



St Vincent de Paul

FEAST DAY

27TH SEPTEMBER

1581- 1660

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners.” (Lk 4:18)

The Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, 27th September, is the feast day of the patron of the Society.

St Vincent de Paul transformed the face of the Church.

Spirituality for St Vincent is an energising vision, a divine force. It is the specific way in which a person is rooted in God. The spirituality of all Christians is centred in Jesus Christ.

St Vincent took a particular aspect of Jesus figure. St Vincent did not look at Jesus Christ as a Teacher, nor as a Healer, but as the Evangelizer of the people living in deep poverty.

Vincent was born in 1581 in the village of Pouy in Gascony, in the Province of Guyenne and Gascony, France, to peasant farmers, father Jean and mother Bertrande de Moras de Paul. He had three brothers - Jean, Bernard and Gayon, and two sisters - Marie and Marie-Claudine. He was the third child. At an early age, he showed a talent for reading and writing but during his childhood, his work was as a herder of his family's livestock. At 15, his father sent him to seminary, managing to pay for it by selling the family's oxen.

Vincent's interest in the priesthood at that time, was largely with the intent to establish a successful career and obtain a benefice, with which he could retire early. However Vincent's thoughts were not God's thoughts!

For two years, Vincent received his education at a college in Dax, France. The atmosphere at the university was anything but pious or conducive to spiritual contemplation. Fights broke out between various factions of students which escalated into armed battles. During the course of the unrest, an official was murdered by two students. Nevertheless, he continued his studies and was able to help pay for his education by tutoring others. He was ordained on 23 September 1600 at the age of nineteen in Château-l'Évêque, near Périgueux. This was against the regulations established by the Council of Trent which required a minimum of 24 years of age for ordination, so when he was appointed parish priest in Tilh, the appointment was appealed against in the Court of Rome. Rather than respond to a lawsuit in which he would probably not have prevailed, he resigned from the position and continued his studies. On 12 October 1604 he received his Bachelor of Theology from the University of Toulouse. Later he received a Licentiate in Canon Law from the University of Paris.

Vincent went to Rome where he continued his studies until 1609, when he was sent back to France on a mission to King Henry IV. Once in Paris, he made the acquaintance of Pierre de Bérulle, whom he took as his spiritual advisor. André Duval, of the Sorbonne introduced him to Canfield's "Rule of Perfection".

In 1612 he was sent as parish priest to the Church of Saint-Medard in Clichy. In less than a year Bérulle recalled him to Paris to serve as a chaplain and tutor to the Gondi family.

Vincent's conversion began through his time with and preaching a mission to the peasants on the Gondi estates which opened him to a call that he should direct his efforts to the poor. It was the Countess de Gondi who persuaded her husband to endow and support a group of able and zealous missionaries who would work among poor tenant farmers and country people in general.

In 1617, Vincent founded the "Ladies of Charity" from a group of women within his parish. He organized these wealthy women of Paris to collect funds for missionary projects, found hospitals, and gather relief funds for the victims of war and to ransom 1,200 galley slaves from North Africa. From these, with the help of St. Louise de Marillac, came the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul (French: Filles de la Charité).

Vincent was zealous in conducting retreats for clergy at a time when there was great laxity, abuse, and ignorance among them. He was a pioneer in clerical training and was instrumental in establishing seminaries. He spent twenty-eight years serving as the spiritual director of the Convent of St. Mary of Angels.

Vincent died in Paris on 27 September 1660.

Vincent de Paul offers a constant reminder in the twenty-first century, as he offered in his own 17th century world of France that true charity consists not just in assistance that is given but in willingness to relate humanly to those whom we meet and whose needs call for our support.

Here are his words to his followers:

"You will find out that Charity is a heavy burden to carry, heavier than the kettle of soup and the full basket. But you will keep your gentleness and your smile. It is not enough to give soup and bread. This the rich can do. You are the servant of the poor, always smiling and good-humoured. They are your masters, terribly sensitive and exacting master you will see. And the uglier and the dirtier they will be, the more unjust and insulting, the more love you must give them. It is for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give to them."

The Vincentian Spirit then is the Spirit of Christ himself as sent to preach the good news to the poor. This is expressed this through:

Love and reverence towards the Father,

Compassionate and effective love for the poor,

Peacefulness and trust in the Divine Providence,

St Vincent de Paul, pray for us!

