



*Putting  
ourselves  
first:  
reflection*

**CONTEMPLATE**

**DO I SEE THE  
FACE OF CHRIST  
IN MY FELLOW  
VINCENTIANS?**

To become a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is to dedicate ourselves to serving others, to “love God...with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.” We hope that our works always are characterized by the Vincentian virtue of selflessness. And yet, as Bl. Frédéric put it, “it is in our own interest first of all that our association has been established, and if we assemble under the roof of the poor, it is at least equally for them as for ourselves, so as to become progressively better friends.” [82. To Curnier, 1834]

It is an idea he repeated often, and one that remains in our Rule today, “that the end of the Society is especially to rekindle and refresh ... the spirit of Catholicism...and that visiting the poor should be the means and not the end of our association.” [182 to Lallier, 1838]

If the Society was formed in our own interest first, what happened to selflessness? Even Frédéric once remarked on the “egoism which is at the bottom of our work...” [82. To Curnier, 1834]

Recalling the Society’s founding, when the young Catholics were challenged to show the good of the church in the world. Frédéric’s answer was not merely to bring bread and firewood to the poor, but, through these works of charity, to share Christ’s love and promise of salvation.

Our works feed our charity, and our charity feeds our friendship, which is what Aquinas called “the friendship of charity, which is God.”

This friendship grows through our “community of faith and works erasing little by little the old divisions of political parties and preparing [us] to become better ... in order to make others happier.” [290, to Amelie, 1841]

As the Apostle John reminds us, “whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

We make our home visits for love alone; the most important thing we share with our neighbors is ourselves.

In other words, if our purpose in the Society is to better ourselves, it is ultimately for the benefit of others; to make of ourselves more worthy gifts.

## **Contemplate**

**Do I see the face of Christ in my fellow  
Vincentians?**