who loves is filled with warmth and affection, is continually aware of the presence of God, finds satisfaction in thinking about Him, and spends her life imperceptibly in such contemplation. Thanks to this love, she does, with no difficulty -and even with pleasure - the most difficult things, and is vigilant and careful concerning anything that can make her pleasing to God; lastly, she basks in this divine love and takes no pleasure in any other thoughts.

³ Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God*. 45-50

⁴ Robert Maloney, *The Way of Vincent de Paul*, 19-21

⁵ CCD Vol 12, 216

⁶ CCD Vol 12, 221

Love is **effective** when we act for God without experiencing its warmth. This love isn't perceptible to the soul; it doesn't feel it, but it still produces its effect and completes its act.⁷

He told them that in serving the poor they serve Christ himself⁸ and he often cited Matt 25:31-46 "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

You are serving Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. And that is as true as that we are here. A Sister will go ten times a day to visit the sick, and ten times a day she'll find God there.⁹

Vincent also included in his vision the universality of Christ's mission. This is a theme that is also strong in the Gospel of Luke. Simeon says that Jesus is light for the Gentiles (Lk 2:32) and John the Baptist says that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." (Lk 3:6) After the resurrection when Jesus is preparing to leave the disciples, he tells them that they must preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations (Lk 24:47).

Vincent also modelled himself on Christ who prayed "again and again, in the morning, at night, and all the important occasions in his ministry".¹⁰

Some examples of occasions that Jesus prayed are:

- At his baptism Lk 3:21
- He withdrew to pray alone Lk 5:16
- He prayed before the transfiguration Lk 9:29
- He teaches the disciples to pray Lk 11:1-4

Luke's gospel is considered the gospel of prayer. Vincent told his priests:

Give me a man of prayer, and he'll be able to do anything; he can say with the holy Apostle, 'I can do all things in Him who sustains and comforts me.' (Phil 4:13) The Congregation of the Mission will survive as long as it's faithful to the practice of meditation because meditation is like an impregnable rampart, which will protect the Missioners against all sorts of attacks;¹¹

"For Vincent de Paul particularly, the lived reality – the experience of Christ was more important than theory."¹² For Vincent, Christ was a human being who showed us how to live and how to care for others. The incarnate Jesus present in the poor people that he served was, for Vincent, the motivation for his life of service. Poor people "were the sacrament, the sign of Christ's presence".¹³ This vision of Jesus and of the poor led Vincent to call for a holistic vision of the poor person and of all their needs.

How does Vincent's vision of Christ resonate with your own?

7 CCD Vol 9, 373

8 CCD Vol 13, 151

9 CCD Vol 9, 199

10 Robert Maloney, *The way of Vincent de Paul*, 32

11 CCD Vol 11, 76

12 Kathryn LaFleur, *Christological Aspects of Vincentian Leadership: The Christ of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise*. *Vincentian Heritage* (1998) 19(1), 31

13 Kathryn LaFleur, *Christological Aspects of Vincentian Leadership*, 35

to share in, the works of the Son of God surpasses our understanding. What! To render ourselves-I dare not say it- so great, so sublime, is it to preach the Gospel to the poor, for it is above all else the office of the Son of God, and we are applied to it as instruments by which the Son of God continues to do from Heaven what he once did on earth. Great reason have we to praise God and to thank him unceasingly for this grace!

In a very direct way, Vincent understands the “office of the Son of God” as the work of evangelizing the poor. As Evangelizer of the poor, Jesus heals the sick, drives out demons, feeds the hungry, and treats the outcasts with compassion. This is the evangelizing Jesus whose life Vincentians are to imitate in all its virtues. This is the Jesus who calls missionaries to a life of self-sacrifice. In a striking section from a conference given in 1638, Vincent said:

In this vocation we are in close conformity with our Lord Jesus Christ, who, it would seem, made it his principal concern on coming into the world to help the poor and take care of them if the Lord were asked: Why did you come on earth? He would reply: ‘To help the poor.’ ‘Anything else?’ ‘No, to help the poor! Should we not be most happy to belong to this Company which has for its end the same one which induced God to become man? And if a missionary were questioned, would it not be a great honour for him to be able to say with the Lord: ‘He sent me to evangelize the poor.’

The Vincentian family today finds its foundation and animating vision from Vincent’s experience of Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the poor.

How do you find your foundation in Jesus as evangelizer of the poor?

MY REFLECTIONS

Contemplatives in Action



Come, you who are blest 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 it for me.

Matt 25:31-46

All¹⁴ genuine spirituality, both Christian and non-Christian, has a transcendent thrust. A contemporary theologian describes spirituality as “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self-absorption, but in self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.” Almost all theologians agree on the main characteristics included in this definition: progressive, consciously pursued, personal integration, through self-transcendence, within and toward a horizon of ultimate concern. In the Christian context, of course, the driving force, the horizon of ultimate concern is God’s love revealed in the person of Jesus.

...the focus of a Vincentian apostolic spirituality must be the humanity of Jesus the missionary of the Father, the Evangelizer of the poor – in his union with his Father, in his personal integrity, in his zeal for the mission that he received, in his deep human love especially for the most abandoned, in his desire to form other evangelizers, in his passion for the truth, in his ability to bridge the poles of anger and gentleness, in his hunger and thirst for justice. Jesus comes from the Father and goes to the Father. He is fully immersed in the mission he receives from the Father. He is united with the Father in contemplation, spending whole nights in prayer. He is united with his brothers and sisters, whose human flesh he shares, giving himself even to death.

...We are called to be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer. Like St. Vincent, the founders of almost all apostolic societies were incredibly active men and women. But were there any among them who were not also known by their contemporaries as persons of deep prayer?

Prayer and action go hand in hand in a healthy Vincentian spirituality. Divorced from action, prayer can turn escapist. It can lose itself in fantasy. It can create illusions of holiness. Conversely, service divorced from prayer can become shallow. It can have a “driven” quality to it. It can become an addiction, an intoxicating lure. It can so dominate a person’s psychology that his or her sense of worth depends on being busy.

¹⁴ Extracts from Robert Maloney, *Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul*, 171-176

FURTHER READING



An Extract from Vincentian Spirituality - an Encounter with Christ in the Poor Luigi Mezzadri CM (Translation by Marcelo Manimtim, C.M.)

A Spirituality of Love

St Vincent used the image of the heart very often. God is a God of the heart¹⁷, “the lover of our hearts”¹⁸.

Let’s ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, that disposes us to go as He went and as He would have gone, if His Eternal Wisdom had deemed it advisable to work for the conversion of poor nations.¹⁹

His was a spirituality of the mystery of the Love of the Son of God made man and present in every person. He was, as Giuseppe Toscani has written, a mystic who “was not taken up by a fantastic imagination of Christ,” inasmuch as he saw the poor in Christ. Medieval spirituality tended, following Plato, to disregard the body and go rather for the heights of the soul. Prayer was seen as “an elevation of the mind to God.” The spirituality of St. Vincent follows rather the impulse of the Incarnation of “approaching the least person as God did in Christ.” In the “kenosis” of humility, St. Vincent found Christ in the poor. While in the mystical tradition one speaks of “the night of the senses and the night of the spirit” as moments of emptying in order to see the face of God, St. Vincent allowed himself to be nailed to the Cross of the poor, “his burden and his sorrow.” That is the reason why the poor become as Christ his “lords and masters.”

St Louise, in her turn speaks about “pure love,” i.e., about love purified of any residue of human love. “The more difficult a place is for service, either because of poverty or for other reasons, the more we must rely on assistance from heaven when we are striving to labor for the pure love of God, which I sincerely hope is your intention”²⁰.

In the heart of the Trinity

St Vincent placed all this within the Trinity. He expressed this idea with the verb “to honor”, an expression that implies participation, filial recognition, and a sharing of Jesus’ regard for the Three Persons. St. Vincent felt loved as a son by the Father and felt invited to the table of the Trinity. Like the great mystics he felt the flow of the love of the Trinity: the Father who takes the initiative of love, the Son who receives, and the Spirit who realizes the communion and the union.

¹⁷ CCD Vol XI, 156

¹⁸ CCD Vol XI, 102; 145-147

¹⁹ Coste, XI, 291; English, XI 264

²⁰ Spritual Writings, 610

St Louise, in her turn, felt the indwelling by the Spirit, as if the Holy Spirit was infused in her:

O Eternal Light, lift my blindness! O Perfect Unity, create in me simplicity of being! Humble my heart to receive Your graces. May the power to love which You have placed in my soul no longer stop at the disorder of my self-sufficiency which, in reality, is but powerlessness and an obstacle to the pure love which I must have as a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.²¹

Incarnation

Vincentian spirituality is Christocentric. St Vincent did not propose particular devotions either for himself or for us (to saints, to places, to ideas), but he went right to the centre of everything, to Christ (“You alone Lord”). “Smitten by love for creatures”²², Christ left the throne of the Father to show God’s tenderness: “This tender love was the cause of His coming down from heaven; he saw humanity deprived of His glory; He was touched by their misfortunes”²³

Vincent tells us that he had truly found Christ. Vincent heard Christ’s voice in the suffering humanity of poor people, in the people hungering for bread and for the word. Seeing the poor, he found Christ. He saw Christ in the “other.”

For the Saint of Charity the Incarnation is the origin of a new relation between Christ and humanity; it is at the root of a new vital impulse:

Let us look upon the Son of God. What a loving heart! What a flame of love!... Does a similar love exist? Who could love with such surpassing love? Nobody but the Lord, who was so smitten by the love of His creatures as to leave the throne of his Father to come and take a body subject to weakness. And why? To establish among us by his word and example love for one another. This is the love that crucified him and accomplished the work of our redemption. Oh, Gentlemen, if we had just a little of this love, would we remain with our arms folded? Will we allow those to perish whom we might assist? Oh, no, love cannot remain idle, it urges us to save and console others²⁴.

The Saint lost no time in looking for other ways. He found Christ, he saw the poor and he sought “to build God’s Kingdom.” The phrase “the people are dying of hunger and are being condemned” was not a ploy to obtain favors from the Holy See, but an urgent scream of pain, a wound of the soul. Incarnation for Vincent was not a mystery to meditate on, but the source of action. According to Bremond, “it is not the love of others that has led him to holiness, it is rather holiness that made him really and

²¹ Spiritual Writings, 818

²² XII, 265

²³ Coste XII, 271; Leonard, 589

²⁴ XII, 264s; Leonard, 584f

Journey Together to Holiness

may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

1 Thess 3:12-13



To “journey together to holiness”²⁶ is a Vincentian value. As members of a Conference we form a faith community and are called upon to support each other in our journey of faith. The Rule²⁷ tells us that this journey to holiness is made by:

- Visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live. Vincentians assume the needs of the poor as their own.
- Attending the meeting of the Conference or Council, where shared fraternal spirituality is a source of inspiration.
- Promoting a life of prayer and reflection, both at the individual and community level, and sharing with their fellow members. Meditating on their Vincentian experiences offers them internal spiritual knowledge of themselves others and the goodness of God.

Vincentians journey together in a “community of faith,” encourage each other in a spirit of prayer and recollection. Blessed Frederic Ozanam said, “God, who draws the clouds together to scatter the lightning, also draws souls together, to radiate love.” Vincentians take with them more than the food, clothing, and financial assistance. They mutually sustain one another by their witnessing, friendship and discipleship. In their ministry to people living in poverty Vincentians are living out the mission of Jesus.

Several months before his death, Blessed Frederic told members of the Society in Livorno, Italy: “The Society has only one purpose: to sanctify its members in the exercise of charity and to help the poor in their corporal and spiritual needs.” In the mind of St. Vincent, the person who deals with holy things has to be holy.

Holiness is living in faith, hope and love, in our families, our work, and our ministry for the poor. Vincentians are called to live as the first Christians: ‘Now the whole group of believers were of one heart and soul’ (Acts 4:32).

What does holiness mean to you?

How is your Conference a community of faith?

²⁶ The Rule, p12
²⁷ The Rule, p13

Further Reading



Community Living²⁸

Be united, and God will bless you, but this union must be the love of Jesus Christ within you. Any other source of harmony, not being cemented by the blood of Jesus Christ, will not endure. It is in Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ that you must be united with one another. The spirit of Jesus Christ is a spirit of union and peace.²⁹

Jesus lived in community with his apostles. They shared their lives intimately with each other. They prayed together often. Jesus instilled in his followers the great vision that his Father had given him of a kingdom of justice, love and peace which they could begin to experience and work toward even now. He asked them to preach that kingdom to others, but first to make it real in their own lives. They shared a common purse from which they paid for food and lodging. When they returned home from preaching, they spent time together resting and enjoying each other's company.

The early Christians were so struck by this example that they idealized about what community should be like:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. (Acts 4:32)

...Below, I will briefly outline four key concepts in regard to community.

1. Community is God's gift; it is at the same time a human creation.

Community as God's Gift

...All true community finds its source in God. Jesus' union with his Father is the paradigm for the intimate bonds that link his followers together in the Spirit. It was reflection of Jesus' mission to draw all together in the father's love that led the Christian community to reflect more deeply on God's inner Trinitarian life.

Since its source is in God, all community is ultimately gift. It is possible only through God's love as it works in us through Christ:

I ask only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (Jn 17:20-21)

²⁸ Adapted from Robert Maloney, *The Way of St Vincent de Paul*, 130-134

²⁹ Louis Abelly, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God*, 126

Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts the God-giveness of community quite strikingly:

It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift of God for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden underfoot by those who have the gift every day. It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the kingdom of God and any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed. Therefore, let him who until now has had the privilege of living a common Christian life with other Christians praise God's grace from the bottom of his heart. Let him thank God on his knees and declare: It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren.³⁰

Community as Human Creation

Though St Vincent often reflected on community's roots in God, even more often he wrote and spoke about the human means for building and nourishing it. The Rules he gave to his communities, the letters he wrote, and the conferences he gave got down to very concrete norms for living together.

...So while community is God's gift, we are his instruments in creating it. Without us it cannot come into being. St Paul emphasizes the human effort that goes into building community:

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1-3)

2. True Community does not stifle diversity; on the contrary, it sees itself as enriched by the varied gifts of different members.

The New Testament abounds in imagery when it describes community. It is a body with all its varied members. It is a vine with many branches. It is a pilgrim people with diverse gifts. The images focus on unity and diversity, as in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1Cor 12:4-7)

...Diversity is not the enemy of community. It is part of its richness.

³⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 9-10

Mary in the Vincentian Tradition

(An extract from *Mary in the Vincentian Tradition* by Corpus Delgado CM)

1. Mary's life

At the time of St. Vincent and St. Louise and at the time of the apparitions to Catherine Laboure, as well as in our own time, authentic Marian spirituality must be nourished from a personal and genuine encounter with Mary in the gospel :

Finally, we wish to point out that our own time, no less than former times, is called upon to verify its knowledge of reality with the word of God, and, keeping to the matter at present under consideration, to compare its anthropological ideas and the problems springing there from with the figure of the Virgin Mary as presented by the Gospel.³¹

There are few New Testament texts concerning Mary. In the epistles, we only find one passage, which is Galatians 4:4. There is also a reference in the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 1, verse 14. There are two indications in Mark's Gospel (3:31-35 and 6:3) and two in the Gospel of John (2:1-12 and 19:26-27). The most abundant details are contained in the infancy narratives: Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2.

The original "kerygma" is centred on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, with no direct reference to Mary. As a whole, though, the New Testament recognises the role of Mary as mother and model in the history of salvation, worthy of acceptance and honour.

a) Mary in salvation history

Mary's role in salvation history can be represented using two expressions that are found in the Gospel of Luke:

- Servant of the Lord (Lk 1:38) - Mary is the instrument chosen by God to accomplish his will, remaining unconditionally faithful to his mission.
- Blessed among women (Lk 1:42) - Mary is not simply the one favoured above her contemporaries. The blessing shows participation in the messianic process and contribution to the work of salvation. This cannot be reduced to bringing the fruit of her womb into the world, but in light of events of the Old Testament, it includes liberation and all the consequences involved in being the mother of the Messiah Liberator.



³¹ Marialis Cultus 37

Mary's mission in salvation history can also be deepened from the prophecy of Simeon (Lk 2:35), at the time of finding Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:48), or the two episodes in the Gospel of John, related to "the hour" (2:1-12 and 19:26-27).

b) Mary, model for the people of God

During the public life of Jesus, the gospels present Mary to us as the Mother who became it disciple (Lk 8:19-20; 11:28). The Evangelists, especially Luke and John, present us the traits of Mary's personality as the perfect Christian and model for the entire people of God, for the Church. "All the spiritual dimensions characteristic of the mystical line of the poor of Yahweh in the Old Testament that would subsequently be ratified by the Beatitudes in the Gospel, are focused on Man, and make up her spiritual portrait: poverty (Lk 1:48), service (Lk 1:38, 48; in 2:5), fear of God (Lk 1:29, 50), awareness of her own fragility (Lk 1:52), sense of justice (Lk 1:35), solidarity with the people of God (Lk 1:52-55), joy (Lk 1:28, 47), openness and availability to the design of God (Lk 1:35, 51), trust in the promises of a faithful and merciful God (Lk 2:19, 51). All these attitudes show the depth of Mary's faith in harmony with Old Testament biblical devotion. The Magnificat, uniting historical and biblical points, is the song of the poor, true and holy people Israel, inheritor of the messianic blessings. It presents Man, as the daughter of Sion, the "little remnant" of the community of Israel, Who has achieved perfection, ready to welcome messianic joy and to bring about the salvific presence of God to Humanity."

c) Mary, worthy of honour

The Gospel of Luke invites Christians to honor Mary: "Henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (1:48); to join with Israel in calling her "blessed" (1:42), recognizing God's action in her, chosen to participate in a fundamental way in God's plan of salvation.

d) Mary, accepted as mother

The Gospel of John invites all who follow Jesus to receive Mary as Mother: "From this time forward, the disciple received her into his home" (19:27). As for Jesus' disciple, the reception of his Mother, in faith, was among all the goods and all things that come from being in communion with Christ."

As we see, the New Testament gives us the essential elements to fashion Marian spirituality: "The reading of Divine Scriptures, carried out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with the discoveries of the human sciences and the different situations in the world today being taken into account, will help us to see how Mary can be considered a mirror of the expectations of the men and women of our time."

...Vincent focused his attention **on three events**, three mysteries in Mary's life: the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation and the Visitation.

“These three mysteries constitute the support, letter and spirit of the fundamental steps of her progression toward Christ and her life with God.” Vincent de Paul’s contemplation of Mary was situated within the centre of the spiritual universe: given to God to serve God in the poor.

a) The Immaculate Conception

Within the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, St. Vincent saw the humble and chaste Virgin, **emptied of herself so as to welcome God** and allow herself to be filled with God. These are fundamental dispositions for those desiring to empty themselves and clothe themselves in the spirit of Jesus Christ:

(God) foresaw then that, since His Son had to take human flesh through a woman, it was proper that He take it from a woman worthy of receiving Him, a woman outstanding in grace, free from sin, filled with piety and far removed from any harmful affections. Already, God paraded before His eyes all the women who might be suitable and found none of them worthy of this important piece of work except the most pure and most immaculate Virgin Mary. That is why, from all eternity, God decided to prepare this dwelling place, to adorn her with rarer and more worthy gifts than any other creature, so that she would be a temple of the Divinity, a palace worthy of her Son. If the eternal foresight searched so far to discover this repository for His Son and, once he had found her, adorned her with all the graces that could embellish a created being, as God declared through the angel sent as an ambassador, how much more should we foresee the day and the dispositions required for receiving him.³²

Welcoming God, being filled with God, clothing oneself with Christ, self-emptying, as did the Immaculate one that is the first event that Vincent de Paul stressed regarding the Virgin Mary.

b) The Annunciation

Humility prepared and sustained the uttering to God. Knowing God and recognising God as the only Lord, **knowing one’s smallness before God, giving oneself to God** to serve one’s neighbour, in order to accomplish God’s work - that is the second movement that Vincent discovered in Mary within the Annunciation:

We must recognise the essence and existence of God and have some knowledge of His perfections before offering sacrifices to Him. That is natural for, I ask you, to whom do you offer gifts? To the great, to princes and Kings. It is to them you render homage. This is so true that God observed this order in the Incarnation. When the angel went to

³² CCD 13, 35

salute the Blessed Virgin, he began by acknowledging that she was replenished with the graces of Heaven: Ave, gratia plena: you are full of grace, You are filled with God's favour. Ave gratia plena. He recognised the fact then, and praised her as being full of grace. And then what did he do? He made her the beautiful gift of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The Holy, Spirit, within her virginal womb formed a body. God created a soul, united it to this body. And immediately the Word united Himself to this soul and body by a wonderful union. And, in this manner, the Holy Spirit wrought the ineffable mystery of the Incantation. Praise preceded sacrifice.³³

Like Mary, in the Annunciation, we must give ourselves to God to accomplish his work.

It is said then: we must seek the Kingdom of God. We must seek. This is but one word. Yet it seems to me to say much. It means that we should place ourselves in such a state as always to aspire after what has been recommended to us, to labour unceasingly for the Kingdom of God and not remain in a languishing and inactive state... Seek: Seek, this implies care; this implies action.³⁴

c) The Visitation

Emptied of ourselves and given to God, our life is at the service of the poor: "You are givers to God for the service of the Poor" St. Vincent discovered this third movement of the spiritual journey in Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. He suggested Mary's promptness, as exemplified within the Visitation, as a model of service to the poor: "They shall honour the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin who went to visit her cousin cheerfully and promptly." Thus, he determined specific applications for the life of the Daughter of Charity:

The Company of the Daughters of Charity is established to love God, to serve and honour Our Lord, their Patron, and the Blessed Virgin. And how will you honour him? Your rule tells you, for it goes on to inform you of God's design in establishing your Company to serve the sick poor corporally, by supplying them with all they need, and spiritually, by taking care that they live and die in a holy state.³⁵

Whatever road we take, Monsieur Vincent, without fail, guides us towards the poor. Our life, like Mary's, is totally given to God for the service of the poor.

How do you experience Marian Spirituality in your life as a Vincentian?

³³ COSTE, Conferences to CMs, p. 698

³⁴ COSTE, Conferences to CMs, p. 472

³⁵ COSTE, Conferences to DCs, p. 17

FURTHER READING

Five Faces of Mary by Robert Maloney CM

We know very little about the Virgin Mary, though the little we know is tantalizing. She played, of course, a crucial role in the story of Jesus and has had an enormous influence in the history of Christianity. The major creeds profess that Jesus was “conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.”³⁶ Mary’s impact on Christian piety has been powerful. She is the first among the saints to whom we unite our voices in the prayers of praise and petition. Is there any prayer that has been said more frequently than the Hail Mary?

On the affective side, Mary has come to symbolize maternal listening for countless people, becoming for them, as a modern writer puts it, “an icon of the tenderness of God.”³⁷ On the level of moral response, Christians, reflecting on the New Testament, regard Mary as the ideal disciples. In the words of St Vincent, “she, more than any other believer penetrated the meaning of the gospels and lived out their teaching.”³⁸

Her influence has deeply affected art, music, and poetry. We need only recall some of the striking paintings of the Virgin Mary, like the Madonnas of Botticelli, of Lippo Lippi, of Murillo. And of course we have all often heard wonderful Ave Marias like those of Schubert and Gounod, as well as countless other Marian hymns. Dante, Shakespeare and Peguy all wrote beautiful poetic tributes to the Virgin Mary.

But perhaps nowhere has Mary flourished so much as in the popular imagination. A contemporary author speaks of the thousand faces of the Virgin Mary.³⁹ In this chapter I will present just five of these faces. I encourage the reader not just to reflect on what I write about each of them, but also to meditate on the faces themselves. Each of these faces has been portrayed beautifully in Marian masterpieces of art and music.

1. Miriam of Nazareth

This is the Mary of history of whom we know so tantalizingly little. Let me try to express the little we can say historically of the Virgin Mary.

Originally I had chosen, to represent Miriam of Nazareth, the lovely “Virgin and Child” of Murillo (1617-1682) that you will find at the end of this chapter. But beautiful as it is and much as I like it, I recognise that its Virgin is surely more European than the historical Miriam of Nazareth. So I selected this much less known painting by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859 -1937). Though we do not know what Miriam of Nazareth looked like, Tanner’s painting captures the humility of her person and her circumstances, something which is central in the biblical texts that describe her.



³⁶ SV XIII, 419

³⁷ Maria Chiara Stucchi, “La Bellezza e la Tenerezza di Maria in ‘Vita Consecrata,’” *Religious in Italia* (#300; May-June 1997) 81-88

³⁸ CCD XII, 129

³⁹ George Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville: Minnesota, 1996). Cf also Jarostav Pelkan, *Mary through the Centuries* (New Haven: Connecticut, 1996)

Mary was actually called Miriam, after the sister of Moses. She was born probably in Nazareth, a small village of about 1600 people, almost all of whom were Jews. If she was not born there, she at least lived much of her life there; her son came to be called ‘the Nazarene,’ as stated in the inscription placed above his head on the cross. Her birth took place most likely between 20 and 15 BC. She, Joseph, and Jesus lived in territory occupied by a foreign power, the Romans, whom many Jews hated. The atmosphere was often tense.

Her husband, Joseph, and her son, Jesus, were woodworkers.⁴⁰ The language that she and they spoke at home was Aramaic, though perhaps she also understood a little Hebrew from hearing it read in the local synagogue services. She may also have understood some Greek phrases; they would have been helpful in the woodworking business since at that time many of the merchants in that area of the Roman Empire were Greek-speaking.

Like mothers of that and many other eras, she would have breastfed her child, cooked meals regularly, and done lots of housecleaning and washing. She would have carried water home from nearby wells or streams. Of course Mary too, like most mothers, would have taught her son to walk, to pray, and to do many other things.

Women in Palestine in that period were rarely given the opportunity to study, so it is likely that Mary did not know how to read or write. Her learning came through family traditions she imbibed at home from the reading of the Scriptures, along with homilies, that she had heard in the synagogue.

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were poor, but, since Joseph had a trade, they were probably no poorer than most Galileans of their time.

Joseph seems to have died before Jesus’ public ministry began. Mary, herself, however, was alive throughout that ministry.⁴¹ Her separation from Jesus as he began his ministry was probably painful for her. In a passage that has sometimes embarrassed Mariologists, Mark tells us that Jesus’ family thought him mad (Mk 3:21), but what mother, upon seeing her son challenge Roman authority rather dauntlessly (this often meant death!), might not have said to him: “Are you crazy?” We know that she was present at his crucifixion. At the time she would probably have been about 50 years of age herself. She lived on at least into the early days of the Church.⁴²

What does this first face say to us? It says that Mary was rooted in real life. She was one of us. Like most women of her time, she was hard working, had little formal education, and was rather poor. She was a deeply believing Jew whose faith was nourished by the word of God which she heard in the synagogue. She loved and nourished her child and husband. She kept house. She probably helped in the carpenter shop from time to time. She may well have experienced some confusion when her son left the shop and set out on an extraordinary ministry. She must have known

⁴⁰ Cf Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55

⁴¹ Mk 3:31; Jn 2:1-12

⁴² Jn 19:25; Acts 1:14

joy at his successes and she certainly felt anguishing sorrow when he was condemned as a criminal and put to death. All of us can identify with that kind of life. It was not easy, nor was it very glorious. Yet it had a noble beauty about it.⁴³ Mary was so real that people of every age have felt that she understands their joys, their needs, their sorrows.

2. The Listening Disciple

While the modern world is very curious about history, the New Testament writers were much more interested in meaning.

The Scriptures often give just a few basic historical facts about a person – not enough to satisfy our modern curiosity – and then focus on the meaning of that person’s life for us who are believers. For the Scriptures, Mary is the ideal disciple, the model listener. She hears God’s word and acts upon it. This theme is most explicit in Luke’s gospel. In Luke’s first two chapters Mary is evangelized by Gabriel, by Elizabeth, by the shepherds, by Simeon, by Anna, and by Jesus himself. All of them proclaim the good news of God’s presence to her and sing in praise of God’s goodness. Luke tells us that Mary kept all these things in her heart, turning them over and over again.⁴⁴

Mary’s response to what she hears from Gabriel is typical: “Be it done unto me according to your word.”⁴⁵

Luke sums it all up in this lovely little story⁴⁶

His mother and brothers came to be with him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. He was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.” He told them in reply, “My mother and my brothers are those who listen to the word of God and act upon it.”

The theme, Mary, as the Listening Disciple, has often been overshadowed by more exalted Marian titles. But it is an extremely important one. In fact, it lies at the core of New Testament spirituality : all disciples, like Mary, are called to listen to the word of God attentively and act upon it.

What can we learn from this second Marian face? We can learn to listen. There is almost nothing more important that Mary can teach us. At root, being a disciple means being a hearer of the word. The whole of the Christian life can be summed up in the Lucan phrase that describes Mary so aptly: “She listened to the word of God and acted on it.”

3. The Mother of God

Mariology has known its ups and downs. Mark’s gospel and some of the early Fathers of the Church show little interest in it. Luke and John, on the other hand emphasize the role that Mary played in the history of salvation. But Mariology took a striking leap when, in the year 431 at the



⁴³ For historical data about Mary, cf John P Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (New York: 1991) esp 253FF; also Raymond

⁴⁴ Lk 2:19; 2:51

⁴⁵ Lk 1:38

⁴⁶ Lk 8:19-21

Council of Ephesus, Mary was declared “Mother of God.” This is surely the most glorious of the Marian titles, but also one of the most paradoxical: Mary is virgin and mother at the same time; not only is she mother of a helpless child, she is mother of the uncreated God.

But this is not simply a Marian title; rather, it was intended as a reaffirmation of Jesus’ divinity. This title was a reaction to the Arians of the 4th and 5th centuries who denied the divinity of Christ. The Church responded by stating clearly: Mary is not just someone who gave birth to a deeply spiritual, human person, Jesus; rather the Council of Ephesus affirmed: Mary gave birth to the one who is God in the flesh. We repeat this title again and again in the Hail Mary: “Holy Mary, Mother of God.” The icons of the Eastern Church, where this title was born and where it was proclaimed at Ephesus, depict Mary with the divine child in her womb or at her side blessing the world. In mosaics, we often see her beside the Risen Lord in glory.

Important as this title is, it is easy to misunderstand. It has known a long history of controversy. In this ecumenical age, it is essential to recall that to proclaim Mary as mother of God is to profess our faith in the divinity of Jesus. In that sense, this Mariological title is profoundly Christological.

What can we learn from this third face of Mary? We can learn that her role was singular. She was the Ark of the Covenant, so to speak, the dwelling place of God. Her relationship with the person of Jesus is unrepeatable; she was his mother. He is flesh of her flesh. Yet the poor have always noted, as Mary herself sings in Luke’s gospel, that God chose her from among them.⁴⁷ The New Testament and the long tradition of the Church teach us, moreover, that Mary’s unique relationship with god, in her son, flows not from her physical relationship with him, but from first conceiving him in faith. Chosen among the poor, Mary’s intimate union with God came from her saying: “Be it done to me according to your word.” For the poor, she is a sign of hope. In her they see the lowly raised up, and they are confident that, with her help, their sorrows can be turned to joy and even death can give way to life with the Risen Lord.

4. Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.



You may ask why I have leaped 14 centuries from the Council of Ephesus in 431 to an apparition at Rue du Bac in Paris in 1830. I chose the apparition to St Catherine Laboure for two reasons: first, it has a very prominent place in the heritage of our Vincentian Family; secondly, it is also representative of other apparitions, of which there have been many over the course of history.

One must, of course, be very cautious about apparitions. In France alone, Mary was alleged to have appeared in at least 21 locations between 1803 and 1899; many of these appearances have been long forgotten. Between 1928 and 1971, there were 210 claims of apparitions at various places throughout the world. The Church’s experience has taught us to be very slow about paying undue attention to such events. But, some like the

⁴⁷ LK 1:46-55

devotions centred at Rue du Bac, have received a form of official approval and encouragement.

With all apparitions, believers should be very aware of two basic principles:

1. Only the Scriptures, as interpreted in and by the Church are God's public revelation; apparitions do not add new revelation necessary for our salvation. The heart of Christian faith always lies in listening to the word of God, as revealed in the Scriptures, and acting on it, as did the Virgin Mary.
2. Apparitions, the messages they bear and prayers evoked by them belong to the realm of private devotion. They are a way of concretizing and expressing our faith. As private devotion, the more closely related they are to the central mysteries of our faith, the more helpful they are.

Apparitions often state, in popular form, a message that concretizes Christian faith or morals as rooted in the Scriptures. They say dramatically: be converted, seek peace, contemplate the suffering love of Jesus, pray faithfully, and mightily, imitate Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

Of course, all those messages are already stated clearly in the Scriptures. In that sense, apparitions are not necessary for our salvation. No one is bound in faith to believe in them. Their popularity waxes and wanes. But they occur repeatedly because the popular imagination needs to be captured and reminded.

St Catherine's visions in 1830 gave popular expression and powerful impetus to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception which Pius IX proclaimed two decades later in 1854. Surely without Catherine Laboure Christians throughout the world would never have prayed so often: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Rue du Bac continues to draw believers, millions of them each year in fact, to reflect on the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, on her graced union with the Lord, and to ask Mary, the first among the saints, to pray with us in our need.

The medal, however, has always had a special appeal for the poor, the humble. More than one billion medals were made even in St. Catherine's lifetime, spreading to the remotest parts corners of the world. The people themselves gave it the name "Miraculous Medal." Born in an era of rationalism, the medal proclaimed the need for symbols to express faith, love, commitment. Struck in an age that sought scientific explanations for everything, the medal proclaimed God's provident loving care for all human persons.⁴⁸ The symbols on the medal were, in fact, a graphic catechesis about God's love and concern for his people.

What does this fourth Marian face teach us? It reminds us that Mary is free from sin, the most perfectly redeemed of God's creatures. She is first among the saints. And it encourages us, within the communion of saints to unite our prayer with hers in our need, trusting deeply in God's provident

48 John Prager, *Maria de Los Pobres, una relectura de la Medalla Milagrosa desde la periferia*. "CLAPVI XXII, No.96 (July-December 1997) 171-179

love for us. In a special way, it is a symbol for the poor, evoking their trust that God listens, through Mary, even if the world does not listen.⁴⁹

5. The Black Madonna and the Multi-Cultural Mary.



The reader might ask why there are “a thousand faces” of Mary.

The reason is simple. We talk again and again today about inculturation. It has been the theme of Church documents and of innumerable meetings. Christian faith is very malleable and the Christian imagination is very creative. Consequently, Marian devotion has been inculturated countless times in countless cultures. Recently I saw a painting of an Indonesian Virgin Mary at our seminary in Java. I have seen Chinese Virgins, Filipino Virgins, and African Virgins. All of us have seen Our Lady of Guadalupe and perhaps many other Latin American Virgins.

There is something wonderfully paradoxical about all of this. Intellectually, we know that Mary was a poor Jewish woman. She was not black, nor did she have Chinese or Indian features. We know too, of course, that she did not wear the wonderful European robes in which Murillo and Lippo Lippi painted her. Her features were probably very much like those of Jewish or Palestinian women living in that area today; her clothes were those of the poor. We know all of that with our heads. But popular imagination has always wanted to bring Mary closer and closer to us, and so it has shaped her to the features of the believing community. She is our mother, so the black have loved to see her black; the Indian has loved to see her Indian; the European, European; the Chinese, Chinese; the Mexican, Mexican. In fact, Octavio Paz once stated: “Our Lady of Guadalupe has been a sign in which each epoch and each Mexican has read his destiny.”⁵⁰ Mexicans call her “la Morenita,” a term of endearment for the dark Virgin whom they love so much.⁵¹

The “multi-cultural Mary” receives special inspiration from the words of the bride in the Song of Songs: “I am black and beautiful.”⁵² This theme flourished in Northern Africa and Ethiopia, as well as in Asia Minor; there are black Madonnas too in France, in Brazil, and in many other countries. The most famous “Black Madonna,” the celebrated icon of Jasna Gora in Czestochowa has become a central symbol in Polish popular devotion.



Ironically, the blackened face of the Virgin in that icon was the result of smoke, not of skin colour, but its darkness has symbolized for Poles suffering that Mary bore heroically, hoping against hope.

Because of Mary’s universal appeal, she has become a powerful force for liturgical and artistic inculturation, taking on local dress and skin-colour almost effortlessly.

What can we learn from this fifth face of the Virgin Mary? We can learn to be creative and sensitive to cultural differences. “The poor have the true religion,” St Vincent tells us.⁵³ Their religious forms are much less heady than those of us who have studied theology. Of course, popular

49 Cf Rene Laurentin, *Vie de Catherine Laboure* (Desclee de Brouwer: Paris, 1980) and *catherine Labouere*
50 Octavio Paz, as quoted in Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of the Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), xix
51 V. Elizondo, *La Morenita: Evangelizadora de las Americas* (St Louis: Ligouri, 1981)
52 Sg 1:5
53 SV XI, 201

Models of Holiness

Apart from Saints Vincent and Louise, and Blessed Frederic and Rosalie, there are a number of Saints and Blesseds who were members of the Society and even more who were part of the broader Vincentian family. Choose one of the many examples of holiness to reflect on.

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla (1922-1962) Feast 28th April



Gianna began primary school in 1928 and secondary school in 1933. She had little interest in academics, preferring art, music and painting. With a love for the outdoors and a lively family life, she was a happy, smiling girl, though quiet. Gianna visited the Blessed Sacrament daily and always carried a rosary with her.

In 1937, the Beretta family moved so the older children could attend the University of Genoa. Gianna became an active member of Catholic Action in her parish. In 1942, both parents died. That same year, Gianna was admitted to the School of Medicine at the University of Milan. In her fourth year, she transferred to the University of Pavia, where she obtained her degree in medicine and surgery in March 1950.

During medical school, Gianna became an active member of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Thinking that she might have a vocation to religious life, she made a pilgrimage to Lourdes, seeking discernment. Upon her return, she met and fell in love with Pietro Molla. Taking this as an answer to her prayers, she married Pietro on September 24, 1955; her brother Giuseppe, a priest, witnessed the marriage.

Gianna successfully blended her profession, ministry, and family life. With her brother Ferdinando, also a physician, she opened a clinic in a small town of two thousand people several miles from the family home. She was especially generous to the poor, providing medicine and money for those in need.

Gianna and Pietro had three children. Each pregnancy was a risk because of her fragile health. Their son, Pierluigi, was born in 1956, Maria Zita in 1957, and Laura Enrica Maria in 1959. After a number of miscarriages, Gianna again became pregnant. Toward the end of the second month of this pregnancy, she began to experience pain. Her doctor diagnosed a fibrous tumour in the ovary. Gianna knew the risk she was running, but kept the suffering to herself.

On the way to the hospital on April 20, 1962, Gianna told her husband, Pietro: "If they should ask which of the two lives they should save, do not hesitate – first, the life of the child." On the 21st of April, Gianna Emanuela was delivered by Caesarean section. Septic peritonitis set in and Gianna suffered greatly, but she refused powerful drugs and insisted on dying at home. On April 29th, she passed away.

For three days, an endless procession of admirers passed her coffin. People spoke of her sacrifices and great compassion. The Archbishop of

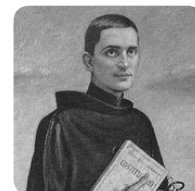
Milan opened the cause for her beatification in 1972 and Pope John Paul II beatified her on the 24th of April, 1994 in the presence of her husband and four children. At the ceremony, her son, Pierluigi, said:

“My mother knew how to live her earthly, daily existence with simplicity, balance, and constant service, all in a beautiful harmony, first as a young student and professional person, as a woman, then as wife and mother. Her generous commitment to and involvement in Catholic Action and the St Vincent de Paul Society, along with her *joie de vivre*, was crowned with her love of piano, painting, tennis, mountain climbing, skiing, the symphony, theatre and travelling.”

St Gianna was canonized by Pope John Paul II on the 16th of May, 2004. Called a “mother-martyr for the love of God and in obedience to his commandments,” Gianna has much to teach Vincentians.

St Richard Pampuri (1897- 1930) Feast 1st of May

Richard Pampuri stands as a symbol of generosity of heart. He was born Erminio Flippo Pampuri in Trivolizi, Italy on the 2nd of August, 1897, the tenth child of well-to-do and pious family. His mother died when he was three, and Richard was sent to Torino to live with his grandfather and an aunt. His uncle, Carlo, a lover of the medical profession, instilled in him a deep love of serving the sick.



In 1907, Richard’s father was killed in an accident. Richard survived the tragedy through the love and kindness of his family. Having seriously considered the foreign missions, he decided on medical school instead. His sister entered the convent, and he became a Franciscan tertiary.

Richard took part in Catholic associations when anticlericalism was rampant in Italy. Drafted into the military, he served in the medical corps in World War I and was decorated for bravery. In 1918, Richard returned to his studies, graduating in medicine and surgery on the 6th of July, 1921. He completed his internship the next year and in 1923 registered at Pavia University as a general practitioner and surgeon.

As a student, Richard became very active in the St Vincent de Paul Society and other service organisations. He wrote to his sister, the religious: “Pray that pride, selfishness, and any other evil passion will not prevent me from always seeing the suffering of Christ in my patients, treating him and comforting him.” This is certainly the core of Vincentian spirituality!

Richard moved to Milan and founded the “Band of Pius X,” a group dedicated to medical care for the poor. He also raised funds to provide food and clothing for the needy. Discerning a vocation to the religious life, he joined the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God. On the 28th of October, 1928, Richard took vows in the community and was assigned to a clinic in Brescia, where he continued to serve the poor. The severe lung disease that he suffered from worsened. Moved to his community’s hospital in Milan, he developed pneumonia and prophesied when he would die: on 1st May, 1930 at the age of 33.

Many healings took place at his tomb and his cause for canonization proceeded quickly. Richard was beatified in 1981, and Pope John Paul II canonised him on the 1st of November, 1989, observing of Richards that he was “close to our times, but even closer to our problems and our sensibilities.” In Richard, Vincentians have another saint to act as intercessor, another young person of great example in witnessing love for the poor.

Blessed Francis Faa di Bruno (1825 -1888) Feast: 27th of March



Francis was born in Alessandria, Italy on the 29th of March 1825, the youngest of twelve children. At the age of sixteen he enlisted in the military of Piedmont and reached the rank of captain. Assigned to Paris in 1849, Francis earned a doctorate in mathematics and astronomy at the Sorbonne. There he joined the St Vincent de Paul Society and became an active member. Since Blessed Frederic Ozanam taught at the Sorbonne until April 1852, Francis may actually have known him.

Resigning his military commission to pursue his academic interests, Francis became one of the leading mathematicians and astronomers of his time. He moved to Italy to assume a professorship at the University of Turin. Francis wrote more than forty articles for American and European publications. His writings are included in the Catalogue of Scientific Papers of the Royal Society in London. Francis also wrote ascetical studies and sacred melodies and invented scientific apparatuses.

In Turin, Francis, a dedicated lay person, focused on charitable works and showed special concern for the well-being and safety of women and young girls, establishing schools, retirement homes, and other charitable institutions. In 1868, he founded the Sisters of Our Lady of Suffrage and the Society of St Zita to help in his ministry. The Society of St Zita especially addressed the needs of domestic works. Francis studied for the priesthood in Turin and was ordained in 1876 at the age of fifty-one. He died in Turin on the 27th of March, 1888.

Pope John Paul II beatified Francis on September 25, 1988, calling him “a prophet in the midst of the people of God’ and “a giant of faith and charity,” and praising him for knowing how “to find positive responses to the needs of his time.” Blessed Francis gives Vincentians much to think about in their ministry.

Blessed Contardo Ferrini (1859-1902) Feast: 27th of October



Contardo Ferrini was born on 5 April 1859 in Milan to Rinaldo Ferrini and Luigia Buccellati. He was baptized at the font where Frédéric Ozanam, also a native of Milan, had been baptized 46 years before. After receiving his First Communion at age 12, he joined a Blessed Sacrament Confraternity.

Contardo’s father, a professor of mathematics and science, taught his son at an early age. By the time he was a young man, he spoke several

languages. His apparent love for his faith caused friends to call him by the nickname St. Aloysius (St. Aloysius Gonzaga). He entered University of Pavia at age 17 and, two years later, was appointed Dean of Students. At age 21 he became a doctor of the law at the University. His doctoral thesis, which related penal law to Homeric poetry, was the basis of his being awarded a scholarship to the university in Berlin, where he specialized in Roman-Byzantine law, an field in which he became internationally recognized as expert.

During Contardo's stay in Berlin, he wrote of his excitement at receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time in a foreign country. The experience brought home to him, he wrote, the universality of the Church.

Upon his return to Italy, he was a lecturer in universities at Messina, Modena, and Pavia. He received his first professorship at age 26. Contardo attempted to discern a vocation as a secular priest, a religious, or as a married person. Ultimately, he remained an unmarried layperson. He vowed himself to God, became a member of the Third Order of St. Francis in 1886, and was a member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, to which he had been introduced by his father, a member of a Conference.

As a faculty member at University of Pavia, he was considered expert in Roman Law. Over the course of his career he published books, articles and reviews. He taught for a time at the University of Paris. He became a canon lawyer in addition to being a civil lawyer. Mountaineering was an avocation.

An anecdote, unsourced, about Contardo is that he was asked to attend a dinner party and, once there, found it tedious. His resort was to invite all the guests to join him in praying the Rosary.

In 1900, Contardo developed a heart lesion. In Autumn, 1902 he went to his country home in Suna in order to rest. There he became ill with typhus. He died at age 43 on 17 October 1902. Residents of Suna immediately declared him a saint. His fellow faculty members at the University of Pavia wrote letters in which he was described as a saint. In 1909 Pope Pius X appointed Cardinal Ferrari to open a cause. Contardo was declared Venerable by Pope Pius XI and he was beatified by Pope Pius XII on 13 April 1947. His body is venerated in a chapel of Milan's Catholic University. He is a patron of universities.

Quotations

"Our life must reach out towards the Infinite, and from that source we must draw whatever we can expect of merit and dignity."

"If on any particular day we do nothing more than give a little joy to a neighbor, that day will not be wasted. For we have succeeded in giving comfort to an immortal soul."

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925) Feast: 4th of July

Pier Giorgio Frassati was born in Turin, Italy on Holy Saturday, 6 April 1901, to Alfredo Frassati and Adelaide Ametis. In 1895 at age 36, Alfredo Frassati founded the Italian newspaper, *La Stampa*. Adelaide Ametis was a well-known painter.

According to the biography written by his sister, Luciana Frassati, as a child Pier Giorgio once answered the door of the family home to find a mother begging; her son, shoeless, was with her. Pier Giorgio gave the boy his own shoes.

In 1918 Pier Giorgio joined the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. By that time, he had decided to study to become a mining engineer in order, in his words, "to serve Christ better among the miners."

At graduation from school, his father presented him with a choice of money or a car. Pier Giorgio chose money and then distributed the gift to the poor. In other acts of charity, for an old woman evicted from a tenement he found a place to stay, he provided a bed for a tuberculosis sufferer, and he supported three children of a widow who was ill. These things and others became known to his sister because he kept a detailed record of his funds and, on his deathbed, gave instructions to her about how to continue caring for those who depended on his help.

Pier Giorgio was an avid mountain climber and, like other offspring of the well-to-do in Turin, he frequented theater and museums. He could quote passages of Dante.

In 1922 he became a member of the Third Order of the Dominicans taking as his name Girolamo, the Dominican preacher and reformer. Along with his own direct service to the poor, he was active in causes for political reform. He said, "Charity is not enough: we need social reform." To this end, he helped to establish the Catholic daily newspaper *Momento*, which was based on *Rerum Novarum*, the encyclical in which St Leo XIII articulated principles of social and economic justice.

In late June, 1925, Pier Giorgio became acutely ill with poliomyelitis. In addition to instructions he gave his sister as he lay dying, he also wrote a note to a Saint Vincent de Paul Society friend regarding their Friday visits. He died on 4th of July, 1925 at the age of 24. Thousands of residents of Turin, knowing of his seven years of service to the poor, stood in the streets to pay respects as the cortege passed. These were the people who petitioned for his canonization; a cause was opened in 1932 and he was beatified by John Paul II on May 20, 1990.

Blessed Ceferino Gimenez Malla (1861-1936)

Feast: 2nd of August

Ceferino Giménez Malla (1861-1936; variously spelled Zefferino Jimenez Malla), popularly “El Pelé” (“the Strong One” or “the Brave One”) was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 4 May 1997. A member of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, he was martyred on 9 August 1936 in Spain.

El Pelé was born to Juan Jiménez and Josefa Malla, a Catholic Gypsy family. Sources differ about the place and date of his birth: in 1861 or 1865 and in Benavente de Segria, Lérida or in Alcolea de Cinca near Barbastro in Huesca/ Aragon. The family supported itself by basket-making. He was baptized at Fraga.

Ceferino’s father chose his son’s wife, in accordance with Roma tradition. Following his marriage in a traditional Roma ceremony to Teresa Castro, Ceferino worked as an animal trader, reputedly honest and also successful at resolving problems among Kalòs (Spanish nomads) and between Kalòs (Spanish nomads) and others. In 1912 Ceferino and Teresa’s marriage was blessed in church. The couple did not have children, but after Ceferino’s father abandoned the family, they cared for Ceferino’s younger brothers and sisters and later reared a niece.

Although Ceferino, like many Roma of his age, never learned to read or write, he gathered children informally to teach them Bible stories and basic prayers. He became a Third Order Franciscan in 1926 and from 1931 regularly attended Nocturnal Eucharistic Devotion.

After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936, Ceferino saw a priest being arrested and spoke up on the priest’s behalf. The soldiers turned on him, found a rosary and a pocket knife in his possession, and imprisoned him at a local monastery, which had been taken over for use as a prison. There he was kept with 350 others. An anarchist who knew him told him that surrendering his rosary would almost certainly result in his being freed; he refused and, according to witnesses, prayed harder.

On August 9 Ceferino and others were taken by truck to a cemetery. The driver later said that throughout the journey Ceferino continually called out, “Long live Jesus the King!” Ceferino, still holding his rosary, and the others were shot and their bodies placed in a common grave. His body has never been recovered.

Of the approximately 3,000 who attended the beatification ceremony in Rome, some had traveled from as far away as Slovakia and Brazil.

Blessed Giuseppe Toniolo (1845 -1918)

Giuseppe Toniolo was the first of four children born in the town of Treviso, Italy, to a middle class family. After obtaining degrees in Civil and Canon Law, he continued his studies in political economy. He went on to become a professor in political economy.

He wrote many books and articles and believed that it was possible to imbue economic life with Christian values. He helped to set the framework for the social teaching that would be formalised in *Rerum Novarum*. He was an advocate for unions to ensure the just treatment of workers.

He was an advocate of “corporatism” which was based in the guild system of medieval Italy. Essentially, this was the principle of subsidiarity which advocates that decisions be made at the lowest possible level. He was also critical of both dominant political ideologies of capitalism and socialism. “He insisted that classic capitalism rested on a false anthropology (assumptions of psychological individualism and egoism), while Marxism centred on a false idolatry of the state.”⁵⁵

Giuseppe was married and had seven children, three of whom died young. He lived out his Catholic faith as a layman. He was a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society

He founded a number of organisations including the Catholic Union for Social Studies. He was someone who tried to straddle the divide between opposing schools of thought and to promote dialogue between them.

He was beatified on April 29th 2012.

⁵⁵ John Allen, *First Economist Saint Packs a Contemporary Punch*, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/first-economist-saint-packs-contemporary-punch> accessed 3/5/2012.



<p><i>Holiness in the</i></p> <p>1581-1660 = Vincent de Paul</p> <p>1591-1660 = Louise de Marillac</p> <p>Daughter of Charity Martyrs</p> <p>Angers – [February]</p> <p>1750-1794 = Odile Baumgarten</p> <p>1734-1794 = Marie-Anne Vaillot</p> <p>Arras – [June]</p> <p>1723-1794 = Marie-Madeleine Fontaine</p> <p>1745-1794 = Marie-Francoise Lanel</p> <p>1747-1794 = Therese-Madeleine Fantou</p> <p>1752 -1794 = Jeanne Gerard</p> <p>1748-1820 = Francis Regis Clet</p> <p>1751-1792 = Louis-Joseph François</p> <p>1734-1792 = Jean-Henri Gruyer</p> <p>1758-1796 = Pierre-Rene Rogue</p> <p>1765-1826 = Joan Antida Thouret</p> <p>1774-1821 = Elizabeth Ann Seton</p>	<p>1786-1856 = Rosalie Rendu</p> <p>1790-1855 = Ghebre Michael</p> <p>1800-1860 = Justin de Jacobis</p> <p>1801-1850 = Mark Anthony Durando</p> <p>1802-1840 = John Gabriel Perboyre</p> <p>1803-1874 = Jean Leon Le Prevost</p> <p>1806-1876 = Catherine Laboure</p> <p>1813-1853 = Frederic Ozanam</p> <p>1847-1916 = Nemesia Valle</p> <p>1856-1937 = Salvatore Micalizzi</p> <p>1861-1936 = Ceferino Gimenez Malla</p> <p>1864-1894 = Agostina Pietrantoni</p> <p>1863-1924 = Giuseppina Nicoli</p> <p>1874-1904 = Marta Anna Wiecka</p> <p>1901-1925 = Pier Giorgio Frassati</p> <p>1922-1962 = Gianna Beretta Molla</p> <p>1953-1993 = Lindalva Justo de Oliveira</p>
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