

LOVE IN ACTION



"Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18)

Pope Francis constantly reminds everyone, let us love not with words but with deeds, and this is a reminder of the need to 'walk the talk', putting our faith into action and complementing the many meaningful words we speak with concrete actions that show our love for God by lives of loving service.

Jesus reminds us, 'the poor will always be with you'. (Matthew 26:11) Just as Jesus reached out to the sick and sinners, the poor and the marginalised, the challenge of following Jesus necessitates that we have a preferential love for those in need. Pope Francis also says, "We are called, then, to draw near to the poor, to encounter them, to meet their gaze, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude."

The many different facets of our service with the St Vincent de Paul Society provide opportune moments to be fully present to the poor. Whether it is through assisting conferences as they undertake home visit or interviews, coordinate special Vinnies occasions, coordinating our volunteers, involving ourselves in all of our Special Works and assisting people in a Vinnies Shop, we have frequent opportunities to encounter the poor and leave them feeling better because of our interaction with them. Sometimes though the tendency can be simply to rush through our responsibilities as mere duties, without taking time to allow for a true encounter to occur. The challenge to live love in action, urges us to go deeper in reaching out to the poor, that they might see the face of Christ in our gratuitous self-giving.

Throughout his life, Jesus demonstrated this selfless love, a love without counting the cost or expecting anything in return. It is this love of Jesus, especially towards those who are poor, which becomes our measuring stick. Jesus is our exemplar of a love which goes beyond barriers and reaches out to others without judgement or distinction. Jesus' life was coherent with what he preached. In the same way we need to guard against moments when there can be a contrast between empty words on our lips and the concrete deeds that mirror the real quality of our love in action.

Both St Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam served the poor in response to their love for God. They lived a love in action which bore witness to the reality that a deep personal relationship with Jesus cannot be contained in the walls of a chapel. Their love for God led them out to the poor, to stand with them as though they were standing with Christ. Blessed Frederic Ozanam was not satisfied just to give a hand out to the poor, but wanted Vincentians to study the conditions that the poor were living in, so as to bring about long term change to their situations. Adapted from Sr Mel Dwyer

In the same way, our service of the poor shouldn't be just regulated acts of kindness that help us feel good about ourselves. Our reaching out to those in need must motivate us to change our lives and raise our awareness. It must lead us to passionate advocacy for making lasting impacts rather than just providing momentary relief.

The poor are not a problem that we need to fix. They don't need a band aid solution that we can provide. We have much to learn from those suffering from poverty in our world. In addition, let us join with Pope Francis who reminds us, "The poor are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practise in our lives the essence of the Gospel."

Conscious that there is no substitute for an authentic, Christ-centred love, may our words and more importantly our deeds, be a testimony of who God is for us. In so doing, may our service continue to enable us to be the hands and feet of Christ, in a world where some have plenty and others struggle to survive.



Questions for Reflection

1. Share some examples of times when you have been able to demonstrate love in action through your service with the St Vincent de Paul Society.
2. In your opinion, why do you believe advocacy is such an important value for the Society?
3. Identify something that you have learnt from the poor during your service with the Society.