



*Let us Learn
from
St Vincent de
Paul*

Celebrating the
Feast Day of
St Vincent de Paul

27 September

**“THE POOR HAVE MUCH TO TEACH YOU.
YOU HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM THEM.”**

ST VINCENT DE PAUL

We are so fortunate in the St Vincent de Paul Society to have been entrusted with a rich spirituality that guides all our good works. I continue to marvel at the way Frederic Ozanam was guided by Blessed Rosalie Rendu to study the spirituality of St Vincent de Paul and to model his charitable works on this great saint. It is not by chance that the Society is under the patronage of St Vincent de Paul. His inspiration as a man of deep love for the poor and concrete faith in action is still just as relevant in today's world as it was when he tried to live out his works of charity more than four hundred years ago. As we celebrate the Feast of St Vincent de Paul in 2018, we are invited to consider what we can learn from this great man to enrich us in this present moment.





Perhaps the first thing we can learn is that God can transform us through our difficulties. St Vincent de Paul was a man who underwent a great transformation in his life. Originally entering the priesthood to satisfy a desire to be amongst the elite class, St Vincent de Paul sought to live a comfortable life. However, as often happens, it took a difficult experience to touch his heart and transform his life. From the trauma of his being captured by Turkish pirates and living as a slave, St Vincent de Paul developed a passionate zeal for the poor, which led him to inspire others through his witness to humble service of those who were marginalized in the Society. In the same way, if we remain open to the transforming power of God in our lives, our seemingly painful life experiences can become opportunities for growth.

We can also learn much from the life of St Vincent de Paul about credibility. He was a man of integrity, who not just spoke many words, but lived them. He frequently encouraged others to serve the poor with empathy and compassion, yet he witnessed to this with his life. Conscious that ‘it is not enough to give soup and bread’, Vincent urged all those who were serious about their faith to serve the poor with patience and gentleness. In the same way, it is easy to talk about how much good we do as Vincentians. It is relatively easy to provide a hand out to those in need in our local community. However until we remain committed to not just providing material resources to others, but instead trying to bring about lasting change in the lives of our companions, then our impact is limited. Unless we remain determined to be truly respectful of all those we encounter, including one another, then can we really say we are living our Vincentian vocation to its fullest?





Finally, St Vincent de Paul was a man of humility. He knew that he didn't have all the answers, and he was willing to listen deeply to the genuine needs of those he served. Just as he invited his followers to learn from the poor, we too are encouraged by his example to not think we have all the solutions to "fix" the problems of others. Instead, we are invited to build relationship with the marginalized. To give the gift of our presence in many different ways to those in need. To devote ourselves to meaningful advocacy on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are voiceless. The encounter with the poor wasn't just a part of the life of St Vincent de Paul. The poor became his life. And the witness of his life of serving the poor became an attractive force impacting on all those around him. In the same way, we are invited as Vincentians to carry on this legacy of respectful dialogue with our companions, conscious of the gift they are for us and the privilege it is to serve them.

As we celebrate the Feast of St Vincent de Paul, and as we strive to make a difference through our service, let us never lose sight of the real reason the Society was formed – to demonstrate faith in action and to show the genuineness of our relationship with God through outreach to the poor. We are called to see the face of Christ in those we serve, conscious that God resides in the hearts and lives of those who are marginalized in our world, and that from them we too can learn.





Let us pray for the grace to be more like St Vincent de Paul in the way we serve, grounded in humility.

Let us pray for an unconditional love that reaches out to the poor without judgment.

Let us pray that we live as genuine disciples of charity, realizing that the more the poor insult us and criticize us, the more we are called to love them.

May we be inspired by the words of St Vincent de Paul who reminds us, 'You must empty yourselves of self to put on Christ'.