



To serve the poor is to  
worship

Let us stand side by  
side with the poor.

The poor have been pushed to the fringes of society throughout history. Even the Church has not always been clearly on their side and has not always used its influence for the benefit of their rights and dignity. Instead of committing to change their living conditions, one often contented oneself with alms for the poor. So it was during the time of Frederic Ozanam. The windows of Notre Dame cathedral were dark. There was no light of hope which came from the church. It's no wonder that, in their despair, people turned to other ideologies (the red flags of communism) and, in their need, turned to violence in order to fight for their rights.

Frederic Ozanam, professor at the Sorbonne University in Paris, was one of the few to recognize that it was essential for society as well as for the church to look after the weak and exploited

He said, " The question which divides people in our time is whether society will continue to exploit the many to the advantage of the strong or to sacrifice a few for the good of the whole, especially for the protection of the meek. On one side is the power of wealth, on the other, the power of despair."

He called on the church in particular to fully commit itself to the protection and comfort of the poor. He also stood for the principles of the French Revolution: freedom, equality, and brotherhood appeared to him to be the perfect expression of the gospels' challenge

The houses, painted in three colors, point to this conviction. The church's lack of interest in the sorrow of the industrial workers deeply concerned him. He wrote, "Had Christians cared more about workers in the last few years, we could now look with confidence to the future." Desperate people stormed the church St. Germain-Auxerrois and shot Archbishop Affre, killing him.

On February 10th, 1848, in the newspaper *Le Correspondent*, Ozanam responded, "Let us align ourselves with the barbarians ("passons aux barbares"), instead of complying with the interests of the egotistical bourgeoisie."

It was important to him not only to develop social ideas, but also to go to the people, in order to understand their lot and to truly be able to help them. "It is of little value to pore over books and listen to speeches when it comes to social welfare and charity reform. Much more must one climb up the steps of the poor houses. One must sit on the beds of the poor, one must feel the cold with them...only then can one think of a solution to their problems."

With one hand he touches the children and, with that gesture, touches all those whom no one wanted anything to do with, neither at that time nor today.

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People  
everywhere among us  
going by  
looking on  
looking away  
meeting



A person like me  
and yet different  
somehow, -foreign,  
what separates us?  
What binds us?



I was sad  
and you comforted  
me.

I was a Roma,  
who sold cheap wares,  
and you did not chase me  
away instead, you bought  
something from me



I begged  
and you  
gave me work.



Lord,  
as you are no longer with us,  
when once you were of flesh  
and blood, then so it was your  
will, that we should take up  
your presence amid the  
people of today.  
You no longer have your  
hands, rather, you have ours.





You no longer have your eyes,  
rather, you have ours.

(Longer pause to view the painting and meditate)



Our hands, with which to soothe the brows of the sick and the elderly. Our eyes, with which to look upon them, to look upon the one, who before now no one has really seen. You have our smile to awaken anew the taste for life, so that each of our mortal acts, Lord, can be a holy act, a true sacrament.



Relief in the very anticipation of being saved and living in sheer poverty, we stand here in this world just as did a young professor at the Sorbonne 170 years ago, one Frederic Ozanam, who said...



"The question which divides people in our time is whether society will continue to exploit the many to the advantage of the strong or to sacrifice a few for the protection of the weak. In plain speech: one must sit on the beds of the poor, one must feel the cold with them. Only then can one understand their lot and truly be able to help them."



The eyes are the windows of the soul. Fr. Henri Boulad, SJ, calls it the "sacrament of the gaze". St. Vincent de Paul said, "How beautiful are poor people to look at, if we consider them in God and with the esteem in which Jesus Christ held them."

(XI:26)



The painter, Fr. Sieger Köder (left) during a visit to Vinzidorf.

“Serving the poor is going to God  
and you should see God in them.”  
St. Vincent, Conference of 31 July 1634  
to the Daughters of Charity.

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