

Presentation of....

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORDS OF FREDERIC OZAMAN

WORDS, SCRIPTURE, REFLECTION

WORDS

All opinions find the doors open, and from that results a very strong emulation; for if one aims to do well, it is not in order to seek applause and praise, it is to give more solid support to the cause which we have embraced.

Of what use is it to know what one would do, if not to do good? Of what use to know our destination, if not to accomplish it? Of what good to see the road, if not to walk in it? Now, provided that the traveller sees ten paces before him, will he not reach the end as well as if he had all the rest in perspective? Provided that the workman knows each hour of the day the task which is imposed upon him for the following hour, will he not as surely reach the end of the work as if he had under his eyes the plan of the architect? And does it not suffice to us to know our duty and our destiny for the nearest moment of the future, without wishing to extend our regards to the Infinite? If we know what God wishes to do with us to-morrow, is it not enough?

SCRIPTURE

Matt 5:1-16

Seeing the crowds, he went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance. Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill. Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognised as children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. 'Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

'You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet. 'You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

REFLECTION

In this passage Jesus is telling us that if we follow him then the rules are different, things are upside down from what we expect. He is telling us that blessings come to us not through being rich and powerful but through weakness and poverty. In Jesus' kingdom there is a different order of things. As Vincentians we can experience this when we serve people living in poverty and realise that they are often simpler than us and therefore closer to God. It is not that poverty of itself is a virtue but rather that it strips away what is not important and helps us to see what is.

Frederic's words above remind us that we need to be clear about what we are doing in order to do it well. This is in line with the words of scripture which remind us that we are salt and light and that our works must be a sign of the kingdom.

NUMBER 1



**WHAT IS YOUR
REACTION TO THESE
WORDS?
HOW DOES YOUR LIGHT
SHINE FOR OTHERS TO
SEE?**

WORDS

That we are here below only to accomplish the will of Providence; that this will is accomplished day by day, and that he who dies leaving his task unfinished is as much advanced in the eyes of the Supreme Justice as he who has the leisure to finish it entirely; that man is no more able to create his moral being than his physical being; that he never makes himself orator, philosopher, artist, man of genius, but that he is made so little by little, and insensibly, by the conduct of God. The greatest men are those who have never made beforehand the plan of their destiny, but who have let themselves be led by the hand. A little confidence in the heavenly Father, without whose will a hair falls not from a human head!

SCRIPTURE

Matt 6:25-34

'That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you are to wear. Surely life is more than food, and the body more than clothing! Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, however much you worry, add one single cubit to your span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the wild flowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you who have so little faith? So do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?" It is the gentiles who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'

REFLECTION

It is part of the Vincentian tradition to trust in Divine Providence, St Vincent and St Louise both spoke a great deal about it. In Frederic's words he tells us that God is in charge and that we need to do our bit without worrying too much about the outcome. Jesus tells us in this passage that we need to focus on the kingdom and justice and "all these other things will be given you as well".

NUMBER 2



HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN YOUR LIFE?

WORDS

Now, we others, we are too young to intervene in the social strife. Shall we then remain inert in the suffering and sighing world? No; there is a preparatory way open to us; before doing public good, we can endeavour to do good to some individuals; before regenerating France, we can solace some individuals amongst her poor. Thus I desire that all young people of mind and heart would unite for some charitable work, and that they would form through all the country a vast generous association for the comfort of the popular classes.

SCRIPTURE

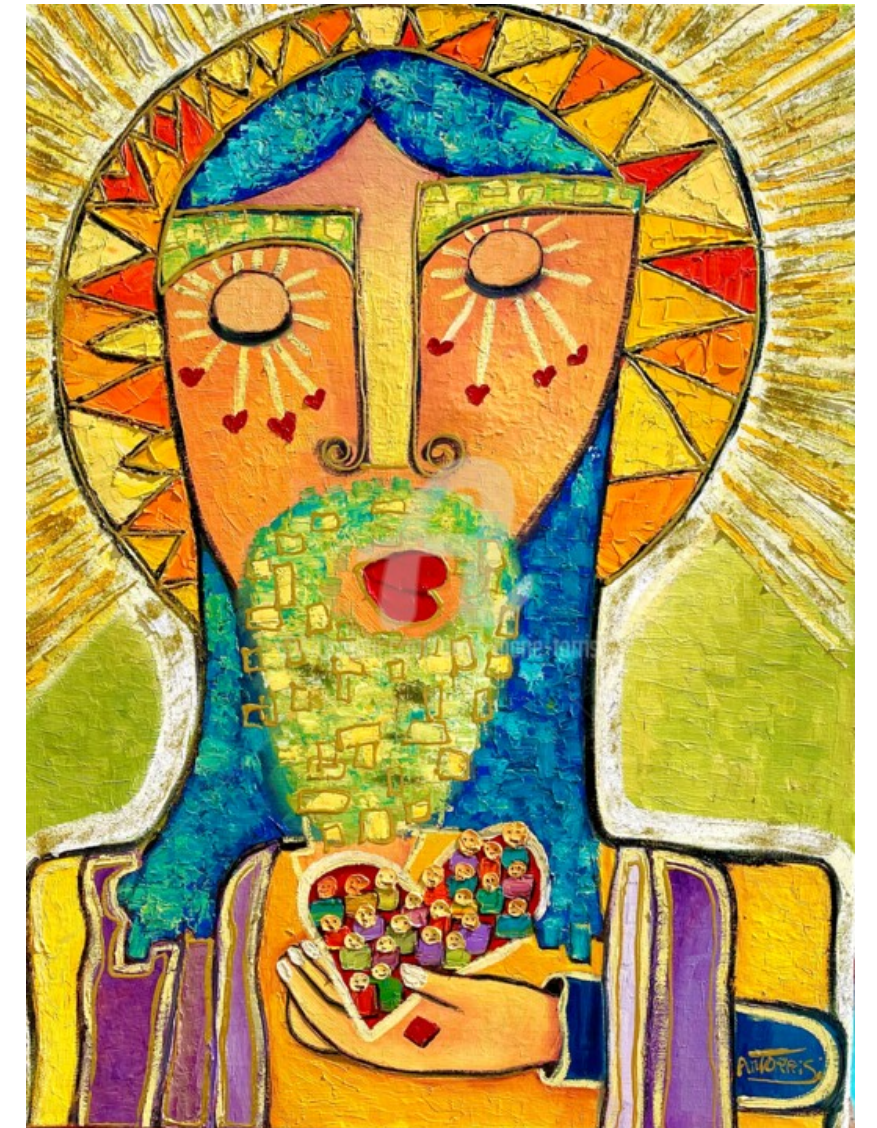
2 Cor 10:12-18

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense. We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you. For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labours of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action. 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.' For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

REFLECTION

Ozanam reminds us that we need to start small. If we want to make changes to our world then we start with our own neighbourhood. This is very relevant to all of us in the Society, we are all called to do what we can in our own area of the Society. The words of Paul remind us too that it is God's strength that we can rely on to help us in our ministry.

NUMBER 3



**HOW DO YOU
EXPERIENCE THE POWER
OF GOD HELPING YOU IN
YOUR SERVICE OF
OTHERS?**

WORDS

Philanthropy is a proud dame for whom good actions are a kind of adorning, and who loves to look at herself in the mirror. Charity is a tender mother who keeps her eyes fixed on the child she carries at the breast, who thinks no longer of herself, and who forgets her beauty for her love.

SCRIPTURE

Jn 13:31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

REFLECTION

Ozanam contrasts philanthropy and charity. Charity is really another word for love. He wants our assistance of people to be motivated by love. We help these people not just because it is the right thing to do and we want to put our faith into action but because they are people who need our help. We need to remember that, just as Rosalie Rendu said, if we had experienced what they have experienced then perhaps we would behave in the same way as they do.

NUMBER 4



**HOW DOES YOUR
SERVICE OF PEOPLE IN
NEED DIFFER FROM
PHILANTHROPY?**

WORDS

Philanthropy is a proud ...to be a martyr is a thing possible to all Christians; to be a martyr is to give our lives for God and for our brothers: it is to give our lives in sacrifice, whether the sacrifice be consumed all at once as the holocaust, or whether it be accomplished slowly, and smoke night and day like the perfumes on the altar; to be a martyr is to give to heaven all which we have received from it – our blood, our gold, our soul all entire. This offering is in our hands; this sacrifice, we are able to make it. It is for us to choose to what altars it will please us to carry it, to what divinity we will consecrate our youth and the times which follow it. dame for whom good actions are a kind of adorning, and who loves to look at herself in the mirror. Charity is a tender mother who keeps her eyes fixed on the child she carries at the breast, who thinks no longer of herself, and who forgets her beauty for her love.

SCRIPTURE

Matt 16:24-26

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

REFLECTION

Martyrdom is a word that we don't hear very often these days. Perhaps it is not a word that we would choose to use to describe what we do in the Society. However, Ozanam is describing, the ordinary sacrifice that it takes for us to serve other people in the Society. We are called to put aside our own needs and focus on the needs of another for a time.

NUMBER 5



HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR SERVICE OF OTHERS IN THE SOCIETY AS SACRIFICE?

WHAT MAKES THIS SACRIFICE EASIER? WHAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT?

WORDS

Nevertheless, there are bonds yet stronger than words — these are actions. I do not know whether you have observed it: nothing familiarizes two men between themselves so much as eating together, travelling together, working together. Now, if acts purely material have this power, acts moral have it much more; and if two or more agree to do good together, their union will be perfect. Thus at least He assures us who says in the Gospel: "In truth, when you are assembled in My name, I will be in the midst of you."

SCRIPTURE

Matt 18:18-19

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

REFLECTION

Frederic's vision of a Conference was that of a community in which we learn from each other. In fact he described a Conference as "an intimate and cheerful circle".

NUMBER 6



**HOW DOES YOUR CONFERENCE
REFLECT THE IDEAL OF A
COMMUNITY WHICH GROWS BY
SHARED EXPERIENCES?**

WORDS

Let us write, not for glory, but for Jesus Christ: let us crucify ourselves to our pen. Although no one should read us more in a hundred years, what matters that? The drop of water on the border of the sea has none the less contributed to make the stream, and the stream dies not. "He who has been of his own time!" says Schiller, "has been of all times" He has done his task; he has had his part in the creation of things which are eternal. How many books, lost today in libraries, have made, three centuries ago, the revolution which we see with our eyes! Our fathers are unknown to ourselves, but we live by them. Besides, nothing in what you have published need discourage your pen.

SCRIPTURE

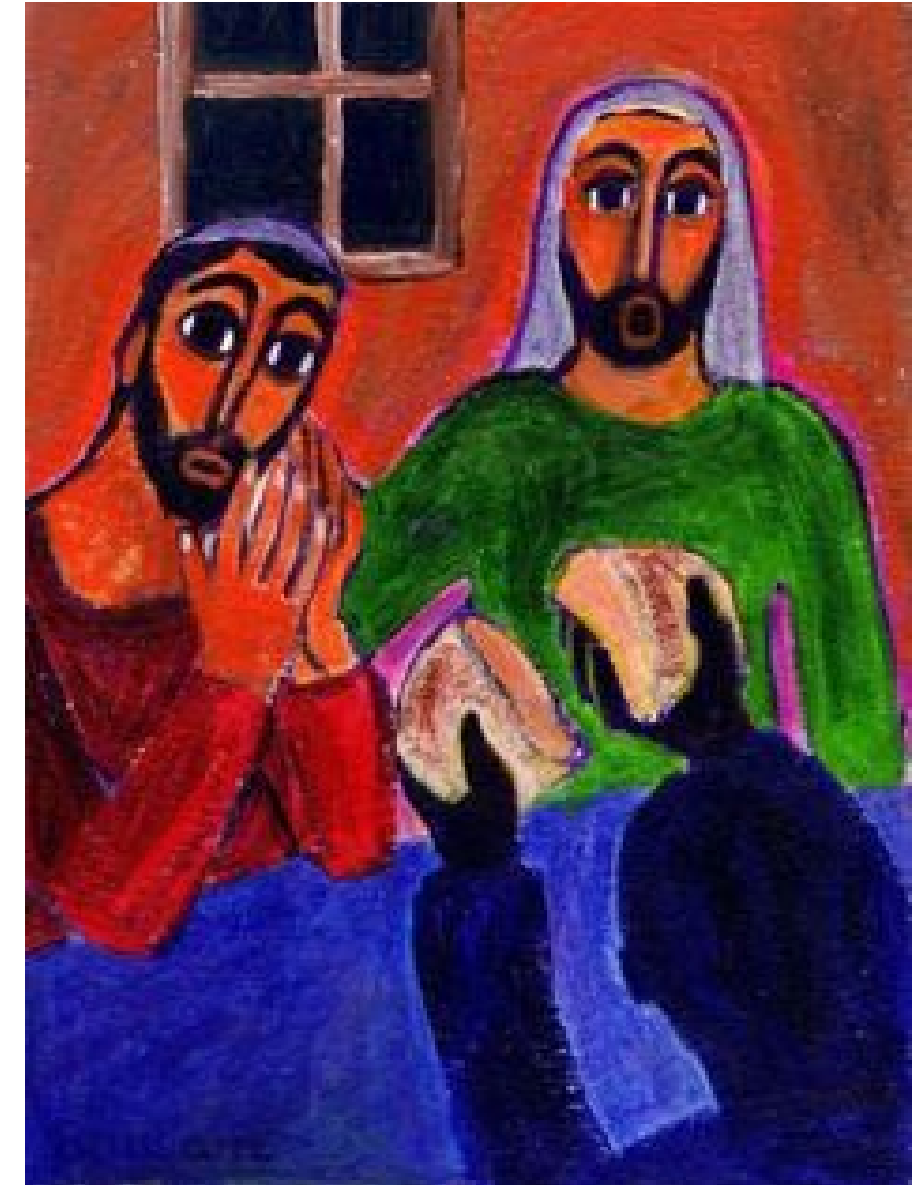
Matt 6:19-21

'Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too.'

REFLECTION

Ozanam was writing to Fr Lacordaire to encourage him in his writing, we can however adapt his advice to ourselves. Ozanam tells him not to worry about the future and whether what he does will last and to just do it. We may sometimes feel as though what we are doing is not making any lasting difference but Ozanam would say that we need to keep going and to trust in God.

NUMBER 7



HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH DISCOURAGEMENT IN MINISTERING TO OTHERS?

HOW DO YOU SUPPORT YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO MINISTER ALONGSIDE YOU?

WORDS

Eight of us united in this idea, and at first, as if jealous of our new-found treasure, we would not open the door of our little assembly to anyone else. But God had other views with respect to us. The association of a few intimate friends, in His designs, the nucleus of an immense family of brothers that was to spread over a great part of Europe. You see that we cannot with truth take the title of founders, for it God who willed and who founded our society. I remember that in the beginning one of my own friends, for a moment misled by the theories of the St Simonians, said to me with a sort of pity, 'But what do you hope to do? You are only eight young fellows, and you expect to relieve the misery that swarms in a city like Paris! Why, if you counted any number of members you could do but comparatively nothing! We, on the contrary, are elaborating ideas and a new system which will reform the world and banish misery from it altogether! We shall do for humanity in a moment what you could not accomplish in several centuries.'

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:28-39

'We gave you a strong warning', he said, 'not to preach in this name, and what have you done? You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and seem determined to fix the guilt for this man's death on us.' In reply Peter and the apostles said, 'Obedience to God comes before obedience to men; it was the God of our ancestors who raised up Jesus, whom you executed by hanging on a tree. By his own right hand God has now raised him up to be leader and Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel. We are witnesses to this, we and the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.' This so infuriated them that they wanted to put them to death. One member of the Sanhedrin, however, a Pharisee called Gamaliel, who was a teacher of the Law respected by the whole people, stood up and asked to have the men taken outside for a time. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin, 'Men of Israel, be careful how you deal with these people. Some time ago there arose Theudas. He claimed to be someone important, and collected about four hundred followers; but when he was killed, all his followers scattered and that was the end of them. And then there was Judas the Galilean, at the time of the census, who attracted crowds of supporters; but he was killed too, and all his followers dispersed.

What I suggest, therefore, is that you leave these men alone and let them go. If this enterprise, this movement of theirs, is of human origin it will break up of its own accord; but if it does in fact come from God you will be unable to destroy them. Take care not to find yourselves fighting against God.' His advice was accepted; and they had the apostles called in, gave orders for them to be flogged, warned them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them.

REFLECTION

Ozanam was reflecting on the beginnings of the Society, little did he know that the Society would be flourishing in 140 countries 180 years later. It is a similar situation to that described in Acts, if the movement is of God then human beings will be unable to stop it from growing.

NUMBER 8



**AS YOU REFLECT ON THE
HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY
WHAT GRACES CAN YOU GIVE
THANKS FOR?**

WORDS

In a work like this, I think we should abandon ourselves much more to the inspiration of our heart than the calculations of our head. Providence sends us counsel and advice in the form of external circumstances, of thoughts and inspirations. I think that you will do better to follow this guidance freely, and not hamper yourself with rules and formulas.

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 51:9-12

But you delight in sincerity of heart, and in secret you teach me wisdom. Purify me with hyssop till I am clean, wash me till I am whiter than snow. Let me hear the sound of joy and gladness, and the bones you have crushed will dance. Turn away your face from my sins, and wipe away all my guilt. God, create in me a clean heart, renew within me a resolute spirit, do not thrust me away from your presence, do not take away from me your spirit of holiness. Give me back the joy of your salvation, sustain in me a generous spirit.

REFLECTION

Frederic is saying that we should trust our hearts more than our heads. The words of the Psalm encourage us to allow God to cleanse our hearts so that we are able to walk in the ways of God.

NUMBER 9



**HOW DO YOU KEEP THE RIGHT
BALANCE BETWEEN HEAD AND
HEART?**

WORDS

Now, the strongest tie, the principle of true friendship, is charity. Charity cannot exist in the hearts of many without outwardly overflowing; it is a fire that dies for want of being fed, and the food of charity is good works.

SCRIPTURE

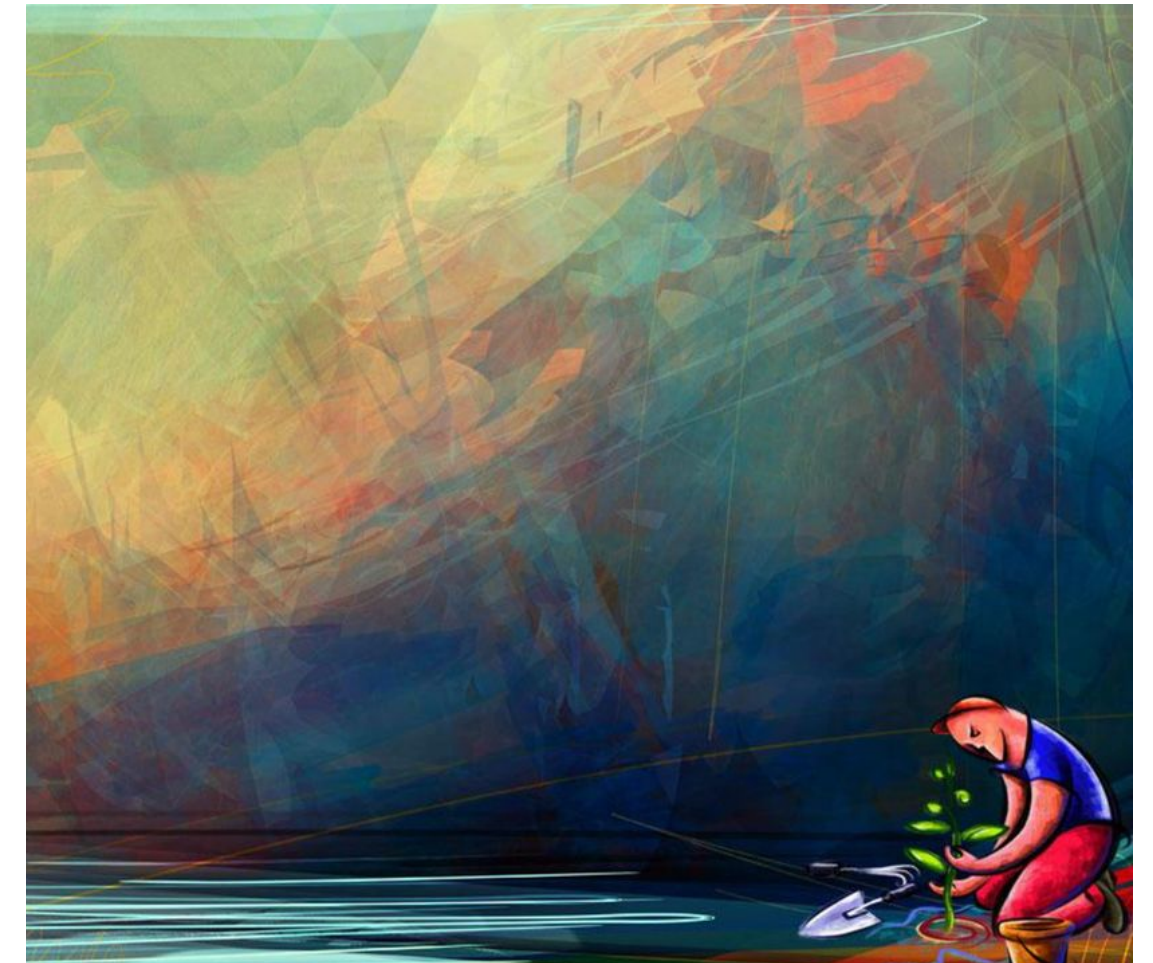
Eph 2:4-10

But God, being rich in faithful love, through the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, brought us to life with Christ -- it is through grace that you have been saved- and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus. This was to show for all ages to come, through his goodness towards us in Christ Jesus, how extraordinarily rich he is in grace. Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life.

REFLECTION

Frederic Ozanam saw that charity, our love, is only words if it is not put into practice. He also saw that doing good works together creates bonds of friendship.

NUMBER 10



**HOW DOES DOING GOOD
WORKS WITH OTHERS CREATE
COMMUNITY WITH THEM?**

NUMBER 11

WORDS

Charity should never look back, but always forward, for the number of her past benefits is always very small, while the present and future wants that she has to relieve are infinite.

SCRIPTURE

Matt 26:6-13

Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon, a man who had suffered from a virulent skin disease, when a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and poured it on his head as he was at table. When they saw this, the disciples said indignantly, 'Why this waste? This could have been sold for a high price and the money given the poor.' But Jesus noticed this and said, 'Why are you upsetting the woman? What she has done for me is indeed a good work! You have the poor with you always, but you will not always have me. When she poured this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. In truth I tell you, wherever in all the world this gospel is proclaimed, what she has done will be told as well, in remembrance of her.'

REFLECTION

In this reading Jesus tells us that there will always be poor people, in other words the Society will never be out of a job. Jesus also tells us that the woman who anointed him would be remembered. Frederic's words call us to always continue to work for people in need and to seek new ways of helping others.



WHAT CHALLENGES DOES THE UNENDING DEMAND FOR ASSISTANCE PLACE ON US?

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THE FATIGUE THAT CAN COME FROM THESE CONTINUAL DEMANDS?

WORDS

It is better that you should raise your work of your own strength, under the inspiration of you own heart, according to your local circumstances.

SCRIPTURE

Lk 9:1-6

He called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, 'Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money; and do not have a spare tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there; and when you leave let your departure be from there. As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as evidence against them.' So they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and healing everywhere.

REFLECTION

Jesus sent his disciples out on their own to begin their ministry. Frederic's words remind us that we need to be responsive to our local circumstances. This is the strength of the Society because we have people on the ground, responding to local needs. Frederic was told his fellow Vincentians that the strength of their work was in their local response to local needs. This is still the case for us now. In the scripture Jesus sends his disciples out to participate in the mission themselves.

NUMBER 12



HOW DO YOU USE YOUR LOCAL WISDOM TO PROVIDE CREATIVE ANSWERS TO THE PROBLEMS THAT ARE PRESENTED TO YOU?

WORDS

Yes, life is contemptible, if we consider the use we make of it; but not if we calculate the use we may make of it if we look upon it as the most perfect work of the Creator – the sacred garment with which the Divine humanity clothed Himself. Oh! Then life is beautiful, and worthy of all reverence and love. Let us pray for one another, my dear friend; let us mistrust our mistrust, our ennui, and our sadness. Let us follow with simplicity the lead of our merciful Providence, satisfied just to see the stone on which we place our foot at each successive step, and without trying to discover the whole length of the road, nor its turns and windings.

SCRIPTURE

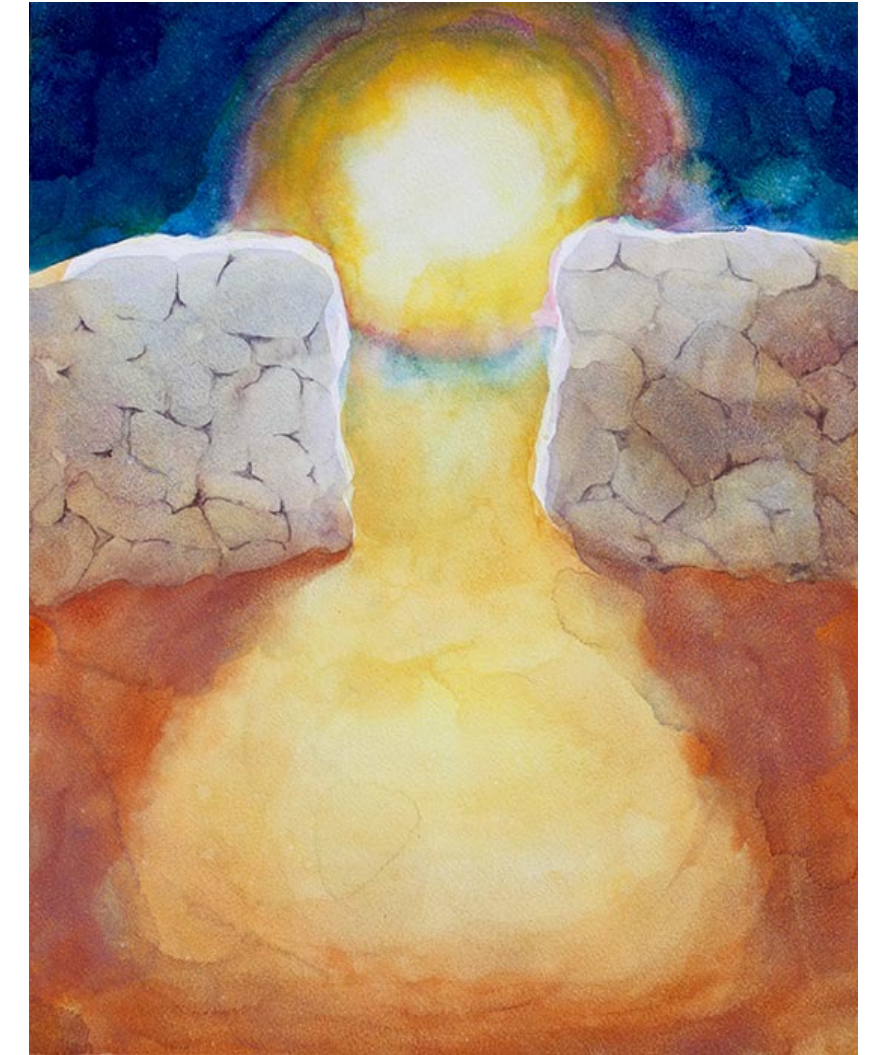
Jn 10:7-11

So Jesus spoke to them again: In all truth I tell you, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All who have come before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: such a one will go in and out and will find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

REFLECTION

Frederic reminds us to make the best use of our life. It can be easy to fall into a routine and allow life to pass us by. Jesus says that he came so that we could have life to the full.

NUMBER 13



**WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO TO
LIVE LIFE MORE FULLY?**

WORDS

...how much greater need have we now of charity, of self-devotion, of patience, to cure the sufferings of the nations.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 21:21-25

The Lord helped them, and a great number believed and were converted to the Lord. The news of them came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas out to Antioch. There he was glad to see for himself that God had given grace, and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion; for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. And a large number of people were won over to the Lord. Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul.

REFLECTION

What Frederic said in his own time holds true for us today, we need all our devotion and patience in order to care for people in need.

NUMBER 14



**WHAT SUPPORTS YOU TO BE
ABLE TO OFFER YOUR
CHARITY, SELF-DEVOTION AND
PATIENCE TO PEOPLE IN NEED?**

WORDS

For you, whatever God's will may be, wheresoever your vocation may lead you, you will find a brother who will be a guide and support to you; you will find the way prepared for you, a circle of friends, many less dangers awaiting you.

SCRIPTURE

Prov 18:24 (NRSV)

Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.

REFLECTION

Frederic was giving advice to his brother that was surely based on his experience of university life and of the friendships that he formed there.

NUMBER 15



HOW DO THE FRIENDSHIPS WE DEVELOP IN THE SOCIETY HELP US TO LIVE OUT OUR MISSION?

WORDS

Of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that which we most need is strength, and we know so little what it means that many fancy they have got it because they have violence and passion, which are on the contrary, like all that is convulsive, proofs of uneasiness and weakness.

SCRIPTURE

Eph 3:14-19

This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every fatherhood, in heaven or on earth, takes its name. In the abundance of his glory may he, through his Spirit, enable you to grow firm in power with regard to your inner self, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, with all God's holy people you will have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; so that, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, you may be filled with the utter fullness of God.

REFLECTION

Frederic understood that we need spiritual strength in order to carry out the mission that we have as Vincentians.

NUMBER 16



WHAT HELPS ME TO DRAW ON THE STRENGTH THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT PROVIDES?

WORDS

God forbid that we should calumniate the poor whom the Gospel blesses, or render the suffering classes responsible for their misery, thus pandering to the hardness of those bad hearts that fancy themselves exonerated from helping the poor man when they have proved his wrong-doing...

SCRIPTURE

Lk 6:17-38

He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all. Then fixing his eyes on his disciples he said:

How blessed are you who are poor: the kingdom of God is yours.

Blessed are you who are hungry now: you shall have your fill.

Blessed are you who are weeping now: you shall laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of man. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, look!—your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now.

Alas for you who have plenty to eat now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who are laughing now: you shall mourn and weep.

'Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

'But I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To anyone who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek as well; to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from someone who takes it. Treat others as you would like people to treat you.

If you love those who love you, what credit can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to get money back, what credit can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. Instead, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 'Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap; because the standard you use will be the standard used for you.'

REFLECTION

Frederic's words and the scripture remind us that we should not judge people who find themselves in poverty. This is a contrast to many people who blame people for their poverty and believe that it is caused by their poor choices. Jesus tells us that the poor are blessed and that we should be judging others by the standards that we use to judge ourselves.

NUMBER 17



**HOW DO YOU PREVENT
YOURSELF FROM BECOMING
JUDGEMENTAL OF PEOPLE IN
NEED?**

WORDS

It is all in order to love God, or at least one believes that he loves Him more than before because one feels a lively gratitude for Him, for him who on exile here on earth, in this capital of corruption, has reserved for us so large a share of happiness and life. It also makes one love more than ever a religion that makes all of its children equals and gathers together the great and the small who, despite the proud disciples of egoism hating and quarrelling among themselves, inspire you with so much love for humanity. Letter 55. March 19th 1833 p 36 (Frederic Ozanam a life in Letters, Translated by Joseph Dirvin, 1986)

SCRIPTURE

Matt 5:43-48

'You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

REFLECTION

Frederic words remind us that all people are equal and that we need great love for all people. Jesus' words take this a step further and encourage us to love even people who hate us or we find difficult to deal with. In our Society work we are often called upon to deal with people whose behaviour is challenging and yet our mission calls us to treat these people with love and respect.

NUMBER 18



**WHAT HELPS YOU TO TREAT
PEOPLE WITH LOVE AND
RESPECT?**

**WHAT RENEWS YOU WHEN
YOU BEGIN TO FEEL BURNT
OUT?**

WORDS

Let us work to increase and multiply, to become better, more tender and stronger; for just as days follow one another, evil is seen to add to evil and misery, the disorder in society becomes more and more apparent; the social problems, the conflict between poverty and riches, between self-interest which wants to take and self-interest which wants to keep, succeeds political problems. And the confrontation between these two self-interests. The poor who have the force of numbers and the rich that of silver, will be terrible if charity does not interpose, become a mediator, if Christians do not dominate with all the force of love. 135. 22nd October 1836 p 88 (Frederic Ozanam a life in Letters, Translated by Joseph Dirvin, 1986)

SCRIPTURE

2 Cor 5:14-21

For the love of Christ overwhelms us when we consider that if one man died for all, then all have died; his purpose in dying for all humanity was that those who live should live not any more for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life. From now onwards, then, we will not consider anyone by human standards: even if we were once familiar with Christ according to human standards, we do not know him in that way any longer. So for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see. It is all God's work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God. For our sake he made the sinless one a victim for sin, so that in him we might become the uprightness of God.

REFLECTION

Frederic's words remind us that there is a conflict between the desires of the rich and poor. He calls upon us to "dominate with the force of love". This language is perhaps somewhat difficult because it uses the language of power and force when talking about love, however, Frederic's message is a good one. It is telling us that our role is to intervene between these two groups and be an advocate, to show rich people that people living in poverty are ordinary people who have suffered difficulties and setbacks in life, to show people living in poverty that they are important people loved by God and their fellow human beings. The Scripture reminds us that this work is God's work and that it is with the help of God that we are able to do it.

NUMBER 19



**DO YOU SEE YOUR ROLE AS
INTERVENING BETWEEN THE
RICH AND THE POOR?**

HOW DOES THIS WORK?

WORDS

For, if the question which disturbs the world around us today is neither a question of political modalities, but a social question ; if it is the struggle between those who have nothing and those who have too much; if it is the violent clash of opulence and poverty which shakes the earth under it, our duty to ourselves as Christians is to throw ourselves between these two irreconcilable enemies, and to make the ones divest themselves so as to fulfil a law, and the others accept as a benefit; to make ones cease to demand, and the others to refuse; to make equality as operative as is possible among men; to make voluntary community replace imposition and brute force; to make charity accomplish what justice alone cannot do. It is then good to be placed by Providence on neutral ground between the two belligerents. To have paths and minds open to both, without being forced in order to mediate to ascend too high or to descend too low. Letter 136. 5th November 1836 p.91-92 (Frederic Ozanam a life in Letters, Translated by Joseph Dirvin, 1986)

SCRIPTURE

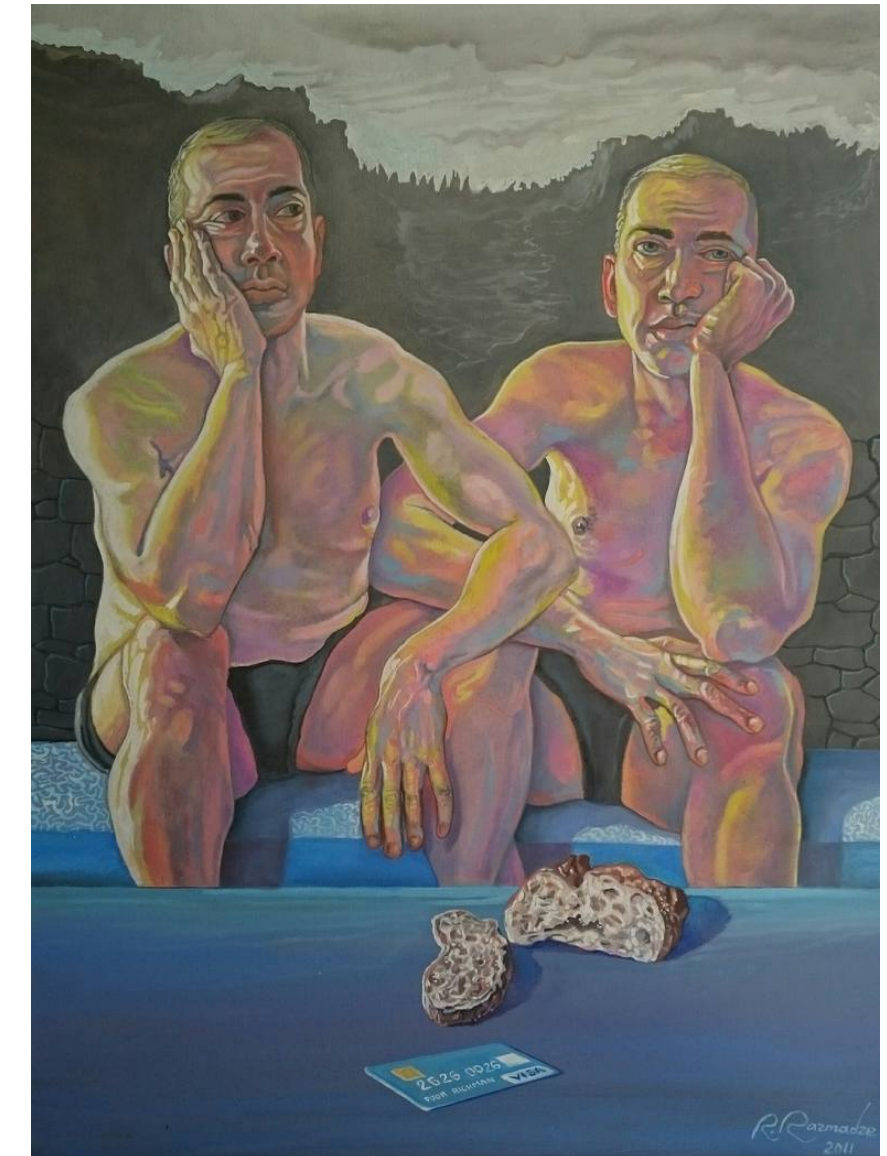
Prov 22:2, 8-9, 22

Rich and poor rub shoulders, Yahweh has made them both. ...Whoever sows injustice reaps disaster, and the rod of such anger will disappear. A kindly eye will earn a blessing, such a person shares out food with the poor. ... Do not despoil the weak, for he is weak, and do not oppress the poor at the gate, for Yahweh takes up their cause...

REFLECTION

Frederic's words highlight the need to acknowledge the equality of all people. Australia prides itself on being the country of the fair go and yet the gap between rich and poor is widening. Many in our society blame people for their own poverty and speak as though the answer is punishment and vilification.

NUMBER 20



HOW DO WE PROMOTE THE EQUALITY OF ALL PEOPLE AND THE EQUITY OF TREATMENT THAT THEY ALL DESERVE?

WORDS

If we do not know how to love God as they loved Him, that should be without doubt a reproach to us, but yet our weakness is able to find some shadow of excuse, for it seems to be necessary to see in order to love and we see God only with the eyes of faith and our faith is so weak! Both men and the poor we see with the eyes of flesh; they are there and we can put our finger and hand in their wounds and the scars of the crown of thorns is visible on their foreheads; and at this incredulity no longer has place and we should fall at their feet and say with the apostle, Tu est Dominus et Deus meus. You are our masters and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love him otherwise shall we not love him in your persons? Alas, if in the Middle Ages, sick society was not able to be healed except by the immense effusion of love shown in a special way by St Francis of Assisi, if much later new sorrows cried out to the soothing hands of St Philip Neri, St John of God and St Vincent de Paul, how much charity, devotion and patience do we not need to heal the present sufferings of these poor people.

Letter 137. 13th November 1837, p 96 (Frederic Ozanam a life in Letters, Translated by Joseph Dirvin, 1986)

SCRIPTURE

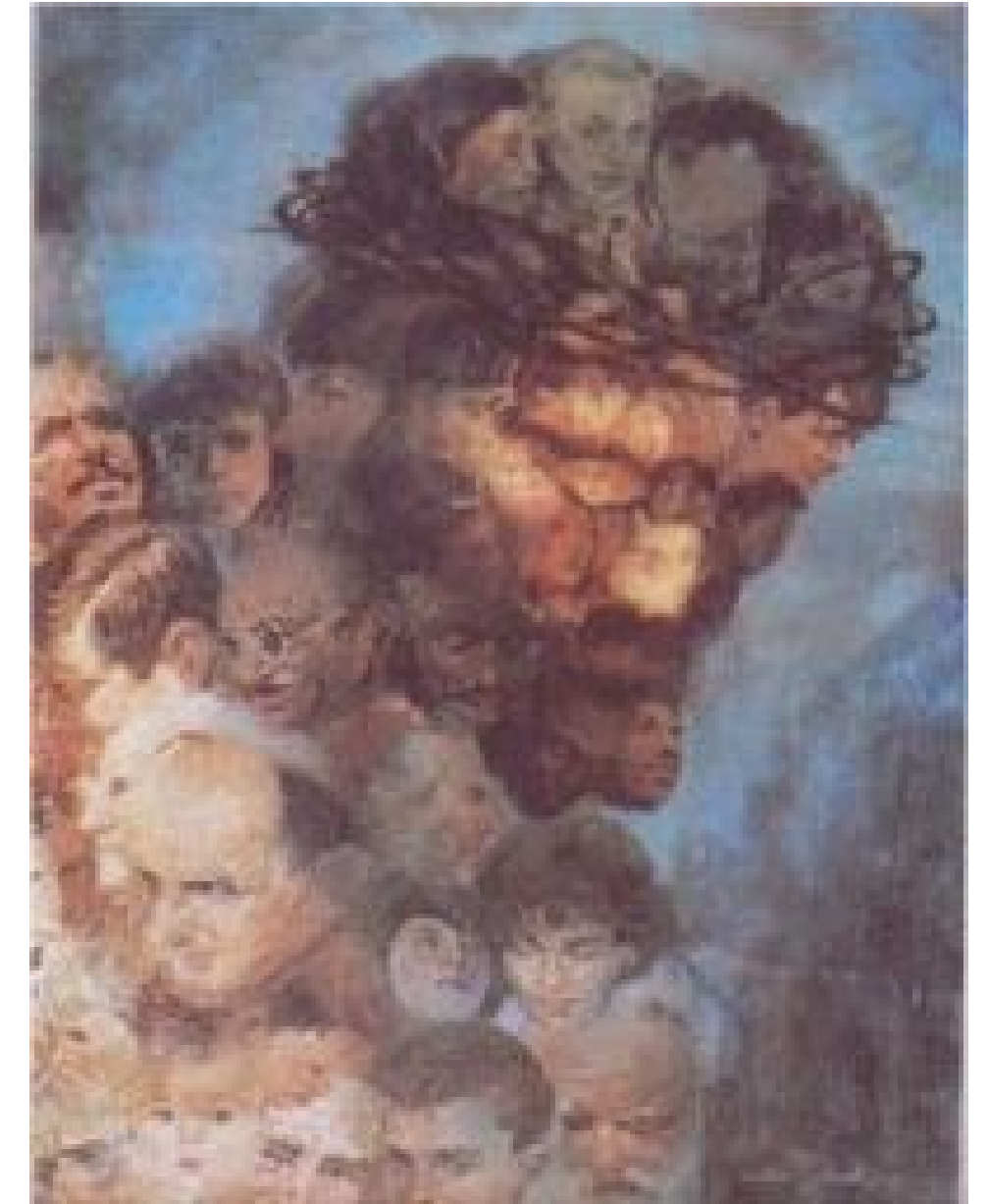
1 Jn 3:18-24

Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine. This will be the proof that we belong to the truth, and it will convince us in his presence, even if our own feelings condemn us, that God is greater than our feelings and knows all things. My dear friends, if our own feelings do not condemn us, we can be fearless before God, and whatever we ask we shall receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what is acceptable to him. His commandment is this, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we should love one another as he commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments remains in God, and God in him. And this is the proof that he remains in us: the Spirit that he has given us.

REFLECTION

Both Frederic's words and this passage of scripture speak to the call to see God in the people we serve and to show them love. They remind us of the principle that God is present to us in the face of the people that we serve. We are also reminded of the people who have worked to improve society and that we are following in their footsteps.

NUMBER 21



**WHAT HELPS YOU TO SEE THE
FACE OF CHRIST IN THE
PEOPLE YOU SERVE?**

WORDS

Help is humiliating when it appeals to men from below, taking heed of their material wants only, paying no attention to those of the flesh, to the cry of hunger and cold, to what excites pity, to what one succours even in beasts. It humiliates when there is no reciprocity, when you give the poor man nothing but bread, or clothes or a bundle of straw – what, in fact there is no likelihood of his giving you in return...But it honours when it appeals to him from above, when it occupies itself with his soul, his religious, moral, and political education, with all that emancipates him from his passions and from a portion of his wants, with those things that make him free and may make him great. Help honours when to the bread that nourishes it adds the visit that consoles, the advice that enlightens, the friendly shake of the hand that lifts up the sinking courage; when it treats the poor man with respect, not only as an equal but as a superior, since he is suffering what perhaps we are incapable of suffering; since he is a messenger of God to us, sent to prove our justice and our charity and to save us by our works.

“Help then becomes honourable, because it may become mutual, because every man who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation today, may tomorrow stand himself in need of a kind word, an advice, a consolation; because the hand you clasp clasps yours in return; because that indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves towards you when the old man, the mother, the little children have prayed for you.” “Do you suppose you pay the priest to whom the state gives a hundred crowns a year to be the father, the schoolmaster, the comforter of the poor village lost in the mountains? Or the soldier who gets five sous a day to die under the flag? Why the soldier gives the alms of his blood to the country, and the priest that of his words, his thoughts, his heart, that will never know the fireside joys! And the country does neither the injustice to think that it pays them: it gives them an alms that will enable them to resume tomorrow the lowly self-devotion of today, to return to the bedside of the plague-stricken or under the fire of the Bedouins... Don't tell me, then, that I humiliate the poor man when I treat him as I treat the priest who blesses and the soldier who dies for me. Alms are the retribution of services that have no salary...In our eyes the man who suffers serves God, and consequently serves society like him who prays; he performs a ministry of expiation, a sacrifice whose merits rebound on us; and we trust less for our safety to the lightning-conductor above our housetops than to the prayer of the poor woman and her little children who are sleeping on a truss of straw in the garret under our roof. And let no one say that in treating poverty as a priesthood we aim at perpetuating it; the same authority which tells us that we shall always have the poor amongst us is the same that commands to do all that we can that there may cease to be any ... When you dread so much to lay an obligation on him who accepts your alms, I fear it is because you have never experienced the obligation it confers on him who gives. Those who know the road to a poor man's house, whose feet have swept the dust from his stairs, never knock at his door without a sentiment of respect. They know that in accepting bread from their hand, as he takes the light from God, the poor man honours them; they know that the theatre and every other place of amusement can be paid for, but that nothing in this world can pay for two tears of joy in the eyes of a poor mother, nor the grasp of an honest man's hand when one has enabled him to wait until he gets work. We are all of us subject, unfortunately, to movements of brusquerie and haughtiness towards our inferiors; but there are few men so wanting in delicacy as to speak harshly to the poor man whom they have relieved, to forget that an alms commits the donor, and closes his lips for ever to anything that might seem like a reproach to the recipient. (Frederic Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne: his Life and Works, p176-178

SCRIPTURE

Jn 13:1-20

Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'Never!' said Peter. 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me.' Simon Peter said, 'Well then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has had a bath needs washing, such a person is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'.

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. 'Now that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly. I am not speaking about all of you: I know the ones I have chosen; but what scripture says must be fulfilled: 'He who shares my table takes advantage of me. I tell you this now, before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe that I am He. In all truth I tell you, whoever welcomes the one I send, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.'

REFLECTION

These words of Frederic's call us to remember that when we are helping people in need there can be a power imbalance. We can be inclined to see ourselves as really wonderful because we are helping these people in need, and yet the call is to see them as people just like us. Frederic asks to think about how we can help these people to retain their dignity and not to be humiliated by the assistance that we give them. This idea is linked with Jesus model of servanthood. He puts himself in the place of a lowly servant and performs one of the lowliest tasks imaginable at that time. Then he reminds us to treat others in this way.

NUMBER 22



**HAVE YOU EVER
THOUGHT ABOUT
HOW OUR HELP
COULD BE
MUTUAL?**

**WHAT WOULD
THIS MUTUALITY
LOOK LIKE?**

WORDS

The first duty of Christians now is not to be frightened, and the second is not to frighten others, but, on the contrary, to reassure the timorous, and to make them understand that the present crisis is like a storm that cannot last. Providence is still here, and we never see it allow these financial shocks, which shake the material order of societies, to last more than a few months. Let us not then be over-anxious about the morrow, saying "What shall we eat and how shall we clothe ourselves? Let us only have courage, and seek first the justice of God and the welfare of the country, and everything else will be given to us over and above.

(Frederic Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne: his Life and Works, p236)

SCRIPTURE

Lk 12:16-31

Then he told them a parable, 'There was once a rich man who, having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, "What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them, and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time." But God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God.'

Then he said to his disciples, 'That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Think of the ravens. They do not sow or reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet God feeds them. And how much more you are worth than the birds! Can any of you, however much you worry, add a single cubit to your span of life? If a very small thing is beyond your powers, why worry about the rest? Think how the flowers grow; they never have to spin or weave; yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of them. Now if that is how God clothes a flower which is growing wild today and is thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will he look after you, who have so little faith! But you must not set your hearts on things to eat and things to drink; nor must you worry. It is the gentiles of this world who set their hearts on all these things. Your Father well knows you need them. No; set your hearts on his kingdom, and these other things will be given you as well.

REFLECTION

These words of Frederic Ozanam seem eerily appropriate to our current times. It can be very easy to get caught up in the doomsday predictions that abound in our world. However, both Frederic's words and these words of Luke call upon us to trust in God and to believe that divine providence will look after us and help us to get through the most difficult of experiences.

NUMBER 23



HOW DOES YOUR FAITH AND THE EXAMPLE OF PEOPLE LIKE FREDERIC OZANAM HELP YOU TO GET THROUGH HARD TIMES?

HOW MUCH OF YOUR MINISTRY IN THE SOCIETY IS "REASSURING THE TIMOROUS"?

WORDS

Let us learn, above all, to defend our convictions, "he says, 'but without hating our adversaries; let us learn how to love those who think differently from us, to admit that there are Christians in every camp, and that God can be served today as ever. Let us complain less of the times, and more of ourselves; let us be less faint-hearted, let us be worthier (Frederic Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne: his Life and Works, p261)

SCRIPTURE

Lk 6:39-42

Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap; because the standard you use will be the standard used for you.' He also told them a parable, 'Can one blind person guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? Disciple is not superior to teacher; but fully trained disciple will be like teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the great log in your own? How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out that splinter in your eye," when you cannot see the great log in your own? Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter in your brother's eyes.

REFLECTION

Frederic's words remind us that there are many different ways of being a Catholic or a Christian and indeed many different ways of being a Vincentian. It can be easy to be critical of others when they do things differently to the way that we would do them.

NUMBER 24



HOW WELCOMING ARE YOU OF DIFFERENCES IN YOUR CONFERENCE AND IN OTHER PARTS OF THE SOCIETY?

WORDS

We have not two lives, one to search out the truth, and the other to practise it. This is why God does not need to be searched after. He reveals himself in this living Christian society which surrounds you; he is before your eyes, he urges you. (Frederic Ozanam, Professor at the Sorbonne: his Life and Works, p274)

SCRIPTURE

Jn 8:28-36

So Jesus said: When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of my own accord. What I say is what the Father has taught me; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him. As he was saying this, many came to believe in him. To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free. They answered, 'We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, "You will be set free?" 'Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now a slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.

REFLECTION

Frederic and Jesus are both talking about the importance of truth in our lives. Living in the truth will set us free.

NUMBER 25



WHERE DO YOU FIND THE TRUTH?

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO LIVE IN THE TRUTH?