



Contemplation: Chopping the Wood

Trust in providence is central to our Vincentian vocation. This means more than simply trusting that "everything will be okay." It means trusting that if we do His will, the outcome will also be His will, whether we understand it completely or not.

In our Conferences, doing His will means we gather together in His name, we serve Christ in the person of His poor, we love the neighbor as ourselves, we treat him with mercy, and we are generous with our time, our talents, our possessions, and ourselves. [Rule, Part I, 2.5.1] It may seem frustrating, at times, when it seems that our help...doesn't help. But what is the outcome we seek?

St. Vincent taught that "God does not consider the outcome of the good work undertaken but the charity that accompanied it." [CCD I:205] Charity, the love of God, is our purpose. The true outcome we seek is the full flourishing and eternal happiness of all persons, [Rule, Part I, 2.5.1] which we know is not in our control!

Just as Christ wept for God's mercy to deliver Him from the agony of the cross but submitted to the Father's will, Frédéric Ozanam wrote down his own lament on his fortieth birthday. Bedridden with the illness that would take his life a few short months later, he poured out his wishes to "grow old alongside my wife, and to complete my daughter's education." Still, he said, "I am coming if you call me, and I have no right to complain." [Book of the Sick, Prayer from Pisa]

Trust in providence is most important exactly when it is most difficult. Frédéric expressed during his own suffering, that it might become "a source of merits and blessings," bringing with it "those inexpressible consolations which go hand in hand with [God's] real presence." [Ibid]

Ours is a ministry of presence; not only our physical presence, as true friends with those in need, but our presence as a sign from a loving God, who sent us to the neighbors to sit with them, to listen to them, to pray with them, and help in any way that we can. We bring what material assistance we can, but we seek most importantly to bring some part of God's "inexpressible consolation."

Trust in providence is not passive; it is actively doing God's will - tirelessly, devotedly, and for love alone. To paraphrase an old Frank Clark "Country Parson" saying, "Trust in providence is what makes you feel the warmth of the hearth while you're outside chopping the wood."

So perhaps, if we are to "to bring this divine fire, this fire of love" as St. Vincent calls us to do, [CCD XI:264] we'd best keep chopping the wood.

Contemplate

Do I tire too easily while chopping the wood?