
English edition

Maynard, Michel Ulysse

1959

Virtues and Spiritual Doctrine of Saint Vincent De Paul

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/maynard_en

Recommended Citation

Virtues and Spiritual Doctrine of Saint Vincent De Paul.
https://via.library.depaul.edu/maynard_en/1

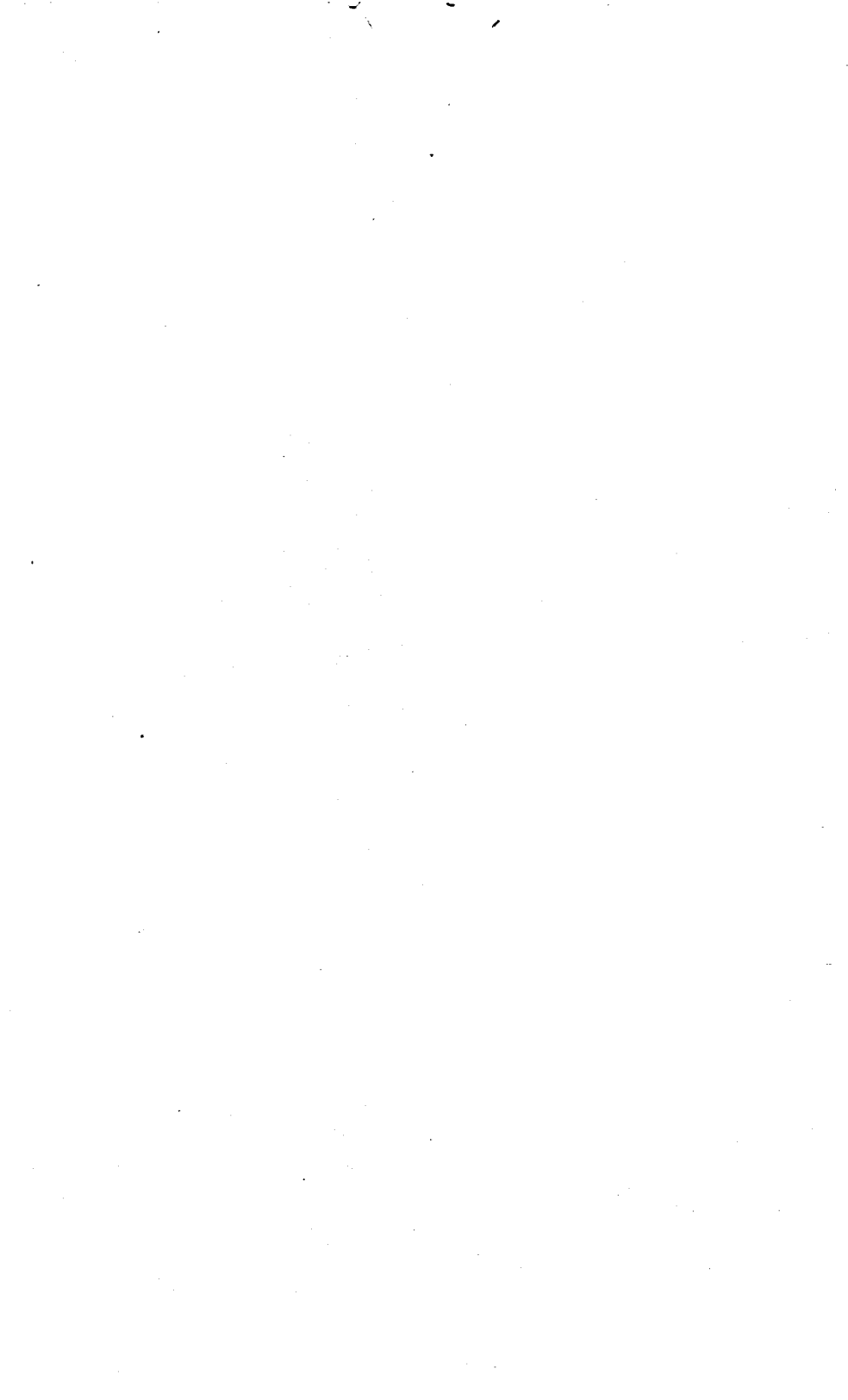
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Maynard, Michel Ulysse at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in English edition by an authorized administrator of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

*VIRTUES AND
SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE
of
SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL*

By ABBÉ MAYNARD

REVISED BY
CARLTON A. PRINDEVILLE, C.M.

VINCENTIAN FOREIGN MISSION PRESS
1849 CASS AVENUE
ST. LOUIS 6, MISSOURI



IMPRIMI POTEST:

GEORGE A. EIRICH, C.M., S.T.L.

NIHIL OBSTAT:

JOHN A. SCHULIEN, S.T.D.
Censor librorum

IMPRIMATUR:

✠ WILLIAM E. COUSINS
Archbishop of Milwaukee
October 28, 1960

Reviser's Preface

The French work, "Vertus et Doctrine Spirituelle de Saint Vincent de Paul" written by Abbé Maynard, appeared in 1864 as the American Civil War was drawing to a close. It was translated into English thirteen years later by a priest of the Congregation of the Mission, and published by the Seminary of Our Lady of the Angels, Niagara Falls, New York. The present work is a revision of that early translation, with reference, where necessary, to the French original. It issues from St. Mary's Seminary, Perryville, Missouri.

In his preface to the English translation of Civil War days, the anonymous translator calls attention to the wealth of material drawn by Abbé Maynard from conferences, correspondence, and — in lesser measure — from personal incidents in the life of St. Vincent. He also remarks upon the difficulties encountered in translating seventeenth-century French into nineteenth-century English.

Under such difficulties the translator wrought well in accomplishing his task of devoted service to the American public and the double family of Vincentian Missioners and Daughters of Charity; but his accomplishment must be measured in its literary context of the latter nineteenth century. Since then the diction, phraseology, and sentence structure of our language have undergone changes, not radical but significant, which call for a somewhat altered presentation of the Abbé's fascinating document.

Meanwhile there has not been any change in the spiritual beauty and eminent practicality that characterized the widely diverse and urgently needed works of St. Vincent, wide-flung works of beneficence which have well merited for him the titles, Father of the Poor, and Apostle of Charity. St. Paul draws a line of distinction between such works and a personal sanctity that constitutes the wellspring of truly apostolic ministrations. He begged for the aid of prayer lest, while preaching to other men, he might neglect his own sanctifica-

tion, and fall from the life of grace. St. Vincent achieved that inner life as do all the saints of God. But the Abbé's book presents with arresting vividness the astonishing manner and intensity with which he realized the words of the Apostle, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me."

His ideals of Christian faith and fraternity, and his practical ways of implementing those ideals, will be of special interest to his Confreres of the Congregation of the Mission and his Daughters of Charity, who figure largely in these pages. They will be of particular value to seminarians. They will bring guidance and encouragement to men of good will who, wearied and despondent in a maelstrom of space-age mechanization and materialism, are eager to find and possess genuinely human values. There are such values in the human soul where dwell the quiet radiance of spiritual promise, and the fostering warmth of supernatural charity, "unaffected love" for God and fellow man.

CARLTON A. PRINDEVILLE, C.M.

Feast of St. Paul's Conversion
January 25, 1960

Contents

Reviser's Preface	v
-----------------------------	---

PART I . FAITH AND HOPE

1. Divine Faith	1
2. Hope and Confidence in God	5
3. Discouragement	9
4. Local Administration	13

PART II . DIVINE LOVE

5. Love for God	17
6. Conformity to the Will of God	21
7. Instances of Conformity	25
8. Means of Conformity	28
9. Detachment	32
10. Recollection; the Presence of God	36

PART III . PRAYER

11. The Art of Prayer	38
12. Varieties of Prayer	41
13. Exercise of the Will in Prayer	45
14. Perseverance in Prayer	48
15. Imitation of Christ	51
16. Devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament	56
17. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin	59

PART IV . ZEAL

18. Apostolic Zeal	61
19. Courage	65
20. War and Pestilence	69
21. Retreats at St. Lazare	73
22. Vincentian Vocations	77

PART V . FRATERNAL CHARITY

23. Charity Toward the Neighbor	80
24. Service to the Clergy	85
25. Devotedness to the Congregation of the Mission	90
26. Generosity to the Poor	94
27. From the Abundance of the Heart	100
28. The Compassion of Charity	104
29. Tactfulness Under Provocation	109
30. Confidence	114
31. The Training of Seminarians	118
32. The Needs of the Poor	123
33. Mutual Forbearance	128
34. Vocation to the Religious Life	133

PART VI . HUMILITY

35. Meekness	139
36. Affability Among Members of a Community	147
37. Cordiality and Forbearance	147
38. Humility	152
39. A Reply to Count Obidos	157

40. Dedication of a Book to Vincent de Paul	160
41. Bitter Jest and Cruel Calumny	165
42. Mass Vestments	168
43. A Virtue of Jesus Christ	172
44. A Reward for Humility	176
45. Vain Complacency	179
46. Desire for Human Esteem	183
47. Progress and Publicity	186

PART VII . OBEDIENCE AND SIMPLICITY

48. Obedience	190
49. Spiritual Navigation	194
50. Qualities of Obedience	197
51. Christian Simplicity	201
52. Simplicity in Preaching	206
53. A Mission in Piedmont	209

PART VIII . PRUDENCE AND POVERTY

54. Prudence	211
55. Administering an Admonition	215
56. A Conference on Prudence	218
57. Justice and Gratitude	221
58. Gifts of God	225
59. Benefactors	229
60. Detachment and Poverty	233
61. Morality Versus Money	236

62. Poverty of Spirit	240
63. Family and Friends	245

PART IX . TEMPERANCE

64. Mortification and Atonement	250
65. Self-Denial	255
66. Humility and Health	259
67. Chastity	262
68. Composure of Spirit	267

PART X . FORTITUDE

69. Courage and Patience	271
70. Meekness Under Fire	275
71. A Letter to a Novice	279
72. Too Much Tranquillity	283
73. Patience in Sickness	286
74. Spiritual Strength in Bodily Weakness	290

PART XI . COMMUNITY ADMINISTRATION

75. Administration	295
76. Administration of Temporalities	299
77. Dismissal of Unfit Members	304
78. Science and Sanctity	308
79. Uniformness in Community Functions	312
80. Responsibilities of Administrative Office	317
81. Difficulties of Administration	321
82. Advice to a Newly Appointed Superior	326

*Letters and Fragmentary Writings
of St. Louise De Marillac*

PART I . "THE GREATEST OF THESE"

1. Love for God 331
2. Practices of Devotion 333

PART II . "AS WAYFARERS"

3. Earthly Pilgrimage 335
4. Change of House 335

PART III . "AND DWELT AMONG US"

5. Morning Meditation 336
6. Recreation 337
7. Christmas 338

PART IV . "YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES"

8. A Mission in Poland 339
9. Mutual Cordiality 341

PART V . "I AM . . . AS HE THAT SERVES"

10. Superior and Subject 342
11. Disunion and Discouragement 343
12. A Letter to the Sisters of Nantes 344

PART VI . "UNTO THIS YOU ARE CALLED"

13. Patience in Trials 346
14. Tribulations of Office 347
15. A Final Illness 347

**PART VII . "GOD . . .
COMFORTS THE HUMBLE"**

16. Relief in Distress 349
17. Mutual Forbearance 349
18. Courage and Other Virtues 350

**PART VIII . "THAT YOU . . . MIGHT
KNOW THE LOVE I BEAR YOU"**

19. Concerning a Letter From St. Vincent 352

PART IX . "THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE"

20. Apostolic Benediction 354
21. Last Will and Testament 354

VIRTUES AND SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE
OF
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

PART I . FAITH AND HOPE

CHAPTER I *Divine Faith*

An act of divine faith is the beginning of salvation, the first approach to the worship and service of God. It is the root of Christian virtue, the foundation of the spiritual edifice (Trent Den. 801). Such faith was the inspiration of St. Vincent in all his undertakings. Characterized by the simplicity of childhood, and the maturity of age, it burgeoned in a vigorous and beautiful charity that was coextensive with the needs of all mankind.

The faith of St. Vincent was vigorous and strong. Like a tree that seems to anchor its roots more firmly under the stress of tempestuous winds, it grew in strength under the assaults of temptation. Held as a slave in Tunis, he resisted the threats and persuasion of his pagan masters. At the Court of Queen Margaret, he patiently endured a protracted and very painful temptation against his faith, which an heroic charity had induced him to take upon himself in order to relieve the pitiful distress and grave danger to a fellow priest. His faith stood firm and unyielding against a rising tide of Jansenism. He frequently gave thanks to God, and with reason, for successfully avoiding all taint of contemporary error, for having maintained on all occasions the teachings of the Church.

His faith was expansive, communicative. He loved to catechize and instruct whomever and wherever possible, but especially the poor people of rural areas. For, by so doing, he shared with others the divine truths that guided and sustained his own daily life and constant hope. Though necessarily restricted in his personal efforts, his world-embracing faith found able colaborers in his Missioners, who

preached the Gospel throughout France, and in foreign countries.

In safeguarding the divine mysteries and as well the human souls entrusted to him, St. Vincent was watchful to discern doctrinal error, and, while never forgetful of meekness and charity toward erring teachers, he was aggressive and unyielding in his opposition to heretical doctrine. Armed with prayer, zeal, and charity, he steadfastly safeguarded his own Missioners and the religious and secular communities of which he was the superior. In this respect, he was of service to the diocesan hierarchy and clergy, bishops and theologians, helping them by timely encouragement and warning, to maintain their doctrinal integrity free from all reproach. It is true that a few members of his Congregation, led astray by Jansenism, remained obdurate in error despite his urgent pleading, but they were expelled, and so the Community was protected.

In his effective campaign against Jansenism, he lost none of his characteristic humility. "God gave me grace to discern truth from error," he said, "even before the issuance of a doctrinal definition by the Holy See. At the same time there was no resultant feeling of complacency or vain joy; for the conformity of my judgment with the mind of the Church was but a gift of God's mercy toward me — as I knew very well. And all the glory, therefore, was owing to Him."

To complete the description, the faith of St. Vincent was full and active. It enlightened his understanding, warmed his heart, animated his thoughts, affections, words, and actions. It afforded him guidance everywhere and in everything.

Everywhere and in all things, not only in the affairs of God, but also in temporal and human affairs, faith lent him guidance according to the maxims of Jesus Christ. All his undertakings had their source in faith, and their goal in God. The saint would gladly have instilled into other souls a virtue as pure and strong as his own. He reprehended an undue reliance upon natural knowledge and human reasoning in the explanation of Christian truth. Similarly he disapproved of too close and curious an examination of supernatural mysteries. He made use of the following comparison: "The

more fixedly we gaze upon the sun, the less we are able to see by its light; and the more intensely we depend upon reason in dealing with mysteries of divine revelation, the less we know by the illumination of supernatural faith. Once the Church has proposed such mysteries, we certainly should not refuse to submit our will and judgment."

"The Church," he went on, "is the kingdom of God, and He enlightens her prelates with principles of good government. The Holy Spirit presides over ecclesiastical councils. From Him has come the light which everywhere has guided saints, converted sinners, and has made known to faithful Christians the right way of their salvation."

Though exercising charity and moderation toward the people of Port Royal, he would have no part of concession that could only compromise the faith, and work injury to immortal souls. "When a dispute has been decided," he said, "the only possible agreement is acceptance of the judgment that has been rendered. Before their condemnation these gentlemen did everything possible to effect the triumph of error over truth. They would not listen to any terms of agreement; and so intemperate were they in their desire to gain the upper hand, that hardly anyone dared to oppose them. And now that the Holy Sec has decided against them, they are seeking to offer various interpretations of the Papal decree in order to evade and circumvent the adverse decision.

"With a semblance of sincerity they have made submission to the common Father of the faithful. Ostensibly they have accepted the Apostolic Constitution in which the propositions of Jansenius are condemned. But all the while not a word of disavowal has been published by their constituents or adherents who have written books and articles in support of the condemned propositions.

"What communion therefore can we have with them so long as they have no sincere intention of submitting? What compromise is possible with regard to a decision issued by the Church. These are matters of Catholic faith. They are not subject to modification, and consequently they cannot be shaped into agreement with contradictory ideas and sentiments. Let these gentlemen unite with us in Catholic

faith, submitting sincerely to the head of the Church. Lacking their submission, we can only pray to God for their conversion."

The Saint disapproved of precipitation and anxiety, for he regarded them as indications of distrust in Divine Providence. To Mlle. Le Gras he wrote, "I perceive in you something of purely human sentiment; when you learn that I am unwell, you imagine that all is lost. Woman of little faith! Why have you not more confidence in the guidance and example of Jesus Christ? This Savior of the world trusted in God the Father for the state of the entire Church, and you think He will fail you in regard to a handful of daughters whom His providence has evidently gathered together! Go, Mademoiselle, humble yourself very much before God."

He regarded overconfidence in human reasons as one explanation for insufficient progress in virtue and the things of God. "Only eternal truth," he said, "is capable of satisfying the heart and leading us in safety. Not that there is anything wrong with the employment of sound reasoning; solid argument is always advantageous when devoted to the service of the faith. However, experience teaches that, in presenting religious truth, natural reason should hold a subordinate position since considerations drawn from divine faith are incomparably more effective of salutary fruit in souls. The reason is that such considerations are always accompanied by a certain heavenly unction that secretly penetrates the heart."

He taught further that things are to be judged, not according to external appearances, but according to what they really are in the sight of God. "I ought not regard a poor peasant according either to appearances," he said, "or to intellectual capacity. Often he is earthly and stupid even to the point of seeming to possess neither the form nor the mind of a rational being. But look upon him again in the light of divine faith, and you will see that the Son of God, who became poor for our sakes, is presented to our view in his person (2 Cor. 8:9). How inspiring it is to look upon poor people when we consider their place in God and the esteem in which Jesus Christ held them!"

CHAPTER 2 *Hope and Confidence in God*

Christian hope stems from divine faith, and it is in proportion to the source from which it springs. This virtue in St. Vincent was of extraordinary power and vitality. It sustained and strengthened him in the midst of labors, difficulties, and obstacles. When there was question of undertaking a work in the service of God, he began by having recourse to prayer, that he might learn the divine will. Satisfied on this point, he began the task, abandoning himself to the divine protection and assistance. While not neglecting the recommendations of human prudence, his first thought was to find some indication of divine action and guidance; for he was convinced that he must work together with God, hand in hand, so to speak, never in advance of Him.

Once he had begun the work in this manner he was not afraid of anything, either for himself, or for his Congregation. Timorous, inconstant souls might endeavor to dissuade him, pointing out the impracticability or even the impossibility of the venture. They might better have saved their breath. "Let us allow our Lord to act," he would answer; "it is His work, and since He has willed to begin the enterprise, we may rest assured that He will bring it to completion in a manner that is pleasing to Himself. Courage, therefore! Let us put confidence in our Lord, for He will be with us first and last in the accomplishment of a work to which He has called us."

True, expenses were heavy sometimes, and houses of the Congregation were under pressure of grave need; but for all that, his paternal heart, though grieving over those who suffered, was neither bereft of hope, nor shaken with alarm in looking to the future and what it might hold in store. Disappointments and afflictions, dangers and labors, far from depressing him, served as opportunities of testifying his trust in God, his unshaken dependence upon the divine will. A work might go badly; it mattered little to St. Vincent, for, accepting failure as coming from the hand of God, he gave thanks for that also.

While proceedings were going on at the Court of Rome for the elevation of his Missioners to the status of a Congregation, and while at the same time negotiations were in progress for the transfer of the Priory of St. Lazare to St. Vincent's possession, he manifested remarkable composure of mind and manner. "I fear only my sins," he said; "I have no misgivings in regard to our cause either in Rome or in Paris. Sooner or later all will be accomplished."

To establish those under him in these maxims and in this manner of acting, he induced them to conceive a great diffidence in themselves, and to become thoroughly convinced that by their own efforts they could do nothing except spoil everything in the work and design of God. He then dwelt on the greatness of the divine mercy. "God," he said, "is a fountain from which each one draws according to his wants. He who needs six pailfuls, receives six; he who requires three, only three; and the little bird that wants only to moisten his beak, flies away immediately afterward. A traveler must drink from the hollow of his hand." Impressed with this idea of the mercy of God, he desired entire abandonment to Providence, just as the child abandons himself to its nurse. "If the nurse places the child on her right arm, the child is content; if she change it to the left, it does not mind, and, provided it has the breast, it is content."

"Let us then say to ourselves: 'God is my father. Let Him put me on the right side, that is to say, in peace and contentment, or on the left, which signifies the cross, it matters not; He will strengthen me, and I will hope in Him.'" It was confidence in God that he gave as a viaticum to those whom he sent into the missions. "Go, Gentlemen, in the name of God," he said to them: "it is He who sends you; you are undertaking this voyage and this mission for His service and His glory. He then will be your guide, He will protect and aid you. This we hope from His infinite goodness. Keep yourselves always in a firm dependence on His faithful guidance; have recourse to Him in all places and in all circumstances. Throw yourselves into His arms, for you should recognize Him as a tender father. Have a firm confidence that He will assist you and bless your labors."

If Missioners grew weak and weary under the burden, he renewed their courage by urging confidence in God. He wrote to their Superior: "I sympathize with you in your labors; they are great, and they go on increasing while sickness is diminishing your forces. It is our good Lord who does this, and certainly He will not leave so great a load on your hands without helping you to sustain it. He will Himself be your strength as well as your recompense for the extraordinary services which, in this pressing need, you render Him. Believe me, when our Lord gives a helping hand, three men can effect more than ten; and He always does help when He deprives us of human means, and places us in the necessity of doing what is beyond our strength. However we shall beseech His divine Goodness to restore your sick to health, and to infuse into your community a great hope in His mercy."

"You must not be surprised," he wrote, "nor frightened because the year is bad. God abounds in riches. Nothing has been wanting to you up to the present; why, then, fear for the future? You would like to have all provision made so as to be assured of having all you desire. I say that you wish to have it so, according to nature, for I think that according to the spirit you are glad to have an opportunity of relying on God alone, and, like a poor man, of depending on the liberality of this Lord who is infinitely rich. May God help the poor people; they are to be pitied in times of distress because they do not know how to turn this time to their advantage. They do not seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, that they may be made worthy to receive material goods over and above the assistance required for everlasting life."

Regarding a heavy loss he said: "All that God does He does for the best; and therefore we must hope that this loss, since it comes from God, will be profitable to us. All things are of benefit to a just man; and we are assured that the adversities we receive from the hand of God will become a joy and a blessing. I beg of you Gentlemen and my dear Brothers, to thank God for the outcome of this affair, for the deprivation of this property and for the disposition He

has given us to accept this loss willingly for His love.

"The loss is great, but His adorable wisdom will know how to turn it to our good, and in a way which to us at present is unknown. But one day we shall see. Yes, we shall see. And I trust that the manner in which you have conducted yourselves in this misfortune, so little foreseen, will serve as a foundation for the grace that God will give you, of making in the future a perfect use of all the afflictions it will please Him to send us."

They should not be troubled at intrigues and persecutions. He wrote: "In regard to the intrigues that are being carried out against us, let us pray God to guard us from this spirit; since we blame it in others, it is all the more reasonable that we be careful to avoid it. It is a fault against Divine Providence, which renders those who are guilty of it unworthy of the care that God takes of everything. Let us establish ourselves in entire dependence on His holy guidance, and on the assurance that in so doing, all that men do or say against us will turn to our good. Yes, my dear sir, even were the entire world to rise up to destroy us, it could do nothing but what is pleasing to God in whom we have placed our hope. I beg of you to enter into these sentiments, and to dwell firmly therein so that hereafter your mind will not be troubled with useless apprehensions."

The sense of their own imperfections and miseries should not, according to him, militate against their trust in God. "We have within us," he said to them, "the germ of divine Omnipotence, and this ought to be a great motive to hope and to place all our confidence in Him notwithstanding all our poverty. You must not be astonished when you see miseries among you, for each one has a good share. It is well to be aware of them, but not to be immoderately troubled by them. It is even good to turn away the thought of them when it leads to discouragement, and redouble our confidence in God and our abandonment of self into His arms."

CHAPTER 3 *Discouragement*

Still further he wrote: "I know the fidelity and care you have for the work of God. What remains for you then but to rest in peace? God requires only this with humble acquiescence in the success which He gives and which, I am sure, will be complete in your soul.

"Why, then, become discouraged? You point to your miseries. Alas! who is there that is not full of them? The only thing is to know them and to love the humiliation arising from them, as you do, without stopping except to lay a strong foundation of confidence in God. For, when a house is built upon a rock, it is not undermined or swept away by storm and rushing waters. Do not be afraid then. This is your case, I know; for these feelings of distrust and discouragement are but from nature and not from your heart which is far too generous for anything like that. Let God do with us and our works as He chooses. Though the labors we undertake, and the troubles we endure for the sake of our neighbor, be unavailing, and though our present recompense be ingratitude and contempt, nevertheless we shall not relax our efforts, knowing as we do that by perseverance we fulfill the law of loving God with our whole heart, and the neighbor as ourselves."

He frequently proposed this maxim to his Missioners: "Once God has begun to bestow His favor on a creature, He continues His beneficence unless the creature proves unworthy." And he said again: "When God once takes a soul into His affections, no matter what that soul does, He supports it. Have you never seen a father who has a little child that he loves very much? He bears with all the little one pleases to do. And why? Because he loves that little child.

"God acts the same way with us." And in this connection, he cited his own Congregation. "Let us have confidence in God, Gentlemen and my Brothers, but let our confidence be entire and perfect, holding for certain that having once begun His work in us He will finish it. I ask you, who established the Congregation? Who appointed us to the missions, to

the ordinations, to the conferences, the retreats and other works in which we are engaged? Was it I? By no means. Was it Father Portail, whom God united to me in the very beginning? Not at all; for we did not think of them, we made no such plan. Who then is the author of all this? It is God, it is His paternal providence, His pure goodness.

“As for ourselves, we are pitiable workers, poor ignorant persons. And among us there are few, if any, who are of noble birth, powerful, learned, or capable of anything. It is God then who has done all this; it is He who in doing it made use of persons according to His own pleasure so that all the glory should redound to Him. For if we place our trust in men, or if we lean on any advantage of nature, God will withdraw from us.

“Someone will say we must make friends both for ourselves as individuals, and for the Community. My Brothers, let us beware of listening to such advice lest we be deceived. Let us look only to God; He will provide us with friends and all else in such fashion that we shall not want for anything. Do you wish to know why we do not succeed in this or that undertaking? It is because we rely too much upon ourselves. That Superior, this confessor, that preacher, is too dependent upon his own prudence, upon his own learning; in a word — upon himself. And meanwhile God withdraws from the merely self-reliant Missioner, leaving him to his own resources, and his own fruitless endeavors. And so, that Missioner, chastened by his own experience, is drawn to the humble realization that without the divine assistance, he is unable to do anything.”

On the same subject he wrote to one of his Missioners in Rome: “Every day you give me reason to praise God on account of your affection for the Congregation, and your solicitude for its affairs. Indeed, I do praise Him with all my heart. But I must likewise call to your attention, as our Savior did for Martha, that in your activity there is a little too much solicitude, and that you have need of leaving more to God and His providence than you are wont to do.

“When subject to Him, foresight is good. It becomes excessive when we take alarm at every danger, when we trust

more to our own provisions and precautions than to His providence in our behalf. Our divine Savior assures us that neither a little sparrow nor a hair on our head will fall without His permission. Yet you are fearful that, apart from human provisions and precautions, our Congregation will not be able to maintain itself, and that others will come to occupy the place which we have had to abandon. Such is the tenor of your letters. And, worse than that, your sanguine temperament urges you on to act as you speak — precipitately. And in your enthusiasm you imagine that you are sufficiently informed without any need of advice from others. Dear Sir, such an attitude and manner of action ill become a Missioner!”

St. Vincent frequently referred to Abraham as an exemplar of unwavering hope and confidence. “You remember the grand old Patriarch,” he would say; “according to the divine promise his only son was to people the earth. Nevertheless that son, by the command of God, must be made a victim of sacrifice.

“An observer of the scene might well have made protest: ‘If Isaac is to be slain, how will God fulfill His promise of progeny?’” But Abraham, perfectly submissive to the divine will, was not anxious about seemingly probable consequences. God who issued the command according to His own good pleasure would make suitable provision in His own way. ‘I will obey Him,’ the Patriarch might have answered, ‘no matter what happens, and I will hope for the fulfillment of His promises.’”

“Admire such confidence,” continued the Saint; “Abraham was not apprehensive about the future yet the affair was of intimate and personal concern to him. His peace of mind was firmly based upon God’s governance and power. Similarly, Gentlemen, should we not also have confidence in God? We need only place in His care all our concerns, and remain faithfully submissive to all His commands.”

In this connection St. Vincent related the story of the Rechabites. To honor God, and manifest their absolute confidence in His paternal providence they and their father Jonadab bound themselves to abstain from the use of wine, and from the cultivation of the soil. Such an extraordinary

renunciation does not find a parallel in even the poorest of religious orders. Yet Jonadab, his children and their descendants continued this manner of life for three hundred and fifty years, meriting thereby unmistakable manifestations of the divine pleasure and approval.

St. Vincent found here a lesson of great practical significance. "Oh, Gentlemen!" he exclaimed, speaking to his Missioners, "what is our fidelity to Rule in comparison with the faithfulness of the Rechabites in practicing such poverty? What confidence we should have in God, that no matter what the circumstances in which He may please to establish us, He will provide all that is necessary! Let us then beg of His goodness, a great confidence in Him, no matter what may happen in our regard. Provided we be faithful to Him, nothing will be wanting to us. He Himself will dwell within us. He will guide, love, defend us. And all that we say, all that we do, will be acceptable to Him."

The Saint then directed their attention to God's providence over the birds of the air, and the flowers of the field, which, He asserted emphatically, is a rebuke to the unwisdom of man's tendency to rely upon his own weakness and poverty rather than upon the wealth and goodness of God. Yet the counsels of Christian prudence must not be slighted or overlooked.

"At this point I wish to say," he added, "that Superiors are under obligation to provide every confrere with everything that is necessary. God takes care of His creatures, supplying the needs of even a tiny midge. Superiors and others in official position are agents of His providence; He would have them see to it that the personnel of their house, priests, novices, scholastics and brothers, be provided with everything necessary. Their wants, whether few or many, are to be supplied. Meanwhile, you, my Brothers, in your turn should remain at peace under the loving care of the same divine providence, content with what is given, and seeking first the kingdom of God; for His infinite wisdom will supply the rest."

CHAPTER 4 *Local Administration*

St. Vincent: "Not long ago I inquired of a Carthusian superior whether they convoke a council of the religious to discuss the management of their temporal affairs. 'We assemble the officers,' he replied, 'such as the Superior and the Procurator. The others are not concerned; they are occupied in chanting the praises of God, and in doing what obedience and the Common Rule prescribe.'

"With us, thanks be to God, the same practice obtains; may it remain so! We, too, must possess property, and administer it in order to meet our needs and obligations. Though for a time the Son of God sent forth His disciples without money or provisions, He judged it proper to have the means wherewith to support His little Company and assist the poor. The Apostles profited by His example; and St. Paul relates of himself, that he labored with his own hands, and collected funds for Christians who were in want. Superiors therefore must administer, each one, the house of which he is in charge. But while careful about the management of temporal things, let them not lessen their solicitude for the cultivation of supernatural virtue. Let them encourage a spiritual vigor in their houses so that God may rule over everything. His kingdom should be their first objective."

To externs who came to consult him, the Saint gave the same advice. "Dismiss from your mind," he counseled them, "all excessive anxiety. Lack of confidence displeases God whereas by placing your trust in Him you will obtain all that you desire."

St. Vincent did not believe that confidence in God could be excessive. "Just as you are unable to believe too firmly in the truths that God has revealed, so also is it impossible to place too much trust in the promises that He has made. It is true that one may be deceived in hoping for what God has not promised, or may be guilty of presumption by hoping without a willingness to fulfill the condition under which only the divine reward can be merited; as for instance, by seeking justification without resolving to amend one's life.

Nevertheless, genuine hope, founded on the goodness of God and the merits of Christ, cannot ever fail by going to excess."

With such conviction in heart and mind, the Saint naturally assisted others who were under temptation to despair. To an ecclesiastic who had confided his troubles, he wrote as follows: "I hope that since you wrote me God has dissipated the clouds that were overshadowing you. Consequently, I will only say a word in passing. You seem to be in doubt whether you are numbered among the elect. My answer is that although no one — unless he be favored with a special revelation — can be quite sure of his predestination, nevertheless, according to the teaching of St. Paul, there are signs whereby we may be morally certain in identifying the true children of God.

"These marks, my dear Sir, I see in you by the grace of God. The very letter wherein you say that you do not perceive any such indications — your letter itself reveals a number of them, and my long acquaintance with you discloses the others. Believe me, Sir, I am not acquainted with any soul more devoted to God than you are, nor any heart more free from evil, more ardent for good than your own.

"You tell me it does not appear so to you. And I answer that God does not always permit His chosen ones to discern the purity of their own interior amid the movements of corrupt nature. He conceals it from them in order that they may humble themselves unceasingly, and that their treasure of grace and holiness may be possessed in greater security. Our Lord is desirous of completing the work of your sanctification. Let His paternal affection give you guidance, for He loves you. And so far is He from rejecting a soul adorned with virtue such as yours, that He never abandons a sinner that hopes in His mercy."

To Missioners and Daughters of Charity he recommended the same confidence. "The true Missioner," he said, "ought never to be anxious about the goods of this world; he should place his trust in the providence of God, never doubting that so long as he is well established in charity, he will always be under the divine protection, and that in consequence no

evil will come to him, and no good be wanting even though external appearances should seem to indicate that all is going to ruin.

"I do not say this of myself; it is written in the psalms: 'You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, say to the Lord, 'my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust' (Ps. 90:1 f.). He who is steadfast in confidence, will be favored with a special protection. No evil will befall him, because all things concur to his advantage; and no necessary benefit will be wanting to him, because God, in giving Himself, brings all good things for both body and soul."

To the Daughters of Charity he spoke the same comforting advice and assurance. When one of them had come forth unharmed from the ruins of a falling house, he commented: "Could God employ a better way of showing how acceptable to Him is the service you render Him in the person of the poor? A new house collapsed, and thirty-five or forty people were crushed beneath the ruins. But this Daughter, with her jar of soup, was in the same house. She stood on a corner of the steps which, it would seem, Providence was holding intact for the express purpose of protecting her. She escaped all harm; she came out of the danger safe and sound.

"We must believe that angels drew her thence. . . . Men, doubtless, were there to lend assistance, but the ministrations of angels was necessary to sustain her. Oh, what marvelous protection! Do you imagine, my Daughters, it was without purpose that God permitted a new house to collapse? Do you think it was by mere coincidence that the Sister was there at the same time? Do you think that her escape was merely a stroke of good fortune? Assuredly it was more than that. Those occurrences have about them an atmosphere of the miraculous. They were preordained so as to furnish unmistakable evidence of the care in which God holds your Community."

Another time a floor gave way in a house of the Sisters, but no one was there at the moment. "Ah, my Daughters," exclaimed the Saint, "what good reason we have to trust in God! Houses are overturned, and Daughters of Charity emerge

from the ruins without the slightest injury. What is this but an evidence that they are as dear to God as the apple of His eye? My Daughters, provided you cherish this holy confidence in your hearts, you may rest assured that God will protect you no matter where you may be."

PART II . DIVINE LOVE

CHAPTER 5 *Love for God*

Vincent's love for God manifested itself by perfect obedience to His holy law. The apostle of charity has written: ". . . he who keeps his word, in him the love of God is truly perfected" (1 Jn. 2:5). The Saint's life was entirely regulated by the divine law since it was entirely consumed by the divine love. His charity was further manifested by an ardent, continuous, and practical desire, that God be known more and more, that He be adored, served, obeyed, loved, and glorified at all times, in all places, and by all creatures. His was a desire that found voice in ardent aspirations: "My Lord, my Savior! Divine Goodness, my God! When will you grant us the grace to be entirely yours, to love you only?" He inspired like sentiments in others. The reaction of those who heard him speak was like that of the disciples who listened to the words of Christ as they made their way to Emmaus.

At a meeting of the Ladies of Charity, Madame de Lamignon spoke for those present when she described her own emotion: "Might we not say with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, that our hearts were glowing with the ardor of divine love while Father Vincent was speaking to us? For my part, though not keenly sensible to spiritual things, I assure you that my heart is all aflame with the words of that holy man." "It is astonishing," replied another of the ladies; "he is an angel of the Lord, and he bears with him the fire of divine love." "That is very true," added a third; "and it will depend upon us to share in the fire of that same love."

The same impression was produced at the ecclesiastical

conferences. "As we listened to his words," Bossuet relates, "there was not one of us who did not feel that the words of the apostle Peter were being fulfilled, 'If anyone speaks, let it be as with words of God'" (1 Pet. 4:11).

Many came to the conferences only to hear him, and they went away saddened whenever his modesty forbade him to speak. Eminent bishops were often among those present. When, through humility and respect, Vincent yielded to them the conclusion of the exercises, they refused in order not to be deprived of the happiness of hearing him. One day, the most venerable of them said to him: "Father Vincent, you must not deprive the company, through your humility, of the good thoughts with which God has inspired you. There is a certain indescribable unction of the Holy Spirit in your words that touches everyone. Moreover, these Gentlemen request you to impart your views because one word from you will have more effect than all that we can say." On leaving the conference they used to say to the Missioners: "You are indeed happy in seeing and hearing daily a man so filled with the love of God."

Purity of intention was the means employed to form in his disciples a love for God. He said to them: "God does not look so much to the exterior of our actions as to the degree of love, and purity of intention with which we perform them. Small actions are not so subject to vain glory as our more brilliant ones which often end in a puff of smoke. We must accustom ourselves to please God in little things if we wish to be acceptable to Him in all our actions."

He held in abhorrence anything done out of human respect. One of his Missioners in Rome, wishing to impress the Cardinals favorably, was planning to give his first missions in their provinces. St. Vincent, informed of the plan, wrote as follows: "My dear Sir, may God preserve us from acting from such unworthy motives! The Divine Goodness requires that, in choosing any particular place for our labors, we do so, not with the purpose of being esteemed, but with the intention of pleasing God. In all our actions let us fix our gaze upon His directly and upon Him only. Prostrate in spirit at your feet for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, I

take this occasion to request of you these two things: first, that you dismiss from your mind the desire of appearing publicly except when your ministrations in public are necessary; and second, that you never do anything out of human respect.

“There must be something precious in the hidden life, since the Son of God lived as a poor artisan for some fifteen years before beginning His public ministry. Upon such humble beginnings He is wont to bestow more grace than upon those that are surrounded with pomp and circumstance. ‘What will they think of us at court?’ you may ask; ‘and what will they have to say in Paris?’ My dear Sir, permit them to say and think of us what they please, and meanwhile rest assured that a ministry which follows the maxims of Jesus Christ and the example of His life, will not be unavailing. It will bear fruit in season whereas a ministry that is formed on other and conflicting maxims will be a failure. Such is my belief, and it is begotten of my own experience. In the name of God therefore, I beg of you to act accordingly and cherish the advantages of retirement.”

His practical good sense, always keeping him within the bounds of moderation, disapproved of excess in manifesting one’s love for God. In August of the year 1655, he gave a beautiful conference on the subject, expressing himself in the following terms: “It is certain that charity when dwelling in the soul takes complete possession of all its power. The person that is once touched by this devouring fire, is continually in movement, always active. The memory wishes to remember nothing but God; other thoughts are distasteful. A person so disposed strives by every means to make the divine presence an object of continuous thought and consciousness. If one means is ineffectual, another must be tried. ‘If only I could succeed in practicing this devotion,’ he says to himself, ‘all would be well. It must be done. But then there is that other devotion; how can they be harmonized? Never mind, I will practice them both.’

“And when this new devotion has been adopted, others follow. The poor soul embraces all, yet is never satisfied. Imagining it can never do enough, it overtaxes both health

and strength. My sweet Savior, what will become of that soul? Continuing all-inflamed, it strives but is unable to produce acts of charity in such incessant frequency. Everywhere and at every moment, in the refectory, in conversation, in company with others, there is nothing but flames of spiritual ardor, acts and aspirations of charity without cessation. The soul is in a state resembling ecstasy.

“Yet how dangerous and imprudent are such practices, this manner of eagerness and zeal! But can there be imprudence in loving God? Can we love Him too much? Are we able even to love sufficiently a God who is infinitely worthy of love? Assuredly not!

“My Savior, my God, who can comprehend the astounding love You bear us? Nevertheless, though we are commanded to love God with our whole heart and strength, we must remember that His goodness does not require us to enter upon multitudinous acts harmful to our health. Even premature death may result from such excess of devotional aspirations and exercises. To die in this manner is to die a most beautiful death; it is a sort of martyrdom.

“At the same time it is much better not to become so strongly affected, not to make the virtue of charity so much a thing of sensibility, of emotional feeling. For, under so great a strain, we must finally relax, and relinquish our hold. And when that happens, let us take heed lest we fall into a state from which it is extremely difficult to arise. Yes, from an excess of devotion such as described above, there frequently ensues a distaste for devotions of what kind soever, a distaste for virtue and holy things.

“When we begin to taste a spiritual sweetness of devotion, we are hungry for fuller consolations; we plunge forward; and often the devil, turning the situation to his advantage, urges us on to undertake more practices of piety than we are able to manage. He overburdens us continually until we break down under the pressure. My brethren, virtue always observes moderation; its path lies between two reprehensible extremes. And there, along the middle way of moderation, we must walk if we wish our actions to be worthy of praise. Be neither foolhardy nor cowardly; mortify nature but do

not ruin good health. God, so good and just, desires no more than that. Knowing our wretchedness, He takes pity on us, and in His mercy supplies for our deficiencies. We must therefore approach Him with entire simplicity and calmness of spirit.

“There comes to mind a saying of the Bishop of Geneva: ‘I would not wish to go to God if He did not wish to come to me.’ A noteworthy utterance from a man thoroughly enlightened in the science of divine love. It means, grace being a gratuitous gift, that God must attract us by His grace before we can approach Him. Hence the utter uselessness of trying to force the issue. When God wishes to communicate Himself, He acts in a quiet and loving manner.”

CHAPTER 6 *Conformity to the Will of God*

Love finds expression in compliance with the will of the one loved. True love for God is entirely submissive to His holy will. Such was the charity of St. Vincent. His habitual attitude of mind is well expressed by the words of St. Paul: “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10.) In his thoughts and affections he endeavored to distinguish what was merely natural from what was of divine origin, for it was his constant intention to follow the plan of God wherever it became apparent. In all things, whether personal conduct, good works in behalf of the neighbor, or matters concerning the Congregation of the Mission, he proposed the question, “What is God’s will?” That was the starting point, and in consequence he never sought the initiative, but waited and watched for an external manifestation that might be regarded as an invitation or approval from divine providence.

If there was question of acquiring candidates for the Congregation, or of making an establishment of some kind, or accepting a temporal advantage for his religious community, he acquiesced as one receiving a gift from the hand of God. And this relation of the gift with the divine Giver he discerned both in the nature and in the circumstances of the

case. Afterward he took measures to preserve the goods received, for that also was well pleasing to God since gratitude toward the giver demands of the beneficiary that he exercise due care in utilizing and safeguarding the benefit bestowed.

When once he became aware of the divine will, either by interior inspiration or external command or counsel, he straightway brought his own will into conformity. In sickness, losses, afflictions — in all the mishaps and miseries of life — he submitted patiently, willingly; nay, more, with joy and affection. From lips and heart came the characteristic exclamation, "Blessed be God, may his name be forever blessed!"

Closely allied with resignation, is holy indifference. And in that spirit he looked upon sickness and health, death and life; all were equally acceptable to him according as God might send them. Indifferently he partook of nourishment and remedies, even though they were extremely distasteful.

The same spirit of indifference characterized his attitude with relation to the extension or increase of his Congregation. He certainly desired that the Congregation should increase, and that its work for souls should be extended. But, as in other matters, he feared to intrude a merely human judgment by taking the initiative. His custom was to wait for a positive indication of the divine good pleasure. To a remark that establishment in larger cities would attract vocations, he answered: "Thus far God's providence has called us to the places where we are now established, without our having sought these locations either directly or indirectly. Our dependence upon His direction must be very pleasing to Him. He knows what is suitable for us, and if, like true children, we put our trust in so good a Father, He will bestow His gift upon us at the proper time."

Accordingly, receiving a proposal very advantageous to his Community, he replied: "I think we shall do well to allow this matter to rest a while. In that way we shall blunt the impetuosity of nature, and allow our Lord an opportunity of making known His will. Meanwhile we shall have an opportunity of recommending the matter to Him in prayer. If He wishes the transaction to be carried through, the delay

will do no harm, and His presence and influence will be more apparent in proportion as we are more in the background."

When Missioners were ill, he recommended them to the Community in this way: "We shall beg of God that He preserve this good Missioner if such be His holy will. This particular sickness, the maladies of others, in a word everything that happens to the Congregation, is under the direction of His providence; and it is for the good of our Congregation. Therefore in praying for the health of the sick or assistance in other necessities, let our prayers be qualified by the proviso—that what we seek be conducive to God's good pleasure and His greater glory."

When announcing the death of a Missioner, he customarily employed the formula: "According to His good pleasure God has deprived us of a confrere. The deceased was dear to us, and I have no doubt his death has affected us deeply. But, thanks be to God, you have told our Lord that He has done well in taking our brother from us, and that you are in full accord with the designs of His holy will."

St. Vincent's conformity was based on his confidence in God. "The things of God," he said, "get themselves done, and the way of true wisdom is to follow the way of divine providence, one step at a time. Let us convince ourselves that in such affairs he who is in haste, succeeds only in losing ground. God is engaged in contemplation of Himself while at every moment He also governs the world, and provides for the needs of all His creatures, even a diminutive insect. May He grant us a share in His eternal thought and providence! Truly, we must labor to acquire a share of this divine spirit."

Explaining further the divine providence to which we must conform our activity, he said: "The works of God are never determined by the desires and views of man. We should be content with turning to best account the talents He has placed in our hands. Though they be inconsiderable, we should not reach out for something better. If we are faithful in small things, He will place us over things that are more important. However, that is not for us but for Him to decide."

A year before his death St. Vincent spoke as follows: "For

more than twenty years I did not dare ask of God the extension of our Congregation, considering that His providence alone should be entrusted with the preservation and increase of a work that was His own. But serious reflection upon the Savior's injunction to beg of God that He send laborers into His harvest, has convinced me that such prayer is both useful and important.

"The spirit of the world is very restless, desiring to do a great many things. As for ourselves, we wish only to tread the path that God points out for us. Let us offer ourselves to do and suffer anything for His glory and for the good of His Church. He wants nothing more.

"It is for Him to determine what results will reward our labors. In the meantime let us ask of God in prayer, that He grant us grace to practice the virtues that adorned the hidden life of our Blessed Lord" (to the Ladies of Charity, August 25, 1659).

St. Vincent disapproved excessive eagerness in activities, and, similarly, discouragement and sadness in misfortune. "Regarding the disquietude and melancholy you feel when things do not go right with you," he wrote to Father Pernelle, "I will tell you two things: The first is that not man, but God makes things go well, and sometimes, either to show us our ineptitude, or to try our patience, He permits that our affairs go badly. The second is that you rely overmuch upon your own administrative ability to preserve the good order which you love. Hence it follows that when your efforts are unsuccessful, you grieve excessively.

"Of yourself you can only spoil things. Be convinced of that; be at peace in failure as in success, reflecting that the issue of events is in the hands of God. I beg of you therefore to regard all things in the light of His providence. Work humbly and carefully to achieve success, but in regard to the actual results be submissive to the divine good pleasure" (To Father Pernelle, November 22, 1658).

CHAPTER 7 *Instances of Conformity*

The doctrine of conformity was applied to a variety of cases. To a pastor who desired to work in a different parish, the Saint wrote: "Pray and take counsel, for the question is to know whether God wishes you to leave the spouse He has given you." To superiors of houses who made known to him their fears of loss or persecution, he said: "Nothing will happen but what is pleasing to God; He is master not only of what we possess, but also of our lives, and it is but proper that He dispose of all according to His divine will." To those who complained of their physical infirmities or their spiritual dryness: "Remain subject to the good pleasure of God; rest content in every circumstance in which it will please Him to place you, and as long as you know it to be agreeable to Him, never desire to leave it. So to act is to practice virtue that is truly sublime."

When St. Louise de Marillac was experiencing great anxiety over the conduct of her son, and was worried about his future, he said to her: "Give son and mother into the hands of God: He will render a good account of both. Permit Him to do His will in you and in him; seek this same will in all your exercises, and desire no other practice, for this alone is sufficient to make you belong entirely to God. Indeed little is necessary to be a saint. The sovereign and almost only means is to accustom yourself to do in all things the will of God."

On another occasion when she begged him to point out the evil of her soul, which she thought was the cause of a bodily ailment, he said: "I cannot indicate any cause of your sickness other than the good pleasure of God. Adore the divine will without questioning why God is pleased that you should suffer. He receives great glory from your entire acceptance of His guidance without inquiring into the reason for His willing what He wills. Let us therefore abandon ourselves to that blessed will as did Isaac to the will of Abraham; and Jesus, to the good pleasure of His heavenly Father." His joy was great when he perceived that his Sons and Daughters

walked in this holy practice. He wrote to one of them: "God be praised that you are ready to do in everything and everywhere His most holy will, and to go live and die wherever He may please to call you. This is the disposition of good servants of God and really apostolic men who are not attached to anything. It is the mark of true children of God, who are always prepared to correspond to the designs of so good a Father. With lively sentiments of tenderness and gratitude I thank Him for you, not doubting that your heart, thus prepared, will receive abundantly the graces of heaven so that you may do a great deal of good on earth. Such is my prayer to His divine goodness."

In one or two of his conferences he thoroughly explained this doctrine which is found scattered in hundreds of his letters, and given fragmentarily in his numerous familiar discourses. "The perfection of love," he said, "does not consist in ecstasies but in properly doing the will of God; and he whose will is most conformable to that of God, will be the most perfect. Hence our perfection consists in so uniting our will to that of God, that His will and ours may be one and the same. When our Lord wished to teach a young man the means to arrive at perfection, He said to him, 'If anyone will come after me, let him renounce himself, take up his cross, and follow me.' But I ask you, who renounces himself more or bears the cross better, and follows Jesus Christ more perfectly than the person who studies never to do his own will but always the will of God? This is a short and easy way to acquire in this life a great treasure of graces.

"Persevering in entire submission to divine guidance, he can be seen from day to day in peace, quietness, and fervor, continually drawing closer to God the while he inspires those about him with the sweet and salutary spirit wherewith he is animated. If you compare him with those who follow their own inclinations, you will see that his actions produce rich fruits. God gives a special blessing to all His works, and accompanies with His grace the designs he undertakes and the counsels he gives to others. His every action gives great edification. On the other hand, we see that persons attached to their own inclinations have thoughts only of this earth; their

language is the language of slaves, and their works are lifeless. The difference arises from this, that they attach themselves to creatures instead of separating themselves from them. Nature acts in base souls, and grace in those who elevate themselves to God, and breathe but His will."

In a conference of March 7, 1659, this doctrine of submission is fully explained according to the plan which St. Vincent called the Little Method.

"MOTIVES. 1. The exercise that consists in always doing the will of God is the most excellent, for it embraces indifference, pure intention, and all the practices and exercises of perfection.

2. "It is certain that actions done after a human manner, mechanically, are lifeless. Meditation, preaching, assisting at the Divine Office, are inanimate actions, they are like money without value, not having the proper stamp, for God accepts our works only inasmuch as He sees His own image in them.

3. "It was the maxim and practice of our Lord to do the will of His Father in everything. 'My food,' He said, 'is to do the will of him who sent me . . . ' (Jn. 4:34).

"St. John practiced penance and urged others to do the same. That was the reason he had been born into the world. And you, Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the world, you came animated with an ardent longing to fulfill and also to promulgate your Father's will. Elias was inflamed with zeal to promote the glory of God, to instill fear and reverence into the hearts of men. You, my Savior, were animated with an affectionate and incomparable desire that the divine will should be done by all creatures. That is why in the Lord's Prayer You included the petition 'Your will be done.'

"Lord, what do You desire that men should do? The will of the heavenly Father. Where? On earth and in heaven. And in what manner? In the same way in which angels and saints do His will, viz., promptly, entirely, constantly, and from a motive of love. It may be that God has rejected some of your good works because in them you sought the fulfillment of your own desires. Such works fall under divine disapproval according to the words of God through the lips of His prophet: 'When you fast you do your own will, and thus

you spoil and vitiate your fast.' The presence of self-seeking taints our devotions, our labors, and our penitential exercises. For twenty years, at Holy Mass I have been reading the Epistle taken from the 58th chapter of Isaias, and each time I have been greatly troubled.

"What then must we do? This — instead of acting through motives of self-seeking, whim or casual inclination, we must accustom ourselves to desire and accomplish the will of God in all things. Jesus describes how, in the Final Judgment, many people will exclaim protestingly: 'Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and cast out evil spirits, and performed wonderful works in Your name?' But he will answer, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity' (Lk. 13:27). Who then will enter the kingdom of heaven? Those who do the will of God. My Savior, grant that by the aid of Your grace we may earnestly desire and faithfully produce good fruit so that all may be pleasing in the eyes of Your Father."

CHAPTER 8 *Means of Conformity*

St. Vincent: "Now, in relation to God's will, things are either forbidden, or commanded, or indifferent. We conform to the divine will by doing what is commanded, and abstaining from what is forbidden; and always with the intention of glorifying and obeying our heavenly Father who is also our sovereign and loving Lord. Whether His commands be direct or indirect, that is to say, given by Himself or through His Church, they must be obeyed; for we are children of the Church, and He would have us obey our mother, His mystical spouse, even as we render obedience to Him.

"Some actions are indifferent in the sense that they are neither commanded nor forbidden. Of these there are some that are pleasing to nature whereas others are displeasing. Between the two, if a choice is permissible, a spirit of mortification will choose the action that is displeasing. For ex-

ample, to visit with a person of less agreeable disposition, would be an act of more perfect virtue unless there is an obligation to visit with a more friendly and sociable person to whom one is naturally inclined. Where alternatives are equal, either choice, as made in the name of the Lord, will be meritorious.

“Another way of discovering the will of God, is by divine inspiration, for God often enlightens the mind, and moves the heart. But there is danger of being deceived by sentiments which, though apparently admirable, do not come from God, and are not according to His good pleasure. Consequently prudence requires that we examine such thoughts carefully in the light of prayer; that we consult with learned men, and follow the advice of our directors who are depositories of divine wisdom.

“To do the will of God in the ways above described, is to do it actively. We conform to the divine good pleasure passively when we accept whatever God may do in us; as for example, in the occurrence of an unforeseen event. Word comes to us that some person has been converted, that an entire people has accepted the Christian Faith, or that a loved one is leading a life of true charity in fervent service of God. In such things there is cause of joyful thanksgiving to our heavenly Father. Or on the other hand we are overtaken by sickness, pecuniary loss, or by calumny. This too we must accept as coming from the hand of God, because it is He who wills to send this trial, He by whose will or permission all afflictions occur. So it was with our Lord in the Garden of Olives. With Him therefore we should pray, ‘Not my will but Yours be done.’

“These words, ‘Your will be done,’ He has placed in our daily prayer as a petition for grace to accomplish the divine will perfectly and without ceasing. Let us therefore accustom ourselves, not only to say this prayer with our lips, but also to practice its precept in our lives. Let us begin this very hour to say, ‘Lord, for Your glory I wish to obey whatever behest may come to me in Your name.’ You may reply that for hours on end you have no thought of offering Him what you do. Such forgetfulness is a cause for sorrow. Let

us humble ourselves and regret sincerely the loss of greater merit which an actual intention would have gained for us.

“Upon rising in the morning, let us offer our day to God, and once or twice morning and afternoon let us renew our offering with these words, ‘My God, I offer You my labors, my sufferings, my entire self; draw me to Yourself entirely.’ The more we exercise this devotion, the easier it will become; we shall be impelled more strongly to love, and love will animate perseverance in this holy practice. Many people in the world are habituated to recall the presence of God frequently during the day. Such faithful souls will one day be our judges, reproving us before the divine Majesty for our neglect; inasmuch as our main purpose in life is to love God and testify our love by our service. Let us therefore beg of our Lord, that He grant us the grace to share His ardent charity, saying with Him, ‘My food is to do the will of him that sent me’ . . .” (Jn. 4:34).

Whatever the circumstances of misfortune might be, St. Vincent urged unconditional submission to God’s good pleasure, a willingness to suffer whatever and for how long soever He might ordain. “This,” added the Saint, “is the great lesson taught by the Son of God. And those who learn it well, impressing it upon their hearts, are top-ranking scholars in the school of this divine Master. For my part, I do not know of anything more holy, more perfect, than complete conformity and resignation.”

This doctrine he adapted to the needs of individual persons. To a Missioner he said: “How beautiful an adornment of soul is holy indifference in a Missioner! It makes him an object of preference in the eyes of God who does not look with equal favor upon others in whom He does not find this admirable disposition, this willingness to seek the divine good pleasure in all things no matter what they may be. Herein both angels and men possess the true source of their happiness.”

He wrote on the same topic: “Thanks be to God for inspiring you with a readiness to serve in foreign countries, or to remain where you are, according to the decision of your Superior. Such holy indifference or preparedness for all even-

tualities is the state of those who are perfect men. Your virtue in this matter gives me reason to hope that you will promote God's glory. That you may do so is my heartfelt prayer. Beg of Him, if you please, in our behalf an entire docility to His blessed guidance. Our apostolate should be directed by His good pleasure in reference to both locality and employment. We belong to God, and that is reason enough to be His without reserve, to be faithful sons, honored in being known as ministers of the Gospel, apostles of Jesus Christ. It matters little in which place or in what capacity we serve, provided we serve Him faithfully; and we shall do just that if we allow Him to live and act in us."

St. Vincent developed the same idea for the Daughters of Charity (Dec. 1659): "An habitual readiness to do the will of God is the state, the attitude of angels. They are always willing and ready to carry out the divine commands, whether in heaven or on earth. Like the angels, an obedient soul never loses an awareness of God's presence, but contemplates Him everywhere and in all things. Such a one finds the divine will in whatever he is given to do; and he is well content wherever he may have to go. He resembles a guardian angel who is equally joyful whether his charge be an evil person, or one of perfect virtue.

"On the other hand, a soul that is not equally disposed and ready to do God's will in a variety of ways; a soul that indulges personal preference despite the divine good pleasure, resembles a reprobate spirit. For, such is the way of the demons — to be in revolt against the will of God. True, they are dominated by that all-powerful will, but their submission is by constraint. Furthermore, as a demon is tormented by infernal sufferings wherever he may be, so too a soul that is filled with multitudinous and alternating desires, will never enjoy true peace of mind and heart. Unrest will be his portion, and uneasiness that is a sort of hell upon earth."

Speaking of detachment from creatures, the Saint spoke to his Missionaries as follows: "Where is the affectionate heart? In the thing it loves. Where our love is, there our heart is held captive; it cannot escape. It is unable to go either to the right or to the left; it is held fast. The heart of an avari-

cious man is with his treasure; and that is true of ourselves, whatever our treasure may be.

“Oftentimes what holds us enslaved is a mere bagatelle, a figment of the imagination, a brief word spoken to us, the omission of a kindly greeting, a slight refusal, the reflection that we are being neglected. Such things are painful to self-love; they leave a wound which we seem unable to cure. Detachment here proves its worth, for it frees us from the unwholesome influence of creatures. But since an habitual attitude of detachment is begotten of self-discipline, we must be unsparing of endeavor to find out whether we are attached inordinately to worldly things, to honors and praise, to our own ease and comfort. In a word, it is necessary to discover the bonds that hold us captive, if we are to break them asunder and gain our freedom.

“God made us His children by sending His divine Son into the world to redeem us. Yet the cowardly man, allowing himself to be overcome by creatures, loses the liberty that belongs to adopted sons. He seems to utter a sort of blasphemy, to assert, in effect, that God is not his Father, or that God is less worthy of love than are the pleasures whereby the human heart is enslaved.”

CHAPTER 9 *Detachment*

In his conference on conformity, St. Vincent went on to speak about detachment: “To what did the Son of God attach Himself? You know how He was subject to the will of His Father. And His perfect subjection is portrayed by the Psalmist where he compares himself to an animal that is completely responsive to control at the hands of its owner. Have you not had frequent occasion to see a number of donkeys — five or six of them — standing in front of a gate? They are waiting for the person who has charge of them, and when he comes they start off. Turning neither to the right nor to the left, they obey his guidance, and they stop as soon as he gives the command. They are perfectly obedient.

“That is why the similitude employed by the Psalmist is an appropriate figure of Christ; ‘I was like a brute beast in your presence’ (Ps. 72:22). Ever in the presence of God, ever amenable to the divine will, He manifested incomparable conformity and complete abandon to the good pleasure of His Father. And what submission! What abandonment! And what was the consequence? As the Psalmist explains of himself, so also of Christ — he was always with God; ‘Yet with you I shall always be’ (*ibid.*, v. 23).

“The Psalmist, speaking to God, has written: ‘You have hold of my right hand; with your counsel you guide me’ (Ps. 72:23 f.). ‘If I have done any good, it is you who have guided me; the least sign of your will is enough for me.’ Do you not observe the good success of those in whom detachment is an habitual disposition? They are united with God alone and He is their guide. At all times you will find them tranquil and at peace. They love Him without ceasing, and they communicate to their neighbors and associates the sweet and salutary fruits of the divine presence and power within them.

“By way of comparison; persons who practice habitual detachment are engaged in works that are fair to the eye, and rich in fruit. They advance in sanctity, speak persuasively; their enterprises are successful; their councils bring help to others. ‘With your counsel you guide me’ (Ps. 72:24). On the other hand, persons given up to their own satisfaction have thoughts of earth, speech of slaves, and works that are lifeless. Clearly, the difference between souls that are detached from earthly things, and those that are not, is that nature is the moving force within earth-bound souls, whereas divine grace gives life and energy to persons who raise themselves to God, and live but for the fulfillment of His will.

“But, my God, I experience difficulty in detaching myself from things that I like; I suffer because I do not preach, because I am not employed, because I am not in good repute. I have a great deal of trouble in bearing with persons of every sort of disposition, but with your help, my God, I will do all. Great St. Peter, you said well that you had abandoned everything, and you proved it clearly when, having recognized your Master on the shore, and having heard St. John say to

you, 'It is the Lord,' you plunged into the water to go to Him. You did not think of the boat, or of your life, but only of your divine Savior. And you St. Paul, great Apostle, endowed with a special grace from the moment of your conversion, practiced this virtue of indifference perfectly in saying, 'Lord, what do You wish me to do?'

"This language of the Apostle marked a wonderful change, a detachment that was clearly the effect of grace. In a brief moment Saul became indifferent to the things that had occupied his previous life as a Pharisee. He became entirely submissive in accepting whatever God might require of him. Since therefore these great saints cherished and practiced the virtue of detachment, we should follow their example; for Missioners belong, not to themselves, but to Jesus Christ.

"He wishes that they do as He has done, and that they suffer according to His example. To them He speaks the words that He spoke to His first Apostles: 'As the Father has sent me, I also send you.' After these considerations, should we not empty our hearts of all desire save that of rendering ourselves conformable to Jesus Christ, and of all will but that of obedience? I think you are all in this disposition, and I trust that God will give you this grace. And I hope, my God, that You will give it to me first of all, because I have so much need of it. In my many attachments from which I find myself powerless to withdraw, I cry out with David, 'Lord, have mercy on me!' But you will be edified my Brothers, when I tell you that we have among us infirm old men who have requested to be sent to the Indies, and they have made this request while suffering from their infirmities which are not slight.

"What is the reason for such courage? It is because their hearts are free; they would go willingly and joyfully wherever God wishes to be known and adored, and nothing but His holy will keeps them here. The rest of us, my Brothers, were we not entangled in some wretched briars, would say, each one in his heart, 'My God, I give myself to You to be sent any place on this earth to which my Superiors judge proper that I should go to announce Your holy name. And even though death should await me, nevertheless I would

still be disposed to go, since I am well aware that my salvation is to be attained through obedience to my Superiors, which is obedience to Your holy will.' Those of us who are not so disposed, should strive to discover what is drawing them in some other direction. For by means of continual mortification, both interior and exterior, they will acquire, with the aid of divine grace, the liberty that belongs to the children of God; and they will be ready to follow the direction of obedience whithersoever it may lead."

Particular incidents, as recounted by St. Vincent, were well calculated to raise the spirit of such detachment and obedience to the point of heroism. Thus, in the year 1657, when seven out of eight Missioners in Genoa had been killed by the plague, he illustrated his conference on trust in God, by speaking about the tragedy. He found among the shadows of sorrow a good reason for humble submission and filial confidence. "Is it not very true, my Brothers," he said, "that we should have great confidence in God, and place ourselves entirely in His hands, being convinced that His providence will direct all things to our advantage. Yes, whatever God gives, and whatever He takes away is for our good.

"With this in view, I make known to you one of the greatest misfortunes that could fall upon us. We have lost the principal support of our house in Genoa. Father Blatiron, the Superior of that house, who was a great servant of God, is dead; he is gone. The good Father Dupont who labored so joyfully in the service of the plague-stricken, has been taken away by the disease. One of our Italian Missioners, Father Dominic Bocconi, a very virtuous priest and a good worker, as I have been informed, died in a pesthouse to which he was confined so as to assist the poor plague-stricken people of that country. In brief, only one remains, Father LeJuge who, though stricken down, happily recovered and is now assisting the other sick people.

"Jesus, my Savior, what a loss! How heavy an affliction! Under these circumstances we have great need of submitting unreservedly to the will of God. Otherwise what could we do but weep ineffectually and lament the loss of those great Missioners who were inflamed with zeal for the divine glory?

Whereas by resignation — after according a few tears to our grief over their departure — by resignation we can elevate our hearts to God, praising Him and blessing Him for this great loss which has come upon us through the providential permission of His holy will.

“Yet, Gentlemen and my Brothers, can we say that we lose the dear ones whom God pleases to take from us? No, in a truer sense we do not lose them; and we should believe that from the ashes of those good Missioners, as from good seed, others will arise. Rest assured that God will not withdraw from our Congregation the graces He was formerly bestowing. He will grant similar favors to other Missioners who, filled with like zeal, advance to replace them.”

CHAPTER 10 *Recollection; the Presence of God*

Love, uniting hearts and wills, is content only in the company of the person loved. Filled with love for God, Vincent was careful never to lose the thought of His holy and amiable presence. Alone or in public, in quiet or amid the distractions of the street, at the royal court, or at a meeting, he was always united with God in mind and heart. Wherever he might be, one could easily infer from his quiet manner, his even temper, his well-modulated voice, that he was recollected in God. When asked a question, he would pause a moment for reflection; and it was usually with the formula, “In the name of the Lord,” that he made a decision or offered advice.

He recalled the presence of God at the sound of the clock — four times an hour — made the sign of the cross, and raised his eyes to heaven. Ordinarily he kept his eyes lowered, fixing his glance on the crucifix of the rosary which he always carried with him, attached to his cincture. Nevertheless the sight of creatures, far from furnishing distractions, directed his thoughts to their Creator. Fields ripe with grain, trees laden with fruit, moved him to bless the goodness of God and adore His paternal providence. Flowers, birds, or

any other pleasing object called forth the exclamation, "What is comparable to the beauty of God who is the source of beauty and perfection in His creatures?"

In passing before a church he would enter and prostrate himself, face to the floor. When the Angelus rang, no matter where he might happen to be at the time, he went on his knees to recite the prayers. The admiring attention of others was drawn toward him but he was unaware of it. Little children pointed him out to each other, saying, "Look, the Saint is passing by."

One of the grand halls at the palace furnished him with a striking symbol of God's ubiquitous presence and all-seeing knowledge of earthly persons and occurrences. The hall was lined with mirrors that reflected everything in all parts of the room. He commented: "If men have been able in this manner to represent everything within a particular place, even the least movement and the smallest thing, have we not greater assurance that absolutely everything is plainly portrayed in the divine essence, and that the blessed angels and saints behold all things in God?"

In different parts of St. Lazare — the Mother House of the Congregation — he placed the inscription, "God sees me." Written in large letters, it was a reminder to all who passed that way, that even their innermost thoughts and affections stood out clearly in the sight of God. Speaking of habitual recollection, he said: "Whoever is faithful to this practice, whoever acquires an affection for it, will soon attain a high degree of holiness"; and again: "The thought of God's presence will habituate us to the practice of doing His will. The remembrance of God will gradually become habitual, an abiding spirit of recollection."

PART III . PRAYER

CHAPTER 11 *The Art of Prayer*

Love is not content with the mere presence of the beloved person. It seeks the expression and consolation that is to be found in conversing, one with the other. To love God, therefore, is to be a man of prayer. St. Vincent de Paul had a religious and profound esteem for that exercise. It held for him a strong attraction, and he had the greatest relish for it. Every morning he devoted an hour to meditation. And though a multiplicity of business affairs during the day, or the strain of a rather primitive medical treatment, might leave on him a burden of considerable fatigue, he would be found at his usual place in chapel the next morning.

He not only consecrated to God the first hour of the day, but he found further opportunities for prayer in long nights of sleeplessness, and in every moment he could spare from the duties that filled his day. Once a year, all other engagements being laid aside, he devoted himself to a spiritual retreat of eight full days. Sometimes the fervor of his devotion at prayer would find expression in sighs of love that he was unable to suppress. What interchange occurred between him and God on such occasions? Did his prayer follow the way of discursive meditation — considerations, affections, and a resolution? Or was he absorbed in the mystic simplicity of passive contemplation? His humility concealed everything. But occasionally, as he came down from the holy mountain of mental prayer, his countenance like that of Moses, was radiant, and the fervor of an inner fire could be discerned in his words and actions.

Influenced by such personal experience, he induced others to make mental prayer. He made arrangements that candi-

dates preparing for the sacrament of holy orders, and other persons performing the exercises of a spiritual retreat, should be instructed in the method of meditating. Meditation as a continuing practice he regarded as the most precious fruit of the retreat. Both the Fathers of the Tuesday Conference, and the Ladies of his Assembly, were initiated and encouraged along the same path of spiritual perfection.

He had special reason for his recommendation to those who were entrusted with the task of proclaiming the word of God. "Those who preach," he said, "will discover that meditation is a marvelous book from which to draw the divine truths that must then be communicated to the people. Prayer will enable them to touch the heart, and bring souls to God."

For his own Missioners therefore, meditation has special significance. "Give me a man of prayer," he said to them, "he will be able to do all things; he can say with the Apostle, 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.'" And again, "The Congregation will subsist as long as the exercise of mental prayer is faithfully maintained, because prayer is an impregnable bastion that will safeguard the Missioners against every assault. Like the Tower of David, it is a mystic arsenal supplied with all sorts of weapons wherewith to rout the enemies of God, and forces hostile to our salvation."

He required that meditation be made as well in sickness as in health, on days of repose as well as on those of labor. "The Prince of Conti," he said in this connection, "will one day be our judge; at least he will be mine. Admirable in his fidelity to mental prayer, he spends two hours daily in this exercise, one in the morning and one in the evening. God grant us a like attraction for union with Him in prayer!"

In the morning, at the conclusion of his own prayer, at least twice a week St. Vincent called upon his Missioners to recount the good thoughts that God had given them during meditation. Such repetition of prayer held for him a special charm. The domestics were invited to speak in their turn, and one of them spoke as follows: "Having considered our Lord's recommendation that assistance be ren-

dered to the poor, I thought I should do something for them. But being poor myself, and unable to give them any material aid, I took the resolution of paying them small marks of esteem, of speaking kindly to them when they speak to me, and even of taking off my hat and saluting them."

These words impressed St. Vincent, and confirmed him in the custom of interrogating the Brothers as well as the Missioners. At each repetition of prayer he invited three or four of them to speak, and, regardless of outside calls, he listened to them with kindness and with pleasure for hours on end. The practice afforded mutual edification; it was a school where newcomers and inexperienced members might learn the great art of mental prayer.

In Conferences during May, 1648, to the Daughters of Charity, the Saint explained the nature and excellence of prayer. "There is nothing," he said to them, "that the Lord has recommended so insistently to His Apostles, exhorting them to ask in His name, whatever they desired, and promising that their petition would be granted. And His words were addressed not only to the Apostles, but also to all Christians. Jesus Christ was a man of prayer. . . . From time to time He withdrew from the company of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, that He might enjoy greater freedom in addressing His prayer to God.

"When about thirty years of age He withdrew into a desert place, where He remained forty days to make ready by prayer and fasting for His public ministry. From time to time He made His way to Jerusalem, and often He withdrew from His Apostles, that He might give Himself to prayer. The night before His Crucifixion He prayed long hours in bloody sweat and mortal agony.

"Learn well therefore the nature of prayer. It is to the soul what nourishment is to the body. And as a person who takes his repast at intervals of two, three, or four days, would not have strength or vigor to perform his duties, so too, a person who never or but rarely devotes a definite time to prayer, will become tepid and languid. He will be without strength and virtue; he will be troublesome to other people, and unsupportable to himself. Finally that person will become

disgusted with his vocation and state of life.

“Prayer is an elevation of the mind to God. By means of prayer the soul goes out of itself to search for God. It is an interview of the soul with Him, a mutual communication wherein God speaks to the soul what He wishes it to know and accomplish. Prayer is an interchange wherein the soul presents to Him the petitions which He Himself inspires.

“Prayer is a sermon we preach to ourselves, a sermon that would impress upon us the necessity of having recourse to God, and of co-operating with His grace in order to remove evil habits from our soul, and implant virtues in their stead. A special purpose of prayer is to mortify and eradicate our predominant passion or evil inclination, for when we have done that, the rest will follow without much difficulty. But we must apply ourselves to the task with constancy. Another point of importance is that we proceed quietly in prayer without straining the mind in search of clever and subtle ideas. Let us raise our thoughts to God and be attentive to His words; for, one word from Him is more effective and profitable than all the speculations and reasonings we can muster.

“Would that we had this manner of prayer, this way of elevating our thoughts to God, remaining in humble recognition of our nothingness, waiting for Him to speak within our hearts, and give us a word of everlasting life! Only what is inspired of God can be profitable to us. Furthermore we must receive from Him what should be communicated to our neighbor. Thus we follow the example of Jesus who learned from His Father what He spoke to the Apostles and the people that followed Him.”

CHAPTER 12 *Varieties of Prayer*

St. Vincent: “There are two kinds of prayer; the one vocal, making use only of words; and the other mental, exercising mind and heart without external words. When Moses was in mental prayer God said to him, ‘Why do you prevent me

from destroying this ungrateful people?' Whereupon the holy Lawgiver only prayed the more urgently, and so obtained mercy for his people. What efficacy therefore must lie in mental prayer since it can bind the hands of God!

"One form of mental prayer is chiefly of the intellect. We strive to understand the mystery or the truth proposed, so as to derive therefrom suitable instructions, to excite affections germane to the subject, and make appropriate resolutions. Though affections and resolutions are acts of the will, nevertheless this prayer pertains to the intellect because it consists principally and predominantly in a search for truth. This type of prayer is known as discursive meditation or simply meditation.

"There is another type of prayer; it is affective, chiefly of the will. It is called the prayer of quiet. It is not a product of human teaching; it is not attainable by personal effort, and it is not bestowed upon everyone. God gives it to whom He pleases and when He wills. In the state of quietude a soul finds itself suddenly filled with spiritual illuminations and holy affections. The intellect is occasionally enlightened with truths that are beyond common understanding, and the will is inflamed with all sorts of admirable desires."

The prayer which the Saint counseled and taught people to practice was, above all, positive and practical, in accord with his own mind and virtue. He respected and admired the extraordinary and sublime prayer to which God is pleased to elevate certain favored souls. At the same time, following the Apostle's advice, he would not easily accept all spirits, but would prove or try them to ascertain whether they were from God or not. From the teaching of St. Paul he was well aware that Satan often takes on the appearance of a luminous angel, and that he leads souls astray as well by proposal of good as by enticement to evil. He knew from personal experience that there are ways of prayer which, though excellent in appearance, lead the soul into falsehood. For that reason his advice was to follow the most humble and ordinary path as being safer and within the reach of everyone, until such time as God Himself should conduct the soul into some other form of prayer.

Referring to the meditation of lowly and simple souls, he said to the Daughters of Charity: "Although learned persons have the resources wherewith to pray well because of their knowledge, yet those who are less favored in that respect, enjoy converse with God in a different manner. Our Lord gives us that assurance in these words: 'I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones.'

"On souls of that sort God bestows His most glorious enlightenment, and His greatest graces. He lays open before them what theological schools have not been able to discover. A theologian discourses of God the way that books have taught him; a person of prayer speaks in a different manner. A theologian speaks from acquired science; a man of prayer, from a knowledge that is divinely infused and replete with charity. Of these two the doctor of theology is not the more learned, and he should be silent in the presence of a man of prayer.

"Let us therefore persevere in prayer without being discouraged by dryness or difficulties. During twenty years St. Teresa was unable to make mental prayer, but she persevered, and God imparted to her that excellent gift. When we try to pray, we at least practice virtue — obedience, humility, the theological virtues, and especially mortification. Like an inseparable companion, mortification should always accompany prayer."

In August of the year 1657, speaking to the Missioners, the Saint explained what they should avoid, and what they should practice in order to pray well. "We come to prayer," he said, "but why? Through custom, because others come. We think of many things, but fail to dispose ourselves for prayer. In prayer, raising our thoughts to God, we speak to Him about our needs, and implore His assistance. Consequently we should make preparation beforehand. What is this devotion we are entering upon? What should we hope to obtain from conference with the Divine Majesty? What is our greatest need? What particular grace shall we beg of Him to bestow?

“Let us control our poor minds, for they naturally incline to levity and inconstancy. Let us repose quietly in the presence of God, thinking of Him while we restrain as best we may the wanderings of an errant imagination. Yes, our efforts should be moderate, for undue strain is of no advantage, but always harmful.

“Finally, we must avoid a curiosity that ministers to display. Coming to prayer, our purpose should not be to hear what will be said, to investigate and learn, to penetrate hidden mysteries with the intention of discoursing learnedly about them later on. You may reply, ‘But I shall be called upon to give an account of my meditation, and I must be ready to say something worthwhile.’ Where such is our view of the situation, we construct a discourse, we conceive subtle thoughts, arranging them in logical order; and all for the purpose of having something beautiful to say, and of expressing our ideas in an uncommonly attractive manner. No, Gentlemen, to proceed in such fashion is not prayer but study. God grant it may not be something less worthy than that.

“This then is what we have to do. First of all, we must place ourselves in the presence of God, considering Him as either our Father in heaven whence He gazes down upon us and perceives all things; or in His immensity as present everywhere — in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; or as present sacramentally in the Most Holy Eucharist. My Savior, behold me, a poor miserable sinner, at the feet of Your divine Majesty, before the altar where You abide. Grant, my Savior, that every thought and will of mine may be worthy of Your holy presence!

“Or lastly we may consider the dwelling of God within the depths of our own heart. As the Prophet Jeremias has written, ‘thou, O Lord, art among us’ (Jer. 14:9). And this part of the meditation — the consideration of God’s presence — is very important. Then let us beg of God the grace to converse with His divine Majesty, for of ourselves we are unable to do anything. Let us implore Him by His great love for us, by the infinite merits of Christ our Savior through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and the saints!

“We then begin to consider the subject of our prayer. If it is perceptible to the imagination, as for example one of the joyful mysteries, we picture to ourselves the scene and the circumstances. If it is not perceptible in that fashion, if for example it is a virtue, we should consider its nature and qualities, its good fruits, and the means of putting it into practice.

“It is well to ask ourselves what are the reasons for practicing the virtue, and to pause thoughtfully on the motives that move us most strongly. They may be found in sayings of the holy Fathers, or in passages of Sacred Scripture. These, if they come to mind, should be considered with care. But there should not be many of them, nor should we spend the time of meditation trying to recall such passages; prayer, not study, is our purpose.”

CHAPTER 13 *Exercise of the Will in Prayer*

St. Vincent: “When wood is ablaze in a fireplace, or when a candle is burning brightly, there is no sense in continuing to strike the flint for a spark. And similarly, when our mind is already sufficiently illumined by considerations, what use would there be in multiplying thoughts and reasons? None whatsoever; it would be only a waste of time.

“At this moment, the mind being sufficiently enlightened, we must exercise the will in following the light of considerations, to love and embrace virtue, or to hate and avoid the contrary vice. And this should be easy enough since the will follows the light of understanding, and inclines toward what is proposed as good and worthy of desire.

“But we must now go further by resolving to practice the virtue. And such resolution is the point of importance, the fruit we should enjoy from prayer. Consequently we should not pass lightly over the resolutions, but by repetition impress them deeply upon our hearts. Then too, it is well to foresee obstacles that may arise and the means whereby the resolutions may be put into practice.

“Now it is not necessary, and, for the most part, it is not helpful, to have grand thoughts concerning the virtue we wish to acquire. Nor is it advisable even to desire such thoughts. When too great an effort places the understanding or the will under strain, harm comes to both head and heart. We must use moderation in everything. Excess, particularly in prayer, is not praiseworthy. We should act moderately and calmly, preserving peace of soul.

“In finishing prayer we should give thanks to God for the lights and graces He has accorded us during it, and for the resolutions with which He has inspired us. And we should beg His help to put into practice what we propose to do. God be praised! This is what we do in prayer. Let us devote ourselves to the practice because by means of it all good things come to us. Perseverance in vocation, success in labor, avoidance of sin — all these are because of prayer. If we persevere in charity, if we attain salvation, it is to God and prayer that we owe our accomplishment. God does not refuse anything to prayer, whereas without prayer He will grant hardly anything. Let us then humbly beg of Him to establish us in this practice.”

To ascertain whether his instructions were well understood, he questioned both the brothers and his priestly confreres. “Brother, what method do you follow in your prayer?” “Father, I always divide the subject into certain points.” “You do well, Brother. Yet when we take a mystery as a subject of meditation, it is not expedient to delay on a particular virtue. . . . It is better to consider the mystery and all its circumstances; for in such circumstances great treasures of grace are hidden if only we know how to search.

“Such minor things are like mustard seeds which, under the blessing of God, become large trees. Like the variegated supplies that are to be found in a merchant’s warehouse, our subjects of meditation differ from each other. Some contain instruction in one virtue only; others display the riches of many virtues. Of such multiple wealth are the mysteries in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ — His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. To draw profit from our meditation on such mysteries, we must adore our Lord as He is presented

to us, we must praise and thank Him for the graces He has merited for us, humbly speak to Him about our miseries and our needs, and ask of Him the graces necessary to imitate the virtues He there teaches."

"Brother," the Saint said again, directing his question to someone else, "do you derive any profit from prayer?" "Not much, Father," was the response. "And what is the cause of that?" rejoined the Saint. "During the repetition of prayer I was questioning within myself why it is that some of us make so little progress in this holy exercise. There is reason to fear that they are lacking in the practice of mortification, insufficiently reserved in the exercise of their senses. The ablest masters of the spiritual life, as we may learn from what they wrote, were unanimously of the persuasion that in order to pray well, the practice of mortification is indispensable. To prepare ourselves properly for converse with God, we must mortify the eyes, the ears, the tongue; in a word, all the exterior senses. In addition we must mortify the faculties of the soul, viz., the understanding, will, and memory. Such mortification will prepare us to pray; and prayer, in turn, will help us to practice mortification.

"Another cause of making little progress, is that some people, though they have excellent thoughts and sentiments, fail to make any personal application of them; they do not reflect upon the state of their own interior. Nevertheless, it has been frequently recommended that when God enlightens the soul or communicates a salutary impulse, we apply such favors to our own particular needs. We must reflect upon our own shortcomings, confess and acknowledge them before God, and, from time to time, accuse ourselves in the presence of the Community. Our purpose in so doing, is to humble ourselves, and also to resolve strongly on the correction of our faults — a practice that is always profitable."

At this point a brother, falling upon his knees, begged forgiveness inasmuch as he had been failing to accomplish anything at meditation during a considerable period of days, and — more than that — had been unable to make a beginning. "May God bless you, Brother," replied the Saint. "He sometimes permits us to lose our liking for prayer, and even

that we grow weary of praying. But as this change that comes upon us is ordinarily a trial of our virtue, we must not become discouraged or downhearted. Many good people, and many saints as well, have undergone this experience. Yes, I am acquainted with several truly virtuous persons who experience only dryness and repugnance in prayer; but since they remain faithful under this trial, it contributes, in good measure, to their advancement in virtue.

“It is true that when such aridity and aversion come upon a person who is entering upon the practice of prayer, the cause may be some negligence on his part; and this, my Brother, may deserve your attention. But perhaps it is not your fault. Do you perchance experience any pain in your head?” “Yes, Father, and it is a result of my having desired, in the latest retreat, to present all the thoughts of my prayer in forms appealing to the imagination.”

“You should not meditate in that manner, Brother; if the things upon which you meditate are by nature imperceptible, you should not endeavor to clothe them with external shape and form. To do so would be a trick of self-love. Guided by a spirit of supernatural faith, we should meditate upon mysteries and virtues humbly, quietly, without endeavoring to employ our imagination. It is desirable to exercise the will in producing affections and resolutions, rather than to make use of the intellect in acquiring knowledge.”

CHAPTER 14 *Perseverance in Prayer*

St. Vincent: “We should persevere courageously, after the example of our Lord who, when His struggle became intense, prayed the more earnestly (Lk. 22:44). Prayer is a gift from God, a gift we must beg of Him earnestly, urgently, saying with the Apostles, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’ (Lk. 11:1). And then, with humility and patience we must wait for Him to grant the favor that we expect from His goodness!”

Once again a brother was heard speaking: “I have no head

for making a good meditation. Of the faculties that are in my soul, I am able to make use of only one; and that one is my will. From the moment the subject is proposed, and without the help of reasoning, it begins to produce affections. I make acts of the will, at one moment giving thanks to God, at another asking pardon, and stirring up within me sentiments of shame and sorrow for my sins. Then too I beg of Him the grace to imitate the virtues practiced by our Lord. And finally, I make resolutions."

"Continue, Brother," interrupted St. Vincent; "continue to meditate as you have been doing. Have no concern about the understanding; its use is merely to motivate the will. And since your will has no need of special motivation, but goes on to elicit affections, and form resolutions regarding the practice of virtue—since that is the case, God grant you the grace to continue in this way so as to become ever more faithful to His holy will! The soul is like a sailboat equipped with oars. The oars are not used unless the wind fails, and then progress is neither so rapid nor so pleasant as when the ship is bowling along under a fair breeze. Similarly, we have need of considerations in mental prayer when special assistance from the Holy Spirit is not forthcoming; but when that heavenly wind blows upon our heart, we must yield ourselves to its influence."

Father Vincent then went on to point out the difference between thoughts that are inspired of God, and those that originate with ourselves. "Remark the difference," he said, "between the light of a fire, and that of the sun. At night our fire gives light, and by means thereof we see things round about us, but imperfectly—superficially, as it were; for, the luminous intensity of our fire is limited. But the sun with its almost unlimited intensity and brilliance, illumines everything far and near, not only disclosing the surface appearance of things, but penetrating their interior as well. Now, the thoughts and considerations that originate with ourselves, are like earthly fire; they glow with a feeble and uncertain light. The supernatural illumination coming from the divine Son of Justice, on the other hand, enters into the secret places of our soul, and stirs within us the will to

accomplish wonderful things. Consequently we must beg of God so to enlighten us, and inspire us with sentiments that may be in accord with His good pleasure.

“Lofty and farfetched considerations are not prayer; on the contrary, they are often a result of pride. People who find satisfaction and pleasure in such thoughts are like a preacher who likes to show off his fine language, and is well pleased when his auditors are satisfied with his florid style. In such case it is not the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of pride, that enlightens the understanding and gives expression to all those fine thoughts. Speaking more precisely, we might say that an evil spirit influences a person to speak in that fashion. Similarly, prayer is infected with pride when we strain after beautiful considerations and extraordinary ideas, especially when this is done for the purpose of displaying our wares at repetition for the admiration of our hearers. In such manner of action there is a sort of blasphemy and — after a manner of speaking — an idolatry of self. For while conversing with God in prayer, one would be meditating on what ministers to one’s own pride, seeking one’s own gratification, admiring one’s beautiful thoughts, and so sacrificing to the idol, vanity.

“Ah, my Brothers, let us guard against this folly; acknowledge that we are laden down with misery, and seek what will lead us to the practice of solid virtue. Let us then see how we may be able to imitate Him best, suppressing in prayer all thoughts of pride, and following the humility of Jesus in simple, common, and familiar words. And, God so permitting, let us rejoice that what we say is not given any consideration, that we are despised and ridiculed, for we may be sure that without a true and sincere humility we shall never be of any advantage either to ourselves, or to others.”

His practical sense always preferred affections in prayer, to thoughts, and resolutions to affections. “To make good resolutions,” he said, “is the most important part of prayer. We must devote ourselves to it, and not so much to reasoning and discourse. The principal fruit of prayer is in forming good and strong resolutions, and in choosing effective means to put them into practice, foreseeing meanwhile the difficulties that may arise.

“Yet, this is not enough, for, after all, the resolutions we make are only physical and moral actions; and though it is well for us to form them in our hearts, and remain steadfast in keeping them, nevertheless we must acknowledge that their worth, and their fulfillment depend upon the divine inspiration and assistance. And what do you think is the most frequent cause of our failure to keep resolutions? The usual reason is that we are overconfident in our own resolves, in our own strength. This is why resolutions do not bear the fruit of attainment. Therefore, after making a resolution, let us direct humble prayer to God, and, distrustful of our own weakness, let us beg of Him the grace to do in fact what we have resolved upon doing. And though after an appeal for divine grace, we fail over and over and over again, nevertheless we should not give up; we should resolve again, and again and again; and as often direct our appeal to God for mercy and strength.

“It is true that past faults and failures are good reason to humble ourselves; they are not good reason to lose courage. No matter what our faults may be, we should not, on that account, lessen our trust in God, the confidence He desires of us. On the contrary, after a fall, we should pick ourselves up, and, with a prayer for needed grace, go forward more cautiously. Medicines prescribed for the cure of sickness, may be temporarily ineffectual; but a physician does not, on that score, discontinue his ministrations. He perseveres, always hoping for success. There is far greater cause to tend the infirmities of our soul where, God willing, marvelous results are produced by His grace.”

CHAPTER 15 *Imitation of Christ*

Devotion, a willingness and readiness to serve, was noticeably characteristic of St. Vincent in his habitual attitude toward God. It filled his heart, animated his words, and appeared in every action of the day.

In the morning, at the first sound of the bell he arose from

bed, made the sign of the cross, prostrated, and kissed the floor, worshipping the divine Majesty, and begging grace to keep free from all sin.

After these first acts of religion he went over to the church; and the disabilities of advancing age and ill health placed no obstacle to his habit of arriving at the place of prayer earlier than did his younger confreres. The sight of his religious family assembled before their divine Lord, comforted his heart.

At the conclusion of meditation, he recited the Litany of the Holy Name, dwelling with special pleasure on the invocation, "Jesus, Father of the poor." Almost every day, after prayer, he would go to confession because he could not endure within himself, even lesser faults and shortcomings. When, as usual, the confessor was unable to find sufficient matter for absolution, the Saint had an explanation: "Ah, Sir," was his comment, "if you could see my soul, as God makes me know myself, you would judge differently."

Following upon confession there was a period of prayer in immediate preparation for Mass. Celebrating the Holy Sacrifice, he appeared as another Christ, fulfilling the office of priest and victim. Humble and contrite, as one bowing down under the burden of sin, he pronounced the penitential prayers and phrases of the liturgy — the "Confiteor," the "Domine non sum dignus," and the "nobis quoque peccatoribus." "When you come to the 'nobis quoque' of the Mass," he wrote on one occasion, "think of me as the greatest sinner of the world." Majesty, serene gravity, and mercy were apparent in countenance, and gesture, and in the sound of his voice when he turned from the altar and faced the people, his hands extended as of one who would embrace them all within the charity of Christ.

His manner of speech and action at the altar was neither slow nor hurried. His Mass occupied a half hour, but no longer than that. The tone of his voice was moderate and agreeable; his enunciation of words, distinct and devout. There was quite evident harmony between lips and heart. His reading of the Gospel was markedly reverent and attentive; and when he came to words of our Lord, he read them some-

how with a responsive tenderness and affection. The familiar "Amen, amen, I say to you," prepared him to consider with special attention a mystery, an admonition to which the Master was giving unusual emphasis. The edification of those who assisted at St. Vincent's Mass was voiced by one who exclaimed, "God be praised, there is a priest who celebrates Mass well!"

It was his custom to celebrate every day except at the beginning of his annual retreat. The first three days of the retreat, according to the usage of the Congregation, were spent in works of penance and purification. On all other days, whatever the circumstances of place or personal inconvenience, he celebrated the Holy Sacrifice.

Afterward he often assisted at another Mass, where not infrequently he was the acolyte. Even in later life, though far advanced in years, overburdened with work, and painfully crippled with illness, the venerable Superior, with the simplicity of a young cleric, and with greater devotion and reverence, was honored in serving his confreres at the Holy Sacrifice. It was also his purpose to convey by personal example, the instruction that a cleric, set apart for the service at the altar, should always be willing to exercise his office in this respect.

Anticipating festive days, he prepared carefully for the liturgical ceremonies in order that the sacred rites might be celebrated fittingly according to the rubrics. He humbled himself before God and his brethren for his inability to make a liturgical genuflection; and any violation of a rubric on his part, was atoned immediately after the service by his kneeling before the Community to ask their pardon. Animated by the same faithfulness to the divine service, he did not hesitate to reprimand others for any failure to observe the sacred rubrics. In consequence the services held at St. Lazare enjoyed an excellent reputation throughout Paris.

St. Vincent's attitude of attention and reverence was the same in private under the eye of God alone, as it was in public where others were present. He read the Breviary kneeling, except when, in later life, his infirmities forbade him that reverential posture. It was the same for his daily reading

of Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament. He honored God in particular mysteries of religion — the Most Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Most Blessed Eucharist considered as both sacrifice and sacrament.

Kneeling before the Tabernacle his attitude was noticeably one of sincere and profound humility. Upon his countenance might be read the testimony of a supernatural faith so strong as to appear almost an actual vision of the Real Presence. In modesty, silence, and concentration of soul, he had no thought or notice of what might be going on round about him. There, for hours on end, he would remain before his Lord all the time he could spare from his duties. There he was content and alone, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

There he went, like Moses, to consult the divine Wisdom in all his difficulties and problems. In back of the high altar at St. Lazare he would open and read important letters. Before going out, he always visited his Lord in the Blessed Sacrament — "the Master of the house," as he called Him. He entered the church to greet Him, to say "good-by," and to receive His blessing. On returning, he paid another visit, rendering thanks for graces received while away, and humbling himself for his faults. When, in the city streets he met a priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament, he went on his knees. Occasionally he followed the Blessed Sacrament along the way so as to be near his good Friend.

On a journey it was his custom, in passing through a village, to enter the church for a visit; or if the door was locked, he would kneel and kiss the doorstep. When illness prevented him from celebrating Mass he received Holy Communion with quite extraordinary reverence and spiritual absorption. Profanations committed by heretics or soldiers, saddened him profoundly. Tears, extraordinary penances, fervent prayers — all were offered in atonement. He went personally to churches that had been profaned, or he sent his Missioners and others to celebrate Mass and receive Holy Communion by way of reparation. He made good the loss of sacred vessels and ornaments. And by means of missions he expiated the offense to God, and repaired the injury to souls.

St. Vincent adored in the Incarnate Word and the Eucharistic Presence, the divine lowliness of which St. Paul writes that "[he] emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men" (Phil. 2:7). And love gave him a strong desire to resemble that perfect exemplar of mankind. While practicing heroic virtue he lived exteriorly a common, ordinary life. Extraordinary gifts of both nature and grace were concealed from casual notice, under the externals presented by a modesty of speech, and poverty of dress. In action, speech, and thought, he gave substance to a characteristic maxim of his, "Nothing pleases me but in Jesus Christ."

His constant thought of Jesus enlightened, purified, and energized his charity. He saw Jesus as Supreme Pontiff in the person of the Pope, as bishop and prince of pastors in bishops, as high priest in pastors, as teacher in doctors of divinity, as king and judge in princes and magistrates, as great and noble in men of noble birth, and as little in the lowly; as a workman in the person of laborers, as a man of spiritual commerce in merchants, as poor in the poor, as a prisoner in prisoners, as infirm and agonizing in the sick and dying. Hence his respect and tender charity for all classes of men, especially for all those whose lowliness and suffering resembled more closely the suffering Messiah, the Man of Sorrows.

So faithful an imitator of Christ, he could in turn, serve as a model for his brethren. First of all he strove to engender in their minds a worthy concept of God. He said one day: "Let us endeavor, my brethren, to elevate and enlarge our ideas of the divine Majesty and holiness. If only we could penetrate a little into the immensity of that Sovereign Excellence, my Jesus, what noble sentiments we should then conceive! We could well exclaim with St. Paul upon human inability to imagine or comprehend the infinite glory that is hidden from earthly view. God is an abyss of perfection, everlasting, most holy, pure, and glorious. Our knowledge of Him, inadequate though it is, should motivate us to admire and praise His divine Majesty, to humble ourselves before Him, and to speak of Him with all reverence and submission.

In proportion to our admiration and reverence, will be our love; and this love will engender in us an insatiable desire to acknowledge His innumerable favors, and procure for Him true servants and worshipers."

CHAPTER 16 *Devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament*

Devotion to the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnate Word of God, is an express rule of the Vincentian Congregation. St. Vincent prescribed greatest reverence in church, and particularly in the fulfillment of sacred ceremonies. Haste, half-made genuflections, the least negligence of any kind, were to him a source of mental anguish; and he was fearful lest scandal might be given. Consequently he was careful to correct in private or, if necessary, in public, all the mistakes that came to his notice.

If one of the confreres, while passing before the altar, genuflected carelessly, he called him back at once, and showed him how low to bend the knee in the presence of the divine Majesty. "We should not move about like manikins," he explained. "One manipulates them so as to produce quick, nimble movements, bows and inclinations that are devoid of soul and thought." Then, humbly shouldering the responsibility, as was his wont, he added: "Who is to blame? I myself am at fault, and I would humble myself on my knees if I were able; pardon my infirmities."

"Nevertheless, if I see the Congregation grow careless, I shall force myself to my knees — cost what it may — and rise as best I am able with your assistance or my own hands, so that I may give the good example it behooves me to give; for the faults of a Community are imputed to the Superior, and faults of this nature are serious because an obligation of religion is involved, an external genuflection that is an expression of the inner worship and reverence we owe to God. Also, if we fail in this matter, the ordinandi and the clergy who come here will not feel under obligation to do any better

than we. And other confreres, filling our places as time goes on, and following the precedent we have established, will not even measure up to our defective standard; for there is a natural tendency to deterioration. Therefore, Gentlemen, and my Brothers, I beg of you to give this matter your considerate attention, and that you comport yourselves exteriorly in a manner at harmony with your interior faith and reverence. God wishes to be adored in spirit and in truth, and therefore every good Christian should imitate the example of Jesus who lay prostrate in the Garden of Olives, thus manifesting His profound humility of mind and heart before the Sovereign Majesty of God."

What he said of the genuflection, he applied to all the ceremonies. "It is true, they are only the shadow," he said, "but the shadow of great things, and this is why we should perform them with all possible attention, in silence, and with fitting decorum and modesty. How will others perform them — those who come here — if we ourselves fail to set the proper example? The singing, too, must be done decorously; the Psalms are to be chanted with an air of devotion. Alas, when God requires of us an accounting, what shall we answer Him if these things have been done badly?"

The ardor kindled within his heart by Holy Communion, appeared in his words: "Do you not feel a divine fire burning within your soul every time you receive the adorable body of Jesus Christ?" Interior trials and troubles, he declared, were no reason for abstaining from the Bread of Life. On one occasion he wrote: "You have not done well to remain away from Holy Communion today on account of the interior trouble that is harassing you. Do you not see that this thought of yours is a temptation, and that your absence from the Eucharistic table is giving an advantage to the enemy of this adorable Sacrament? Do you imagine that by remaining apart from our Lord you render yourself more worthy of being united with Him? Assuredly you are deceived if such be your thought, for it is nothing but an illusion." Such illusion organized into Jansenism, he combated with all his might; and his efforts were largely instrumental in procuring the condemnation and gradual extinction of that heresy.

In the mind and heart of St. Vincent the Eucharistic Presence was closely associated with the virtues of the hidden life at Nazareth. "Let us honor the unknown life of Christ," he said. "From it we may learn what He requires of us for the present, for the future, and always until His Divine Majesty indicates unmistakably that He wishes us to do something else. Let us honor, I say, the simple, common life our Lord led upon earth. His humility and all the excellent virtues He practiced in that manner of life. But let us honor this divine Master especially in the moderation that characterized His manner of acting. Certainly He did less than He was able to do; He could have done more, but He wished to teach us to be content with doing what charity requires of us, and what is in accordance with the divine good pleasure.

"How greatly I esteem the generous resolution you have to imitate the hidden life of our Lord! Quite clearly, this thought comes from God since it is dissociated from purely human sentiments. It is unquestionably a disposition proper to children of God. Consequently, be firm; resist courageously any and all contrary ideas that may be suggested. Rest assured that by this means you will be where God wishes you to be, and that you will always do His holy will. After all, the will of God is the goal toward which, with all the saints, we should be ever tending.

"Consistently, the same spirit of Christ would lead the Apostolic soul into the activities of missionary endeavor. A Missioner," he explained, "is one whom God has called to save mankind. As Missioners, therefore, our object and purpose is to labor for their salvation as did our Lord Jesus Christ who alone is the true Redeemer, who alone has completely verified the lovely name, Jesus, or Savior. He came from heaven to exercise that office. To save was the purpose of His life and of His death; and still He continues the work by communicating to souls the graces He has merited for us. While on earth His thoughts were directed to the salvation of men; in heaven He cherishes the same sentiments conformably with the salvific will of His Father. . . . And by His example He has taught us the virtues proper to one who

would be a savior of his fellow men. Let us therefore give ourselves to our Lord, that in us and through us He may continue to bring souls to God."

CHAPTER 17 *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*

In a certain sense the Blessed Virgin was St. Vincent's teacher in his early childhood, and she received the first fruits of his piety. As a child he lived near the ruins of a chapel that had been dedicated to Our Lady of Buglos. When he had hardly left his mother's arms, it was his custom to pray before a little statue that he had enshrined in the hollow of an oak tree. He grew up amid local traditions of pilgrimages to the holy chapel, and of miracles wrought by Mary. It was in a chapel bearing her name, that he celebrated his first Mass after ordination to the Sacred Priesthood. Such were the early sources and manifestations of the tender devotion which characterized the Saint throughout his life.

His devotion was always practical. After preparing himself by fasting and good works, he celebrated her festivals with solemnity. He offered the Holy Sacrifice in chapels or on altars dedicated in her honor. He terminated conferences and meetings with one of her anthems, and said the Angelus at the sound of the bell. He recited the rosary every day, and wore it constantly at his cassock-cincture.

He frequently visited her churches, and, in times of danger to Church or State, he went on pilgrimage to Chartres. In each mission he delivered at least one discourse in her honor; and two hundred years before the doctrinal definition, he proclaimed the privilege of her Immaculate Conception. He placed under Mary's protection, all the confraternities of charity, all the works established for the good of the Church and the relief of the poor.

Being a leader of a missionary Congregation, he quite naturally extended his devotion to the twelve Apostles, first and greatest of missionaries; and particularly to St. Peter and the Bishops of Rome, supreme vicars of Christ; and then

to St. Paul, pioneer Apostle of the Gentiles. Among the Blessed who might be styled his more intimate friends, were his guardian angel whom he saluted upon entering, and leaving his room; St. Vincent Martyr, his patron saint, the traditions of whose life and works in Spain he had collected; and St. Vincent Ferrer. There was the great St. Joseph whom he gave as patron to his internal seminarians, whose devotion he introduced into all his houses, and whose intercession he petitioned through promises, Masses, and pilgrimages whenever he was entering upon important undertakings. The sainted Bishop of Geneva had a special place in the honored group. In them all he admired the gifts bestowed by the Author of all sanctity, whom he praised and adored in reverencing the sublime fruits of divine grace. He honored likewise the holy souls in Purgatory, living members of Jesus Christ, and inheritors, in certain expectation of everlasting life. He prayed for them, and offered in their behalf, "the holy acceptable Sacrifice of the Mass."

Such devotions have been written into the Rules of the Congregation of the Mission. During the troubles of the Fronde he induced the ecclesiastics of his conferences, and the Ladies of Charity to make several pilgrimages to Marian Shrines, there to obtain peace and prosperity for France through the intercession of her who is the Mother of Mercy. He instructed his Missioners to encourage the people to honor her, and to have great confidence in her protection. When the Chapter of Notre Dame, formed in procession, were bringing the principal relics of the Cathedral to St. Lazare, he spoke to his Community as follows: "We shall receive these precious relics as we would receive the saints in person, were they to honor us with a visit, and thus we shall honor God in His blessed servitors, and we shall beg of Him to make us partakers of the graces with which they are endowed."

PART IV . ZEAL

CHAPTER 18 *Apostolic Zeal*

St. Vincent was a man of truly Apostolic zeal. The works he undertook for the reform and sanctification of the clergy; the confraternities, assemblies, and institutions, the missions given in France and other European countries, and in lands across the sea, all these activities give ample evidence of the zeal that animated his never ceasing endeavors to prevent the ravages of evil-doing wherever possible; and everywhere to promote God's glory and the salvation of souls.

The zeal that characterized him was enlightened because it followed the gospel teaching and the decisions of the Church. It was free from both weakness and rigidity. It was discreet and prudent, devoid of bitterness and caprice, always tempered with respect or gentleness, according to the character of the person with whom he was dealing. It was an invincible zeal, never yielding to outbreaks of anger or persecution, nor even to threat or danger of death. It was disinterested, that is to say, unaffected by considerations of inordinate self-interest. It was indefatigable and persevering so long as there was yet work to be done.

In old age he remarked on one occasion: "I remember how, in returning from a mission, as I was approaching Paris it seemed to me that the gates of the city would fall and crush me. Rarely did I return from a mission without being moved by that idea. It was as though someone were saying to me: 'You leave the villages; and behold there are some as yet uncared for, some that are in want of the assistance you have given elsewhere. Had you not gone to certain places, it is probable that persons whom you prepared for death, would have been lost forever.

“Now since you found grave transgressions in one particular parish, is there not reason to suppose that similar transgressions exist in a neighboring parish where the poor people are waiting for a mission? Nevertheless you go your way, leaving them as they are! If, then they die in their sins, you will be, in a measure, the cause of their destruction, and you will have reason to fear that God will punish you.’ Such was the troubled state of mind in which I found myself.”

When seventy-eight years of age he envied the labors of his missionary sons. In the year 1654 he wrote as follows: “How ashamed I feel of my uselessness in comparison with you! Truly, sir, I can hardly restrain the urge within me. I must say to you in all simplicity that what you have written gives me a renewed and burning desire to go forth, with my slight infirmities, and end my days laboring in some small wayside village. And it seems to me that I would be very happy, should God be pleased to grant me this favor.”

There is a saying of his, “If love for God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray.” Zeal inflamed his discourses and letters, it enkindled its fire in the hearts of his Missioners. “How happy,” said he, “are they that give themselves to God in order to do what Jesus Christ has done and to practice the virtues they have learned from His life. For in this manner they become true disciples of their Master. They live by His holy spirit, and they spread abroad, through an exemplification of His humility, patience, and zeal, the efficacy of His actions for the sanctification of the souls for whom He willingly gave His life.

“Are we not then happy, my Brethren, to carry on the manner of work which Jesus Christ was called upon to perform and re-enact His manner of life as do other missioners? I refer to those great and apostolic laborers, members of other Communities, who give missions in France and elsewhere. They are indeed great missioners, and we, only their shadows. They journey to India, Japan, Canada, in order to continue the work which Jesus Christ began, the work which He has never abandoned since first He was appointed by His heavenly Father. We may imagine Him saying to us in-

teriorly: 'Go forth, Missioners, go whither I send you! Behold! poor souls await your coming; their salvation depends upon your sermons and catechetical instructions!' This we should seriously consider, for God has destined us to labor at particular times and places in behalf of particular persons. In similar fashion He appointed His Prophets; their mission was associated with certain places and people.

"Now, what answer could we give to God if one soul should perish because of our fault? Would not that soul have just cause of accusation against us? And should not we, in turn, have reason to fear at the hour of death, when an accounting is required of us? Whereas, if we carry out faithfully the duties of our vocation, assuredly we shall have reason to hope that God will augment His grace within us from day to day, that He will multiply the Congregation, that He will draw good men into its ranks, men of admirable dispositions, and that He will bestow His blessing upon all our works. Meanwhile, souls that have attained their salvation by means of our ministry, will be witnesses to our faithful performance of the functions entrusted to us. How happy the Missioner who, at the hour of death, can find a résumé of his priestly life in the words of our Lord, 'He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor' (cf. Lk. 4:18).

"But woe to us if we become remiss in serving and aiding the poor! For when in answer to God's call, we have given ourselves to Him for that purpose, He wills, as it were, to be dependent upon our services. These words of one of the Fathers, 'If you have not nourished, you have killed,' should be borne in mind, for they apply not only to bodily nourishment, but, with even greater truth, to spiritual reflection. We would have cause to fear; we would fail of our duty in this matter if, on account of age, infirmity or ill health, we should lose our first fervor.

"As for myself, my age notwithstanding, I do not consider that I am excused from the obligation of laboring in the service of the poor; what is there to prevent me from so doing? If I am unable to preach every day, I will preach twice a week; and if I lack sufficient strength to make myself heard in large churches, I will speak in small ones; and if even

that should prove impracticable, what will hinder me from gathering those good people round me, and speaking to them simply and familiarly just as I am now talking to you?

"I am acquainted with men of advanced age who, on the Day of Judgment, may bear witness against us. Among them was a good Jesuit father; a man of exemplary life, he preached many years at court until, at sixty years of age, he was prostrated by a sickness that brought him to the gates of death. Meanwhile God revealed to him how vain and ineffectual, for the most part, his elaborate and polished sermons had been. Thereupon, stricken with a great remorse of conscience, and, at the same time, favored with a restoration of health, he sought and obtained permission to teach catechism, and give popular instruction to the poor people of the countryside. There he labored for twenty years, persevering until the end. And when death was near at hand, he requested as a favor, that the ferule which he had used in teaching catechism, might be buried with him. It would bear witness, he said, that he had withdrawn from the employ of the royal court, for the service of our Lord in the person of His poor.

"There are some people whose ambition it is to live a long life upon earth. They might perhaps be fearful in consequence, that the labor of missionary work would shorten their days, hasten the hour of death, and so they might seek exemption from service in the missions, avoiding that sort of work as much as possible, regarding it as a misfortune. But I would ask of such a one, when a person is journeying through a foreign land, is it a misfortune for him to draw nearer and nearer to his own country? When a person is at sea, is it a calamity for him to approach the port? Is it a disaster for a faithful soul to depart this earth and enter upon the joys of heaven? Is it unfortunate that missionaries go soon to possess the glory their divine Master has merited for them by His blessed sufferings and death? Merciful heavens! Are we to fear the occurrence of something which, for all our longing, is worthy of much greater desire, and which, though it may happen soon, is always long acoming?

"And what I say to those in holy priesthood, I say like-

wise to all our Brothers. You are not employed in preaching, but you must not imagine that you are thereby exempted from our common obligation of laboring for the salvation of the poor. You can work in your own way, perhaps as fruitfully as the preacher, and certainly with less danger to yourselves. You are obligated with us because you are members of the same body with us, just as all the members of the Sacred Body of Jesus Christ contributed, each in its way, to the work of our salvation. As the head was crowned with thorns, so the feet were pierced with nails. And both head and feet participated in the glory that followed upon the Resurrection."

CHAPTER 19 *Courage*

The Saint sustained the courage of His Missioners. "Oh, Sir, what consolation I feel in thinking of you who belong entirely to God, and of your vocation which is truly Apostolic! Love, then, this blessed vocation; it will bring innumerable graces upon you, provided you are faithful. Doubtless you will have much to struggle against. The devil and corrupt nature will join forces to block the good work you wish to do. They will picture the difficulties as greater than they really are; and in order to sadden and depress you, they will endeavor to convince you that in time of need, grace will not be forthcoming. Through their influence, men will contradict and persecute you. And perhaps they will be the very ones whom you formerly regarded as your best friends, persons from whom you have reason to expect support and consolation.

"If that should happen to you, my dear Confrere, look upon it as a good sign of God's favor, for by this means you will be drawn into closer union with our Lord who was overwhelmed with sadness, deserted, denied and betrayed by His own Apostles, and, for our sake, given over by His heavenly Father into the hands of His executioners. Truly blessed are they who willingly carry their cross in the footsteps of

such a Master! Remember and hold for certain that whatever happens, you will never be tried beyond your power to endure, for God Himself will be your support and strength, and the more completely so in proportion as your trust and refuge is in Himself alone."

He encouraged them when their mission work was apparently unsuccessful. Thus he wrote: "Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has so sweetly and firmly inspired you with the thought of the mission which you have undertaken for the propagation of the faith! And blessed be the same Lord who has come into the world, not only to redeem the souls you go to instruct, but also to merit for you the graces needful to procure their salvation and your own! Since then these graces are all prepared for you, and since our Lord God, who bestows them desires nothing so much as to grant them to those who wish to make good use of them, you have only to receive them worthily and abundantly, and so by their power to destroy what remains of the old self within you, and likewise to dispel from this people the darkness of ignorance and sin.

"I trust that on your part you will not spare either labor or health or life. You have given yourselves to God for this purpose, exposing yourselves to the dangers of a long voyage; and therefore you need only resolve upon setting your hand firmly to the work. Meanwhile, for a good beginning and a successful prosecution of the work, you must remember to act in the spirit of our Lord, to unite your actions with His, and offer them all for God's greater glory. God will then shower upon you abundant blessings.

"Nevertheless you may not be aware of them, at least not in their full extent, because for His own good reasons God occasionally conceals from His laborers the fruits of their labors, while at the same time He grants a fruitful harvest. St. Francis Xavier did not live to see the wonderful fruits of his holy labors, the spiritual harvest that would mature after his death, and the amazing progress of the missions that he had pioneered. This thought should keep your heart and will detached from untoward appearances, and united with God, strong in confidence that all will be well."

Under his transforming touch, persecution became a reason for zealous endeavor. "It may be," he said, "that God has permitted this misfortune, to test your fidelity. Does the foresight of danger deter merchants from voyaging over the ocean? For fear of wounds, or even of death, do soldiers refuse to march off to war? And we, on our part, when our work becomes the occasion of suffering and persecution, shall we allow such things to turn us from the performance of duty in aiding and saving souls?"

The ravages of war, and similar calamities aroused in the heart of St. Vincent the fervor of martyrdom, and in speaking to confreres at home, his thoughts were with those who occupied a post of stress and peril. "By the grace of God they suffer in the proper spirit, and in suffering they are happy, first because they are paying a service to God, and secondly because they are procuring the salvation of souls. We, too, Gentlemen, should have a similar desire to work for God and the neighbor, to expend our strength utterly for this blessed purpose. Yes, Gentlemen and my Brothers, we must belong to God and our neighbor unreservedly. We should willingly sacrifice our own possessions in order to clothe our neighbor, willingly do everything and suffer everything for the sake of charity, and go whithersoever God may please to send us for the spiritual good of our dear neighbor, and the extension of God's kingdom over souls.

"I myself, though aged and weary, should be steadfast in this disposition of readiness to go to the Indies, there to gain souls for God, even though there would be danger of dying on the way. We must not imagine that God requires health and strength of body. All He requires is good will and an habitual disposition to accept opportunities of serving Him though it be at the peril of our lives. Indeed our desire should be to sacrifice ourselves for God, even to the point of martyrdom. And this desire may be as pleasing to the Divine Majesty as is actual martyrdom, for the Church honors as martyrs many saints who after being exiled for the faith, died a natural death.

"Our brothers who labor in foreign lands, how learned they are in the science of suffering! Some of them are ex-

posed to the danger of pestilence from attending diseaseridden patients; others are beset with the perils of war; still others endure the pangs of hunger. Yet, despite everything, they remain firm and unshaken in the good work they have undertaken. Let us then acknowledge thankfully the grace that God has given to this poor and insignificant Congregation, for He has enriched it with members who are admirably faithful and constant in suffering for the love and service of His divine Majesty.

“Courage, then, Gentlemen and my Brothers! Let us hope that our Lord will strengthen us to bear the crosses that will be laid upon us, how heavy soever they may be. And so He will do, provided He perceives in us a love for the cross, and confidence in Him. When afflictions come upon us — sickness, persecution, sufferings, temptations, death itself — let us address them in this manner: ‘Welcome heavenly favors, graces from God, holy trials, which come from God’s paternal hand for my advantage; I receive you with a heart full of respect, submission and confidence in Him who sends you. I abandon myself to you, that I may give myself to Him.’”

One of the Missioners in Scotland was imprisoned by Cromwell; that is, he was on the threshold of martyrdom. St. Vincent had this to say: “I do not know whether we should be joyful or sorrowful. On the one hand God is honored in the state in which our brother is detained, since it is for His love. What acts of virtue our confrere is now practicing — faith, hope, love for God, resignation and oblation whereby he prepares himself more and more to merit such a crown! All this is reason for joy and gratitude. But on the other hand, it is our brother who is in distress; should we not suffer with him? As for me I confess that according to nature I am greatly afflicted, but according to the spirit I judge that we should thank God for a very special grace.

“Observe the working of divine providence. After a person has rendered a remarkable service, God loads him with afflictions and opprobrium. Gentlemen and my Brothers, there must be something very precious in crosses and sufferings, something the mind cannot fathom, since ordinarily they are the sequel to faithful service. Whoever wishes to

be a disciple of Jesus Christ, must expect the cross, but he should also be of good hope that when it comes, God will give him strength to bear the suffering, and overcome the torment."

CHAPTER 20 *War and Pestilence*

Two Missioners of Poland were in the midst of war and pestilence. St. Vincent took the occasion to address the Community: "Others, placed in a situation such as that, three hundred or four hundred leagues from their own country, would become discouraged. They would say: 'Why were we sent off to so distant a field of labor? Our brethren in France are enjoying their comfort while we are left here to die in a strange land.' This is the way carnal men would speak, men who cling to natural sentiments, and do not enter into those of our suffering Lord by finding their blessedness in suffering.

"How useful a lesson these servants of His offer us! We may learn therefrom to love the circumstances in which it may please divine providence to place us. Our Missioners face life and death with equanimity, humbly submissive to whatever God ordains. They give no sign of impatience or complaint; on the contrary they seem disposed to suffer still more. Are we of like mind, Gentlemen and my Brothers? Are we ready to undergo the trials that God will send, and to hold in check the reactions of nature, so as to love the life of Jesus Christ? Are we ready to go to Poland, Barbary, the Indies, to sacrifice, for the sake of Christ, our comforts and our lives?

"If such be the case, let us give thanks to God. If on the contrary, there be those who fear to forego their conveniences and comforts, and who are so soft that they complain if the least thing is wanting to them, and so delicate that they desire a change of house and occupation because the air is not good, or the food is poor, or they have not the liberty to come and go as they choose; if there be Missioners

of that kind, let them be ashamed at being so devoid of spirit and courage while their confreres are so worthily fulfilling their obligations.

“They have suffered much in that country from famine, plague, war. And shall we at home be fettered by home comforts, without spirit or zeal? While others expose themselves to danger in the service of God, shall we be timid as wet hens?

“How miserable and spiritless we are! Twenty thousand soldiers march off to war. They will endure every sort of suffering; one will lose an arm; another a leg; many will give up their lives, and for what? For a little glory and uncertain gain. Yet they have no fear, and they pursue their way as if in search of treasure. But where heaven is the goal, there are few that will make the necessary effort. And frequently they that undertake the task, indulge in a soft and sensual manner of life, a way of living that is unworthy, not only of a priest or of a Christian, but even of a human being. If there be such among us, they are only the inanimate replicas of Missioners. But God be praised and glorified for the grace He has given to those who are faithful to Him! God be praised for having given to the Little Company these two men of grace!

“Let us give ourselves to God, Gentlemen, that we may preach the Gospel to the entire world, going whithersoever He may lead us. There let us do our part, fulfilling our duties until such time as He is pleased to recall us. Let us not be deterred by difficulties. The glory of the heavenly Father, the fruitfulness of the gospel message, and the efficacy of the Savior’s Passion are at stake. Eternal salvation both for ourselves and for other men, is a reward well worth whatever price we have to pay for it. We suffer no loss in dying sooner, provided we die with our weapons in our hands. We shall be happier, and the Congregation will be none the poorer, for the blood of martyrs is a seed. In place of one Missioner who gives his life for the sake of charity, the goodness of God will raise up several others to take up the work where he left off.

“Let each one, therefore, determine to combat worldliness,

to mortify his passions, and obey the commandments of God, to fulfill the obligations of a Missioner wherever, God so willing, he may be stationed. This, our determination, instinct with the spirit of Christ, should be strong in confidence that God will help us in every need. You do so resolve, and freely, do you not, my Brothers of the Seminary? And you are of like mind, are you not, my Brothers, the students? The Fathers, I have no doubt, are so disposed. Yes, my God, we all desire to correspond with Your will in our regard. Such is our purpose with the aid of Your grace. No longer shall we cling to life, health, personal convenience, one particular place in preference to another, or anything at all that could hinder you, my God, from bestowing the mercy which each one of us begs of You in behalf of all the others."

St. Vincent continued on the same theme: "Behold the fair field of labor that God presents to us in Madagascar, the British Isles and elsewhere! Let us pray that our hearts be inflamed with a desire to serve Him, and let us be amenable to His good pleasure. St. Vincent Ferrer found encouragement in the reflection that good and zealous pastors at some future time would fill the entire world with the blessings of their priestly ministrations. If we are not of their Apostolic number, let us at least beg of God to make us their precursors. But, be that as it may, we must hold the conviction that we are not genuine followers of Christ unless we are willing to lose everything, even our life, in the service of Jesus Christ, unless we resolve, with the Apostle, to endure sufferings and death rather than be separated from the love of our divine Savior."

The Saint had something to say about the works of the Mission in France. "Gentlemen, how highly we should esteem the grace that is ours in helping other people work out their salvation! Among those people are a number of soldiers. A few days ago one of them said to me: 'Father, I must soon go to war, and so I desire to prepare my soul. My conscience bothers me, and I wish to be ready for whatever may happen, whatever God may ordain in my regard.'

"We have now in the house a goodly number of persons

on retreat. What great good may be accomplished if we work faithfully! On the other hand, what a misfortune if this house should become weary of the practice! Gentlemen and my Brothers, I fear such a time will come. And then there will be reason to fear that God will take away, not only the grace of this work, but all the other graces as well.

“The day before yesterday I was told that Parliament had degraded and defrocked a councilor, taking from him his red robe and cap, because he was unworthy to retain the honors and functions of office. We too, Gentlemen, shall be rejected if we abuse God’s grace by neglecting our original functions. He will take these functions from us if we prove unworthy of the office in which He has placed us, unfit for the works He has confided to our care. And what cause of grief that would be! For, many people come here to make a retreat in order to learn whether or not their intention of quitting the world is according to God’s will. In this connection I recommend to your prayers a retreatant who has just finished the spiritual exercises. On leaving here he will go to the Capuchins to take the habit.

“Some Communities direct several of their prospective members to make the retreat at St. Lazare. Their purpose in so doing is to test the solidity of their vocation. Other retreatants travel ten, twenty, fifty leagues not only to spend a few days of recollection, and make a good general confession, but also to decide upon a state of life in the world, and make plans for working out their salvation. Then too, there are many parish priests and others of the clergy who come here from various places to renew themselves in the spirit of their vocation, and advance in the spiritual life.

“They all come without bothering to bring money, for they know they will be well received without that. One of them said to me recently: ‘Those who have no money find great consolation in the knowledge that there is a place in Paris always ready to receive them out of charity whenever they apply with the sincere purpose of setting their spiritual affairs in order.’”

CHAPTER 21 *Retreats at St. Lazare*

St. Vincent: "This house of St. Lazare formerly served as a refuge for lepers; not one of them recovered. It now serves as a refuge for sinners, people who are covered by a spiritual leprosy; but by the grace of God they recover. We go further and say that the dead rise again to life. What a happiness, that our house of St. Lazare should be a place of resurrection! St. Lazarus, after lying entombed in death three days, was raised from the tomb by our Lord who now works a similar favor in behalf of sinners. A number of people remain some days at St. Lazare as in a sort of sepulcher from which, by God's grace, they depart with the renewed life of sanctifying grace.

"Who would not rejoice at so great a blessing? Who would not entertain sentiments of love and gratitude for God's goodness in conferring so great a favor? What shame therefore would be ours if ever we should become unworthy of such a grace? What humiliation, Gentlemen, and what regret if through our fault this great work should ever be shamefully neglected before God and man! What affliction and sadness a poor Brother of the Little Company would experience in observing such neglect! In contrast with the great good that is now being accomplished, he would then see a lamentable vacuity, a discontinuance of the retreats, empty places where, formerly, retreatants were making the spiritual exercises.

"And it may come to this, Gentlemen; not soon, perhaps, but eventually. And what will be the cause? It will happen in this manner. A Missionary, become remiss in his duties and spirit, will be given an appointment — 'Father,' the Superior will say to him, 'would you please direct this person in his retreat?' The request will be to him a torment. And if he does not go so far as to refuse the appointment, he will undertake the duty with great reluctance. He will be so attached to his own gratification, and so averse from sacrificing a half hour from his ordinary recreation after dinner and after supper, that the hour spent with the re-

treasant will seem insupportable even though, as being devoted to the salvation of a soul, it is in fact the most holily and profitably spent hour of the entire day. Others will murmur at this employment, under pretext that it is very burdensome and very expensive; and in this way the Priests of the Mission will retain only the name and appearance of what they had been. And thus this house which is now a pool of life-giving water, will become a pond of stagnation and corruption. Let us address our prayers to God, Gentlemen and my Brothers, that this evil may be averted. Let us invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin for the same purpose. Let us petition the great St. Lazarus, that he may always protect this house, and obtain for us the grace to persevere in a good work well begun."

Zeal, perhaps more than other virtue, has need of the direction given by prudence. "Zeal is not good unless it is discreet," he wrote. "It appears that you undertake too much at the beginning. By going too fast we often spoil good works, for then we act according to our inclinations which disturb the exercise of reason, and lead us to imagine that the work we have in mind is good and appropriate whereas it is not so. Unsatisfactory results are evidence of our lack of discretion. The good that God wishes to accomplish, is done by itself, so to speak, without thought on our part. I am very desirous that you moderate your enthusiasm, and weigh matters well in the scales of the sanctuary before coming to a decision. Be more inclined to suffering, and then God will accomplish by means of your ministry, good results, which many men working together without Him, would be unable to accomplish."

Meekness was to be another characteristic of their zeal. To a Missioner at Annecy, he wrote: "It seems to me that the zeal you have for the advancement of the Congregation is always accompanied with some harshness, and even turns to bitterness. What you tell me, what you term laxness and sensuality in some people, proves my point, and especially the manner in which you speak of such things. My dear Sir, great care must be taken in this regard. It is easy, after holding the virtuous middle way, to merit reproach on ac-

count of immoderate zeal. There is a saying that good wine easily turns to vinegar, and that good health may be a sign of approaching illness.

“It is true that zeal is the soul of virtue, but then it must be according to knowledge, a knowledge that comes from experience. And because young people, generally speaking, do not possess this knowledge, their zeal tends to excess. Such excess is characteristic especially of persons who are inclined to harshness. We should avoid this fault and be on our guard, especially when we are young, and of a sanguine disposition. Martha complained about the prayerful idleness and saintly sensuality of her dear sister. Magdalene, unlike Martha, was not all anxiety to wait upon our Lord, and therefore Martha judged that her sister was doing wrong. You and I, perhaps, had we been present, would have reacted as did Martha.

“Observe how the inactivity and careflessness of Magdalene, according to our Lord’s declaration, was more pleasing to Him than was the less discreet zeal of St. Martha. In the name of God, let us adopt these true sentiments and practices, and let us fear lest the evil spirit urge us into an excess of zeal, and so lead us to fail in the respect we owe to our Superiors, and in the charity we should exercise toward our equals. Such failure is ordinarily the result of our indiscreet zeal, and it is an advantage gained by the evil spirit.

“Therefore in the name of our Lord I beg of you, let us endeavor to be rid of all zeal that is injurious to respect, esteem, and charity. And because it seems to me that the demon’s purpose is to mislead you and me, let us humble our thoughts in order to interpret favorably the neighbor’s manner of acting, and bear patiently his minor shortcomings.”

St. Vincent recommended that the works of zeal should be exercised gratuitously. He wrote as follows: “Do you not know that a Missioner who accepts money for the support of his work, is no less reprehensible than a Capuchin who acts in similar fashion? Once and for all I beg of you never to give a mission except at the expense of your own house.”

He desired that they should not be jealous of good works done by the Congregation of the Mission, looking askance

at the good accomplished by others; that they should petition of God that He send laborers into His vineyard, and that they should cultivate the spirit animating Moses when he expressed the wish "that all might prophesy." The Saint wrote accordingly: "It would be preferable for others to establish a hundred missions than for us to hinder a single one. Let us have more confidence in God. Leave to Him the burden of guiding our little bark; if it be useful to Him, He will protect it from shipwreck. Other vessels, no matter how large or numerous they may be, present no threat to our safety, provided we go directly to our destination, and guard against intercepting the course which they are steering."

When Father Eudes was giving a mission, St. Vincent took occasion to write: "Some priests from Normandy, directed by Father Eudes, came to Paris for the purpose of giving a mission. The Court called 'Fifteen-Twenty,' though very large, did not accommodate all the people who came to hear the sermons. At the same time a large number of ecclesiastics left Paris to labor in other cities, and it is impossible to describe the fruits they have produced. In all this we had no share, because our portion is the poor people of the rural areas. . . . There is reason to thank God for the zeal He imparts to many for the salvation of souls."

On the same theme — humility — St. Vincent said one day: "My brethren, let us be like the peasant who carried the luggage of St. Ignatius and his companions. When he saw them fall wearily to their knees as they arrived at a stopping place, he did the same. When they gave themselves to prayer, he too prayed. And when questioned what he was doing, he replied, 'I am praying to God, that He may grant what you ask of Him. Not knowing how to pray as you do, I offer Him your prayers.'

"Gentlemen and my Brothers, we should look upon ourselves as the luggage-bearers of those worthy laborers, as poor simpletons who know not how to say anything, as second rate workers, poor gleaners following in the footsteps of those great harvesters. Let us thank God that He has been pleased to accept our small services. Since He gave to the countryman mentioned above, the light and grace that have merited

for him a place in history, we may hope that in doing the best we are able to contribute to His honor and service, His divine Goodness will receive our offering favorably, and bless our works."

CHAPTER 22 *Vincentian Vocations*

St. Vincent's dependence upon divine guidance, his fear of impeding or anticipating Divine Providence, was carried to a point from which he judged it well to recede somewhat at a later time. "Gentlemen," he said, "when you serve and direct those who come here to make their spiritual retreat, be careful never to say anything that may attract them to the Congregation. It belongs to God to call them and to give them the first inspiration. And even if they disclose an inclination of that nature, do not urge or advise them to become Missioners. Simply tell them that they should give much thought to a matter of such importance, and pray meanwhile for divine guidance.

"Speak to them also about the difficulties they are likely to encounter, and explain that they must be prepared to suffer much in the Congregation and work hard in the service of God. Thereafter if they resolve upon entering, well and good; you may bring them to the Superior for a discussion of their vocation. Let us allow God to act, Gentlemen; in dependence upon Him, let us await humbly the orders of His Providence. By His mercy such has been the custom in the Congregation up to the present, and we can say there is nothing in it that God has not placed there. In the name of God let us continue this practice. Let us follow, not anticipate His orders. Believe me, if we act in this manner, God will bless the Congregation."

By the same token, neither those who were minded to enter some other order, nor those whom Superiors had sent for a trial of their vocation, were allowed to remain at St. Lazare. "Should we perceive that they entertain the notion of going elsewhere to serve God in some other Community,

let us not hinder them. Otherwise we would have to fear lest the indignation of God fall upon the Congregation for coveting what He was unwilling it should possess. If it were not our custom to accept only those persons whom God is pleased to send, and who for a considerable period of time have been intending to enter the Congregation — if that were not our custom, would the Carthusians and other Communities choose our house, St. Lazare, as the place of retreat for young men who desire to become members of those Communities? They certainly would be careful not to do so.

“For example: a person who is thinking of entering the Carthusian Order, comes here, by direction of a Superior, to consult our Lord by means of a retreat. Now, suppose that someone tries to persuade him to remain, to become a Vincentian. Would that not be an endeavor to retain what does not belong to us? That person has no vocation to enter the Little Company; he has no thought of becoming a Vincentian. Would not such persuasion on our part bring the divine displeasure upon the entire Congregation?”

“Poor little Congregation of Missioners, in what evil plight you would be if that were to befall you! But, by the mercy of God, you have always been quite free from such a practice. Let us pray to God, Gentlemen, that He may strengthen the Congregation in the grace He has given, of desiring only what He is pleased we should possess.”

To a priest who was in favor of discontinuing the ruinous Barbary Mission, he replied: “If a single soul is of so great value, that one should risk one’s life to procure the salvation of that soul, how can we abandon a great number of souls for fear of expense? Our mission stations in that spiritually blighted country show forth the beauty of our holy religion. Our Missioners voluntarily exile themselves from their homeland; they give up the comforts of civilization; they expose themselves to innumerable dangers in order to bring consolation to their afflicted brethren. And I consider that the manifestation of our holy religion in such ways — even if no other advantage were gained — would amply justify the employment of both men and money in the works of the Barbary Mission.”

Even the death of Missioners in Madagascar and various

other places, was no reason for a lessening of Apostolic ardor. "It is not possible," he said, "for a missionary priest who lives faintheartedly, to succeed in his vocation, or come to a happy end; for such weak, timid souls cause great harm in a community, harm to themselves, and injury to others whom they discourage by their example and their foolish talk. 'What good,' they ask, 'are all these missions, seminaries, conferences, retreats, assemblies and sea voyages, for the poor? When Father Vincent is dead, all these ventures will soon be abandoned, for how can they be supported? Where will you find Missioners for Madagascar, the British Isles, Barbary, Poland, and other places? How will you obtain money to defray the cost of missions that are so distant and so burdensome?'

"To such reasoning we must answer as follows: If the Congregation, from its very beginning, had courage enough to undertake these opportunities of serving God, and if the first Missioners manifested such fervor, is there not good reason to hope that the missionary spirit will grow stronger with time? Gentlemen, if God should offer to the Congregation further opportunities of serving Him, we certainly would not fail to accept such opportunities depending meanwhile on the aid of His grace. Fainthearted persons are capable only of discouraging others, and, for that reason you should be on your guard against them. When you hear them speak in that manner, say boldly, 'so now many antichrists have arisen' (1 Jn. 2:18), 'unworthy missioners who oppose the designs of God.' As yet, Gentlemen, we experience only the first graces of our vocation flowing in upon us; graces however that are abundant. And we have reason to fear lest, by our slothfulness, we become unworthy of God's many blessings, and of the works which He has entrusted to our care. Into that state of unworthiness a few communities have already fallen; and if we should fall in like manner, our plight would be, for us, the greatest of evils."

PART V . FRATERNAL CHARITY

CHAPTER 23 *Charity Toward the Neighbor*

The name of St. Vincent de Paul is a synonym for charity. The exercise of this virtue was the first act of his childhood, and the final effort of his old age. Like the Savior, he went about doing good, his charity was universal, extending to all those who were in need, and to all the necessities of body and soul. He had a mouthful of bread for the hungry, clothing for the naked, instruction for the ignorant, a comforting word for the sorrowful, and a heart and arms for those who had been abandoned.

He carried his charity to the heroic ideal of the Gospel, to the disregard and sacrifice of his life. Often, on his journeys, he got out of his carriage, and set himself between drawn swords to save others at grave risk to himself. And often he succeeded by courage and entreaties, in disarming adversaries. We cannot forget how he took upon himself an obnoxious temptation against the faith, in order to relieve a brother priest whose extreme distress under that same temptation had aroused his compassion.

His charity was well regulated. It ascended to the Sovereign Pontiff, and then stooped tenderly to the poorest and most lowly without neglecting anyone in between. How many prayers he offered, how many he begged of others during vacancies of the Holy See! What respect, what filial affection he professed for the Elect of the Holy Spirit!

Bishops had in Vincent the most religious and most devoted of servants. His correspondence with them is admirable for humility and charity. He felicitated them in their successes, and united with them in returning thanks to God. He advised moderation in their labors. "It is true, my Lord, that

I desired you would use moderation; my reason is that your work may endure, and that your ardent and untiring zeal may not soon deprive your diocese and the entire Church of the incomparable good you are doing. If this advice of mine does not accord with what your zeal commends to you, I shall not be surprised; for my human sentiments hold me at a distance from the eminence of Christian perfection to which your love for God has raised you.

“As yet I am entirely sensual whereas you are above nature. I have equal reason to humble myself for my shortcomings, and to thank God for the virtuous dispositions He has given you. I humbly beg of you, my Lord, to obtain for me by your prayers, not indeed an equality of spiritual abundance, but a small portion though it be no more than the crumbs, as it were, that fall from your table.”

He traced out for the Bishop this excellent plan of action. “My Lord, I know not how to express the sorrow I feel in face of the contagion with which your city is threatened. I am embarrassed, too, by the confidence with which you are pleased to honor me. I pray most earnestly that God may divert this bitter scourge from the people of your diocese and that He may make me worthily responsive to your command.

“Meanwhile, my Lord, my humble thought on the present distressful situation, is that a prelate, under such circumstances, should be prepared to provide for the spiritual and temporal needs of his diocese during the general distress, and that in consequence he should not remain in any one place, or engage in any occupation that would prevent him from providing for other localities; for he is the shepherd of the entire diocese. If where help is needed he can make provision through the ministrations of a priest, well and good. If not, he is under obligation to risk his own life for the salvation of his people, placing his trust in the adorable providence of God.

“Such, my Lord, is the plan of action followed by an excellent Prelate of this Kingdom. He encourages his pastors to run any risk for the salvation of their parishioners. And when the disease appears in a particular locality, he goes there to ascertain whether the pastor is fulfilling his office,

to strengthen his resolution, and also to offer suitable advice, and furnish available means for assisting the people. Without exposing himself among those who are infected with the disease, he renders what aid he can, and then returns home. Meanwhile he is ready to risk his own life if the need should arise. If St. Charles Borromeo acted in a different way, it was probably because he was guided by a special inspiration from God, or because Milan was the only city infected with the contagion.

“But since what can easily be done in a small diocese may be accomplished only with difficulty in one of greater extent, it seems to me, my Lord, that in order to encourage the pastors under your jurisdiction, it would be well for you to visit the affected areas — if that is agreeable to you. Or if you are prevented by illness, or by danger in these times of war, from making a personal visit, you should then commission archdeacons or other ecclesiastics to make a visitation for the same purpose.

“In country places poor people taken down with contagious disease, are usually without assistance, and in great need of something to eat. Your charity would be honored, my Lord, by sending alms to the good pastors who in turn would provide bread, wine, and a little meat. The poor people could then procure these provisions in a place and at a time appointed.

“If the integrity of a particular pastor should be in doubt, there would be need of giving the alms to some other pastor or vicar in the vicinity, or to some good lay persons of the parish. Generally speaking, someone can always be found capable of this charitable office, especially when there is no question of any contact with the plague-stricken. If it please God to bless this good work, I hope, my Lord, that He will be given much glory, that you will receive consolation in life and at the hour of death and that your diocese will be greatly edified. But of all this, a necessary condition is that you do not restrict your presence and activity to any one place.”

Another problem was to find worthy incumbents for the episcopal office, and sometimes the Saint would urge a Bishop to remain at the post of duty. To one he wrote: “You

are not experiencing more difficulty in the duties of office, my Lord, than did St. Paul. Yet the Apostle bore the burden till death; and none of the Apostles laid aside the labor and fatigue of Apostolic ministration until the time had come to cease earthly labor and receive an unfading crown of glory. Such advice, my Lord, would be presumptuous on my part, except that God Himself, who has raised you to the dignity of the Apostles, invites you to follow their example; and as for me, the liberty I allow myself derives from the profound reverence and inexpressible affection our Lord has given me for your sacred person."

He consoled them in their troubles, and when accusations were brought against them before the King, he spared them pain and humiliation so far as possible, and even to the detriment of his own Congregation. "It is preferable," he would say, "that suffering and humiliation should fall upon us than that we should do anything that would be prejudicial to this good prelate."

During times of public disturbance he prevailed upon the bishops to remain in their own dioceses, for in the interest of both King and people they might there be in a position to suppress factions, alleviate misery, and preside over supplicatory prayer. Some were minded to come to Paris, there to enter a complaint regarding damage done by the Army, and to obtain redress. He advised them that individual representations would be useless in a calamity enveloping almost the entire country, that by remaining, each Bishop in his own diocese, they would be able to assist their people more effectually, and that by keeping the citizenry in faithfulness and submission to the Government, they might prepare a way to obtain an expression of royal gratitude.

In giving advice, St. Vincent knew how to be firm without sacrificing the deference owing to ecclesiastics of prelatial dignity. To one of them, in litigation with his clergy before a court of law, he wrote as follows: "In the name of God, pardon me, my Lord, if I concern myself with your affairs without knowing whether my overtures will be acceptable to you. Perhaps you will be dissatisfied, but even so I must continue on because my purpose, motivated by a great affection

for your Lordship, is to deliver you from the cares and distractions of this troublesome business, so as to make it possible for you to engage, with greater peace of mind, in the government and sanctification of your diocese.

“To achieve this purpose I frequently offer my poor prayers to God. But there is one thing, my Lord, that grieves me very much, namely, that you have been presented to the Council as a Prelate who has great facility in going to law; and this impression is firmly established in the minds of the Councilors. As for me I admire our Lord Jesus Christ in His disapproval of lawsuits, and in His one legal involvement where the case went against Him.

“I have no doubt, my Lord, that if you enter upon a few lawsuits, it is for the sole purpose of sustaining and defending the cause of God. And because you consider Him alone, seeking to please the divine Majesty without being disturbed by what men have to say, therefore you maintain a great interior peace amid various external contradictions. For this I give thanks to the divine Goodness; such tranquillity is a grace characteristic of souls closely united with God. At the same time I must make known to your Lordship, that the aforementioned conviction of the Councilmen may weaken your case, and prevent you from obtaining the judgment you desire.”

The Bishop would not make any concession, and the Saint pursued his point: “I humbly beg of you, my Lord, bear with me this once if I presume to propose a compromise. I feel sure you have no doubt of my devotion to your service, or of the affection that causes me to desire the arrangement I am proposing. Yet, you might be resentful that a person with so little intelligence as I should offer a second proposition after the previous one has been rejected.

“I do not make the proposal of myself, but on advice of your agent who counsels a friendly termination of these disputes. He offered several reasons, one of which is the requirement of propriety that so eminent a Prelate should conclude the affair in a friendly way. And the reasonableness of such a solution gathers emphasis from the fact that among the clergy with whom you are in conflict, some are disposed to

be rebellious; and they are capable of harassing you for the rest of your life.

“Moreover, basing his judgment on the frame of mind evident in the Councilors, your agent is fearful regarding the result of the court proceedings; for, many of the members, being unacquainted with your saintly life, and the honorable intentions that motivate your conduct, may think that in your manner of acting there is something contrary to the patience and meekness suitable to your dignity. Again I humbly beg of you, my Lord, pardon my boldness, and consider my recommendation as coming not from me, but from your agent, one of the wisest men of his time, and one of the best judges in the world. I pray God to restore peace to your church, and quiet to your mind. You know the power you have over me, and the singular readiness God has given me for your service. If then you judge me worthy of doing anything to serve you, His divine goodness knows that I will devote myself to the work with all my heart.”

CHAPTER 24 *Service to the Clergy*

The Saint was regretful and apologetic when he found it impossible to serve the Bishops according to their wishes. “My Lord, I blush with shame as often as I read the latest letter with which you have honored me; indeed, as often as I merely recall the letter, considering, as I do, how far your Lordship has humbled himself before a person who was born a poor swineherd, and who is now a miserable old man full of sin. At the same time I am very much grieved to have given you the occasion of humbling yourself in that way. And such occasion I actually gave by taking the liberty of explaining to your Lordship that we were unable to furnish the men you desired. You may well suppose that my failure has been through no lack of respect or obedience, but merely from inability to satisfy your wishes on this occasion. In the name of God, pardon our poverty. You well know, my Lord, that there is none better disposed than we to respect your com-

mands. And in particular that is true of myself over whom God has given you sovereign authority."

When a Bishop sought his advice, his instinctive reaction was, not a sense of exaltation, but a consciousness of personal unworthiness and incapacity. "Alas! my Lord, how is it that you communicate so many important affairs to a poor, ignorant person such as I am? An abomination in the sight of God and man, owing both to past sins and present miseries, I am unworthy of the honor you confer upon me. And an expression of my thoughts on the subject of your inquiry is fitting only because you command me to speak. Accordingly, with all the respect owing to you, I offer my poor thoughts in the simplicity of my heart."

And again: "I have read and re-read your letter, my Lord, not that I may examine the question you propose, but that I may admire the judgment you arrive at. The decision you have made is instinct with something superior to the mind of man; for only the Spirit of God residing in your sacred person, could unite justice and charity in the degree you propose in this affair. So then, I give thanks to God for the supernatural enlightenment He has accorded you, and for the confidence with which you have honored an unprofitable servant. What you propose is far above me, and I confess to a sense of embarrassment in proposing to you my own judgment in the matter. However I shall not fail to comply with your wish."

St. Vincent's penchant for mercy seasoned his love for justice, and consequently he was not in favor of employing ecclesiastical censures except in cases of real necessity. When consulted regarding certain religious who had been unfaithful to their obligations, especially in matters of poverty, he answered: "Truly, Sir, you greatly embarrass me in seeking my advice, for I am the son of a poor farmer. Years ago I herded sheep and swine; and I am still in a state of ignorance and sin. However, like the poor donkey that spoke obediently under the power of its Creator, I, too, will obey in the conviction that my Lord, the Bishop, and yourself will hear and heed my counsel only in so far as it conforms with your own best judgment in the matter."

Then follows the Saint's advice and observations. "In general, we must deal with unruly religious the same way our Lord dealt with sinners. A Bishop or a priest, as such, is under obligation to be more perfect than a religious, considered merely as a religious. And consequently, for a considerable time he should act only by good example, mindful that the Son of God followed that same way during the years of His life on earth. Thereafter it will be necessary to speak with charity and moderation; and after that, earnestly and firmly without recourse to interdict, suspension, or excommunication, terrible censures which our Savior never employed.

"I can well believe that what I have said surprises you somewhat, but what would you have me say? My thoughts express what I feel regarding what our Lord has taught by word and example. And I have noticed that what is done according to this rule, succeeds admirably. By following it, the Blessed Bishop of Geneva, and, following his example, the late Monsignor Commings, rose to a state of sanctity; and they were instrumental in the work of sanctifying thousands of other souls.

"You will doubtless reply that a prelate who acts in this way will be despised. And I grant you it may happen that way, for a time. It is even necessary it should be so, in order that we may honor the Son of God by the similar circumstances of a ministry that is like His mission on earth. On the other hand, after suffering for as long a time as is pleasing to our Lord, He will give us grace to accomplish more good in three years than of ourselves we would be able to accomplish in thirty.

"Indeed, Sir, I do not believe that success can be obtained in any other way. Fine regulations may be made, censures employed, and all powers withdrawn, but will reformation result? It is not likely. Such means will neither extend nor preserve the empire of Jesus Christ in hearts. In former days God armed heaven and earth against sinful men; did He thereby convert them? Not so. When He was minded to effect man's conversion, He found it necessary to humble Himself. It was in that way He induced man to submit himself to the

divine yoke and law. Can a prelate accomplish by his episcopal power, what God has not effected by His omnipotence?"

St. Vincent's charity toward religious orders is well known. Franciscans, Benedictines, and the Order of Malta, the Congregations of St. Genevieve, Premontré, Grandmont, St. Anthony, and St. Bernard — all had reason to be thankful for his charitable intervention in their behalf, and they rendered ample testimony of their gratitude during the process of his canonization. He treated all religious with an affectionate respect. He would kneel at their feet, and so remain until he received their blessing. "I have remarked," he used to say, "that everything succeeded with me on the days when a servant of God was pleased to bless me."

His charitable concern was disinterested. He was fond of passing on to other Communities honors and advantages primarily intended for his own. When an ecclesiastic of Anjou, wishing to man one of his benefices, requested Missionaries of St. Vincent, the Saint recommended the priests of St. Sulpice, or those of St. Nicholas of Chardonnet. "They are exemplary Communities," he said, "they accomplish great good in the Church, and their activities are quite extensive. They are better fitted than we to commence and carry on the work you have so much at heart."

A woman had received, by inheritance, a permanent fund of money that had been given to educate young men for the priesthood. She sought advice regarding the manner of employing the revenue. He advised her to place it in the hands of the Fathers of St. Sulpice. "If you make this arrangement," he explained, "you may rest assured that the intention of the donor will be faithfully carried out. You might wish to see for yourself the good work that is being done at St. Sulpice. And you may look for equally good results when the Sulpicians enter upon the work you have in mind, for in all their establishments they are animated with a desire to promote the glory of God."

St. Vincent's affection and esteem for a friend could rise to the point of heroism. Persons hostile to Father Olier had roused the populace against him. Informed of the disturbance, the Saint made his way to the place of trouble, resolved

to defend the life of his friend, even at peril to his own life. That peril became evident as the fury of the mob was directed against the intruder. Without regard for his age or sanctity; unmindful of the services he had rendered the people, they loaded him with reproaches, and went so far as to strike him. Careless of his own safety, St. Vincent spoke out repeatedly in behalf of his friend: "Level your blows at St. Lazare, but spare St. Sulpice." And he was happy when he saw that friends of Father Olier, taking advantage of the turn in mob resentment, were leading him away from the tumult, and bringing him to the Luxembourg Palace.

Amid the jeers of the crowd, St. Vincent then withdrew, thanking God for the opportunity of braving persecution for the sake of justice and friendship. But there was a sequel. A report on the affair was brought before the Council of State where all the blame was thrown upon St. Vincent, because of a common misconception that regarded Father Olier and his missionaries as members of the Congregation of the Mission. The next time Vincent appeared at the Council of Conscience, he was received with disapproval. Courtiers, ministers of State, and princes condemned his conduct. A word of explanation would have cleared him, but he remained silent because it was his way to stand with a friend in time of trouble, and share with him the burden. He accepted as his own the cause of Father Olier and his missionaries, and spoke in their defense with energy and warmth.

However, as might have been expected, the facts of the matter soon became known. Then astonishment and admiration took the place of disapproval. And when asked an explanation of his astonishing reticence, he simply answered, "I have only done my duty; every Christian following the maxims of the Gospel should act in similar fashion." His friendship for Father Olier was constant and persevering. He assisted him at the approach of death, consoled the members of his Community, presided at the election of a successor, and co-operated in the perpetuation of his work. Religious women also profited by his beneficence. The Nuns of the Visitation and various other Orders were indebted to him for spiritual direction, reformation, establishment, and preser-

vation, according to their need. The services and favors he conferred upon the secular clergy have already been remarked. Spiritual retreats in preparation for the reception of holy orders, retreats for clergy and laity, clergy conferences, the establishment and management of diocesan seminaries — these and other works are well known.

CHAPTER 25 *Devotedness to the Congregation of the Mission*

St. Vincent's devotion and affection toward the members of his Congregation was truly paternal and Christlike. When confronted by someone with apparent reason to complain of him, rising from his chair, he would embrace the complainant, and say: "Dear brother, if my heart were not yours already, I would now bestow it upon you unreservedly."

He employed every feasible measure to retain Community members that were tempted to leave the Congregation. But if they left in spite of him, he followed them with charitable favors. In 1655, a young seminarian, disregarding St. Vincent's counsel, took his departure. Thereafter he enlisted in a company of Swiss Guards, but soon deserted so that in consequence, having been captured, he found himself in prison, under sentence of death. In this extremity remembering the father whom he had abandoned, he appealed to him, for his intervention. And St. Vincent, pardoning the prodigal, interceded for him, and obtained a reprieve.

To those whom he could not induce to remain, he gave the expenses of their journey, and obtained hospitality for them in houses of the Province. "I trust," he wrote, "that God will always give the Congregation grace to exercise kindness toward everyone, and especially toward those who withdraw from us. Recipient of such hospitality, they will not only have no cause to complain, but they will realize, even to the end, the charity of their good mother."

He listened willingly to the complaints of the coadjutor brothers. "You have done well to bring me this information;

I will attend to the matter. Always come to me, my brother, when you are in trouble, for you know how much I love you." He reassured the hesitant, the timid ones, "My brother, do not fear that you will annoy me by coming again and again with request or complaint. Be assured, and always remember, that a person whom God has appointed to help other people, is not overburdened with the work of assistance and instruction required of him. His position is like that of a father who gives assistance and instruction to his children."

In thought and practical solicitude he followed his Missioners on their travels. He would always write to the Superior of a house: "I recommend such a one to your care, and I feel sure that he will have great confidence in you when he sees the patience and charity our Lord has given you for those whom He commits to your guidance." He responded to every request and provided for every need when they were on the mission. One of them wrote, requesting, among other things, a skull cap. Removing his own, he handed it to a brother. And when the brother protested, explaining that another cap could be purchased in town, and mailed later on, the Saint answered, "No, my brother, we must not make him wait; he may need one right away. Send him our skull cap, together with the other things he has requested."

His charity included the entire family of each confrere. "We shall pray to God for this afflicted family," he was accustomed to say, "I request that the priests who have no special obligation, celebrate Mass, and that our brothers receive Holy Communion for this intention. For the same intention I will gladly offer to God the Mass I am about to celebrate." Through the power of such affection he moved all hearts, and inspired them to make the most difficult sacrifices. The soldiers of Turenne exposed themselves to the fire of the enemy, and braved all dangers at the least of his orders because they saw in their leader, not only a renowned captain, but also a most attentive and compassionate father. In like manner, the sons of St. Vincent, were prepared to exercise their ministry in the midst of barbarous nations. For to them his charity was an image of the God who was to be their final recompense.

He sustained them in their distant and laborious missions. At their departure he knelt and kissed their feet, and afterward wrote to them these words of paternal affection: "God has indicated clearly and in an extraordinary way that you have been called to procure the salvation of that people. I embrace you therefore in spirit and with all the joy and affection merited by a soul chosen for so great a work, a soul entirely dedicated to the accomplishment of mission work for the salvation of men. Detached from creatures, from your own interest, and from bodily comforts, you are truly deserving of affection and esteem. Your sole purpose is to carry out the designs of God. At the same time, and for that reason, you must husband your bodily strength whereby you have given sight to the blind, and life to the dead. Regard and preserve your body, I beg of you, as an instrument of God for the salvation of many souls."

St. Vincent's immense charity for the poor may be viewed through the words of Bossuet: "What part of the inhabited world has not heard of the charitable institutions founded by St. Vincent? The Sisters of Charity, the Assemblies of Ladies, the work done for the galley slaves, the mission in Barbary, hospitals for foundlings, and the General Hospital — is not the mere list sufficient to impress the mind with an idea of the immense charity exercised by Vincent in behalf of the poor and suffering? I will not speak about the Congregation of the Mission. Father Vincent has himself stated the case: 'We are ministers of the poor; God has chosen us for them. That is our principal object; all else is accessory.'"

In truth, Vincent was wholly devoted to the poor. They were the object of all his thoughts and affections; for them he grieved and felt sad. "I am in trouble over the Congregation," he said, "but to tell the truth, it is not of so deep concern to me as are the poor. We can get along by asking aid from other houses, or by serving as curates in the parishes. But the poor — what will they do, and whither can they go? I am told that while the fruit holds out, the poor people in the country can survive, but after that there is nothing left for them but to dig their graves, and bury themselves alive.

My God, what an excess of misery! And where are the means of bringing relief?"

The history of his life shows how he found the answer to that question. In that biographical narrative, one may read how he saved the Provinces of Lorraine, Picardy, Champagne, and many others; how he snatched the suburbs of Paris from starvation; and how his activity in this huge campaign of mercy was direct and personal; how vast were the funds distributed; and how the voice of a grateful people proclaimed him the Almoner of all France, and the Savior of his country. In this volume we shall gather a few particular facts, some anecdotes, a few ears of grain, as it were, gleaned from the harvest.

First of all there was the famous carriage which the charity of the Saint soon turned into a public conveyance. Poor people met in the streets of Paris, or in the surrounding countryside were invited to ride with him. One day he encountered a poor woman some leagues from Paris. She was tired from walking and from the weight of the child whom she carried in her arms. She was requested to enter the carriage. And on another occasion the same kindness was extended to a woman afflicted with disgusting ulcers. Would she like to ride in the carriage? And could he convey her to her destination? When the carriage was not available, he endeavored to procure other means of transporting the poor and sick to their homes, or to the Hotel Dieu Hospital.

But he preferred by far to be of personal service. One day in the Faubourg St. Denis he saw a poor woman lying on the ground. People were passing by without stopping, or they answered her moans with a word or two of ineffectual pity; it was the gospel parable over again. But Vincent, man of pity and man of action as he was, had her placed in his carriage. Then, though business called him to a different and distant section of the city, he gave orders to drive to the Hospital. After a few moments the poor woman became sick from the motion of the carriage; and it was necessary to remove her. But Vincent procured wine to strengthen her, and porters to carry her to the Hospital. He gave them a letter of recommendation for the Sister Superior.

One day he heard the distressing cries of a small child. Immediately dismounting from the carriage, he questioned the little one, and, finding a sore on his hand, brought him to a surgeon. He remained beside the child while the ailing hand was being treated and bandaged. Then he paid the fee, comforted the child and returned him to his parents. A journeyman tailor who had formerly worked at St. Lazare, wrote to him, requesting a hundred needles. Though, at the time, St. Vincent was occupied with important business both at Court, and in the City, he considered the request quite reasonable, and hastened to comply.

He visited prisons to instruct and assist the inmates. By procuring dowries for girls in danger, he enabled them to marry honorably, or he obtained for them admittance into a religious house. In the St. Lazare district he settled disputes, restored peace among families, and among soldiers. When fire, sickness, or other misfortune ruined a family, he offered consolation, and supplied their immediate needs. Later on he restored the family in its original status, procuring furniture, material, and implements for work. A poor wagoner having lost his horses, appealed to Vincent for assistance in repairing the loss. Immediately he received one hundred livres. Another died leaving seven sons prostrate with illness. Having ministered to their recovery, the Saint gave them a horse and cart, thus relieving their misery. A poor laborer died, leaving his wife and two little children in want, to which a hopeless lawsuit contributed a share. Vincent provided for the support of the widow, and he also took care of the boys until they were able to gain their own livelihood.

CHAPTER 26 *Generosity to the Poor*

Many poor people were saved from destitution by St. Vincent's anonymous generosity. He was wont to pay out a regular sum of money every month. During his final illness, one of his beneficiaries came to St. Lazare to claim, as of right, the two crowns which he had been receiving for the past

seventeen years, but which of late had not reached him. For many years he supported a poor blind man, and before dying, he recommended that the assistance be continued. A woman was in distress; she had recourse to St. Vincent, but when he sent her half a crown, she was not satisfied. "In my extreme poverty this is very little," she said. And at once she obtained another half crown.

A farmer, ruined by three successive inundations, was deprived of his farm by the landlord who seized also the farm implements and horses. Vincent gave him a piece of land already in seed — a part of St. Lazare property — for cultivation. The man could no longer keep his son at school, and so Vincent sent the boy to the Community house at Richelieu, obtained for him a clerical title, and succeeded in educating him for the priesthood.

An old soldier whose many wounds gave him the nickname "riddled" called at St. Lazare one day and requested to speak with the Superior. "Sir," he remarked without further introduction, "I have heard it said that you are a charitable man. Would you be so kind as to receive me into your house for a time?" "Willingly, my friend," replied Vincent, and ordered that a room be given him. Two days later the soldier fell ill. Immediately he was transferred to a room with a fireplace, and a brother was appointed to take care of him. Medicine and proper nourishment were supplied, and he remained until he had fully recovered.

On another occasion, coming home from town, Vincent found some poor women at the gate of St. Lazare. They asked him for an alms, and he promised. But, important matters occupying all his attention, he forgot his promise. Some time later, being reminded by a brother, he went immediately, and on his knees, he begged pardon of the poor women for having forgotten them.

Nothing was able to discourage him, not even insults directed against him by poor people. Neither for himself, nor for his confreres, did he desire that retaliatory measures be taken on account of the ill treatment with which their charitable services were often rewarded. Two of his clerics, on their way to visit sick people within the domain of St.

Lazare, were met by soldiers who relieved them of their cloaks. The robbers were apprehended by the people of the neighborhood, and brought to the local prison. To punish them, Vincent needed only to allow his officers of justice to act. Instead, he sent someone to visit the culprits, supplied them with food, persuaded them to make a good confession, and, on their promise never to repeat their offense in the future, ordered that they be set at liberty.

A serious problem was presented by the death of a Vincentian brother. Poor women had been admitted into the property of St. Lazare. The brother happened upon them when they were in the act of stealing from the harvest. One of them took up a stone and killed him. Informed of the tragedy, Vincent thought of the slain man's blood crying for the infliction of just punishment. But then he reflected upon the blood of Christ pleading for mercy. He sent for the woman's husband, and advised him to remove his wife to some other place, and since they were both poor, he supplied money for the journey.

Poachers on Vincentian land were easily pardoned when they shot pigeons. He would say to them: "Why do you kill the parent birds? If you must have pigeons, why do you not come and ask me for young ones?" As a general rule, he would not permit the punishment of thievery committed on the property of St. Lazare. "They are poor people, and I pity them," was his explanation; and often he invited them to his table, and after the meal bade them farewell with a small gift of money.

Perfect charity extends to one's enemies. It happened occasionally that unfortunate men, enraged by political passion, or by suffering, maltreated the Saint, either because they mistook him for a Royalist, or because they imagined that he was responsible for the distressing conditions which, in fact, he was endeavoring to prevent and alleviate. One day he was called to St. Germain by order of the Queen. On his return, as he entered Paris, the gatekeepers accosted him with insults, tore his clothes, and struck him; one of them, more violent than the others, dragged him from his horse, and threatened him with death. Shortly afterward the

magistrates were informed of the affair. They would have brought the guilty ones to justice, but St. Vincent appeared in person before the Judges to enter a plea for mercy; and since he implemented his appeal by refusing to reveal the hour when the attack had been perpetrated, it was impossible to determine which gatekeepers had been on duty at the time. The identity of the malefactors therefore remained unknown. But in order to prevent a recurrence of outrage, Vincent requested, and received, from the Duke of Orleans a passport enabling him to leave and enter Paris at will.

But he had his troubles within the City. On a certain occasion a few steps from St. Lazare, an infuriated man, pretending that the Saint had brushed against him in passing, slapped his face, and called out to the angry crowd gathering round, "He is the cause of all our evils, of the subsidies and taxes with which the people are burdened." By invoking the judicial powers enjoyed by St. Lazare at the time, St. Vincent could have punished the assault with imprisonment. But, mindful of a gospel maxim, he went on his knees before his accuser. "My friend," he said, "I am not the author of the subsidies; they were never within my jurisdiction; but I am a great sinner, and I ask pardon of God and of you for the cause I may have given you to treat me as you have done." By such meekness the man was disarmed of his fury. And the next morning, he came to St. Lazare with sincere apologies. Vincent welcomed him as a friend, kept him at the house six or seven days, and by inducing him to make a spiritual retreat, gained him for God.

His great means of taking revenge on those who had insulted him, was the spiritual retreat. A man requested that Vincent speak in his favor to Chief Justice de Lamoignon. A few days later, encountering Vincent on the street, and imagining himself to have been badly served, he poured out a torrent of abuse which even the humility of a Saint kneeling before him, and asking pardon, was unable to arrest. But the following day the man's petition at Court was granted, and then he discovered that his good fortune was owing to the intervention of St. Vincent. So he went in haste to apologize.

The charity he manifested in response to ingratitude and injurious treatment is amazing. For instance: the Queen had recently exiled a lord in punishment for an insult which he had inflicted upon Vincent. "No, Madame," replied the holy priest, "this must not be; I will not set foot in the Council until that good noble has been restored to your favor."

He showed the utmost consideration and forbearance toward his tenants and those who were debtors of his Congregation. When they suffered losses because of a bad season, or mortality among the cattle, he did not increase their misfortune by seizing their property. On the contrary, he canceled their debts and rents, and assisted them to re-establish their affairs. In the same spirit he wrote to a confrere: "If it should become necessary to confiscate the grainery belonging to the farmer at Chaussie, that would be a lamentable state of affairs, for the poor people are already too sorely afflicted without your adding to their distress." And similarly he wrote to another priest: "If you could pay your servant his regular wages corresponding to the four months he was ill, and also defray the cost of medicines and medical treatment, you would, I think, do the proper thing, for your servant is a poor man."

Members of the Irish clergy, expelled by revolutionary disturbances in their own country, had found refuge in France. St. Vincent gave them assistance. He had also appointed one of his Missioners to assemble them on certain days of the week for instruction in things that pertained to their sacred ministry. Afterward he was to obtain ecclesiastical employment for them. St. Vincent urged the Missioner to work on the project.

But the Missioner encountered serious difficulties. "You are aware, Father," he said to the Saint, "that in response to your orders, these meetings were in session for some time. But the exiles are difficult to manage, and they are as divided among themselves as are the counties of their own land. Therefore this good work has been discontinued. They became distrustful and jealous of each other, and, though you have shown them many kindnesses, and have obtained for them many favors, they have lost confidence in you, and

they have complained about you. They have been so inconsiderate as to say in your presence, what they have written in a letter to Rome, that you must not concern yourself any further about them or their affairs. Now, Father, such ingratitude would seem to merit no further kindness on your part." But Vincent replied, "What is it that you are saying? Their very ingratitude is a reason why we should show them kindness."

This principle of his was occasionally subjected to rude shocks. A young German Lutheran, who had abjured Protestantism in Paris, was directed to St. Vincent by the Superioress of a religious community. She recommended him as a young man who, become a member of the Congregation, might render great service to the Church. The Saint received him, gave him a room, and put him on retreat.

The new novice, having studied the house more carefully than his vocation, appropriated a cassock, a cloak, and various other things. He then stealthily took his departure. Garbed as a Missioner, he made his way to the Faubourg St. Germain, where he presented himself to the Protestant Minister, Drelincourt. "I belonged to the Congregation of the Mission," he explained, "but God opened my eyes, and I have come here to make profession of the Reformed Religion."

Drelincourt received the miscreant gladly and paraded him triumphantly from street to street, and from house to house where the pinchbeck Missioner was accorded affected congratulations; and Drelincourt, reluctant alms. During one of these promenades they were met by Lord des Isles, a zealous Catholic, and something of a controversialist. Noticing the cassock worn by Drelincourt's companion, he understood what was happening. He followed them for a while and then, approaching Drelincourt, he inquired of the young German, "Why are you traveling about with this Protestant Minister?" The pretended Missioner, mistaking des Isles for a Huguenot, explained that he had withdrawn from St. Lazare with the intention of becoming a Calvinist. Without further words, des Isles took his leave, and had the young man arrested and imprisoned.

St. Vincent was urged by his friends to prosecute and so

to punish both the theft and the scandal. He thanked them for their advice to which he would give proper consideration. But what he then requested of the Judges was not justice, but mercy. In the name of his Community, he declared before the King's Advocate, that he was not requiring any restitution either for the larceny or for the outrage. "For my part," he added, "I humbly beg of you to set the young man at liberty; for to show mercy is to imitate an attribute of God. Release this poor stranger who, at worst, has been guilty of youthful waywardness. Your leniency will be a most acceptable service to God."

CHAPTER 27 *From the Abundance of the Heart*

Living consistently by the law of divine love, Vincent spoke and wrote eloquently on the virtue of charity. "Everything," he said, "produces a likeness of itself, as may be seen in the images that are cast upon a mirror. Ugly features there appear as ugly, and a beautiful countenance may be seen in a beautiful reflection. In like manner, good qualities and bad qualities diffuse themselves externally. In particular, charity is communicative of itself; it produces charity. A heart that is really inflamed with this virtue, causes its ardor to be felt by others. In a charitable man, everything breathes and preaches love."

St. Vincent explained the general doctrine: "The precept of charity sums up the entire law, especially when it includes our neighbor as well as God. There is not a Congregation more obliged to the practice of perfect charity than is ours. Our vocation is to go, not to one parish only, nor to one single diocese, but all over the earth in order to inflame the hearts of men. It is true therefore that we are sent, not only to love God, but to make others love Him. It is not enough for us to love God if our neighbor does not love Him, and we cannot love our neighbor as ourselves if we do not procure

for him the good we are bound to wish for ourselves, namely the divine love which unites us to Him who is our Sovereign Lord.

“We should love our neighbor as being the image of God, and the object of His love. Consequently we should labor that men may in turn love their most amiable Creator, and one another for the love of God who has so loved them as to give His own Son to death for their salvation. Gentlemen, we must look upon this divine Savior as the perfect model of the charity we owe our neighbor. My Jesus, tell us, if it please You, what induced You to share the malediction of earth? What excess of love compelled You to lower Yourself to our level, and suffer infamous death upon a cross? What immense charity made You expose Yourself to all our miseries, take upon Yourself the nature of a sinner, lead a life of suffering, and undergo so shameful a death?

“Gentlemen, had we a spark of the sacred fire that consumed the heart of Jesus Christ, could we remain with our arms folded, and abandon those whom we are able to assist? Assuredly not, for true charity is unacquainted with idleness; it does not permit us to see our friends and brethren in want without manifesting our solicitude. And that solicitude naturally finds expression in exterior action. It is the property of material fire to emit heat and light, and it is characteristic of love to be communicative. We should love God with the strength of our arms, and in the sweat of our brow.

“We should serve our neighbor with our wealth and our life. How happy are they who are impoverished by their charity toward others! But let us not fear such a consequence lest we doubt the goodness of our Lord and the truth of His word. But if God should permit that we be reduced to the necessity of serving as curates in villages in order to obtain a livelihood; or if we should have to go and beg our daily bread; or if, overcome with cold, we should have to seek a resting place in some hedgecorner, and if someone should then put the question, ‘Poor priest of the Mission, what has reduced you to this extremity?’ — if that should happen, what happiness, Gentlemen, would be ours in making response,

'It is charity that has done this.' Oh, how highly a priest so situated would be esteemed by God and the angels!

"And now, what are the acts of charity? The first is to do unto others what we reasonably desire that they do unto us. This first act, beautiful and luminous, brings light to the mind; this light produces esteem; and esteem, moving the will to love, convinces the person who loves, that he has duties of charity toward the neighbor. It is the property of love to illumine the mind, and beget sentiments of respect and affection for the person loved. If we possess this divine virtue, it will dissipate the fog of disdain and aversion, and will show us what is good and admirable in our neighbor so that we may esteem and cherish him.

"The second act of charity, is to avoid contradiction. I gain my brother, not by contradicting him, but by taking kindly in our Lord what he advances. He may be right, and possibly I may be wrong. He is doing his part in contributing to an honest and fitting conversation; why should I turn it into a dispute? What he says may be understood in a sense which, if I were aware of his meaning, I would approve.

"Contradiction dividing hearts, may it be far from us! Let us avoid it as we would a dessicating fever, a desolating pestilence, a demon that carries ruin into soul shrines of sanctity. Let us banish this evil spirit by our prayers. Far from quarreling with others, let us enter into their sentiments! They express their ideas frankly; let us accept in good part what they have to say. If someone should indulge in raillery or detraction — which God forbid — we should not rebuke him publicly, for such admonition would be in disregard of our Common Rules, theology, and the maxims of the Gospel. Correct such a one quietly and in private.

"I was just questioning within myself whether our Lord had ever contradicted any of His disciples in the presence of others. Only two instances come to mind. One such instance was the rebuke He spoke to Simon Peter, saying to him, 'O, Satan,' and the other was His reproof of the Apostle's presumption: 'This night you will deny me three times.' But, be that as it may, we see that our Lord was very sparing of contradiction. Why then should we not follow His example?

His was the right of public reprimand, for He was the way and the truth; but we are subject to making mistakes, and for that reason we should think twice before contradicting anyone, lest we embarrass our brother, arouse contention, or prejudice the truth.

“The third act of charity is mutual forbearance. Who is perfect? Nobody on earth; and that being the case, everyone has need of being treated with patience. He who examines his own conscience, will discover a number of weaknesses and failings by reason of which, though he would have it otherwise, he is a trial to other people. Sometimes we experience an extreme distaste for the most holy things. Often we feel a strange repugnance to someone who is no more imperfect than ourselves; everything pertaining to him displeases us. Whether he look, or listen, or speak, or act, it is all the same; by reason of our evil disposition, everything appears deserving of blame.

“Another person will speak with exactitude according to the rules of grammar, but because of an involuntary antipathy we consider his thoughts obscure, his remarks pointless. But if he should become aware of our feeling toward him, we would certainly feel pleased if he should not manifest any displeasure, but rather excuse our attitude. When, therefore, he shows a sour countenance, and criticizes our actions, why should we not be ready to excuse him? For, he may reciprocate our antipathy. Now we are gay and cheerful, and again, depressed and sad. Yesterday we were immoderately joyful; today we are overcome by a deep melancholy. We wish our neighbor to bear with us in our variant moods. Should we not be equally forbearing in his regard?

“Let us question ourselves. Let each one consider carefully all his miseries and failings: bodily infirmities, inordinate passions, unfaithfulness and ingratitude to God, and injustice toward the neighbor. He will discover more malice in himself than in anyone else. Let him then confess: ‘I am the worst of sinners, and the most insupportable of men.’ Yes, assuredly, if we studied ourselves properly, we would find that we are a great burden to those with whom we live. And whoever, by the grace of God, has been successful in knowing his

own wretchedness, may rest assured that he has also discovered his obligation to bear with others.

“Such a one will not see any faults in his neighbor; or if he sees them, they will seem trivial in comparison with his own shortcomings. And so, conscious of his own deficiency, he will bear with other people, especially when he considers that he has need of the divine mercy. Admirable forbearance of our Lord! You see that crossbeam; it sustains the entire weight of the floor above, and without the beam, the floor would collapse. Similarly, our Lord sustains us in our weariness, our blindness, our falls. We were all crushed, so to speak, beneath the weight of our miseries of both body and soul, and this gracious and gentle Savior took the burden upon Himself so as to suffer the pain and the opprobrium. We can readily see therefore how much we deserve to be despised and punished — we, the guilty; and, most of all, myself.”

CHAPTER 28 *The Compassion of Charity*

St. Vincent: “The fourth act of charity is to sympathize with the sufferings of our neighbor. Love unites the hearts of men, and causes a friend to share the sufferings of his friend, whom he therefore compassionates. Such charity does not abide in persons who experience no compassion for the afflicted, for the sufferings of the poor. The Son of God, how sympathetic He was! Always I feel an inclination to ponder upon that prototype of charity. When a call of distress reached Him from Bethany, He set forth. Magdalene, weeping, went to meet Him. The Jews, following her, shared her tears. And our Lord, what was His reaction? He wept in sympathy with them.

“It was a tenderness of love such as this, that brought Him down from heaven. Seeing that mankind was despoiled of glorious grace, He was moved by so great a misfortune. Like Him, we should be moved with pity at the sight of our afflicted neighbor, and compassionate his affliction. St. Paul,

yours was indeed a heart of compassion! My Savior, you endowed that apostolic heart with your own spirit and sentiments. Enable us to say with him, 'Who is weak, and I am not weak?'

"But how can I feel within me his illness and his afflictions? Through the union we all have in Jesus Christ who is our head. In the human body, and even in that of animals, if one member is bruised or strained or injured in some other way, the other members are somehow affected. In such manner all our members are associated, one with another. Similarly, but more truly, Christians should commiserate with each other, for they are closely associated with each other as members of the one Mystical Body.

"To be a Christian, and to see a brother in affliction and not weep with him, or feel for him in his illness, is to be devoid of charity, and without humility. Let us then strive to have sentiments of grief and compassion for our neighbor. In the exercise of Christian virtue let us do what, in people of the world, is often prompted by human respect. When they visit a person in bereavement, they usually dress in mourning; and when they come to the house, their facial expression is one of sadness. Meeting the bereaved person, their words are in keeping with the occasion: 'I am unable to express the sorrow I feel in common with you; I am inconsolable! I have come to share your grief.'

"This custom originated with the first Christians, and was inspired by charity. But becoming separated from the source, it has fallen a prey to formalism. It is inspired by custom, self-interest, or natural affection. It no longer takes its rise from the unity of mind and heart, which our Savior came to establish in His Church, a unity which, animated with the spirit of Christ, moves the faithful to be saddened and afflicted by the misfortunes of their brethren.

"In the same spirit, we should regard as happening to ourselves whatever befalls our neighbor, our fellow member in the Mystical Body. In joy as well as in sorrow, we should be of one mind with him because charity bids us rejoice with them that rejoice. Let us therefore, rejoice at the good fortune of our neighbor. Let us be glad that he is more highly

honored and esteemed than we; that he is richly endowed, more so than we, with talents, grace, and virtues.

“The fifth act of charity, is to anticipate one another in honor. Why so? Because to do otherwise would have the appearance of pride and arrogance which chill and contract the heart of one’s neighbor, whereas it is warmed and expanded by a gesture of sincere esteem and friendship. As a product of charity, humility impels us to make the first advance of honor and respect, and so it conciliates affection. Who does not love a humble person? What can we do but love such a one? Like a valley that receives moisture from the mountains, he draws down upon himself the good will and blessings of everyone.

“The sixth act of charity, is to manifest our inner sentiment of affection exteriorly. There is need of showing that we love one another cordially; and this we do by offering our services, provided we offer them with sincerity. We might say, for example, ‘How I would like to give you pleasure, to do a favor so as to show how much I admire you!’ And then to translate words into action by making ourselves all to all. For, charity in word and affection is not sufficient; it should find expression in action, even to the extent of giving one’s life for the neighbor, if necessary, according to the example of our Lord. Charity such as that is fecund; it engenders a responsive love in the hearts of those toward whom it is exercised.”

This commandment Vincent preached to the religious communities of which he was director, especially the Nuns of the Visitation. “Each one of you,” he said, “must cherish an ardent love that will find expression in various ways. In religious communities, any lack of mutual esteem, or any word injurious to the neighbor is insufferable. I greatly fear that ruin will destroy communities whose members are not closely united with one another. And such disunion does not occur except through lack of esteem, forbearance, and charity.

“Nuns must look upon each other as spouses of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, and living images of God. In this light they must entertain great love and respect

for one another. For the attainment of this purpose, two means must be employed. The first is to invoke the good God, who is all charity, in order to beg a share in the divine light and love. The second is to cherish an energetic desire for our amendment, and to labor in earnest to correct the faults that we commit against charity. We should make our particular examen on our practice of neighborly charity, so as to correct the faults or shortcomings that may impair our union with God and among ourselves."

St. Vincent was fond of performing good offices in behalf of both individuals and communities. For instance, when consulted by religious, he dissuaded them from entering lax communities. "The community you have in mind," he would say to them, "is not an order but a disorder, a phantom of religion where there is no safety for conscience."

Rarely, and then only in case of disruption in a community, did he permit anyone to change from one order to another. To one such proposal he replied as follows: "Rev. Father, I read your letter with respect, and indeed, with embarrassment, seeing that you address yourself to the most worldly minded and least spiritual of men, one whose lack of spirituality is recognized by everybody. Nevertheless I will not forego offering you my humble thoughts on the matter you have proposed. I will speak, not from a desire to give advice, but simply from the courteous consideration which our Lord would have us exercise toward our neighbor. I was consoled in seeing the attraction you feel toward perfect union with our Lord; your faithful correspondence with grace, and the supernatural consolations often bestowed upon you by the divine Goodness. I remarked the considerable difficulties and contradictions that you have encountered, and, finally, the great love you have for that great mistress of the spiritual life, St. Teresa.

"But all this notwithstanding, I believe, Rev. Father, that you will find greater security in the common life of your own Order, with entire submission to direction from your Superior, than you could hope to enjoy in some other order, holy though it may be. My first reason for this opinion, is that a religious should strive to cultivate within himself the

spirit of his Order; otherwise he will possess only the exterior garb of religious life. Your Order is known as one of the most perfect in the Church; and consequently you have a more than common obligation to persevere as a member of that Order, and likewise to cultivate its characteristic spirit by practicing the virtues which appealed to you so strongly when you entered the Community.

“My second reason is the maxim that the spirit of our Lord acts quietly and sweetly, whereas the spirit of nature and that of the devil act harshly and morosely. Now, from what you tell me, it would seem that your manner of acting is harsh and morose, and that you are obstinately attached to your own opinions in opposition to the judgment of your Superiors. Consequently, Rev. Father, my thought is that you should give yourself to God anew, and that you should renounce your own judgment, and seek the accomplishment of His holy will in the state to which His providence has called you.”

His own attitude toward other communities was to be reflected in his own Missioners and Daughters of Charity. “Entertain esteem and respect for all religious,” he said to them, “and never allow envy, jealousy, or any other feeling contrary to the humility and charity of Jesus Christ, to enter your minds. Always speak of them in terms of esteem and affection. Do not find fault with their conduct, but profess approval of the good they are doing.”

He wrote again: “You ask me how you should conduct yourselves toward members of religious orders. You should endeavor to serve them; visit them now and then; never take sides against them, nor concern yourself about their affairs except when you can charitably act or speak in their defense. Speak well of them; do not say anything either in public or in private that might offend them. Conduct yourselves in this manner even though they do not serve you with equal courtesy and charity. It is my desire that we all act in this fashion, for as they are in a state of religious perfection, we should honor and serve them.”

CHAPTER 29 *Tactfulness Under Provocation*

When there was rivalry or conflict between his own Missioners and members of some other order, as happened in Poland, Vincent wrote: "I adore in this event the hand of God, without whose providence nothing takes place. And when evils and disappointments befall us, it is better to view them in the light of His good pleasure than to lay the blame on anyone. Even though it should be true that those persons concerning whom you received information, were envious of us, and were doing their worst against us, still I would never weary of esteeming, loving, and serving them as much as possible, whether here or elsewhere."

Two years later he wrote: "With reference to the attacks which you fear may be directed against you by a certain community, I trust that, through the mercy of God, they will never materialize. And I beg of you, take appropriate measures to forestall them by offering to those good fathers your services, deference, and respect. We try to follow the same policy in this place, and we have little trouble doing it. But I am firmly resolved that even though mud should be thrown into my face, I would never show the least resentment, lest otherwise I break amicable relations with them, or lay aside the esteem and honor I owe them. Thus I act under the eye of God. If the religious to whom you refer, work any harm to your small ship, even though their intention be to destroy it, suffer the injury for the love of God; He knows well how to safeguard you from shipwreck, and how to make the storm retreat for the establishment of peace and calm. Do not complain, or say a single word about it. Continue to manifest affection for them when you meet them, just as though nothing had gone wrong.

"You must not be astonished at things of this nature, but be prepared to receive them in the proper way. Oppositions existed among the Apostles, and even among the angels but without offense to God, for each one acted according to his lights. And similarly — God so permitting — those who serve Him oppose and contradict each other, and one congregation

persecutes another. Though the parties involved have an upright intention, there is much more evil in such conflict than one might think. But for those who humble themselves, and who do not resist, there is always great gain."

The Missioners repeated their complaints, and St. Vincent sent them the same advice as before. "Is it possible, my dear Sir," he wrote, "that those good fathers are treating you in the manner you describe? I have difficulty in believing it. But even so, I beg two things of you and the Community: first, do not speak of it, or complain to anyone, for to do so would make matters worse. And, secondly, overcome evil with good, which means that you should visit them as formerly, speak favorably and respectfully of them on every occasion, and, should an opportunity arise, render them a service of some kind. Such practices are wise and according to God, whereas to act in contrary fashion, would result in a thousand unfortunate consequences."

A reconciliation was effected, and he wrote joyfully: "May God be blessed that the Congregation is living on terms of respect with those very reverend fathers. Beg of our Lord the grace, that we may do the same with all other communities."

When difficulties arose between Vincentians and Oratorians in Rome, he offered the same good counsel. "It is true that they wish to embroil us, and that would not disturb me except that my sins give me reason to fear. . . . Nevertheless, you must act in a most Christian manner toward those who are causing you embarrassment. Here I see the Oratorians, thanks be to God, as often and as cordially as before. And it seems to me, that by His grace, I do not bear them any ill will, but honor and love them even more than previously."

Meanwhile the Oratorians requested assistance from the Vincentian Fathers, in order that they, the Oratorians, might receive instruction in the manner of giving missions. St. Vincent complied with the request. "For I would not consider myself a Christian," he explained, "if I should fail to share in St. Paul's desire that 'all might prophesy.' Truly, my dear Sir, the field is vast. And there are thousands of souls in hell! And all the secular clergy together with all the religious could

not muster sufficient resources to remedy the evil. Should we then be jealous of persons devoting themselves to assist poor people walking in the way of destruction?

"Surely, so to act, would be to hinder the work of Jesus Christ upon earth! If, on the other hand, people try to obstruct our activity, we must pray, humble ourselves, and do penance for the sins we have committed in this holy ministry." Three years later — July, 1655 — experiencing a continuation of the same opposition, he wrote from Rome: "Even though they were to pluck out my eyes, that would not hinder me from cherishing them as children cherish father and mother; for they imagine that they render a service to God. It is my wish and prayer that every member of the Congregation adopt my sentiments in this matter, and follow my example."

An important work of the Congregation of the Mission was to serve the clergy by means of spiritual exercises for candidates who were preparing for ordination, and, on a larger scale, to direct ecclesiastical seminaries. The Saint strove to impress upon his Missioners the deep significance of their ministry in these fields of activity. "To be employed in training a worthy priesthood, is to perform the work of Jesus Christ. During His life upon earth He took upon Himself the task of training twelve good priests, viz., the Apostles, with whom He lived for several years in order to instruct them in the work of Apostolic ministry.

"God has called us all to the state of life we have embraced, so that we may labor at this truly sublime task. And it is a sublime vocation since nothing greater in this world can be imagined. In fact what is equal to the ecclesiastical state? What so noble? Principalities and kingdoms are not comparable to it. Kings and heads of state do not possess the priestly power to change bread into the body of our Lord, to forgive sins, or to exercise other spiritual functions which, of their very nature, surpass all temporal greatness."

By the same token, a priest shoulders an incomparable weight of responsibility. This idea St. Vincent then developed as well in its evil consequences as in its beneficial results. "The people will resemble their pastor," he said. "To the

officers of an army is attributed the good or bad success of a war. And in like manner, we can say that if the ministers of the Church are good and faithful in the performance of their duties, all will be well, whereas if they are unfaithful, to them will be attributed the disorders that inevitably follow.

“Alas, we, the Catholic priesthood, are the cause of the desolation that presently ravages the Church in so many places. The Church is almost entirely destroyed in Asia, Africa, Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, in the United Provinces, and in a large part of Germany. And how many heretics there are in France! Yes, Lord, it is we who have provoked Your anger; it is our sins that have precipitated these calamities. It is the clerics and those who aspire to the clerical state; it is the subdeacons and deacons, and those who are in the priestly state; it is we who have caused this desolation in the Church.”

Entering into particulars, he described the ecclesiastics of his day. “Some,” he said, “read their Breviary, and celebrate Mass very carelessly. Others administer the Sacraments indifferently well, and that is all.” He spoke about priests of an entire Province, who were so given over to drunkenness, that it was necessary to hold a council of bishops in order to devise a remedy, but no remedy could be found. Yet he added a word on the brighter side. “You must not imagine that all are disorderly. No, my Savior! Oh, how many holy ecclesiastics there are! A great many pastors and others come here to make their retreat and effect a renovation of soul. And how many good priests there are in Paris! There are a great number of them. And among these gentlemen of the Conference who assemble here, there is not one who is anything but exemplary. They all give themselves to priestly labor with unequalled effectiveness. So then, while there are bad ecclesiastics in the world — and I am the worst, the most unworthy, and the greatest sinner of them all — there are also those who praise God worthily by the holiness of their lives.

“Now, our vocation is to reform the bad, and render the good more perfect. But who are we that we should engage in such a ministry? We are worthless folk; poor laborers and peasants. And what proportion is there between us, miserable

men, and an employment so holy, so exalted, so heavenly? Nevertheless it is to us that God has confided so great a grace as that of contributing to the restoration of good order in the Church. To attain this purpose God did not appoint doctors of theology, or find ministers among the many communities and religious orders full of learning and sanctity. He has addressed Himself to this poor, miserable and wretched Congregation, the last of all, and the most unworthy.

“What has God found in us, that He should engage our services in this employment? Where are our fine accomplishments? What famous or brilliant actions have we performed? Where is our great ability? In us there is nothing of that sort. Simply because God willed it so, He has chosen poor miserable idiots, that they might attempt again to repair the ruins that dishonor the kingdom of His Son, and the ecclesiastical state. Gentlemen, let us safeguard carefully this grace which God has given us in preference to so many learned and holy persons who merit this grace much more than we. For, if through neglect, we allow it to remain useless, God will deprive us of it, and in punishment for our unfaithfulness, He will give it to others.

“Alas, who among us will be the cause of so great an evil, and who will deprive the Church of so great a good? Shall I be the one? Let each one search his conscience, and ask himself, ‘Shall I be the unhappy culprit?’ One miserable person, such as I, would be enough to effect this lamentable consequence, one who by his abominations would avert the favors of heaven from an entire house, and bring upon it the curse of God. Lord, You behold me covered and filled with the sins that lie heavy upon me. But do not, I beg of You, on that account, withdraw Your grace from this Little Company. Grant, rather, that it may continue serving You with humility and fidelity, so as to co-operate with the plan — Your plan, as it seems — of employing its ministry in a final effort at re-establishing the honor and glory of Your Church!”

CHAPTER 30 *Confidence*

St. Vincent loved humility, lowliness, and he found there a source, not of discouragement, but of renewed confidence. "God has always made use of weak instruments," he said, "for the purpose of accomplishing noblest designs. In founding the Church our Lord chose twelve poor, ignorant, rustic men. Yet by their means He overturned idolatry, brought earthly princes and potentates under the rule of the Church, and extended our holy religion throughout the world. He can make use of us also, pitiable though we are, to promote a betterment of the ecclesiastical state. In the name of our Lord, Gentlemen and my Brothers, let us give ourselves to Him that we may contribute to this purpose by all the means in our power; by good example, prayer and mortification."

And in those final words—good example, prayer, mortification—he summed up the means he loved to recommend for the success of a holy work. Beforehand, afterward, and always, prayer. "Owing to our insufficiency, we must pray much. My Savior, nothing will avail unless You lend a helping hand. Your grace must effect everything through our ministry; it must impart the spirit without which we are not able to do anything. What do we know how to do, we who are miserable persons? Lord, give us the spirit of your priesthood, the spirit of the Apostles and the first priests who succeeded them."

Then, at the time of ordinations, he requested of all, that, in order to obtain good priests, they offer to God their Communions, prayers, and good works. And to encourage them he said: "St. Teresa saw that the Church of her day had need of good workmen; and she prayed that God would be pleased to send worthy priests; and it was her wish that the Sisters of her order pray for that same purpose. And perhaps the change for the better, now discernible in the clergy, is partly owing to the piety of that great Saint."

He felt convinced that prayer would attain its purpose in proportion as it was offered by humble souls. And for this reason he begged prayers from the most humble brother in

his Community. "It may happen," he said, "that if God be pleased to grant spiritual favors, they will be granted in response to the prayers of some brother who will not even lay eyes on the candidates for orders. While occupied with his ordinary duties, he will often raise his thoughts to God, and pray that God bless the ordination. And perhaps without his knowing it, God will grant the grace he desires, answering his prayer on account of the worthy sentiments of his heart.

"There is a verse in the Psalms: 'The Lord has heard the desires of the poor.'" Here Vincent paused, not knowing the rest of the verse. Then, in keeping with his humble, familiar, and dramatic manner, he turned to the confreres grouped about him, and asked, "Who will tell me the rest?" Someone finished the verse: "strengthening their hearts, you pay heed" (Ps. 9:17). "God bless you, Sir," said the Saint — his usual thanks. And, charmed with the beauty of the passage, he repeated it several times with joy and devotion. Then he continued: "Wonderful manner of speech, worthy of the Holy Spirit! 'The Lord has granted the desire of the poor; He has understood the preparation of their heart' — these words make known to us, that God grants the petitions of souls well disposed, even before they put their desires into words. This is a great consolation, and we should certainly be encouraged in the service of God, despite our misery and poverty."

Together with prayer he recommended humility. "These," he said, "ought to be the weapons of a Missioner. By means of humility all will succeed. Believe me, Gentlemen and my Brothers, it is an infallible maxim of Jesus Christ, and one I have often called to your attention, that as soon as a heart is empty of itself, God fills that heart. He it is who dwells and acts there. It is the desire of being given the lowest place that empties us of our conceited selves; it is humility, holy humility.

"Then it will be no longer ourselves that live, but God that lives and acts in us; and all will be well. Therefore you that are laboring directly in this work; you that should possess the spirit of the priesthood, and should infuse that spirit into others; you who, by divine favor, are entrusted

with the office of preparing souls to receive this holy and sanctifying spirit — seek only the glory of God. Walk in simplicity of heart before Him, and be respectful in your dealings with these gentlemen. Be assured that in this way you will succeed; anything else will not be of much help to you. Up to now only humility and a pure intention of pleasing God have caused this work to prosper.

“Let us show the ordinands every mark of deference and respect, not manifesting pride and reserve, but serving them humbly. Let us be specially watchful in observing their needs, in seeking and supplying, without delay, whatever they desire, whatever we can reasonably do to satisfy them.”

For the success of the exercises he counted heavily on the influence of good example. “What comes by seeing,” he remarked, “moves us more strongly than what comes by hearing, and it more easily wins our assent. True, ‘faith comes by hearing,’ but the virtues we see put into practice, impress us more deeply than do those that are presented by way of instruction. Readily noticeable in servants of God is a certain external composure, a humble, devout, and recollected bearing that reflects the life of grace within the soul. Some of the confreres here in this house are so filled with God, that I cannot look upon them without being moved.

“In a painting or picture, a halo is placed about the head of a saint because while on earth the saints diffuse about them a certain aura of holiness that is characteristic of them only. So it was with the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Lord, and, proportionately, with all the saints. Whence we may conclude, Gentlemen and my Brothers, that if you are virtuous, tending always to perfection, God will work through your presence in such a way as to enlighten the minds of the ordinands, and sanctify their wills, even though you be lacking in external talent.”

This chapter on the edification of the ordinands he concluded in this manner: “How happy you are, Gentlemen, to be inspiring these favored souls with the spirit of God by your piety, meekness, and affability, your modesty and humility, and to be serving God in the persons of His greatest servants! How happy you are to be giving them good ex-

ample at the conferences, in ceremonies, in choir, in the refectory and everywhere. What a privilege we all enjoy when by our silence, discretion, and charity, we correspond with God's purpose in sending them to us!"

So great a work must receive inspiration from God, who, as the Saint explained, "is an inexhaustible source of wisdom, light, and love. From Him we should learn what we say to others. We should put aside our own ideas and sentiments in order to leave room for the working of grace which alone illumines and warms the heart. We must go out of ourselves, and enter into God. We must consult Him, learn His language, and beg of Him to speak in us and through us. He then will do His work, and we shall not spoil anything. When conversing among men, our Savior did not speak as from Himself. 'My doctrine,' He said, 'is not mine; it comes from My Father.' This makes clear the necessity of having recourse to God, that not we, but He may speak and act."

When the number of seminaries directed by the Congregation increased, the Saint redoubled his encouragement so as to strengthen the charity of the confreres against the burden of their employments, and the fear that their work in behalf of the clergy would prejudice that of the missions. "God has sent the Missioners," he said, "to labor for the sanctification of ecclesiastics, and one purpose of such labor is to inculcate the practice of Christian virtue. Intellectual ability and a virtuous life are both necessary. Without virtue, knowledge is useless and fraught with danger. We should form candidates in both the one and the other, and the work of training men in such fashion, is what God requires of us.

"At first we had no thought of serving the clergy; we were thinking only about ourselves and the poor. How did the Son of God begin? He lived a retired life, apparently thinking only of Himself. He prayed to God, and engaged in work that had reference to Himself. Later on He announced His Gospel to the poor. Later still, He called His Apostles, took pains to instruct them, to admonish and train them, and finally He animated them with His spirit, not only for themselves, but for all the peoples of the earth. He

taught them all that was necessary for priestly administration of the Sacraments, and the fulfillment of their ministry.

“In the same way, our little Congregation occupied itself exclusively with advancing its own spiritual perfection and evangelizing the poor. For given periods of time the confreres lived in retirement, and at other times they went forth to instruct the country people. Such was God’s plan for our beginnings. But in the fullness of time He called upon us to contribute our share in the work of training good men for the priesthood, of giving good pastors to the parishes, and of showing them what they should know, and how they should act.

“Truly this employment of ours is noble, sublime! It is much in excess of our merit and capacity. Who of us ever dreamed of exercises for ordinands, or of the seminaries? Never did those enterprises come to mind until God made known His pleasure that we undertake the work. He has led the Congregation to these duties without initiative on our part, and therefore He requires that we apply ourselves to the work. Our application, moreover, must be serious, humble, devout, constant, and in harmony with the excellence of our task.”

CHAPTER 31 *The Training of Seminarians*

St. Vincent, giving a conference, continued: “Some of the confreres will say that they entered the Congregation to labor in rural areas, not to remain inside a city, and teach in a seminary. But each and every one of us knows full well that the work we do inside the house with reference to diocesan and other clergy, and especially the work of the seminaries is not to be neglected under pretext of having to give missions. The Constitutions of our Missionary Congregation oblige us to engage in both works, the giving of missions and the direction of seminaries. The obligation on the one side and the obligation on the other are approximately equal, and therefore we may not neglect either work

for the sake of the other. Moreover long experience has proved that the good fruits of a mission will not endure for any length of time without the aid of a worthy pastor; and worthy pastors are formed in the seminary. And therefore each one will give himself to God, with good heart, in order to perform his duty faithfully and well.

“To labor for the instruction of the poor is assuredly a great work, but to instruct ecclesiastics is still more important, because if they are ignorant, the people placed under their guidance, will be ignorant. Some might have proposed this question to the Son of God, ‘Why have You come? It is to preach the Gospel to the poor, is it not? Why then do You train Your Apostles for the priesthood? Why do You take so much trouble to teach and form them?’

“In response our Lord might have said that He had come, not only to teach the truths necessary for salvation, but also to train and form good priests, better than those of the Old Law. You know that in former times God rejected unworthy ministers of the temple, priests who profaned sacred things. He held their sacrifices in abomination, declaring that He would raise up acceptable ministers who, from the rising to the setting of the sun, and from south to north, would offer a sacrifice pleasing to His name, and would make their voices resound ‘unto all the earth.’

“By whom has He accomplished this promise? By His Son, our Lord, who established a priesthood, who instructed and fashioned His priests, and who has empowered His Church to ordain others. ‘As the Father has sent me, I also send you.’ And this He has done for the purpose of perpetuating through the sacerdotal ministry, the work which He Himself performed throughout His public life. His purpose is to provide in doctrinal instruction and sacramental administration the means of salvation for the peoples of the world. A Missioner, therefore, would be under a dangerous illusion if he should wish to detach himself from the work of training candidates for a worthy priesthood. He would be grossly in error, for there is nothing greater than a good priest.

“Giving the subject thorough study, we shall discover that

the formation of a good priest is our greatest work; for to His minister our Lord gives power over His natural body, a power that awakens amazement in the angels; and power over His mystical body, that is to say, the faculty of remitting sins, a faculty that arouses angelic wonderment and gratitude. My God, how marvelous a power is this! What sublime dignity! Is there anything more admirable? Truly, Gentlemen, a good priest is a great work of God.

“Is there any priestly work that a good ecclesiastic is unable to accomplish, any conversions that he cannot bring about? Upon the priesthood is dependent the happiness of Christendom. Such considerations therefore oblige us to serve the priestly state which is so holy and so sublime. And there is the additional consideration, that the Church has need of priestly teachers to remedy the immense ignorance and the innumerable vices with which the earth is covered, evils that should move pious souls to tears of blood.

“It is conceivable that all the disorders we witness may be attributed to those who bear the priestly character unworthily. Some people will perhaps be scandalized by that statement, but the situation demands that in order to indicate the need of a remedy, I make known the magnitude of the existing evil. Some time ago this matter was thoroughly discussed in several conferences for the purpose of discovering the sources of so many evils. And the final conclusion of the discussions was that the Church has no enemy worse than a bad priest.

“From unworthy priests, heresies have sprung. Instances may be seen in the false teachings of two great heresiarchs — Luther and Calvin. Through the influence and activities of unworthy priests, heresy has become prevalent, vice has taken control, and ignorance has been established among the people. These calamities have occurred because of the disorders of which evil priests were guilty, and because of their neglectful failure to oppose with utmost vigor — as it was their bounden duty to oppose — these three ruinous torrents that have inundated the world. So, then, Gentlemen, shall we hesitate at making any sacrifice that is involved in our laboring for the reformation of the clergy? Such is our

purpose, that they may learn to live conformably to the requirements of their sacred state, and that the Church may rise thereby from out of her shame and desolation."

But of the charity that he so much recommended, the privileged object was the poor. "God loves the poor," he said, "and in consequence He loves those who love the poor. For when we love anyone, our affection extends also to his friends and servants. Now, the Little Company of the Mission strives to devote itself to the service of the poor who are well-beloved of God, therefore we have reason to hope that God's love for the poor will extend to us also who are their friends. Those who have loved the poor during life, need have no fear of death.

"Courage then, my Brothers, and let us devote ourselves with renewed love to serving the poor. Let us even seek out the most wretched and most abandoned. Let us acknowledge before God, that they are our lords and masters, and that we are not worthy to render them our small services. When we visit them, let us enter into their feelings, and suffer with them. Let us draw inspiration from the words and spirit of the Apostle, 'I became all things to all men.' For thus we shall not bring upon us the divine complaint spoken by the Prophet, 'I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was no one.'

"We must endeavor to arouse pity within our hearts, and by compassion to share the sufferings and misfortunes of our neighbor. We must beg of God to give us a true spirit of mercy, which is a reflection of Himself, and so, when people see a Missioner, they will remark, 'There is a man full of mercy.' We should possess this virtue more perfectly than do other priests, because our missionary vocation obliges us to serve the most miserable and abandoned of men, those who are overwhelmed with bodily and spiritual misery.

"Therefore let us have this compassion in our hearts; and let us manifest our sympathy exteriorly, on our countenance, as did our Lord when He wept over Jerusalem on account of the calamities that were to overtake the Holy City. Let us utter words of sympathy showing that we take an interest in our neighbor, and feel for him in his afflictions. Finally,

let us aid the neighbor in his necessities and misfortunes as well as we are able, endeavoring to bring relief; for the hand, so far as possible, should be an agent of the heart."

St. Vincent's all-embracing charity extended to the insane persons and young libertines under detention at St. Lazare. And he sustained the courage of those who had undertaken so repugnant and thankless a task. "This work," he said to them, "is all the more meritorious because nature fails to find there any satisfaction, and because it is a good work done in secret for the sake of those who will not return any sign of gratitude. Some of these unfortunates are sick in body; others, in mind. Among them are witless, irresponsible souls; psychotics, and some enslaved by vicious habits. What a spirit of guidance is needed if we, their priestly helpers, are to care for them! What grace, what strength and patience our poor brothers have need of that they may endure so much trouble and so much labor!" He animated their courage by recalling that pagan Emperors condemned some of the early Popes to be keepers of animals at the Arena. "The men of whom you have charge," he said, "are not animals, but because of their disorders and debaucheries, they are, in some ways, worse than animals."

He proposed the example of Christ who was desirous of undergoing a variety of sufferings. "My Savior," exclaimed the Saint, "through the uncreated Wisdom, You permitted the Jews to regard You as a stumbling block, and the Gentiles as a fool!" And in answer to those who objected to that sort of ministry, he answered: "In this matter, the rule that guides us is Jesus Christ who wished to be surrounded with lunatics, demoniacs, and morons; with persons tempted, and others possessed by the devil. From all sides, those unfortunates were brought in to Him, and He freed them with great kindness, from both spiritual and bodily ailments. Why then find fault with our endeavor to imitate Him by means of ministrations that are evidently so pleasing to Him?"

"If He received people mentally ill, and others under diabolic possession, why should not we do the same? We do not go to seek them; they come to us. My Savior and

my God, grant us the grace to regard these things, to estimate their worth the same way that you looked upon them." St. Vincent proposed as a further consideration, that St. Lazare was an excellent school of experience where the Missioners could learn to sympathize with all classes of afflicted souls, and exercise in their behalf, a variety of charitable services. "Bless God, Gentlemen and my Brothers," he said, "and give Him thanks, for entrusting to us the care of these poor people, for in serving them, we observe at firsthand, the magnitude and variety of human miseries, and with such knowledge we become better prepared to labor successfully for our neighbor.

"We shall fulfill our duties more faithfully in proportion as we know by experience the meaning of misery and suffering. For that reason I beg of those engaged in this work, to take good care of their wards, and I beg of the Community to recommend them frequently in prayer to God, and also to value rightly the opportunity of exercising charity and patience toward those unfortunate people.

"Should we act otherwise, God will punish us. Yes, you may expect a curse to fall upon St. Lazare if proper care of them be neglected. I recommend especially that they be rightly nourished, at least as well as the members of the Community. I would be better pleased, that my portion of the common fare be given to them."

CHAPTER 32 *The Needs of the Poor*

How indignantly St. Vincent reproved those who were unresponsive to the needs of the poor! One of his Missioners disapproved of his liberality in support of the foundlings. He complained about the straightened circumstances that had been brought upon St. Lazare by such free spending, and he warned of impending ruin. The Saint made this response: "May God forgive him this weakness which removes him so far from the sentiments of the Gospel! Oh, what weakness of divine faith there is in the fear that while we

promote the well-being of poor and abandoned children, our Savior will be less generous in His dealings with us — He who has promised to reward a hundredfold whatever is done in His name!

“This gentle Savior said to His disciples, ‘Allow the little ones to come unto me.’ Would we not, therefore, depart from His rule of action by neglecting or abandoning the children who come to us? What admirable tenderness was His for little children as He embraced them, and placed His hands upon them in blessing! They furnished Him with an occasion to formulate a rule of salvation, namely, that we must resemble them if we desire to enter the kingdom of heaven. And in a manner of speaking we become children by loving and caring for children. To provide for the needs of poor foundlings, is to fill the place of their fathers and mothers.

“If our Lord were living upon earth today, and if He saw children abandoned by their parents, would He also, think you, be willing to abandon those little ones? Such a supposition would surely do an injustice to His infinite goodness. And we too would be unfaithful to divine grace if, after being chosen by Divine Providence to care for both the bodily and spiritual well-being of these children, we were to become weary of the work, and abandon them because of the trouble we experience.”

The service of the poor was his favorite theme with the Daughters of Charity. “How happy you are, my Daughters, to have been destined by God for so noble and holy a work! The great ones of the world consider themselves fortunate when they are able to devote a portion of their time to the task. You are witnesses . . . with what zeal and fervor the good and great ladies who accompany you, tend the poor. My Daughters, how highly you should esteem the state wherein, every day, you have an occasion of doing works of charity which are the means of which God makes use to sanctify many souls! With a holy and exemplary humility, St. Louis served the poor in the Hotel Dieu Hospital, and that work of mercy contributed greatly to his holiness. All the saints were of like mind in this regard; they all were fond of caring for the poor. Humble yourselves therefore, my Daughters,

whenever you practice this charity, and keep in mind that God has given you a grace far above your deserts.

“After your love for God, and the desire to make yourselves more agreeable to His divine Majesty, your principal concern should be to serve the sick poor, compassionating them in their illness, and listening to their complaints as a good mother ought to do, for they look upon you as their mothers, as persons that have come to assist them. In this way you represent the goodness of God in their regard. Such goodness acts toward the afflicted in a sweet and charitable way. And that is why you must treat the sick poor with gentleness, pity, and love. They are your lords and masters as well as mine. And what great lords they are in the eyes of God! It will be their duty to open for you the gate of heaven. That is the reason you are under obligation to serve them with respect because they are your masters, and with devotion because they represent the person of our Lord.

“Always remember to suggest some good thoughts to them. For example you might manage it like this: ‘Well, brother, what are your thoughts about making the journey to the other world?’ Then to another, ‘Well, my child, you wish to go and see our Lord, don’t you?’ But in giving them necessary instruction, be sure to give it little by little, never much at one time; just as you would feed a child small quantities of nourishing food. You should act in the same way with great personages of the world, for in matters of religion they are mere children, and a word coming from the heart, and uttered with sincerity is enough to lead them to God.

“You see, my Sisters, that though it be something worth while to assist the poor in their bodies, it was never the design of God in establishing your Community, that you should care for the body exclusively. Persons will not be wanting to render that service. The intention of our Lord was that you should assist the souls of the sick poor. That is your beautiful vocation. You have left all you had in the world — father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends, possessions, and even your native land, in order to serve the poor, to aid and instruct them how to go to heaven. Is there anything more beautiful, more worthy of esteem? If we could see a

Daughter formed according to this ideal, we would see a soul resplendent as the sun; we could not gaze upon such beauty without being dazzled. So then give yourselves to God for the salvation of the poor whom you serve."

Service of the poor is the principal vocation of a Daughter of Charity; it enjoys precedence over other duties. And when other works are set aside for the sake of that service, a Sister — in St. Vincent's phrase — is "leaving God for God." Illustrating the point, he said: "A man of the house issues an order; his servant is to clean out the basement, but then comes another directive that must be fulfilled at once. The master of the house will not find fault with the servant for setting aside the first order; on the contrary, he will be well pleased. Well, God is not less reasonable.

"He has called you to the Company to serve the poor; and for your perfection He has given you a book of rules. But at the time of Community exercises He calls you elsewhere; go at once, never doubting that you are doing His holy will. What a source of consolation for a good Daughter of Charity, that she is able to think and say to herself: 'Instead of making my prayer or my reading, I will go and tend the poor sick people who are waiting for me, and I know that God will receive my service as pleasing to Him.' With that thought in mind, a Sister goes gladly whithersoever God calls her."

St. Vincent exhorted his confreres to love one another, taking as his text the exhortation of St. John, "Little children, . . . love one another." "The Congregation," he said, "will endure as long as the virtue of charity abides in it." He uttered maledictions against those who, by destroying charity, would bring ruin upon the Congregation. Then he continued: "Charity is the soul of all virtues, and the paradise of Communities; for where charity abides, there is the dwelling place of God. Let us then practice charity and meekness. Let us bear with one another, for then God will dwell with us; we shall have Him in our hearts."

He wrote as follows: "With all my heart I beg of God for you and your loved ones, that His infinite goodness may form in you but one heart and one soul. Charity is the bond that unites Christians with God and with each other. And

therefore he that fosters union of hearts in a Congregation, draws that Congregation close to God. May His Infinite Goodness be pleased to bestow upon us a great love for such union!"

And when he learned of a charitable deed, he exclaimed: "Oh goodness of God, unite in this fashion all hearts of the Little Company, and then command whatever you please. All pain will be sweet, all work easy. The strong will assist the weak who, in turn, will cherish the strong, and obtain for them an increase of strength. Then, my God, our doing of Your work will be according to Your desire; it will edify the Church; and Your laborers will multiply, being attracted by the splendor of such charity" (To Gennes, Nov. 13, 1642).

Union was his final word to departing Missioners who were to labor in the ministry together. "Be united," he said to them, "and God will bless you. Be one in the charity of Jesus Christ, for no other bond will endure. It is therefore in Jesus Christ, through Him, and for Him, that you should be closely associated with one another. The spirit of Jesus is a spirit of peace and union. If you be not united among yourselves, how can you draw other souls to Him? It would be impossible. Have only one mind and one will, for otherwise you will resemble horses attached to the same plow, but pulling in opposite directions with resultant ruin of the equipment. God is calling you to labor in His vineyard. Heed His call, as those who in God have the same heart, the same purpose. In that way you will reap an abundant harvest."

The Most Holy Trinity was for him the sovereign ideal of union. He spoke as follows to the Daughters of Charity: "For a long time now I have been wishing that our Sisters might attain a great respect for each other, a reverence by reason of which the Sister Servant would be indistinguishable from her Sister companions. For, as you can see, my Daughters, there are three Persons in one God, but the Father is not greater than the Son, nor is the Son greater than the Holy Spirit. Similarly the Daughters of Charity, as an image of the Holy Spirit, though they are numerous, should have only one heart and one mind.

"Again, in the Most Holy Trinity, diverse operations are

appropriated to particular persons, wisdom to the Son and goodness to the Holy Spirit. But such appropriation does not imply that such attributes are lacking in either of the other two Persons. The third Person, for instance, possesses the power of the Father, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. And so it should be among Daughters of Charity. She who serves the poor is associated with her who has charge of the children, and the one who has charge of the children is associated with her who serves the poor.

“In the Most Holy Trinity, the Father communicates Himself entirely to the Son, and the Son entirely to the Father; and from their union proceeds the Holy Spirit. I wish that the Sisters, imitating the Divine Persons, would be entirely devoted to one another so that they may produce works of charity, attributable to the Holy Spirit. For in this manner they will be associated with the Most Holy Trinity. As you can see, my Daughters, one who says charity, says God. You are Daughters of Charity, and therefore so far as possible you ought to form within yourselves an image of God. Such is the purpose and objective of every community that aspires to perfection.

“And what is there in God? Equality of persons and unity of essence. Well, this teaches you, does it not, that you should be one and equal. True, there must be a Superior, a Sister Servant. But the Superior should be mainly an exemplar of virtue and humility to the other sisters by being first in every good action, the first one to humble herself at the feet of a sister companion, the first one to beg pardon, and first in renouncing her own opinion to follow that of someone else.”

CHAPTER 33 *Mutual Forbearance*

To his confreres St. Vincent recommended mutual forbearance as a matter of great importance. “It is the support of a Community,” he said, “just as in a house the beams at ground level sustain the upper structure. Let us look upon

personal shortcomings, whether of body or of mind as a special mercy of God, and let us manifest a particular reverence for persons thus afflicted; for they are a work of the Divine Artist, even though that work is not yet complete.

“We should not be surprised when, sometimes, we observe defects in other persons. God permits the occurrence of such faults for purposes unknown to us. More than that, He makes use of sins to bring about a person’s justification. In a sense they enter into the order of our predestination, for they become an occasion of repentance, of reparation, and of humility; yes, Gentlemen, humility which is a characteristic virtue of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

“Tell me, do not roses have their thorns? There is no rose without them. The shortcomings which God permits in His faithful servants, serve as ashes to conceal their virtues, in order that, seeing their faults, they may preserve a spirit of genuine humility. And who is free from defects? Even the saints had their failings; none but the Son of God and His holy mother, is exempt. The Apostles were taught in the school of Christ; He Himself was their teacher. Yet you know what went on among them — petty rivalries, a lack of strong faith. Even at the time of His Ascension into heaven, the Savior reproached them with their incredulity. . . . What you should fear, are sins of the understanding, for they are scarcely ever corrected. Of the faults they are the most dangerous” (Conference, April 27, 1657).

The humble old man then went upon his knees and said: “More than anyone else I have need that the Community exercise forbearance in my regard, because of the failings of which I am conscious, because of the disedification that I give to my confreres, in particular to those who assist me in my infirmities. And I beg of you, my Brothers, to continue the same charity, and also to forgive me my faults of the past. Aged men, as King David observes, have great need of being treated with kindly patience. Bear with me then, my Confreres, and, I beg of you, pray to God for me, that I may amend my life” (Conference of July 25, 1658).

He cautioned the Sisters against the danger of scandal. The evil of scandal may be compared to that of a person who digs

a deep ditch in the middle of a great thoroughfare, as a trap for pedestrians. And the more surely to catch them off their guard, he covers the ditch in such a way as to conceal it from view. Scandal is even worse than a trap of that sort, because scandal extends its evil and harmful power to more than the human body; its tendency is to cast the soul into hell (Conference to Sisters of Charity, Nov. 15, 1654).

He also combated the sin of detraction. He said that blows directed against any particular person, first pierce the heart of Christ. And he condemned, not only the slanderer, but equally the person who lends a willing ear to slanderous words. "There is a saying," he remarked, "that there would be no thieves if there were no one to receive stolen goods; and similarly it can be said that people would not slander if others were unwilling to listen" (Conference, Sisters, Oct. 28, 1646). "Detraction," he added, "is like a ravenous wolf that causes ruin and desolation to the sheepfold where it enters. One of the greatest evils that can befall a community is to have members who are detractors, murmurers, malcontents, persons who always find fault."

Finally the Saint exposed envy: "To envy is to find fault with the order of things that God has established. If we become displeased because someone else is better off than we are, we attack, not so much the one who has the advantage, as the One who has bestowed the advantage; our complaint is against God who says to us, 'Is your eye evil because I am good?' The blood of Christ is the source of all graces both natural and supernatural; and therefore, to envy is to indulge a spirit of sadness, that His blood is efficacious of all good, whereas by our sins we have merited everlasting punishment. To envy, is to be at variance with the Communion of Saints, for in the Church there is a communication of good works. Would a merchant in partnership with another, feel angry because his partner has made a sizeable profit? In that profit he himself will have a share. Or will one member of the human body feel badly because another member is in perfect health?" (Repetition of prayer, 1656.)

"In a word, it was envy, the envy of the devil and that of

the Jews, which caused the death of Jesus Christ. It was the gate through which sin penetrated the angelic ranks, and from there came down upon earth. It ruined Lucifer, changing him into an angel of darkness. Then that exiled spirit, seeing that man was created to occupy the places left vacant by fallen angels, envied him, and resolved to destroy him by leading him into sin. He succeeded by causing the sin of Eve and Adam through whom sin entered the world. And therefore, it may be said that whatever evil happens in a community, originates in the sin of envy which is the original source of all the sins that are committed."

Passing on to consequences, the Saint explained: "It is said that they who commit sin, experience a certain satisfaction, but that is not the case with envy. This vice is an executioner who punishes, and at once, the person who is guilty of it. Consider the envious person; everything is a cause of suffering to him; the good he sees in others, or hears of them, gnaws at his heart. He has a serpent within. You are acquainted with the torments of people who are afflicted by a tapeworm; they are without repose both day and night.

"The Holy Spirit declares that envy dries up even the marrow of the bones. In a word, envious persons are in a state more deplorable than that of those afflicted with a tapeworm. Let us then take the resolution never to envy the good things of other people, the human esteem which they enjoy, or the occupations in which they are engaged. On the contrary, let us choose for ourselves whatever is least and poorest, the most troublesome employment, and the most ordinary clothes, regarding ourselves as the least and last of all" (Conference to Sisters of Charity, June 24, 1654).

Moved by charity, the Saint endeavored to dissuade those who were minded to abandon their vocation. Thus he wrote in November of 1656: "If you understood the gift of God, you would not desire a change in preference to the happiness of serving Him in the state to which He has called you, a great grace that should be dearer to you than life. When I contrast your present dispositions with those which I formerly saw in you, it seems to me that you are no longer the same person.

“Where now is that gratitude which often moved you to thank God for having withdrawn you from the world, that you might find in the Congregation so many means of sanctifying yourself, and so many exercises of charity to aid others in procuring their salvation? Where now is that holy indifference to riches and employments, an indifference which caused you to declare more than once that you were ready to go or to stay in order to follow our Lord? Where is that great fervor wherein you were quite ready to do in all things the will of God, according as it might become known to you by way of holy obedience?”

He wrote in similar strain to a brother coadjutor (Sept., 1649): “Do you not remember the lights God often gave you in prayer? They were graces whereby you resolved, under the eye of His divine Majesty, to declare in the presence of the entire Community, that you would rather die than leave the Congregation. And now when there is no question of dying, or bloodshedding, or even of menacing danger, but only some trifling occasion, you surrender without resistance to the temptation that is causing your distress. Yet meanwhile the promise made to God, requires of you an exercise of strength, for He is a strong and jealous God, requiring service according to His good pleasure. Will you now set aside your promise, abuse His grace, and make light of His goodness? If so, you will have to endure a remorseful regret such as others have experienced by reason of similar disorders.

“To other men God has given graces like those which you have received from His kindness. But I have not seen any such person leave a religious community without his feeling in his conscience the divine reproach, and suffering in his daily life innumerable vexations. You will say that you have the intention of always pleasing God. But that is a specious pretext. If you consider your situation honestly, you will discover that your determination is not prompted by the desire of rendering yourself better, of becoming more submissive, more detached from the world and your own comfort. Your decision does not stem from a desire to be more humble and mortified, or more united with your neighbor by deeds of charity, as is necessary if one is to

become more pleasing to God. Nevertheless you imagine, my dear Brother, that you will render Him service, and work out your salvation by withdrawing from the path of perfection. Your manner of thinking in this matter, is a delusion. If you had not already entered upon the way of perfection, the situation would be different. But St. Paul teaches that they who fall away after they have received enlightenment, and have tasted the word of God, will find that the way of renewal unto penance is difficult. How can you persuade yourself that you will be able to walk the path of well-doing when you have returned to the world? Why, even though not as yet exposed to the greater temptations of civilian life, you experience much trouble in overcoming your inordinate nature. But if you are of a contrary opinion, at least make your departure from the Congregation through the same door that gave you entrance; I mean, a spiritual retreat; it will afford the proper opportunity of thinking seriously upon so momentous a decision."

CHAPTER 34 *Vocation to the Religious Life*

Reflections on a religious vocation are to be found in a letter to a Missioner (Jan., 1656). "Consider these reasons; first of all, the graces of your vocation, a way of life wherein God confers upon you many means of perfecting your own soul, and procuring the salvation of others. 'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you' are the words of Christ. But He does not pledge His word that He will give you those graces in a way of life to which He is not calling you. Second, consider how, up to the present, God has been pleased to bless all the labors whereby you have done much good both inside and outside the Community; labors, moreover, which in addition to their merit in the sight of God, have gained for you the esteem and affection of everyone.

"Third, think seriously upon the promise you have made to God, a promise to serve Him in the Little Company. If you fail to honor your word with God, with whom will you

keep faith? In the fourth place, reflect on these words of our Savior, 'He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me.' Thanks be to God, you have left your parents, that you may give yourself entirely to Him. What excuse therefore can you allege for abandoning Him, and returning, by preference, to your former home? Fifth, think of the remorse you would suffer at the hour of death, and the accounting you would have to render at the judgment seat of God if, through human respect for temporal gain, for a life of greater comfort, or on account of all these reasons — whatever the external pretext may be — you should incur the guilt of unfaithfulness, and lose the opportunities that are yours, at this hour, of promoting the glory of our divine Master.

"God forbid, Sir, that this evil should ever befall you. You may hear it said, as you have already heard, that you can work out your salvation anywhere. That much I concede. But I reply, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to attain salvation in a place, and in a state of life where God does not wish you to be. And that is true especially when, without cause, one has abandoned a genuine vocation such as you have recognized in yourself.

"You may allege that you lack the strength necessary to fulfill the functions of the Congregation; but you are aware, Sir, that our works are various, that the labors of each confrere are proportioned to his talents, and that even those who bear the heaviest burdens, are less encumbered than is a rural pastor that performs his duties faithfully. If anyone argues that you owe more to the souls of your own people than to those of strangers, you may reply, without fear of contradiction, that you can obtain a mission for the parish where your people are living, and that such a mission, lasting three weeks or a month, will be of greater advantage to them than they could possibly expect from your living among them for an entire lifetime. The reason for this is that familiarity lessens respect, and often destroys it altogether; and when that happens, one is no longer in a position to produce any fruit at all. This very reason explains why a person is not often a prophet in his own country.

“Our Savior went back to Nazareth only once, but the citizens of that place attempted to cast Him down from a ledge of the mountain whereon the town was built. He permitted them to act in that manner; and His reason perhaps was to teach Evangelical laborers that by returning to their homes, they incur danger of losing the high esteem won for them by the labors of their ministry, and of lapsing into shameful misconduct.

“For the same reason, when two of His disciples requested permission to return home for a while, the one to bury his father, and the other to sell his property and give the proceeds to the poor, the Savior was unwilling to grant their wish. If you say that you are under obligation to assist your mother, I agree, but that obligation obtains only when she is in want of necessities of life, and when without your aid she would be in danger of death from hunger.

“But, thanks be to God, she has a sufficiency of the goods of this world, and she will be able to get along without you in the future as in the past. For all these reasons I hope, Sir, that you will give yourself to God anew, and serve Him in the Congregation according to His eternal designs, without any further concern for your good relatives, except by detaching yourself the more from them, and recommending them to the divine mercy. For if you act in this manner, His divine bounty will continue to bless you, and, for your sake, He will bless the souls of those dear to you. That these blessings may be yours, I pray with all my heart.”

In keeping with St. Vincent's attitude in regard to unswerving fidelity and perseverance in the privileged vocation of his Missioners, were the sublime faith and gentle charity that he manifested when one of those Missioners, one of his own spiritual family, was near the gates of death. Here is an admirable instance: “Well, my Brother, how are you at present? So you believe, then, that our great General, the first of all missioners, our Lord, really wants you in the mission of heaven. It is His will, as you know, that we all share in the supernal reward, each of us in his turn; ‘It is my will that where I am, there also may my minister be.’

“God be praised! What consolation you should experience

in being among the first chosen to depart for the everlasting mission where all activities are centered in loving God! Is it not true that our great Superior is generously willing to give you the grace of being numbered among those happy missionaries? Without doubt you should hope for it from His mercy and goodness. Animated with such confidence you should say in all humility: 'My Lord, whence comes this happiness? It is not primarily because I have merited the reward. . . . It is from your bounty and liberality, my divine Master, that I hope for so great a recompense.'

"Moreover, I have been guilty of many sins, guilty of unfaithfulness and cowardice, which made me unworthy of the reward. But I trust, with reliance on Your infinite goodness and generosity, that the debt has been remitted, even as forgiveness was accorded the poor debtor of the Gospel. Such is my confidence because Your mercy and benevolence are infinitely greater than my malice and unworthiness.' It is certain that the greatest glory you are capable of rendering Him at present is to hope with all your heart in His infinite goodness and merits, for the magnitude of the faults to be forgiven will only manifest more clearly the greatness of His mercy. He awaits that confidence from you, so that He may be constrained, as it were, to reply with paternal affection, 'This day you will be with me in Paradise.'

"Now, too, is the time to make frequent and ardent acts of love for your dear and good Master. Whatever beautiful acts of hope, so pleasing to God, that you have just made, should lead you to love; for He is so munificent, so liberal, so good. Assuredly you have good reason to say: 'God of my heart, Your infinite goodness does not allow me to divide my affections. I desire that You, and You alone, take possession of my heart and my liberty. How could I desire anything but You? How attach myself to anything other than You? Would it perhaps be myself? You love me infinitely more than I can love myself. You are infinitely more desirous of my good, and You have the power of achieving that good. As for me, I have nothing, and hope for nothing but in You.

" 'My only God! Oh, Infinite Goodness! Why do I not love You with the love of all the Seraphim? Alas, it is very

late for me to imitate them! Oh, Ancient Beauty, late have I loved You. But at least with full heart I offer You the love of her who is the Queen of Angels, and the love of all the Blessed. My God, in the presence of heaven and earth, I give You my heart, such as it is. With love I adore the paternal providence You exercise over Your unworthy servant. In Your presence, and before the heavenly court, I detest all that might separate me from You. Sovereign Goodness, You who desire to be loved by sinners, grant me to love You, and then command whatever You wish. Give me what You demand, and then demand of me what You wish.'

"Yes, my very dear brother, it has always been God's good pleasure that you love Him; but especially at this moment does He wish to have your love. That is the reason why He made us in His image and likeness, for we love only what bears a resemblance to us, at least in part. This lover of our hearts, seeing that sin had spoiled this likeness, desired to repair the damage. But He has accomplished His purpose in so wonderful a manner, that, not content with restoring in us His image, and the dignity impressed upon adopted sons of God, He has been pleased to become like unto us by clothing Himself with our humanity. More than that, since love is infinitely inventive, He not only sacrificed Himself upon a cross in order to gain the souls of those by whom He would be loved, but, foreseeing that His absence might cause forgetfulness or a cooling of affection in our hearts, He instituted the most august Sacrament of the Altar, in which He is as really and substantially present as He is in heaven.

"In the Blessed Eucharist He desires to abase and humble Himself even more than in the Incarnation. In a sense He becomes more than similar to us, when He becomes our food and drink. His intention and purpose is that by this means, the union and resemblance effected between our nature and our nourishment, may be established spiritually between Himself and His people, for love has the will and the power to do all things. He would have it so. And since He feared that men, by misapprehending this unutterable mystery and stratagem of love, would neglect coming to this

divine Sacrament, He imposed, under pain of incurring His everlasting displeasure, the obligation of receiving Holy Communion; 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, . . . you shall not have life in you.' Strengthen therefore your love for Him. Remember that your heart is the greatest gift; that is all He desires of you: 'Son, give Me your heart.'

"If you are troubled with the fear that a poor debtor and miserable servant would be presumptuous to expect manifestations of intimate affection from the Sovereign Master, simply recall that God has given command, that He Himself desires it. If you have experienced any difficulty in making acts of divine faith, turn to acts of love; they are more pleasing to God, and they contain acts of the other virtues. So, too, with the act of contrition; it is contained in acts of charity. It is your desire, is it not, that the will of God be done in you; that He find pleasure in your heart; that He receive glory from the sufferings He permits you to endure in these days; that He be glorified by all creatures according to His will? Are you not happy in contemplating the glory and perfection that God has in Himself? Do you not abominate everything that is contrary to God's good pleasure? Do you not wish you had loved Him a lifetime as did the Blessed Virgin?

"Well, entertain yourself often with such beautiful sentiments, for they are comparable to the lighted lanterns of the wise virgins, that merited admission to the marriage feast of the King. Ah, that is a beautiful disposition in which to enter His kingdom! Do leave us the hope that you will not forget us when you are in heaven among the small band of Missioners who are already there! Be so kind as to tell them that we have confidence in their holy prayers! For so they may obtain for us the grace to fulfill our mission here below, and merit a place in the mission that is heaven, a mission of love that will endure forever."

PART VI . HUMILITY

CHAPTER 35 *Meekness*

Charity, as St. Paul teaches, is not readily provoked to anger. On the contrary, it will engender the virtue of meekness in one who is otherwise inclined. St. Vincent was choleric by temperament. But by persevering effort and the aid of divine grace he became a man of singular meekness. He overcame his irascible nature, but the struggle was a long one. While he was acting as chaplain for the de Gondi household, Madam de Gondi was distressed by his habitual melancholy. It was not until 1621 that he was able to speak of a change recently accomplished. "I addressed myself to God, and earnestly besought Him to change this irritable and forbidding disposition of mine, and to grant me a kindly and benign spirit. And with the grace of our Lord, by giving a little attention to suppressing the impetuous impulses of my nature, I have been partially cured of my gloomy disposition."

Having once acquired meekness, he carefully guarded and cultivated that virtue, and then went on to practice it faithfully. Following the example of St. Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva, he became easy of approach, charmingly affable. And whenever he conversed with other people, these qualities found expression in a courteous manner of speech though he never indulged in flattery, and, unless there was very good reason, he never praised others in their presence.

The mildness of his demeanor was especially noticeable when he administered reprimand or correction. On such occasions, both manner and speech were so markedly gentle and moderate, that he won the hardest hearts, and overcame all resistance.

His meekness became compassionate and kindly toward

sinners whose faults he loved to conceal and, as it were, to bury out of sight. Never a word of complaint would he speak against those who had abandoned him, never a word in retaliation for their ill-tempered grumbling. Far from revealing the motives of their departure, he said of them all the good things that truth would permit. And in response to their petty spite, he avenged himself by rendering every manner of good service.

In exercising his office, his manner was more that of a person requesting a favor, than that of a Superior issuing orders. If his directives were disregarded, he was content with remarking, "Perhaps, if you had fulfilled my wishes in the manner indicated, God would have blessed your work." When the disobedience was owing to thoughtlessness, or if it was of no particular importance, he often made no comment at all; silence and patience, he judged, were correction enough.

His gentleness became apparent especially in dealing with those who were infirm of mind or body. He never complained about them, never uttered a word even suggestive of the idea that he considered them a burden. Sometimes, despite warning and advice to the contrary, he admitted to the Congregation tentatively, certain persons who gave little hope of becoming suitable members. And more than once by his gentle care, he merited of God for those persons, deliverance from their ailments, and an aptitude for a life of usefulness in the Community. He manifested even greater meekness and patience toward those who were already members of the Congregation, no matter what their disabilities might be. "Do not fear your being a burden to the Congregation," he said to them; "on the contrary, ill and infirm confreres are a blessing, for they merit more by their sufferings than do others by their labors."

The coadjutor brothers were the privileged beneficiaries of his affability and kindness. He called upon them in conference, listened with gentle patience, and never interrupted them except for the purpose of lending assistance. And with mingled excuse and praise, he corrected any errors they might unintentionally have proposed.

His meekness, so patient with natural defects of body or mind, was not alarmed by failings that were sinful. He bore with unruly members of the Congregation so as to give them an opportunity of repentance and amendment; and when there was hardly any hope of correction, he still exercised meekness in his dealings with them.

Even when overwhelmed with pressing duties he opened his room to everyone, and gave kindly attention to all comers. Whenever confreres came to speak with him, whether it was before Mass, during his reading of the Breviary, or at night, he always listened to them willingly. Scrupulous persons could approach him again and again during the same day or hour, or while he was engaged in conversation with a person of distinction; he invariably received them with kindness. He would rise from his chair, go to meet them, lead them to a secluded place, listen to them, repeat his advice, even write, and have them read what he had written, so as to be sure they understood. Nothing wearied his gentle charity.

All this explains why Father Tronson, Superior General of the Sulpician Order, could say of St. Vincent, that he possessed the virtue of meekness in an eminent degree. Such extraordinary virtue, said Father Tronson, gave one the impression that one beheld St. Paul conjuring the Corinthians by the meekness and modesty of Jesus Christ.

Yet the humble priest was not conscious of possessing this virtue. He could recognize it in others, but not in himself. And so, in one of his conferences, he spoke as follows: "Occasionally we see persons who appear to be endowed with considerable meekness; yet their apparent virtue is merely an effect of a natural moderation. It is not the Christian virtue that enables us to repress and stifle the contrary vice. The virtue of chastity does not consist in the absence of temptation, but in habitual readiness to resist when temptation makes an assault.

"We have in the house an example of true meekness. I mention it because the person is not present, and because you can all perceive that by nature he is of a sharp and arid disposition. It is Father Blank, and you may judge whether in

all the world there are two men as rough and repellent as he and I. Yet, as you have observed, he is conquering himself, and really becoming a noticeably different person. And what is causing the change? It is the virtue of meekness which he is endeavoring to acquire. For my part — may God forgive me! — I am still as rough as a briar. I beg of you, Gentlemen, pay no attention to my bad example, but, following the exhortation of the Apostle, walk worthily, with all meekness and gentleness, in the state to which God has called you.”

St. Vincent did not confuse meekness with weakness or overindulgence. He saw it was a virtue endowed with force and firmness by reason of its union with the other virtues. “There is no one,” he said, “more constant or firm in good than the person who is meek and gentle; whereas they who allow themselves to be carried away by anger, are ordinarily very inconstant, because they act only by fits and starts. They are like torrents which, though forceful and impetuous when in flood, are much diminished when the flood subsides. Ordinary rivers, on the contrary, like souls schooled in meekness, flow tranquilly, noiselessly, and never become dry.

“Therefore let us be firm regarding the end we propose in our good works. But let us practice meekness regarding the means we employ, thus imitating the wisdom of God who reaches from end to end mightily, but orders the means gently. Let us imitate also the blessed Bishop of Geneva; he was the mildest and most gentle person I ever knew. The first time I ever saw him, I recognized in his bearing, in the serenity of his countenance, in his manner of speech and conversation, a well-formed replica of our Savior’s meekness; and my heart was taken captive.”

CHAPTER 36 *Affability Among Members of a Community*

Affability is especially necessary for persons who live in a Community, and for those who labor in behalf of souls. “We

have need of affability," said the Saint, "and greater need in proportion as our vocation obliges us to associate frequently with one another, and with the neighbor. This intercourse is difficult among ourselves because we are from different countries, and of dissimilar temperaments. It is difficult in relation to the neighbor because often he tries our patience.

"The virtue of affability overcomes all such obstacles. Under its vitalizing and restraining influence, our conversation becomes both useful and agreeable. Exercising this virtue, we comport ourselves with propriety and with consideration for each other. Charity unites us as members of one body; affability perfects the union. Let us practice the virtue of meekness especially with the poor people of the country; otherwise they will be discouraged and afraid to approach us, thinking that we are too severe and too lofty for them. But when we treat them with affability and friendliness, they become better disposed to profit by the good we wish to do them. Since God has destined us to serve them, we ought to do it in the manner most profitable to them. Consequently we should act toward them with great kindness, taking, each one as addressed to himself, the word of the Wise Man, 'Make yourself affable to the congregation of the poor.'

"Be amiable but never adulatory, for adulation is a despicable vice unworthy of a Christian. On the other hand, do not be contentious, not even with evil men whom it may be necessary to reprehend. But always employ a moderate and courteous manner of speech according as charity and prudence may dictate. In our discussions with heretics let us not enter into altercation, or employ harshness. Such persons are won more easily by mild and kindly remonstrance. This is how the angels act toward us. They commend the doing of what is good, but without importunity. Experience has made clear to me that more is gained over minds by this manner of acting than by urging them to adopt our ideas, and by wishing to overcome all reluctance. The devil is ordinarily importunate, and anxious disquietude is characteristically an effect of his interference.

"In a journey to Beauvais, I had the happiness of converting three heretics, and I must say that the kindness and

mildness I exercised toward them contributed more to their conversion than did the rest of our discussion. When we argue with anyone, our disputatious manner reveals our determination to win the argument. In consequence the person whom we wish to convince, prepares to defend his position rather than to learn the truth. And so it happens that the debate, instead of enlightening his mind, usually closes the door of his heart; whereas meekness and affability would make him receptive of the truth. A beautiful example of meekness as an instrument of winning hearts, is to be seen in St. Francis de Sales. Though expert in controversy, he converted by his gentle manner rather than by his learning.

“On this point Cardinal De Perron used to say that though he was well able to convince heretics, their conversion was the special work of the Bishop of Geneva. Bear in mind the words of St. Paul to St. Timothy: ‘the servant of the Lord must not quarrel.’ And I assure you, I have never seen a heretic or heard of one that was converted by force or subtlety of argument. But such persons have been converted by meekness, for that virtue has power to bring souls to God.”

The Saint seemed to take pleasure in reverting to the kindness and affability that one should manifest in ministering to the poor. In his judgment, this manner of acting explained the success of the missions given by the Congregation. When one of his Missioners was accused of harshness in his sermons, St. Vincent wrote a letter in the following terms: “God blessed our first missions. And it has been remarked that the divine blessing was bestowed because the Missioners acted amiably, humbly, and sincerely toward all classes of people. And while God has deigned to employ the least of His disciples in the conversion of some heretics, those same converts have acknowledged that they were drawn into the Church by the patience and cordiality shown toward them.

“Even the galley slaves, with whom I spent some time, are won over that same way. Whenever I spoke to them with severity, I spoiled everything. But when I praised them for their resignation, when I compassionated their sufferings, told them they were happy to have their purgatory in this

life, kissed their chains, and showed sorrow for their disgrace, then they glorified God, and became reconciled to Him.

"I beg of you, Sir, to unite with me in giving thanks to God for His merciful action in human hearts. Ask of Him, if you please, to inspire in all Missioners the will to treat their neighbors, even though they be obdurate sinners — to treat them with kindness, humility, and charity, and never to employ invective, reproach, or harshness. I have no doubt, Sir, that you try to avoid that unfortunate manner of serving souls, for it is an approach that embitters and alienates. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the unfailing source of meekness for angels and men. And it is by means of this virtue that we should lead the neighbor to Him."

On the same subject, the Saint explains further: "You must not be astonished at the faults of other people. It is natural for briars to bear thorns. And similarly, fallen man has a natural tendency to commit sin; according to Solomon, even the just man falls several times a day. Like the body, the human spirit has its bad spells, its maladies. And therefore, instead of being disturbed and discouraged, we should humble ourselves, saying with the repentant King David, 'It is good for me that thou hast humbled me, that I may learn thy justifications.'

"We must be patient under our own infirmities, and meanwhile we must endeavor to overcome our faults. Moreover we must exercise forbearance toward the neighbor, and charitably conceal his failings; for if it is unlawful to judge ill of another, it is even more unlawful to speak ill of him. Charity, on the other hand, covers a multitude of sins. Such too, is the advice of the Wise Man: 'hast thou heard a word against your neighbor? Let it die within thee.'"

St. Vincent desired that his Missioners manifest forbearance even toward those who might seem unworthy of such consideration — priests and religious, for instance, whom slavery in Tunis and Algiers, had led into shameful deeds. To a priest functioning as Grand Vicar he wrote, "You should never allow yourself to become angered over abuses, for such an attitude would result in greater evil. By means of gentleness persuade the priests and religious in captivity

to observe Christian standards of conduct. Severity should be employed only in exceptional cases; for otherwise the sufferings endured by reason of slavery, conjoined with rigorous treatment at your hands, might easily drive our unfortunate brethren to despair. It would be impossible to fulfill the duties of your office in the full rigor of justice without increasing the afflictions of these poor people, exhausting their patience, and injuring yourself.

“In particular, you should abstain from any attempt at immediate abolition of customs that are in vogue among them, even though the customs are evil. The other day someone called my attention to a beautiful passage from St. Augustine: ‘One should be especially careful regarding an abuse that is prevalent in a community of people. For, there is danger not only that an attack on such a custom will fail of its purpose; but also that the people habituated to such a way of acting, will be offended, and that in consequence you will be unable to promote their welfare in other ways that would be open to you if your manner of handling the situation had been different.’ So I beg of you to be as considerate as you can in dealing with human frailty.

“The ecclesiastics in captivity will be won to goodness far sooner by compassion than by reproof and correction. They are wanting, not in light, but in fortitude; and their courage will be strengthened by word and example. I am not saying that you should authorize or permit their disorders, but I do say that the remedy should be mild and kind, and should be applied with great caution.”

When one person complained about another, St. Vincent would reply: “If he were free of those faults, he would very probably have other shortcomings; and if you had nothing to suffer, you would not have much opportunity to exercise charity; then too your life would not bear a sufficiently close relation to that of Jesus Christ. Our Lord was pleased to choose His disciples from among plain and common men marked by common failings. And He did so in order that by the practice of meekness and forbearance in their regard, He might instruct Superiors how they should conduct themselves.

"I beg of you, Sir, conform yourself to this holy model. He will teach you, not only how to bear with your confreres, but also how to help them rid themselves of their imperfections. You must not neglect the evil, but neither must you fail to employ meekness in applying a remedy."

CHAPTER 37 *Cordiality and Forbearance*

He wrote to a Superior who was having trouble with a Missioner: "If you and he will exercise cordiality and forbearance toward each other, I will entertain the hope that of His goodness our Lord will bless your work. And in the name of God I beg of you, Sir, to adopt such sentiments as your habitual attitude. And since, besides being older than your companion, you are also the local Superior, therefore, bear all things in a spirit of meekness. And by this I mean that, laying aside the attitude of command, you should accommodate yourself to his need in a spirit of charity. In such fashion did our Savior gain the affection of His Apostles, and lead them along the way of perfection. It is the only way you can succeed with this good priest.

"Therefore, humor him somewhat. Never contradict on the spur of the moment when occasion arises, but wait a while before you remonstrate with him, and then speak your mind humbly and cordially. Be careful to conduct yourself in such wise that if any division arise between you and him, it will not become apparent to other people. You are placed, as it were, on a stage where you are exposed to public observation and comment, and where a single act of bitterness, if it should be observed, might ruin everything. I trust that you will take to heart the advice I am giving you, and that God will form your many acts of priestly virtue into a sort of base or foundation, and build thereon the good works He wishes you to accomplish."

Explaining this admirable virtue, he said again: "Meekness has various functions, but they can be reduced to three that are more important. One of them is to repress all move-

ments of anger, the turbulent resentment that mounts to the face, troubles the soul, and alters a man's appearance beyond recognition. It makes the countenance either dark and scowling, or else all inflamed. Meekness, though it does not suppress the movements of passion entirely, controls anger, and keeps it within bounds.

"We must not be surprised to experience a conflict within us, the law of the members warring against the law of the mind; divine grace is given to win the victory for meekness. This then is the first office of a marvelously beautiful virtue — to restrain the upsurge of anger, and then even to quiet the emotion completely.

"The second office is to exercise a controlling influence when the necessity arises of manifesting displeasure, administering a rebuke, or inflicting punishment. Disciplinary action should be taken, not from an impulse of nature, but from the dictate of duty. The Son of God called Simon Peter, Satan, and on several occasions, He classified the Jews as hypocrites. He drove merchants from the temple, overturned their tables, and exhibited other signs of displeasure. Was He acting in transports of anger? No; under the controlling influence of meekness the Savior's anger followed, not preceded, the direction and judgment of right reason. It was an instrument perfectly obedient to His human will.

"If, therefore, He who was mild and kindly, manifested severity on particular occasions, He did so that He might correct those to whom He spoke, that He might expel sin, and remove scandal. His purpose was to edify others, and give us a lesson. If a Superior would act in like manner, what abundant fruit he would produce! His admonitions, because governed not by caprice, but by reason, would be well received. While administering a stiff reprimand, he would not allow anger to gain the mastery, but would consult for the good of the person admonished. Since our Lord is our model in all things, therefore persons in position of authority, should consider how He acted, and then they should act in like manner. He governed through love. And if sometimes He promised recompense, and sometimes threatened chastisement, we must do the same, but always through love. Ours

then will be the spirit of meekness which the Prophet wished to find in God, when he wrote: 'Lord, rebuke me not in thy indignation.' To that poor king it seemed that God was angry with him, and he feared lest correction be launched with fury. In this respect all men are of like mind; no one wishes to be corrected with anger. As I have remarked, few persons are free from the first movements of this emotion, but the meek man soon masters himself, so that whatever follows, is under the influence of love.

"This then is the first act of meekness, to hold in check the contrary emotion as soon as one becomes conscious of it. We must maintain mastery either by subduing anger altogether, or by keeping it under the control of meekness. Therefore, Gentlemen, let us resolve that when we are under provocation, we shall restrain our natural impulse, recollect ourselves, and raise our minds to God. Let us then say to Him, 'Lord, you behold that I am assailed by temptation; deliver me from the evil into which it would betray me.'

"The second act of meekness is to show ourselves affable, cordial, and serene of countenance, so that we may give pleasure to those who approach us. That is why certain people, having a smiling and pleasant manner, impress everyone favorably. God has endowed them with the grace whereby they offer you their heart, so to speak, and request yours in return. On the other hand, there are persons — myself, for instance — who are uncouth; persons who are gloomy and repellent because they present themselves with a forbidding and frowning countenance. Such a manner is contrary to meekness.

"A true Missioner will do well to make himself agreeable, to inspire a sense of confidence and contentment in everyone that approaches him. You are aware that a pleasant manner wins the human heart; that is why our Lord has declared, 'the meek shall possess the land,' whereas, on the contrary, it has been remarked regarding persons of rank who happen to be occupying official position, that when they are too serious and reserved, people fear and avoid them.

"And as our duties bring us in contact with the poor people of the country, with those preparing for orders, with re-

treatants, and all classes of people, it is impossible to produce good results if we are like barren soil that grows nothing but thistles. We should manifest a friendly manner, a smiling countenance lest otherwise we embarrass or discourage other people. Three or four days ago when someone was leaving our house, I was consoled to observe his joyful attitude. He was very pleased, he said, because he had found here a graciousness of manner, an openness of heart, and a charming simplicity — those were his very words — that impressed him deeply.

“My Savior, how happy were the people who approached You! They who looked upon Your countenance experienced Your meekness. With what cordial affection You attracted them to You! With what confidence they drew near! What appealing tokens of love You gave them! St. Andrew came first; through him, Simon Peter; and then all the others.

“My Savior, he who is endowed with a friendly manner, a charming kindliness, will assuredly produce great good in the Church. Both just men and sinners will throng about him to find either reconciliation with God, or encouragement in a virtuous life. According to the prophecy of Isaias, the Savior’s nourishment would be butter and honey, to symbolize His wisdom in the choice of what is good, and His rejection of what is evil. Only meek souls are gifted with such discernment, for just as anger beclouds reason, so meekness imparts discernment. Meek Savior, grant us this virtue!

“The third function of meekness is to withdraw our thoughts from any displeasure that may have been given us by the neighbor. This virtue suppresses any external sign of resentment; it excuses the neighbor, saying, ‘He did not think; he acted hastily; impulse carried him away.’ When disagreeable things are spoken, things calculated to exasperate, the meek man holds his peace, gives no indication of having heard.

“Meekness not only excuses the affronts and injustices done us, but also acts with forbearance toward those who are guilty. It makes use of quiet words; and even though the offender should go to the extreme of striking us, we should endure it patiently for the love of God. The Son of God manifested much urbanity in His daily conversation, but

the meekness He exercised amid the sufferings of His Passion, was even more admirable and astonishing. Not a single hasty word escaped His lips in response to the deicidal men who flung insult upon Him, spat in His face, and mocked Him in His sufferings.

“At the very moment of betrayal He addressed Judas with the endearing name, ‘friend.’ Toward the Pharisees and soldiery who had come to arrest Him, He acted with similar kindness: ‘Whom do you seek? Behold, I am he.’ Let us meditate on these prodigious acts of meekness, acts that surpass human understanding. Consider how the Savior maintained that meekness amid the terrible sufferings of His Passion. My Jesus, what an example for us who have undertaken to follow in Your footsteps!

“After all this, ought we not love this virtue whereby God gives us the grace, not only to control movements of anger, to act with kindness toward our neighbor, and return good for evil, but also to suffer patiently all the afflictions and injuries, even death, that men can inflict. Grant us, my Savior, the grace to profit by the sufferings You endured with so much love and meekness! Many have profited by Your example. It may be that I alone of the present company, have not yet begun to practice meekness and patience.”

In another conference, manifesting the positive discernment which he employed in matters of highest spirituality, St. Vincent set forth the practice of meekness in the form of precise counsels. “In the first place,” he said, “so as not to be surprised into failures against meekness, we should foresee the occasions, whatever circumstances may stir us to anger. And then, in advance, we should formulate in our own minds, the acts of meekness we propose to exercise when the circumstances occur.

“Second, we must detest the vice of anger inasmuch as it gives displeasure to God. Yet our detestation should not make us impatient with ourselves for our shortcomings in this matter. Our hatred of anger, and our love for meekness must find motivation in our love for God who is pleased with meekness, and offended by the vice of anger. Thus our sorrow for having sinned against meekness will be tranquil.

“Third, when we perceive that we are being roused to anger, we should strive to refrain from acting, or even speaking. It is of special importance that we should not make any decision until emotion has subsided. Actions, though good in themselves, will never be perfect when they are performed under emotional agitation, for under such circumstances, they are not fully under the direction of reason.

“Fourth, when disturbed in this manner, we should strive to maintain an untroubled countenance under the control of Christian meekness. And so to act is not contrary to Christian meekness, for it is not our purpose to pretend to be what we are not. We sincerely desire that the virtue of meekness, residing in the superior part of the soul, may appear in our words and actions in order to please God, and, for His love, to please also our neighbor.

“Last, no matter how intense our anger may be, no matter how ardent the zeal we seem to sense within us, we must control our tongue; we must utter only kindly and agreeable words, so that in this manner we may gain souls for God. Oftentimes one kind word will convert an obdurate spirit, whereas a rough and hasty word may engender a sense of grief and bitterness that is extremely dangerous. Only three times in my life did I employ harsh words in reprimanding and correcting other people, thinking at the time that I had just cause for so doing. And ever since, I have regretted my action, both because I failed to succeed, and because through meekness I have always achieved whatever I desired.”

CHAPTER 38 *Humility*

We now come to the fundamental virtue of St. Vincent — humility; a virtue which he exercised, not only in heroic degree, but in ways which were truly prodigious. In the practical ways he found for the exercise of the virtue, his humility not only astonishes our pride, but puzzles our understanding. A humility that goes to the extent of taking a place below the demons, is indeed astonishing.

Some people have expressed the opinion that St. Vincent's humility was excessive. It unquestionably furnished powerful inspiration to his boundless charity. In considerable measure it explains the high opinion he held of other people, and the extremely deferential attitude he manifested in his dealings with both civil and ecclesiastical Superiors. As for the lowly place in which he put himself, we must remember that every truthful soul, if standing constantly and consciously in the presence of divine Majesty, must perforce entertain a profoundly humble estimate of self.

It is not enough to say of St. Vincent de Paul, that humility was a characteristic virtue. One must go further and say that, in a manner of speaking, it was a passion, an ardent ambition, a hunger and thirst for contempt and humiliation. Not only did he abstain from saying anything in praise of himself, but he strove to destroy documents that recorded his praiseworthy deeds. He made repeated efforts to regain and destroy a letter that has remained as a testimony of his captivity in Tunis. In 1658 the letter had been found among family papers, and transmitted to Canon Martin. Wishing to give pleasure to the aged Saint by recalling memories of his youth, the Canon immediately sent him a copy of the original.

At the sight of that written witness of his glorious years as a slave, Vincent blushed, and threw the document into the fire. Then, lest the original should be published, he wrote to the Canon imploring him to send him the manuscript. But the Canon, divining the purpose of his humble friend, was not in a hurry to comply with the request. During an entire year and more, Vincent continued his entreaties, and in March of 1660 he wrote once again, in these moving terms: "By all the graces God has been pleased to bestow upon you, I conjure you to do me the favor of sending me the wretched letter with its mention of the country of the Turks. Moreover, I beg of you, by the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, to grant my request as soon as possible."

Men have not pleaded for life in words more strong or sacred. For Vincent there was question of something more important than the prolongation of an earthly life now far

spent. There was question of removing a record written and signed by his own hand, a record which, unless destroyed, would remain as a title of honor and praise. The affair was urgent, for he felt that he was dying. Hence his insistent pleading.

During the course of his life he spoke only once about the years he spent in slavery; the experience was of recent memory when in confidence, he spoke of his captivity to a priest whom he was perhaps preparing for Apostolic work in that barbarous country. Except for that one disclosure, he maintained complete silence on the subject. Twenty times, in meetings for charitable purposes, he had an opportunity to entertain his audience with a narration of his experiences, and twenty times he remained silent. Yet what motives he could have discovered for the recital! For instance there was need of arousing pity for the unfortunate slaves; and he could have done so by relating his own personal sufferings. In dramatic fashion, he could have pictured himself on the scene; he could have shown the imprint made by iron shackles on his members.

He alone did not believe that the most exacting charity could require such a sacrifice from humility. And his silence was more astonishing in view of the fact that despite his efforts at concealment, his captivity in Tunis, though not in detail, was known to others, and the subject was often broached in his presence. A royal secretary, John Baptist Danlier by name, who had been a slave in Tunis, often recited his own adventures in an endeavor to draw a similar narration from Vincent. Useless effort! Vincent listened to the description of cities in Barbary as though the country had been unknown to him. He heard the recital of sufferings endured in slavery, but he abstained from rejoicing that he had personal experience of such things. Quite naturally travelers, especially if they have been through strange adventures, are inclined to speak about themselves; Vincent never yielded to the temptation.

Though a man of magnificent ability, he considered himself incapable of ordinary accomplishment. It seemed to him that he was more likely to destroy than to build in the

Church of God. Hence his contempt and diffidence of self. Hence his fear of undertaking a work unless he was thrust into it, so to speak, by the hand of God. Where good was to be done, his preference was that others have the privilege of doing it. When he was under obligation to act, he awaited some external impulse wherein he saw the guidance of Divine Providence. And from that moment he gave glory to God for whatever good was accomplished. "It is God who had done everything," he would say, "I did not even think of it. My part in the work is my sins which have hindered the fulfillment of God's purpose."

He strove to hide the special grace that God gave him. And the personal part or action which he, Vincent, contributed to any enterprise — that also he desired to conceal. Charity only could overcome the reluctance of humility, and induce him to disclose what was likely to attract admiring attention. One of his guiding principles was to avoid, in public actions, whatever might attract favorable attention unnecessarily. "Of two thoughts that present themselves to me while speaking," he said, "I will give expression to the less impressive in order to humble myself. This I do unless charity requires that I act otherwise. The more beautiful concept I sacrifice to God in the silence and in secret. For, our Lord is pleased only with what is done in humility of heart, and in simplicity of word and action."

When there was reason to speak of works which God performed through him or of the divine blessings that attended his co-operation with divine grace, he managed to present the case impersonally. Good and praiseworthy things he attributed to the Congregation, or he spoke in the plural, uniting himself with his confreres in common endeavor. But when there was question of a humbling acknowledgment, or when he made reference to a lack of success, then he was careful to speak of himself only, for to himself he reserved the coveted privilege of accepting every opportunity or occasion of self-abasement. To God and fellow men he gave honor and praise for all the good that was done in the Congregation. Himself, his incivility, his transgressions, he regarded as the cause of all the evil that might be committed.

Silent concerning his merits and his talents, he willingly made known small imperfections, and was inclined to exaggerate them. Any derogatory circumstances of his birth, his person, or his manner of acting — to such things he laid claim unhesitatingly as his own. Arrived in Paris, he avoided publicity, and, wishing to identify himself with ordinary folk, he laid aside the surname, de Paul with its suggestion of noble lineage, and let himself be known simply as Father Vincent, or, as French custom expresses it, Monsieur Vincent. When he had to sign his full name on a legal document, he wrote name and surname close together as forming just one word, lest, in writing them separately, there might be a connotation of nobility.

Whenever occasion offered, he enjoyed making reference to his peasant family, and the lowly occupations of his childhood. During a visit with the Vincentians at St. Lazare, the Bishop of St. Pons happened to speak of the Castle of Mont Gaillard from which his family took their name. "I know the place well," responded Vincent; "as a boy I often led my animals in that direction." On another occasion, a young man of good family wrote him a letter from Dax. Since he was requesting a favor he wrote, "I have the honor of being a relative of yours." The humble priest replied: "I will do for you what I would do for my own brother, but do not claim relationship with a man whose father was a poor peasant, and whose first occupation was herding swine."

He employed the same language with humble folk as with people who were prominent in society. Thus when a poor woman, seeking an alms, addressed him as "My Lord," he answered: "My poor woman, you are not acquainted with me; I am only the son of a poor villager." Another would have it appear that she had been a servant of Madame, his mother. "You are mistaken, my good woman," Vincent replied. "My mother never had a servant; she did her own work, for she was the wife, just as I am the son, of a poor peasant."

The lowly birth thus made public knowledge at home, St. Vincent also published abroad. It furnished a motive of gratitude for favors bestowed upon himself or his Congregation, and it served as a refuge from praise merited by his virtue.

CHAPTER 39 *A Reply to Count Obidos*

A certain Count Obidos had befriended a Vincentian Missioner in Portugal, and in a letter had given expression to the profound respect in which he held the Saint. Vincent replied: "What is worthy of praise, I ask of you, in one whom everything is lacking, and whose father was a poor farmer?" When a villager had come to St. Lazare one day to speak with St. Vincent, the porter explained that he was engaged at the moment in converse with some lords. "Well, then," replied the villager, "he is no longer Father Vincent, for he himself told me that he, like myself, is only the son of a simple peasant."

In such avowals there was no least suggestion of wishing to imply a favorable comparison with subsequent eminence and achievement. With Vincent the sole purpose was to occupy the lowest place. Yet he felt the sacrifice of higher aspiration even though, in consequence of the pain, he was refreshed inwardly with a supernatural consolation. Thus, after declaring his peasant origin before a community, he wrote to one of his Missioners, "Would you really believe, Sir, that I fear having a vain satisfaction that arises from the pain that nature suffers in making such an avowal?" Truly admirable virtue of humility with which, in its higher degrees of perfection, is associated a joy that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit!

In 1623, while he was residing at the College des Bons Enfants, his humility underwent a test from which it emerged victorious. He was in his room when the porter came to announce that a young farmer, claiming to be his nephew, wished to speak with him. Visibly embarrassed, Vincent requested a confrere to go down and receive the caller. But the next moment, blushing for having blushed, he went down to the street, embraced his nephew affectionately, and brought him into the College yard.

Then he summoned all the priests of the house, to whom he said, "Gentlemen, this young man is the most virtuous member of my family. Nephew, salute these gentlemen."

During the entire day he presented his relative as an important person to all the distinguished visitors that came to speak with Vincent. But remorse continued to trouble him, and he must be rid of its burden. So, at the first general retreat, he said publicly to his confreres: "Gentlemen and my Brothers, pray for a proud man who wished to receive his nephew secretly because the young man was a peasant, and poorly dressed."

This visit recalls an incident of his childhood which in old age he related to Madame de Lamoignon who was accompanying him on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Fiacre near Meaux. The conversation turning to the Saint whom they were going to venerate, St. Vincent said: "He was a very humble man whereas I am full of pride and sin. I recall that, when at the College, I was told one day that my father, a poor country man, had come to visit me. I refused to go and speak with him, and by acting that way I committed a great sin." Madame de Lamoignon, recounting the incident later, made this comment: "I believe that that sin was the greatest he was ever guilty of."

His humility dissuaded him from any attempt to raise his relatives from their lowly state of poverty. "They are happy," he said, "in the place they occupy as laborers; it is conducive to Christian living, and it is relatively free from real dangers to salvation." He was even more disinclined to do anything that would better the financial position of his nephews by directing them toward clerical training and the priesthood. Such sacrilegious intrusion into the sanctuary was thoroughly repugnant to his virtue. In answer to every suggestion of that kind, even though it was made by a Bishop, he would say, "It is better to remain a poor worker of the soil than to become a rich prebendary of the Church."

In this connection he wrote to the Abbé St. Martin, an old friend of his: "I thank you for the care you are taking of my little nephew. I wish to say that I never had any desire that he should become a priest, nor did I ever think of giving him a clerical education, for the priesthood is the most sublime vocation on earth; it is the calling to which our Blessed Lord devoted Himself. As for me, if I had known

— before having the temerity to enter that sacred profession — what I subsequently learned about the priesthood, I would have much preferred to make my livelihood as a tiller of the soil than enter so formidable a state of life. I have so expressed myself a hundred times and more to poor people in the country when, for the purpose of encouragement, I said to them, that I considered them fortunate in their manner of life.”

St. Vincent, after years in theological study, became a Bachelor of Sacred Theology and a Licentiate of Canon Law. He was a man of keen intellect, and sound judgment. Yet, in referring to his personal capacity, he spoke only of his ignorance and stupidity, calling himself a poor scholar. One day the proud Abbé St. Cyran used against him that very term of opprobrium: “You are an ignoramus,” he said: “far from deserving to be the Superior of your Congregation, you would be well served by being driven out. What surprises me, is that you are allowed to remain.”

“I am even more surprised than you,” was the quiet reply of the humble Saint; “for I am far more ignorant than you think, and if justice were done, I would be sent away from St. Lazare immediately.” On another occasion, after repeated consolation and counsel to a young student assailed by a temptation to despair, he added: “If the devil continues to suggest that evil thought, answer as I have directed you, and say to the miserable tempter, that Vincent, an ignorant man of the fourth form, has given you that advice.”

When reference was made to the allegedly uncouth manners of a certain Superior, St. Vincent took occasion to criticize himself in the following terms: “What are my own qualifications? For what reason has the Congregation permitted me to remain in office? I am of all men the most uncouth, ridiculous, and stupid. When among persons of culture, I am unable to speak six consecutive words without manifesting my lack of intelligence and judgment; and what is worse, I have none of the virtues that adorn the Superior who has been singled out as unfit for the office he holds.”

When Marie Henrietta de Rochechouart, Superioress of a Visitation Convent in Paris recommended herself to his

prayers, he answered: "I will offer you to God since that is what you request; but in view of the immense miseries that weigh heavily upon me, I myself, more than anyone else, have need of the assistance that kindly souls may confer. Indeed, because of these miseries, I must consider the favorable opinion others have of me, as a punishment for my hypocrisy — an hypocrisy that makes me appear other than I really am."

A prelate called him a perfect Christian. Vincent replied: "I, a perfect Christian? What on earth are you saying? Men should rather look upon me as a person already condemned, as the greatest sinner in the world!" A young Missioner, lately received into the Congregation accused himself of having profited very little by Father Vincent's good example, and the wonderful things he had accomplished. "Sir," answered the Saint, "among ourselves it is a custom never to praise anyone in his presence. It is true that I am a marvel, but a marvel of wickedness, a person more wicked than the devil; for the devil is not so deserving of hell as I am. And this assertion is not intended by way of exaggeration; it is in accord with my sincere conviction."

CHAPTER 40 *Dedication of a Book to Vincent de Paul*

Apparently an author had already dedicated a book to Vincent when he sought permission for the dedication, and received this reply: "Sir, what is this you are saying? If you had reflected that I am the son of a poor peasant, you would never have given me cause for embarrassment, nor would you have done injury to your book by placing on its title page the name of a poor priest whose only claim to publicity is wretchedness and sin."

To another author who proposed to make a similar dedication, he said: "You would give me much displeasure if you should carry out your intention. A dedication is made in praise of him to whom it is addressed, and I am altogether

unworthy of praise. To speak of me appropriately, you would have to say that I am the son of a peasant, and that I herded swine and cattle in my youth. And then you would have to add that worse than my common origin are my ignorance and wickedness. From this you can judge whether so worthless a person as I, is deserving of the public notice which you propose to give me. Were you to make the dedication, it would be extremely displeasing to me. Yes, it would be so painful an experience, I do not know whether I would ever lose a feeling of resentment."

All of his letters contain similar professions of humility. "I feel humbled," he wrote to the Baroness de Renty, "that you should address a poor priest such as I am; for you are not unaware either of my low intelligence or my wretchedness." He wrote to the Superioress of the Visitation Convent at Warsaw: "For more than thirty years I have had the honor of serving your houses in Paris. But alas, my dear Mother, I am none the better for that though by contact with those incomparably holy souls I should have made great progress in virtue. I humbly beg of you to assist me in seeking pardon of God for the bad use I have made of all His graces."

He wrote again: "The complimentary way you speak of me, afflicts me very much. It is clear to me that I am far from the state in which you suppose me to be. Indeed, unless God has pity on me, I shall be traveling the path that leads to the abyss; for I am quite useless, and most wretched. I stand very much in need of the divine mercy; pray for me, I beseech you, that I may obtain it."

In the assemblies of piety, the meetings of the Ladies of Charity, and in the ecclesiastical conferences, humility often imposed silence upon him, or caused him to set aside his own ideas, that he might give preference to the judgment of others. One day, having noticed this manner of acting, a lady voiced a mild reproach: "Why do you not maintain your opinions more strongly?" she said, "they are always the best." "God forbid, Madam," he answered, "that my poor thoughts should have preference over the ideas of others! I am quite content that God accomplish His works without me, wretch that I am."

But his humility shone brightest in the Council of Conscience, that is to say, at the summit of honor. The Council gave him entry to the French Court and people of rank and influence. It brought homage from the ambitious, and considerable power to direct the affairs, and apportion the wealth of the Church in France. One may readily understand the grief he felt at his appointment, and the efforts he made to free himself from such an honor. He wrote at once to Rome: "Never have I been more deserving of compassion than I am at present, and never have I felt greater need of prayer. I hope that my new office will not be for long. Pray to God for me."

The hope of release sustained him for more than a year. "I pray to God every day," he said to one of His Missioners, "that I may be recognized as the simpleton I am, and so may be no longer employed in this appointment, but may have greater opportunity of doing penance for my sins." In fact, he addressed petitions to both God and man. From the day of his appointment, morning by morning, in celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, he sought the grace of being restored to his former status. Unceasingly he sought the intervention of the Queen, the Cardinal, and any others from whom he could hope to obtain the fulfillment of his desire.

Toward the end of the year 1644 his petition was apparently on the point of being granted. On one of his journeys, it was being rumored that he was in disgrace at Court. An ecclesiastic, informed that the report was false, came to felicitate the Saint. In response, Vincent exclaimed, "Would to God the rumor were true!" raising his eyes to heaven meanwhile, and striking his breast. "But so miserable a creature as I, is unworthy of such a favor." On the same subject he wrote in 1645 to Father Codoing, the Superior in Rome: "God be praised for what you say! It is true there was reason to think that I would no longer be allowed to remain in office. But my sins are the reason why the outcome was different than expected, and why God has not been pleased to accept the sacrifices that I offered in that regard. My hope is in the name of the Lord; I shall never be dismayed."

The equipage he made use of in going to Court, was the same as that which carried him to his missions in the country; and he wore the same cassock, a garment made of coarse material, threadbare and patched. He would never change it, not even when he was going to the Louvre. If a new cassock was left in his room, he still put on the old one, and if the old cassock had been removed, he would look for a similar one that was being worn by a priest about the same size. Then, under one pretext or another, he would work an exchange. His clothes, though poor, were neat and clean. His reply to compliment or banter on the subject was, "My clothes are neither spotted nor torn." And it was in such fashion that he answered Mazarin when the Cardinal, taking hold of St. Vincent's poor cincture, showed it to the Queen with the remark, "See, Madame, in what sort of clothes Father Vincent comes to Court; just look at his elegant cincture."

He believed that by such cleanliness his obligation to respect the amenities was harmonized with his habitual practice of poverty and simplicity. The flamboyance of the Louvre Palace did not dazzle him. When his image was reflected in the mirrors, he remarked upon the rogue that was returning his glance. No doubt he contrasted the splendor of the royal apartments with the poor cottage of his childhood. Then raising his thoughts to higher things, he said to himself: "My God, if by means of this mirror, a product of earth, we are able to observe whatever occurs in this room, what multitude and magnificence of things must be revealed to the blessed saints, in the divine Essence which is the efficient cause, and contains the exemplary ideas of all creatures!"

St. Vincent loved to humble himself, not only in the secrecy of his own heart, but in the presence of other people, as an expiation of the unwished for grandeur that was thrust upon him, and an atonement for special privileges and honors that were, to him, a sort of martyrdom. Le Pelletier, an official at the Royal Court, made the following deposition in the process of Canonization: "I was a young man when for the first time I saw the servant of God at the Louvre Palace.

I encountered him there frequently on other occasions, and it became evident that he was a man of dignity, prudence, and modest self-possession."

Out of sincere esteem, courtiers, prelates, ecclesiastics and other persons paid him great honor. He accepted such honor with deep humbleness. On leaving the Council of Conscience where he had exercised his influence in deciding matters of great importance for the French Kingdom, he was accommodating and approachable as he had been among the slaves in Tunis or on a galley ship. A virtuous Bishop who had known Vincent before the Saint's employment at the Royal Court, and who met him again afterward, discovered that he was as humble and affable as ever, and equally ready to grant a favor. His admiring comment was the now well-known saying: "Father Vincent is always Father Vincent."

When Vincent was first summoned to the Royal Court, the Prince of Condé invited him to be seated beside him. "My Lord," answered the humble priest, "you already honor me too much by allowing me to remain in your presence. But now you wish me to take a place beside you! Are you then unaware that I am only the son of a poor villager?" "A man acquires true nobility," responded the Prince, "by the moral tone of his life, and by his manner of acting." And the better to form a judgment, he introduced a point of controversy into the conversation. Vincent handled the subject with so much clarity and precision, that the Prince exclaimed: "Father Vincent, Father Vincent, you proclaim everywhere that you are an ignorant person, but look here! In a few words you have solved one of the greatest difficulties proposed by the sectaries."

Then the Prince proposed a question of Canon Law, and he was more and more pleased with the answers given by this poor scholar. Presently taking his leave, and hastening to the Queen, he congratulated her on her choice of a man so well informed regarding ecclesiastical matters.

CHAPTER 41 *Bitter Jest and Cruel Calumny*

More than once St. Vincent was the object of bitter jest and cruel calumny. There were people who endeavored to ruin his reputation with the Queen, the Minister of State and people of good character. He regarded such endeavors as a reason for rejoicing, and as a recompense of zeal. A young nobleman, taking umbrage perhaps because Vincent had opposed some culpable ambition of his, expressed his displeasure in harsh terms: "Sir," he said, "you are an old fool." "You are quite right, my son," replied Vincent, going on his knees, "and I ask pardon for whatever may have given you cause to speak as you have spoken." On another occasion, and in a bantering mood, the Queen said to him, "Do you know, Father Vincent, what is being said about you?" "Madame," came his response, "I am a great sinner." "But you ought to justify yourself," said the Queen. "Well, your Majesty," replied Vincent, "far worse things were said about our Lord; yet He spoke not a word of self-justification."

An unworthy ecclesiastic whom Vincent had prevented from obtaining a benefice, sought revenge by spreading false accusations among persons of influential position. "Vincent did not speak in my favor," he said, "and the reason is that I was unwilling to gain my point by giving a bribe. But while opposed to simony in other people, that man is quite willing to make use of malpractice. I am acquainted with a person to whom he gave a benefice in exchange for a library and a considerable sum of money." This time the Saint was moved with resentment. And in the first moment of emotional stress he seized a pen to compose a letter of self-exoneration. But hardly had he written a few words when he said to himself, "Ah, wretch, of what are you thinking? You wish to justify yourself. And the news has just arrived that a Christian in Tunis, though falsely accused, endured torture for three days and unto death without uttering a word of complaint! No, it must not be." And he tore up the letter already begun. Some days later, the calumniator died miserably, and everyone regarded his death as a manifestation of divine vengeance.

When he noticed that a certain nobleman of the Court, formerly his friend, no longer manifested for him anything but aversion, he approached the gentleman, and said quietly, with serene countenance: "Sir, it has been my misfortune to give you displeasure without any intention of doing so; and, not knowing the nature of my offense, I humbly beg of you to tell me, that I may make amends." Confronted with such candor and humility, the nobleman had no desire to complain; their friendship was re-established.

He acted in similar fashion regarding a religious who was ill-disposed toward him. While vesting for Mass at the College of Bons Enfants, he remembered the words of Christ: "Suppose, then, you are about to offer your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother holds something against you" (Mt. 5:23). Laying aside the vestments forthwith, he went over to the religious, made an apology, and gave assurance of his esteem both for the religious and for his Community. Then he donned the vestments once more and celebrated the Sacrifice of reconciliation and love.

Though he might not gain his purpose at the first attempt, eventually he almost always succeeded in disarming aversion. On one occasion however, though he cast himself at the feet of the Superior of a religious community, to beg pardon for an imaginary offense, he was repulsed with scorn and insult. He withdrew, not chagrined, but rejoicing that he had been ill-treated for the sake of justice. Some days later, having need of certain ornaments at St. Lazare, he sent a request, wishing to borrow them from the same Superior as from a good friend. Deeply affected by such manifestation of charity and forgiveness, the Superior was not slow to respond: "This is indeed," he said, "an action wherein I recognize a man of God." He loaned the ornaments, and followed them in person. Soon the two men, reunited, had repaired the bond of untroubled friendship.

Sometimes people who gave offense, were disconcerted by an unexpected act of humility. One day as Vincent was about to enter St. Lazare, he was publicly berated by a nobleman whose son had failed to obtain a recommendation. The Saint went on his knees before the angry man. "What you say is

true, my Lord, I am a wretch and a sinner." Thereupon the nobleman withdrew into his carriage, but Vincent arose, followed the carriage, and made a profound reverence before turning back.

Often he knelt before his Missioners to avow publicly what he called the crimes of his past life. Often he accused himself of some transgression, or of an inner temptation which, nevertheless, he had mastered. Often he took upon himself the blame for the faults committed in the Congregation, because, to his way of thinking, they somehow traced back to himself as their source. He regarded the death of his Missioners, and the loss of Community possessions, as a punishment for his own transgressions. Every year, at the anniversary of his baptism, he knelt before the Community, and begged pardon of God and men, for all the sins he had committed and for all the scandals he had given during the many years the divine Goodness had suffered him to remain upon earth. And he recommended himself to the prayers of all, that he might obtain from God, mercy and conversion.

He humbled himself in this manner before the least of his brethren. When he thought he had offended one of them, he sought him everywhere — in the garden, the kitchen, and even the cellar — to go on his knees before the offended party, kiss his feet, and ask pardon. In 1649, when St. Vincent was taken ill at Richlieu, the brother infirmarian of St. Lazare came from Paris to take care of him. With characteristic forgetfulness of self, the invalid received his good samaritan with the remark: "My old carcass was not worth so long a journey." But then, fearing lest the infirmarian might have understood the words as a reproach rather than as a protestation of humility, he knelt before him, and begged his pardon.

But that was not the end of the affair. Vincent's fear of having wounded fraternal charity would not be allayed without making further amendment. Consequently, on his return to St. Lazare, he found a suitable occasion for his purpose. When the brother infirmarian and his assistant were in his room one day, he said to the assistant: "Would you believe, Sir, that when this good man came to Richlieu for my sake,

I did not receive him with my customary warmth of affection! And that is why, in your presence, I very humbly beg of him to forgive me, and of you to pray that God may grant me the grace to avoid giving such offense in future."

Such humility renders easily understandable the efforts made by him to lay aside the office of Superior in the year 1642. Unsuccessful in his endeavors, he complained about the marks of reverence and honor which his Missioners, in filial piety, bestowed upon him. They explained that such observance was customary in all communities. "I know that very well," was his reply, "and we must respect the reasons they have for so doing. But I have a more valid reason for not allowing it in my own regard, since I am unworthy of being placed on the same level with even the least of men — I who am the worst of all."

He would not permit that a rug be spread at the place he occupied in church; much less would he consider having his chair elevated above the common level. "That is the privilege of a Bishop," he said, "not of a worthless priest such as I."

CHAPTER 42 *Mass Vestments*

Under the influence of humility, Father Vincent chose for himself the poorest vestments for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. In 1638, when an heir to the throne was born, Ann of Austria sent a magnificent vestment of silver cloth to St. Lazare. The Feast of Christmas was near and St. Vincent was to officiate at the solemnity. Everyone was happy in supposing that he would be the first to wear the gorgeous new vestment. But he was frightened at the prospect of appearing in splendid apparel. And so it was necessary to supply ordinary vestments.

He took pleasure in performing the most humble services for others, as for example washing dishes, and cleaning shoes. But, despite his age and infirmity, he would not be the recipient of like services. He dressed his ulcerated leg, and,

though perforce making use of a carriage, he voiced clearly his ineffectual preference by referring to the vehicle as the ignominy and shame of one who was riding whereas he should have been trudging along on foot like the poor people among whom he numbered himself, and whom he loved so sincerely.

Valuing humility so highly in himself, he naturally desired to see the same admirable virtue in his religious Congregation. He therefore spoke of "the Little Company," and "the worthless Company." He wished people to look upon it as the least of all, as occupying the last place among the clergy both regular and secular. He limited the ministry of his Missioners to poor people in rural areas.

In a letter to St. Jane Frances Chantal he wrote inadvertently something of a nature to draw admiration and praise upon the Congregation of the Mission. Uneasy and remorseful in consequence, he wrote again: "I have told you many things that are to the advantage of this little Congregation; and that gives me reason to fear. Hence I beg of you to discount greatly my statements, and to keep the information to yourself. Alas! My worthy Mother, if you only knew how ignorant we are, and how slight is the virtue we possess, you would indeed feel sorry for us. I speak thus with tears, knowing well the truth of what I say, and the wretchedness of my poor soul. Therefore, I beseech you, my dear Mother, offer to God my feeling of shame, and the confession I make in the presence of the Divine Majesty."

When anyone sought admission into the Congregation, he would say in effect: "You wish to be a Missioner, but why have you come to our Little Congregation? We are only poor people." He was very much surprised when the Abbé of Tournus expressed a wish to become a poor Missioner. When he heard someone praise and continue to praise the Congregation, he would reply: "Your kindness toward us is father to your thought of us. Nevertheless it is true that other communities are holy whereas we are wretched, and worse than wretched." When he learned that the labors of the Congregation were ignored or calumniated, he rejoiced, and abstained from defending the corporate reputation. Of him-

self personally he remarked, "I will never justify myself except by my works. It is a blessing to be treated the same way that men treated our Savior."

St. Thomas has well said that far from destroying greatness of soul, humility strengthens it by furnishing a solid foundation in God while at the same time it safeguards a person from losing himself amid the violence and vanity of human affairs. When there was question of supporting the interests of God or the Church, no one was more active and constant than Vincent. He proposed the humble and magnanimous St. Louis, King of France, as an instance of humility harmonizing easily with generosity and true greatness of soul. The same concord between seemingly conflicting virtues is to be clearly seen in Vincent. No one humbled himself more profoundly; no one accomplished greater things.

Of his favorite virtue the Saint spoke with affection and quiet enthusiasm. In his conferences on humility, according to his custom he first portrayed the excellence and necessity of the virtue by presenting the doctrine and example of Christ. "If I should call upon one of you, no matter whom, to speak on the subject, he would advance a number of pertinent authorities and reasons, but for the purpose of honoring the words and sentiments of our Lord, we shall say only this, that He Himself has recommended the virtue: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt. 9:29). If our teacher were an Apostle — St. Peter or St. Paul — if he were a saint, or one of the Prophets, we might remark that such a one, like ourselves, is to be numbered among the disciples of Christ. If he were a philosopher — alas! The philosophers were ignorant of this virtue. Even Aristotle, though he spoke well of other moral virtues, made no mention of humility.

"Only Jesus Christ has declared, only He could so speak; 'Learn of me.' Oh, what words! Learn of Me, and not of someone else, not of man, but of God! Learn of Me! What then is it Lord, that is so pleasing to Your eyes? 'That I am humble,' not merely in external appearance, not by way of ostentation or vanity, but with sincerity of heart. Mine is that virtue, not in small measure or transiently, but pro-

foundly, eternally in the presence of my heavenly Father. I am humble in the sight of sinners, and for their sake; yes, looking with compassion upon human souls that are abject and ignoble, welcoming them at all times with joy and love.

“‘Learn of me,’ to learn humility is so contrary to the spirit and maxims of the world, so foreign to the natural inclinations of men, so unattractive to the human heart, that unless the God-Man had spoken the words and exemplified them in His own person, no one would heed such advice. Everyone loves his own personal excellence, and admires whatever external work he is able to produce. By impulse of nature everyone wishes to enjoy a good reputation among his fellow men, and he spares no endeavor to win their esteem and praise.

“On the other hand, by the grace of baptism, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, men love humility more than the other moral virtues; in theory at least, it is their preference. They love this virtue, yet in practice they are not really humble. They do not, as we might say, possess humility, so strong is nature’s inclination to pride. My Savior, we learn an entirely different lesson in the actions of Your life!

“What was the life of this divine Savior if not a continual humiliation in both His works and His afflictions? On earth He humbled Himself unceasingly, and after death He desires that His Church represent Him to us, in effigy upon a cross as a visible reminder of the ignominy that He endured when He was done to a most shameful death as though He had been a common criminal. And why would He appear in such guise? Because He understood the excellence of humiliations, and the evil of the vice that abhors them; because He understood how pride not only aggravates other sins, but also vitiates actions which are otherwise good and holy. He thus humbled Himself because He saw the height and depth, the length and width of humility, and because He knew the relation it bears to the perfections of God in His dealings with sinful man.

“The entire life of Christ therefore was a continual succession of humiliations. For nine months He remained in the womb of a Virgin. Refused lodging at Bethlehem, He

was under the necessity of taking shelter in a stable. As a child, after herald angels had sung their homage of praise, He was obliged to escape mortal hatred, and seek refuge in Egypt. What am I saying, a child? He was an all-powerful and feeble God. His life was characterized by an unceasing desire to be made an object of contempt. So strong was the inclination, that if someone had examined the adorable Heart, he would have seen there engraved, and pre-eminently, the word 'humility.'"

CHAPTER 43 *A Virtue of Jesus Christ*

St. Vincent found in Christ the true model of Christian lowliness. "Humility," he said, "is a pre-eminent virtue of Jesus Christ, of His Blessed Mother, and of the great saints and missioners — would that we possessed it! In styling it a virtue of missioners, I mean it as a virtue of which they have great need, and which they should ardently desire. I mean that this Little Congregation, which is least of all, should have humility as a fundamental and characteristic virtue. Otherwise we shall never do anything worthwhile either within the Little Company, or in the world round about us. Without humility we could never expect progress for ourselves, or profit for our neighbor.

"My Savior, grant us this holy virtue so well suited to our state of life, this virtue which you have made known to the world, and which you cherished with great affection! Gentlemen, you know that one who desires to be a true Missioner, should labor without ceasing to become perfect in this virtue. In particular he should guard against all thoughts of pride, ambition and vanity, for they are his mortal enemies. . . . Yes, I repeat, if we are true Missioners, each one of us will be well content with being treated as an ignoramus; with being insulted and despised; with bearing reproach for his deficiencies; with being represented as insufferable because of his wretchedness and imperfections.

"I say further, we should rejoice when it is affirmed that

our Congregation is useless, is composed of poor, simple persons, is indifferently successful in its undertakings, and, in particular, that the ordinations are not properly conducted. Yes, if we possess the spirit of Jesus Christ, we shall be content with being regarded in that manner. But someone may object that what I have said is a 'hard saying.' I grant you it is with difficulty the natural man is brought to the admission that he has done badly; and it is even more difficult for him to endure consequent reproach from his fellow man.

"On the other hand, the precept of humility is easily understood by a soul that is truly humble, a soul endowed with true self-knowledge. Such a one, far from repining, rejoices and is well content that God be exalted and glorified by human humiliation and insignificance. I know that God has given to several members of the Congregation the grace to make rapid progress in the practice of this virtue, grace to animate their actions with a desire to humble themselves, to avoid favorable notice, and accept disparaging comment. But we must ask of God, that He grant the same grace to all the others, that we may sincerely desire to humble ourselves profoundly for the love of God and for His glory. In a word, we must be ambitious to make humility the characteristic virtue of our Congregation.

"That you may esteem this virtue more highly, pay good attention to what I am going to say; if you have ever heard people remarking upon some good or other as accomplished by the Congregation, you will find that their praise attaches in particular to the humility they have discovered in our Missioners whom they have observed in lowly occupations, as for instance instructing lowly folk, and serving the poor. Similarly, when you observe that ordinands, at the conclusion of a spiritual retreat, have been edified by the conferences and the confreres, you will perceive, upon examination, that the cause of edification is a simple and humble manner of acting which they have not noticed elsewhere, and which is a charming experience for everyone."

What Vincent recommended, therefore, was not merely an individual humility; it was corporate virtue, a humility

attaching to the entire Congregation. "Our Lord," he said, "was humble, not only in Himself, but also in His little company of disciples. He founded His Church upon a small group of poor men without knowledge or refinement, men who were not in agreement among themselves. They all abandoned Him, and after His death they were persecuted, as He had been, despised, condemned, and put to death.

"Is it not strange that men, who readily understand how particular members of a society — Peter, James, and John — should avoid honors, and love contempt, fail to apply the same norm of religious perfection to a community as a group. They maintain that the Congregation, and the local Community must acquire and preserve a position of esteem and honor in the world. Now, I ask you, how is it possible for Peter, James, and John truly and sincerely to love and seek after contempt, while at the same time they and other members, as a community, love and strive to receive honor and praise? We must assuredly admit that these two positions are incompatible.

"Consequently, all Missioners should be well satisfied not only when they personally are contemned and humbled, but likewise when their Congregation is despised, for that will be a sign that they are truly humble. The Apostles agreed upon a symbol whereby they might recognize each other, and identify other Christians. To the question, 'Who are you?' a Christian would answer, 'I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ.' Similarly, let humility be the distinctive mark of the Congregation, in preference to the title of the Little Company. And so, when someone inquires concerning our way of life, we may reply, 'Humility,' and if we are accosted with the challenge, 'Who goes there?' we may give the password, 'humility.'"

Under the influence of these lowly sentiments, Vincent issued instructions, that his Missioners, when attending a public affair at university or college, should occupy the lower places, and avoid making a show of erudition. One of the most distinguished Missioners, Father James de la Fosse, disregarded the instructions one day, and so drew upon himself one compliment after another. Vincent however

was in no mood for paying compliments. He had heard of the incident, and he made the following comment in person: "You are aware, Sir, that a man who is truly humble, a poor Missioner, does not seek the first place in an assembly, neither does he wish to make himself the subject of conversation. You are hereby under order to go and ask pardon of those whom you have disedified."

Discoursing on his favorite virtue, the Saint gave this explanation: "If each one of us would study his own character, he would find reason enough to despise himself. For on the one hand, if we consider seriously the corruption of our nature, the darkness of our understanding, the disorder of our will, and the impurity of our affections; and on the other hand, if we weigh well our works and accomplishments in the scales of the sanctuary, we shall find that all of them are worthy of contempt. This may surprise you and you may ask whether I mean to include the sermons you preach, the confessions you hear and the care and trouble you take in serving the neighbor for the glory of God.

"My answer, Gentlemen, is yes; if we look back upon our best actions, we shall discover that in most of them we have failed in our manner of acting, and often in the purpose we had in view. In whatever way we examine the situation we shall find as much of evil as of good. Tell me, pray, what can be expected from the weakness of man? Who is it that produces nothingness and sin? And what else do we have within us — as of ourselves — but nothingness and sin?

"Let us therefore hold for certain, that in all things and everywhere we deserve to be rejected; that we are very despicable because there is within us a something that stands in opposition to the sanctity and other perfections of God, to the life of Jesus Christ, and to the workings of His grace. If then we strive to know ourselves thoroughly, and if we consider carefully our thoughts, words, and actions, we shall find in either the substance or circumstances of these things, that there are many reasons why we should be humbled and contemned. If we turn aside from flattery, we shall perceive that we are not only worse than other men, but that, in a sense, we are more wicked than demons in hell. For, if those

wretched spirits had had at their disposal the graces and means given to us for our improvement, they might well have made far better use of such favors.

“Nay, more; we ought to be pleased when others know our faults, and so despise us; we ought to receive with satisfaction the contempt which our state of life, our bearing, our manner of acting and speaking, bring upon us. Our Lord could have avoided the insults, jeers, and reproaches of the Jews, yet He did not avoid them. Let us conceive an affection for humiliation, and God will give us humility, He will preserve that virtue, and He will increase it through the acts which He inspires us to perform. For, one act of virtue, when it is well performed, leads on to another, and the first degree of humility is a steppingstone for the second.”

CHAPTER 44 *A Reward for Humility*

St. Vincent loved to speak about his favorite virtue. “Remember, Gentlemen,” he said, “that Jesus Christ, referring to the Publican who humbled himself, affirmed that his prayer had been heard. If then He rendered such testimony in favor of a man whose life as a taxgatherer had likely been marred by the injustice and rapacity characteristic of his trade — if Christ so testified in favor of the Publican, may we not hope to receive divine graces, provided we are truly humble?”

“Now, what was the outcome for the Pharisee? He was a man separated from the rest of the people by his manner of life which, among the Jews, appears to have been that of a religious order. He prayed, fasted, and did many other good works. Nevertheless God rejected him. And why? Because the Pharisee regarded his own good works with complacency; because he took pride in his works just as though he had performed them by his own power.

“Behold then two persons; one a just man, the other a sinner, before the throne of God. Because the just man was devoid of humility, he was rejected; with all his good works

he was condemned. What appeared virtuous, was actually sinful. The Publican on the other hand, acknowledging his wickedness, and touched with a sentiment of true humility remained at the door of the temple, struck his breast, and did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven. Upon entering the temple he had been guilty of many sins, but by his humble disposition of heart he was justified upon his departure; a single act of humility was for him the means of salvation.

“From this incident we may perceive that humility, when true and genuine, introduces all the other virtues into the soul, that a sinner is justified by sincerely and profoundly humbling himself. Yes, even though we were the most wicked of men, we would be justified by having recourse to humility, whereas angelic virtues, did we possess them, would be lost by a sin of pride, because the other virtues, bereft of humility, and so deprived of their foundation, fall into ruin.

“Consequently, Gentlemen, let each one understand well the truth, and engrave it upon his heart. Let him say within himself: ‘Even though I possessed all other virtues, nevertheless if I should fail in humility, I would thereby become the victim of self-deception. While accounting myself to be a man of tried virtue, I would be merely a proud Pharisee, an abominable Missionary.’ My Savior, Jesus Christ, shed upon our minds the light that filled Your holy soul, and made You prefer contumely to praise. In flame our hearts with the holy affections that burned and consumed your Sacred Heart, the sentiments which caused You to seek with profound humility, the glory of Your heavenly Father! Grant, that by the help of Your grace, we may begin at once to reject everything that does not conduce to Your glory, all that does not keep us in our proper place of self-abasement. Preserve us from whatever savors of ostentation, vanity, and self-esteem! Grant that once and for all we may renounce the praise that is given by men who, themselves deceived, are in turn deceivers of other men. Forefend our hearts against vain imaginings in regard to the success of our works! In a word, my Savior, grant that with the aid of Your grace, and the encouragement of Your example we may learn to be truly humble of heart!”

The above is an abridgment of the great conference given on April 18, 1659. Vincent continually returns to his beloved humility. One morning, at a repetition of prayer, a member of the Community humbled himself for his poor thoughts. The Saint made these comments by way of reply: "When speaking of things that are of a nature to humble us, it is a good practice to enter into particulars if prudence allows us to declare such particulars in public. It is good because of the advantage derived from overcoming the natural repugnance we experience in disclosing what we are naturally inclined to keep secret.

"St. Augustine published a book wherein he narrated the secret sins of his youth so that men throughout the world might know about the folly of his errors, and the excess of his licentiousness. The great Apostle St. Paul, God's chosen messenger, was raised to the third heaven; yet he confessed to having persecuted the Church. He has even committed his avowal to writing, so that until the end of time all men may know that he was a persecutor. As for ourselves, unless we are careful, unless we overcome ourselves by admitting our faults and shortcomings, we shall soon be embellishing our speech with statements calculated to arouse esteem; and we shall remain silent with regard to whatever may humble us. This tendency we inherit from our first father, Adam, who, upon becoming conscious of his transgression, went and hid himself.

"I have made visits to various houses of religious women, and frequently I have inquired of them which virtue they found most attractive and estimable. I made the inquiry even of those who were least habituated to the practice of humility. Yet, out of twenty, all but one made answer that humility was their chosen virtue, so true is it that this virtue is particularly beautiful and amiable.

"What then is the reason that few people seek to cultivate this virtue, and still fewer have acquired proficiency? The reason is that they content themselves with admiring what they will not endeavor to practice. In theory the virtue is attractive, but in practice its appearance is disagreeable to nature. Acts of humility are distasteful precisely because to

be humble means to choose always the lowest place, to put ourselves below others, even the least of men, to bear with calumny, to endure contempt meekly, and love our own lowliness — things from which we naturally seek to escape.

“Therefore it is necessary to overcome our natural feeling of repugnance, and also to practice this virtue, for otherwise we shall never become really humble. I am well aware that through the mercy of God there are those who practice this divine virtue, those who not only hold themselves, their talents, learning, and virtue in low esteem, but even regard themselves as truly miserable, inferior to other men, and who desire that others think of them in like fashion. And I must confess that whenever I behold these persons, they move me, within my soul, to thoughts of self-reproach, for they silently rebuke the pride that lurks within me, wretch that I am. But they meanwhile are always at peace, and their joy is reflected in their countenance; for the Holy Spirit residing within them, and establishes them in tranquillity.

“When contradicted, they remain silent; when calumniated, they endure it; when forgotten, they say it is their due; and when overburdened with work, they willingly do their best. No matter how difficult the thing commanded may be, they apply themselves to the task with good will, trusting meanwhile in the power of holy obedience. The temptations that assail them serve only to strengthen them in humility, motivate recourse to God, and so enable them to be victorious over the devil.”

CHAPTER 45 *Vain Complacency*

St. Vincent:

“In a sense, the only enemy that threatens perfect souls is pride, a vice which here on earth never declares a truce, but assails even the greatest of saints, now in one way, now in another. Some souls experience an urge to indulge in vain complacency over the good they have accomplished; others, an inclination to take pride in the knowledge they have

acquired. Speculative souls are tempted to consider themselves very learned; practical souls incline to think of themselves as very virtuous and constant. Hence it is most necessary for us to pray to God, that, of His good pleasure He may preserve us from this pernicious vice; a vice the more to be feared because we are naturally inclined that way.

“We should be vigilant, and careful to do the opposite of what is favored by corrupt nature. If nature would bear us upward on thoughts of self-conceit, we must lower ourselves; if it stir within us feelings of presumption, we must think of our weakness; if it would lead us into desires of making a good appearance before other men, let us conceal what might attract attention, and let us choose lowly and inconsiderable actions in preference to others that are brilliant and likely to win human praise. In a word, we must frequently indulge sentiments of satisfaction over our position of lowliness and abjection, for such sentiments are a safe refuge against the inner disturbance which pride repeatedly arouses within us. Let us beg of our Lord by the adorable humility of His life and of His death, to draw us after Him. Let each one for himself, and the community for us all, offer to Him the humiliations we may have to suffer, and may our practice of humility be conducive to the glory of God, and our own advancement in the true spirit of this excellent virtue.”

In a clergy conference at St. Lazare, St. Vincent spoke as follows: “Tuesday last, the ecclesiastics who assemble here took as the subject of their conference the virtues each had remarked in the late Father Olier, formerly a member of their association. Among various things remarked on that occasion, one of the most significant was that that great servant of God usually spoke disparagingly of himself, and that while exercising the Christian virtues in their entirety, he made a special endeavor to practice humility.

“As they were speaking, I glanced up at the portraits that are there on the wall of our assembly room, and I said to myself, ‘Lord, my God, if we could understand the Christian truths as those holy persons have done, and bring our lives into conformity with our knowledge, we would act very dif-

ferently from the way we do.' While fixing my attention on the portrait of the Blessed Bishop of Geneva, I reflected that if we regarded the things of this world in the manner that he did; if we spoke of them as he spoke; and if our ears, like his, were attuned only to eternal truths, we would not allow vanity to occupy our minds and hearts.

"But above all, Gentlemen, if we consider attentively the beautiful painting we have before our eyes, the admirable original of humility, our Lord Jesus Christ, is it possible for us to harbor vain thoughts about ourselves? We are indeed much removed from His prodigious lowliness. Seeing that He was given second place to a murderer, shall we be so presumptuous as to prefer ourselves to other persons? Shall we fear that people will remark our wretchedness? Innocence was treated as a malefactor; He died between two criminals as though He had been more guilty than they.

"Let us beg of God, Gentlemen, to preserve us from such blindness; let us ask of Him the grace of seeking always the lowest place, confessing in His presence, and in the presence of men, that of ourselves we are nothing but sin, ignorance, and malice. Let our desire be that men speak of us in this manner, and so regard us with contempt. Let us accept every opportunity of subduing prideful nature by the practice of humility. To have a liking for humility, and a resolve to be humble, is good; many do that much. In addition we must overcome ourselves, and actually put the virtue into practice as frequently as opportunities present themselves."

He explained what may be termed Congregational humility: "God has sent us, not to assume assignments and activities that attract human praise. He does not intend that we act and speak pompously, dictatorially. He has sent us to evangelize and assist the poor, and to perform other functions of our Congregation in a humble, pleasant, and familiar manner.

"We may apply to ourselves what St. John Chrysostom said in one of his homilies, that so long as we remain sheep from a motive of sincere humility, we shall not only avoid being devoured, but we shall even change the wolves into sheep. On the other hand, the moment we depart from

humility and simplicity — which is the spirit of our Congregation — we shall lose the grace that is associated with that spirit; and we shall not find any other though it be in the most brilliant accomplishments.

“In truth, a Missioner, by the worthy exercise of his lowly profession may well merit the benediction of heaven, and the approval of men. But when he devotes himself to occupations which, by reason of the acclaim he seeks thereby, take on a worldly character that is contrary to our state, then, surely, it is just and reasonable that he should lose both divine benediction and human approval. Is there not reason to fear that he will fall into disorder? He will resemble the servant who, rising to a position of authority, became at the same time proud and unbearable.

“The late Cardinal Berulle, a great servant of God, was wont to say that it is well for one to remain in lowly state, and that the humbler positions of life are more safe, whereas a certain indefinable danger is to be feared in high and influential offices. ‘That danger,’ he said, ‘is the reason why the saints have always tried to eschew dignities, and why our Lord, wishing to convince us by word and example, declared of Himself, that He had come into the world, not to be served, but to serve.’”

As previously remarked, St. Vincent regarded humility as a corporate virtue. Accordingly, when a person, recently admitted, referred to the Congregation of the Mission as “holy,” Vincent brusquely replied: “Sir, in speaking of the Congregation we should never make use of such terms; we should say, the poor Congregation, the little Company, or something similar. For so doing, we imitate the Son of God who spoke of His Apostles as a little company.

“Oh how I wish that God, of His good pleasure, would give to this lowly Congregation the grace firmly to establish itself upon humility as upon a foundation, to build upon this virtue, and remain there as in its proper place! Gentlemen, let us not deceive ourselves; if we do not possess humility, we do not possess anything. I speak not merely of exterior humility, but principally of the humility that is of the heart, the virtue that makes us really believe there is

no one on earth more wretched than you and I. The virtue I am referring to, engenders the conviction that the Congregation of the Mission is the least estimable of all congregations, the poorest in both number and quality of its members. It is a humility whereby we take pleasure in the knowledge that the world speaks of us in such terms."

CHAPTER 46 *Desire for Human Esteem*

St. Vincent:

"To seek esteem is to act otherwise than did the Son of God. It is to tread the path of insufferable pride. When He was on earth what did the Pharisees say to Him? And was He willing to be misjudged by the people? He was classified as a fool, a seditious person, a sinner, though the charges were false. When Barabbas was released in preference to Christ, our Lord made no protest — and Barabbas was a criminal, a robber, and murderer. My Savior, my Savior, how your holy humility will put to shame all sinners, such as myself, miserable wretch that I am, on the day of judgment!

"Let us be watchful in this matter, particularly those who go on the missions, and speak in public. Occasionally, and often enough, people are moved by what is said to them, and they are seen to weep. More than that, one may hear the exclamation, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breast that nourished you.' We ourselves have heard expressions of that kind now and then.

"By such words the natural man is gratified, and vanity is engendered and nourished unless, putting aside vain complacency, we seek purely the glory of God, for which only, we should labor. Yes, we should labor only for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. And he who preaches to gain applause, praise and esteem, to have his name on every tongue — what is he doing? He is committing a sacrilege, yes a sacrilege! The word of God is being made a means to acquire a reputation. Yes, to act thus is a sacrilege.

"My God, my God, give to every member of this little

Congregation the grace to keep from falling into this misfortune! Believe me, Gentlemen, until we have a profound humility, and a complete contempt for ourselves, we shall never be capable of doing the work of God. If the Congregation of the Mission be not humble; if it be not persuaded that of itself it is unable to do any good, but is rather suited to spoil everything, it will never accomplish much. But when it possesses the spirit I have spoken of, when it lives by that spirit, then, Gentlemen, it will be ready for the designs of God because God makes use of humble souls to accomplish great and lasting good.

“Some theologians, explaining the Gospel where mention is made of the wise and foolish virgins, think that the parable should be interpreted of persons in Community who have retired from the world. If then it be true that half of these virgins are lost, alas! What should we not fear? And of what should not I, first of all, be fearful? But now, Gentlemen, let us take courage and not lose heart; let us give ourselves properly to God, renouncing ourselves and our satisfactions, our ease and vanity. . . . Let us do all the good we can, with all requisite perfection. It is not enough to assist our neighbor, to fast, meditate, and labor on the missions. Merely to do these things is good, but it is not enough. We must do them well, viz., in the spirit of our Lord, humbly and with an upright intention, that the name of His Father may be glorified, and His will accomplished.

“The fruit of a plant is not more excellent than the stalk. We are the stalks of those who will come after us, and it is not likely that their work will be more excellent than ours. If we do well, our example will inspire others, and so on from generation to generation. Those of an earlier generation teach those that follow concerning the manner in which virtue was practiced by the earlier fathers, and such teaching is carried on successively with the help of grace merited by the first fathers. Something similar happens in the world where certain families live in the fear of God from generation to generation. I have in mind a particular family. I knew the grandfather, and the father. Today I know the children, and they too are good Christians.

“How does this come about? It is because the parents by their good and holy lives, have merited the grace from God. For according to His promise, He will bless such families through innumerable generations. On the other hand, we see husbands and wives who live virtuously, yet everything melts away, and goes to ruin in their hands; nothing succeeds with them. What is the reason? It is because punishment merited by grievous faults of the parents passes on to their descendants according to what is written that God will punish a sinful father in his children to the fourth generation. Though this is understood principally with regard to temporal goods, it may apply in some way to spiritual things.

“Consequently, if we observe the Rules faithfully, if we practice well the virtues proper to a Missioner, we shall merit this grace from God for our children, viz., for those who come after us, who will do well as we have done. If we do badly, it is to be feared that they will do in like manner, or even worse because nature carries us along unceasingly in the direction of disorder. We may consider ourselves the fathers of those who will come after us. The Congregation is still in its cradle. It has just been born; only a few years have passed since its beginning.

“Two or three hundred years from now the members of the Congregation will look upon us as their fathers, and the confreres recently admitted will be so regarded, for all who have entered the Congregation within the first hundred years will be known as the first fathers. When you wish to give greater authority to an early patristic quotation, you say: ‘This passage is taken from a certain Father who lived in the first or second century.’ In much the same way it will be said: ‘Among the first priests of the Congregation of the Mission such a thing was done; they lived in such a manner, and such and such virtues were in flower.’ That being the case, Gentlemen, what example should we not leave to our successors? For, the good they accomplish will depend in a measure on what we ourselves are doing.

“Some of the Fathers of the Church are of the opinion that in order to increase the punishment of parents in hell, God makes known to them the evil things done by their

children on earth; and that the more such transgressions are multiplied, the more do the parents feel the vengeance of heaven in so far as the parents, by their bad example have been the cause of the sins committed by their children. And conversely, St. Augustine affirms that for the purpose of increasing the joy of fathers and mothers in heaven, God makes known to them the good their children are doing on earth. So, Gentlemen, what joy and consolation will be ours when God makes known to us that the Congregation is doing well, abounding in good works, observing faithfully the traditional order of time and activities, living in the practice of the virtues, and following the good example we shall have handed on as a heritage!

“Oh, wretch that I am, a man of words but not of deeds! Pray to God for me, my Brothers, that I may be converted! But now let us all give ourselves to God in earnest, and let us labor, let us aid the poor country people who are waiting for us!

CHAPTER 47 *Progress and Publicity*

A Missioner stationed at Artois published a brief account of the Congregation, setting forth its progress and its works. But in this he acted without necessary permission. Then he sent a copy to St. Vincent, expecting that he, the author, would receive an expression of gratitude. But the humble Vincent was of a different mind. On February 7, 1657, he wrote as follows: “I cannot find words equal to expressing the intense grief your publication has caused me. To publish what we are and what we do, is very much at variance with humility. If there is any good in us or in our way of life, it is from God, and He will make it known if He judges it expedient. Our part — poor, ignorant, and sinful men that we are — our part is to hide ourselves as incapable of good, and unworthy of notice.

“And, therefore, up to now God has given me the grace to refuse permission for the publication of anything that

would bring the Congregation into public notice or esteem; although I have been strongly urged to adopt a different policy, especially with regard to correspondence from Madagascar and the Hebrides. Much less would I have permitted the publication of matter that relates to the essence and spirit, birth and growth, and the functions and purpose of our Congregation. And I would to God, Sir, that what you have done, were still waiting to be done! But since that is not the case, and there is no remedy, I shall say no more. Only, I beg of you, do not take action in any matter concerning the Congregation, without first informing me."

When it was impossible to conceal from himself and others the virtue and success of the Congregation, he wished to protect humility, or even to make use of the circumstances to promote the virtue. He would say: "We should never fix our gaze on what is good in us, but strive to know what is evil and defective; for in this way we employ an effective means of preserving humility. We should not dwell in thought upon the gift of converting souls, or on any other exterior talents we may possess; for they are not ours; we are only stewards, and even with such gifts we can lose our souls.

"God may perform great things through our instrumentality, but that is no reason anyone should flatter himself, or entertain a feeling of self-complacency, or self-esteem. On the contrary, he should humble himself and acknowledge that he is merely a wretched instrument which God is pleased to employ just as He made use of the rod of Moses, an instrument which, though working prodigies, was none the less a piece of fragile wood.

"I beg of you, adopt these sentiments, and seek, as earthly recompense for your labors, nothing other than humiliation and ignominy, and, if it please God, death at the end. Should not a priest die of shame if he seeks reputation in the service of God? To die in bed, should that not be a grievous embarrassment for one who has pondered upon the 'torment of the Cross' whereby the Savior was recompensed for His labor? Recall that through the death of Jesus Christ we live the life of His grace; and that we must die to a life of sin

if we are to live a life of grace. Our life should be hidden in Jesus Christ, and full of Him. If we are to die as He died, we must live as He lived.

“Now these principles established, let us willingly accept ignominy and obloquy; let us disapprove of the honors that come our way, and of the good name and applause that are bestowed upon us. Let not your work be motivated by a desire to procure such things. Humble yourselves profoundly with the thought that though Judas received greater and more effective graces than you, he became eternally reprobate. And what will it profit the greatest and most talented preacher in the world to have the praise of his preaching upon every tongue throughout an entire province, or even to have converted thousands of souls — of what advantage will it be to him if he fails to save his own soul?”

St. Vincent recognized humility as the guardian of all the other virtues, especially of charity. “During the sixty-seven years that God has permitted me to live upon earth, I have pondered again and again upon the most effective means to acquire and preserve union and charity with God and our neighbor. I have not found any means better than holy humility. I have not come upon a means more effectual than the practice of humbling ourselves with reference to others, thinking no evil of anyone, reckoning ourselves as least and worst of all. It is pride and self-love that blind us, and move us to prefer our own opinions in contradiction to the opinions of the neighbor. And consequently the more humble a man is, the more charitable he will be toward the neighbor.

“Charity is the paradise of communities. It is the soul of the other virtues, while humility attracts and safeguards them. Humble communities are like valleys that receive mountain rains. Once we are empty of ourselves, God will fill us with Himself, for that sort of emptiness has a providential purpose. Let us therefore humble ourselves, my Brothers, knowing as we do, that God has cast His eyes upon this little Company to make it serviceable to His Church. But can we apply the name, ‘company,’ to a handful of men who are of poor birth, meager learning and mediocre virtue; men who, so to speak, are dregs and sweepings of humanity, the off-

scouring of the world? Two or three times a day I offer prayer to God, that He may destroy us if we prove useless for His purposes. Gentlemen, would we desire to be in the world without pleasing God, and procuring His glory?"

PART VII . OBEDIENCE AND SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER 48 *Obedience*

Vincent's obedience was profound, and admirably ordered. First, he kept himself in constant and absolute dependence on God, seeking to do His adorable will in everything. Hardly had he arrived in Paris when he placed himself under the direction of Father Berulle whom he obeyed as he would obey God Himself. On a word from him he assumed either pastoral duty, or service in the Gondi household. He saw God in all spiritual and temporal rulers, and obeyed them alike in sorrow and in joy, in honor and in humiliation.

He obeyed the Pope as the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and Sovereign Pastor of the Church. And he obeyed the Bishops as the successors of the Apostles; never would he perform or permit any ecclesiastical functions without their consent. If a Bishop refused the services of Vincentian Missioners, he withdrew them immediately, with a letter of submission to this effect: "We are entirely unworthy to serve God under so great a prelate as yourself. When I seek for a reason why Divine Providence would have such judgment passed upon us, I find no other than my sins" (to the Bishop of Perigeux, April, 1651).

In obedience to a Bishop—St. Francis de Sales—he accepted and continued for many years the spiritual direction of the Visitation Nuns despite the burden of other duties, his infirmities, and advanced age. "I am a child of obedience," he wrote one day, "and it seems to me that if the Bishop should command me to go to the farthest place in his diocese, there to remain all my life, I would obey just as if our Lord had issued the command, and that the retirement or employment assigned me would be a foretaste

of Paradise because I would be accomplishing the good pleasure of God."

Though possessed of an episcopal mandate and full power to conduct a mission, he rendered obedience to the parish priest. Only with the pastor's consent, and according to his wishes, would he undertake any work within a parish.

In matters whether of great or of slight importance he complied with the will of the King. A coadjutor Brother, having found some partridge eggs within the acreage of St. Lazare, put them under a hen. When the birds hatched he put them in a cage, and brought them to Vincent. The Saint, unresponsive for a few moments, said presently: "Come, let us walk about the grounds." And as soon as they had entered an open field, he told the Brother to open the cage and release the birds. "My Brother," he then said, "you knew quite well that in the place where you found the eggs, the King had forbidden the taking of partridges. Do not, I beg of you, repeat the offense."

One day a nobleman said to the Queen: "There are few persons attached to the service of King and country with so sincere, constant, and disinterested a fidelity as that of Father Vincent." "Right you are," she answered, "Father Vincent is a true servant of God, and of his Prince." In deference to the Queen, he undertook missions at St. Germain and Fontainebleau. And when, at the latter place, obstacles were encountered, he would not recall his Missioners until he had received the Queen's permission to do so.

He was deferential toward the advice and opinions of other persons. On the advice of Father Duval, his Missioners began residence at St. Lazare. At the recommendation of a priest who had formerly been Prior of St. Lazare, he acquired a farm at Orsigny. In general, he was attentive to the advice and the wishes of others unless they appeared to compromise the rights of truth and charity. Where a matter of indifference was in question, he chose to set aside his knowledge and experience, for he felt that by so doing he was acting with the spirit of humility and obedience.

He did not indulge in contradiction or contention. And when contradicted, he simply proposed substantiating rea-

sons, and then maintained a humble silence. But not always; if the service or the glory of God was at stake, he was unalterably firm in his convictions and in his determinations. . . . "I will yield as much as you like," he would say, "provided that God be not offended." But even in such case, he held his ground with so much courtesy, kindness and humility, that his firmness was more acceptable than the deference of others.

The virtue of St. Vincent exemplified so admirably in his own life, he recommended to others, and first of all to the members of his Congregation. In the book of Community Constitutions he wrote: "We shall obey with exactitude all our Superiors, considering them in our Lord, and our Lord in them. First of all we must render obedience and reverence faithfully and sincerely to our Holy Father the Pope."

He particularized in reference to foreign missions: "The power of sending Missioners to various nations resides exclusively in the person of the Holy Father. It is his prerogative to dispatch ecclesiastics throughout the whole world for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls; and they who are sent, are under obligation to obey. In accordance with this principle I have offered the Little Company to God to go whithersoever the Sovereign Pontiff may ordain. With relation to the Pope we should be like the servants of the centurion, as related in the Gospel. In response to the Pope's command, we must go or come or do what he wishes to be done. This 'Little Company' should be disposed at all times to obey, leaving if necessary all things else. When it is the good pleasure of His Holiness to send us, one and all, to the ends of the earth, the Little Company will go most willingly."

While reserving to himself and his successors the interior control of the Congregation, he requested of the Holy See that the Community be subject to the Bishops in all functions involving services to the neighbor missions, for instance, conferences, retreats, and the management of seminaries. In matters of this nature, nothing was to be done without episcopal consent and approval. He recommended that nothing be done in a parish, were it only — as he expressed

it — the moving of a straw — without the approval of the pastor. He wrote: "It is our custom to labor in serving the people, with the approval of the pastor, and never to disregard his wishes. And at the beginning and at the close of every mission we receive their blessing in a spirit of obedience."

He preached the obligation of rendering obedience to civil rulers. "Following the example of the first Christians," he said, "we should always obey the King faithfully and simply without ever complaining about his orders, or murmuring against them under any pretext. And even when forfeiture of property is in question, or the loss of one's life, let us willingly make the sacrifice in a spirit of obedience — unless the divine will forbids; for Kings represent the sovereign power of God in our regard."

Carrying the principle to a further consequence, he referred to the teaching of St. Peter, that we submit to every rational creature for the love of God. "Let us regard all other persons," he explained, "as our betters, and ourselves therefore as inferior to the least of them. And accordingly let our attitude and manner toward them be characterized by deference, accommodation, and kindness. We would indeed be blessed if God should establish us firmly in this practice."

This advice he commended particularly to the members of the same religious family. "In a community," he said, "the members should accommodate themselves to each other. Animated by that spirit, the learned should stoop to the level of the ignorant in everything except sin or error. The wise and prudent should speak and act simply with the humble and simple, 'do not set your mind on high things but condescend to the lowly' (Rom. 12:16). In the same spirit we should not only approve the sentiments of others, but ever prefer them to our own, believing that the neighbor is more enlightened, and has better natural or supernatural qualities than we. But we must be on our guard against making concessions in things that are evil, for in such case, concession would be no longer a virtue, but a serious fault proceeding either from a lax conscience or from pusillanimity."

So minded, St. Vincent would not be one to tolerate a disregard of orders and regulations within his own Congregation. Father Lambert, though First Assistant to the Superior General, was not exempt from the firm control of such discipline. One evening the Saint kept him at work very late, and, as the Assistant was leaving the room, he instructed him to sleep late in the morning. Father Lambert, however, was first at morning prayer. Vincent ordered him to kneel down, and in the presence of the entire Community, coadjutor brothers and young seminarists included, he administered the following admonition: "Sir, obedience is better than sacrifice. A fault less grave than yours nearly cost Jonathan his life, and it threw the army of Israel into disorder."

CHAPTER 49 *Spiritual Navigation*

He said to the Daughters of Charity: "You have doubtless heard tell what sailors do when they are on the open sea, and sometimes more than five hundred leagues from land. So long as the laws of navigation are observed, they are fully confident that all is well. But when the rules of navigation are disregarded, and the sails become unmanageable they run considerable risk of shipwreck. Now, a religious community is a small ship afloat in an open sea where grave dangers are multiplied. In that situation, fidelity to your vocation, good behavior, and constant observance of the Rules, give assurance of safety. Have no fear therefore; you are aboard the very ship wherein God has inspired you to take passage.

"Meanwhile you need an able pilot who will keep watch while you are asleep. And who are they, think you, that exercise the office of navigation? Your Superiors, for it is their office to direct the course, so that you may arrive safely in port. This happiness will be yours if you obey them punctually, and are faithful in the practice of the Rule."

According to testimony given by the Nuns who were stationed at the first Visitation Convent in Paris, St. Vincent

frequently recommended to them an exact obedience even in the least particulars of their Community Rule. He took special satisfaction, they relate, in forming their Community in obedience and exactitude. "These two virtues," he explained, "when practiced perseveringly, constitute religion. To encourage one's self to such practice, it is well to discuss these virtues among ourselves, and fix our attention upon their excellence and their beauty.

"We should love them because God is pleased with religious who are faithful in observing them, and because the divine Spouse of souls, in His love for them is displeased at even a minor delay in obedience. A truly religious soul having vowed obedience in the presence of the entire Church, should fulfill with exactitude what she has promised. If we are lax in small things, we shall soon be lax in something greater. The well-being of a creature is to be found in doing the will of God, particularly in the faithful practice of obedience, and in the exact observance of Community Rule.

"We cannot render a more agreeable homage to God than by practicing obedience, for thereby He accomplishes His designs in our regard. Obedience procures the divine glory. At the same time, it brings about the destruction of self-love and self-interest. . . . This practice endows a soul with the true and perfect freedom proper to the children of God."

He strongly recommended that the nuns renounce their own judgment, by submitting to the will of Superiors. "Obedience," he said, "consists not only in doing immediately what is ordered, but also in holding ourselves in readiness to do whatever may be commanded. We must look upon our Superiors as holding, in our regard, the place of Jesus Christ; and in consequence we should render them very great respect.

"To murmur against them is, in a sense, a form of interior apostasy. Exterior apostasy consists in putting off the garb of religion, abandoning the Community. Similarly, one apostatizes interiorly by separating from Superiors, contradicting them in one's own mind, maintaining one's own ideas in opposition to their judgments. So to act is the greatest misfortune that can befall a Community. A religious avoids that

evil by maintaining a holy indifference, and submitting to the guidance of her Superiors."

Developing the subject further, he said, "As basic to the submission that should thrive in a Community, the following facts deserve careful consideration: (1) The position of Superiors as vicegerents of Jesus Christ. (2) The trouble they take providing for our advancement in spiritual perfection. Sometimes they pass a sleepless night; often they are deeply troubled . . . and their anxiety is all the greater because of the account they will have to render to God. (3) The recompense that has been promised to obedient souls, a recompense that belongs also to earthly life. (4) The punishment which disobedience has reason to fear . . . a punishment dramatically and disturbingly exemplified by the chastisement inflicted upon Core, Dathan, and Abiron for their insubordination to Moses as the representative of God. (5) The obedience of Jesus Christ. Contemplating His 'obedience unto death' for our salvation, we, poor, miserable creatures, will be wretched indeed unless we subject ourselves to obedience for love of Him."

In conferences to the members of his own Double Family, he proposed motives for practicing obedience: "Certainly there must be something very great and divine in this virtue since our Savior loved it so much from the moment of His birth to the hour of His death, since it controlled all the actions of His life. He obeyed His heavenly Father, His mother and His foster father; 'He was subject to them.' He acknowledged the authority of those in office of earthly rule, whether they were virtuous or sinful. His entire life was cast in this mold. 'He became obedient unto death, even to death upon a cross.' That was the reason why His heavenly Father exalted Him.

"My Savior, what then is the virtue of obedience? How excellent it must be since You found it worthy of Yourself! How beautiful an example our Lord has left us; what need of other motives? If we would have another motive, it will be found in His words, 'He that does not renounce himself, is not worthy of Me.'

"By disobeying we sin more or less grievously according

to the gravity of the disobedience . . . and when the disobedience is in important matters we may sin mortally by giving scandal, especially where contempt of authority is involved." Coming then to the nature of the virtue, he continued: "It consists in a disposition to do what our Superiors ordain. . . . With such disposition we go straight to God. A Superior who issues an order can indeed fail in so doing, since he is neither infallible nor impeccable. But he who renders obedience — provided the matter involved is not sinful — is assured of doing the divine will, for God cannot mislead us. Our Lord required that the people obey the Scribes and Pharisees and priests of the ancient Law, though for the most part they were sinful to the point of public rebuke at His hands. 'Obey them,' He said, 'do as they tell you, but do not follow their example.' But if to obey such people had been wrong, how could He have required others to obey them? How could He Himself have yielded such obedience? They were in position of authority and dignity; hence the obligation to obey them according to the word of Christ, 'He who hears you, hears Me.'

"Let us then follow the beautiful example our Lord has given us; 'I do always the things that please him.' And that obedience, begun during His life on earth, continues now that He is glorious in heaven. He allows a celebrant, even though he be a sinful priest, to raise and lower Him at will in the Holy Eucharist. How truly great must be an obedience that endures even after death! My Lord, from eternity You made a resolution to obey. Grant us the grace to be of like mind with You, to obey the Rule, to obey the command of authority, the will, whether expressed or implied, and even the intention, of our Superiors!"

CHAPTER 50 *Qualities of Obedience*

The manner of obedience is explained in a conference to the Daughters of Charity, under date of June 25, 1642. "We must obey promptly, cheerfully, with submission of judgment,

and with the intention of pleasing God. Obedience should be prompt because dilatoriness and delay greatly diminish the merit, disedify the neighbor, and sadden Superiors who, in such case, would rather perform the task themselves than impose a command upon someone else. Our conformity should proceed from good will, not from a concession to force and constraint. It should not be motivated by fear of arousing displeasure, and suffering a reprimand in consequence.

“Our obedience should be characterized by submission of judgment. That is to say, while doing what is commanded, and in the manner desired by our Superior, our practical judgment should be one of approval, regardless of what our speculative reasoning on the matter may be. And finally, our intention should be to please God. Oh, what a happiness for a poor and wretched creature to have the power to do what is pleasing to God! To do His holy will is to do what the angels do. On the contrary, to act of one’s own will and choice, how excellent soever the thing may be in itself, is to incur the danger of doing the will of the devil, for he transforms himself into an angel of light in order to deceive us by an appearance of some little good.”

In conferences delivered April 7, 1650, and May 23, 1655, he spoke of the increase of merit attaching to a virtuous action performed from a motive of obedience. “There is the merit of a work that is good in itself,” he said, “and there is the merit contributed by obedience through which the good work is done. A good work of that kind is like a painting from the hand of a great master, as for instance, a canvas done by Michelangelo. Such a work of art has an intrinsic worth of perhaps 10 crowns. But by reason of the great artist, its value is 20 or 30 crowns. Thus a good action has its own merit, but obedience gives it additional merit. Moreover, it can give spiritual worth to actions which in themselves are valueless.

“Imagine a dress made of beautiful silk. The dress is resplendent by reason of the silk, but its beauty is enhanced if gold lace be added, and so it is with good actions performed out of obedience; they are deserving of two rewards. Indifferent actions under obedience, are more pleasing to

God than are good works untouched by obedience which like the Midas touch turns everything into gold.”

To Mademoiselle Le Gras who, out of obedience, had relinquished one of her pious undertakings, he wrote: “Our Lord will perhaps draw greater glory from your submission than from all the good you would have been able to accomplish, a beautiful diamond is of greater value than a mountain of common stones, and one act of acquiescence and submission is worth more than a number of good works performed in behalf of the neighbor.”

On May 28, 1659, he wrote to a cleric: “Your letter has informed me of your trouble. I fully believe that God makes you feel the unhappy consequences of a change sought by your own will; for it is His want to make known to those who serve Him, that peace of heart is to be found in obedience, never in following their own inclination. You will never enjoy peace of mind unless you renounce yourself; for He has declared that in order to follow Him, we must make this renunciation, and carry our cross every day. You have heard this a hundred times, yet you are not applying the lesson to yourself. At least you have manifested a contrary-mindedness by frequently petitioning a change despite my entreaty that you exercise patience where you are. You were having difficulties, and I have explained that you would have them everywhere.

“It became necessary to satisfy your insistence, but the resulting contentment did not last long; you yourself tell me so. Our Lord calls obedience a yoke in order to signify that its observance is a painful servitude for those who wish to escape from its requirements, but a pleasant and agreeable way of life for those who love it and are submissive to its authority. My dear Brother, do you wish to find peace of heart, and innumerable blessings from God? Then do not listen any more to your own will or judgment. You have already sacrificed them to God; be careful not to reclaim them. Let yourself be guided, and rest assured that God will be your guide. He will conduct you to the liberty of supernatural filiation, to an abundance of consolation, to great progress in virtue, and everlasting happiness.

"I say all these things to you because you propose that I change you again. Otherwise I would have imitated the goodness of God who never reproaches us with faults that He has pardoned. I would have dismissed yours from my mind if I had not seen that you were in danger of committing the same again. And that is the reason I am drawing your attention to the trouble you will bring upon yourself unless your previous experience makes you more submissive. Consider it as quite certain that if you should be sent back because of your insistence, to the place whence you have come, you would say what you are now saying, viz., that your situation is a consequence of your own choice, not of God's will; and this thought will arouse within you a ceaseless inquietude.

"Now, in order to remove the sting of conscience regarding the place where you are now stationed, remain there because holy obedience ordains it; and look upon your appointment as an expression, not of your choice, but of the divine good pleasure. Beg His pardon for the past, and then think no more of it. Resolve to set aside your own judgment if you do not wish to be led astray, for it is of a nature to cause trouble whithersoever you go.

"I pray that our Lord will animate you with His own spirit, He whose obedience was so complete as to bear comparison with a pack animal. Were we in such disposition, God would soon lead us to perfection."

Relating an illustrative incident, he said: "A few days ago a Captain spoke to me as follows: 'If I should perceive that my commanding officer had issued an erroneous order, and that I would lose my life in obeying, and if by a word of explanation I could have the order withdrawn, I would not utter a word!' Behold, Gentlemen, the contrast between our manner of obedience and that of a soldier; how unfavorable a light, before God, it throws upon us!"

Then suddenly, reflecting upon his position as Superior, he exclaimed: "Wretch that I am, urging obedience to a man who disobeys God! Who disobeys holy Mother Church! One who from childhood was disobedient to father and mother! Almost all my life has been characterized by disobedience. Alas! Gentlemen, to whom do you render obedi-

ence? To one who, like the Scribes and Pharisees, is full of sin.

“But this will make your obedience more meritorious. Reflecting a little while ago on my disobedience, I recalled that when my father brought me, then a child, to the city, I was ashamed of him because he was badly dressed and somewhat lame. Miserable wretch that I am, how disobedient I have been! For that and for all the scandals I have given you, I beg pardon of the entire congregation, and I conjure you to pray God for me that He may pardon me these faults, and inspire me with sincere contrition.”

CHAPTER 51 *Christian Simplicity*

In St. Vincent simplicity shone with all its modest brightness. It attracted all those with whom he came in contact. It contributed largely to the success of his immense undertakings because it won for him, not only the blessings of God, but likewise the confidence and affection of his fellow men. A characteristic of great men, of true virtue and of real genius, this excellence as manifested in St. Vincent held a special charm for Bossuet. With evident feeling, the Bishop of Meaux gave frequent testimony to the admirable simplicity of the holy old man, and, himself grown old, he paid one final tribute in a letter to Pope Clement XI. It was a simplicity all the more wonderful inasmuch as it survived and grew strong in dealings with the world, amid the hypocrisies of a royal court, and intricacies of business; that is to say, in contact with dissimulation, deceit and duplicity that should naturally have withered and destroyed it.

He spoke eloquently on the subject. “To appear good externally, and to be much different internally, is to be like the hypocritical Pharisees; it is to imitate the demon who transforms himself into an angel of light. And since prudence of the flesh, and hypocrisy are dominant in this corrupt age — to the great prejudice of the Christian spirit — we must combat and vanquish them by a true and sincere simplicity.”

“God is simple,” he said again; “wherever you discover Christian simplicity, there you find God. The wise man says that he who walks with simplicity, walks with confidence, whereas they that use craftiness and duplicity are in constant fear lest their cunning be detected, and lest in consequence other people cease to have confidence in them.”

Then there is the conference delivered on March 14, 1659, where he spoke as follows: “In sending His Apostles to preach the Gospel throughout the world, Christ commended to them this virtue in particular as one of the most important and necessary to draw down upon them the grace of heaven, and also to dispose favorably the hearts of their hearers. But He spoke, not only to His Apostles, but likewise to all those whom His providence predestined for the work of preaching the Gospel, of instructing and converting souls.

“Consequently, it is to us that Jesus Christ is speaking when He commends this virtue of simplicity so agreeable to God. Imagine, my Brothers, what consolation and happiness come to those who are numbered among the truly simple when they receive assurance from God’s own word, that He delights to dwell among them, and converse with them; for ‘his communication is with the simple’ (Prov. 3:32).

“The Savior declared: ‘I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones’ (Mt. 11:25). By these words He indicates how pleased He is with simplicity. He acknowledges gratefully that the doctrine which He has learned from the heavenly Father and which He diffuses among men, is known only to little and simple souls, and is not understood by the wise and prudent of the world. Certainly these words, upon reflection, should alarm us who run after knowledge as though our happiness depended upon it. Of course a missionary priest should possess learning, but such as is necessary to fulfill the duties of the sacred ministry, not to satisfy ambition and curiosity.

“A priest should study for the acquisition of knowledge, but with moderation as the Apostle has counseled. Not all study in that manner. There are some who pride themselves on a sort of universal understanding, who wish to be con-

sidered clever, accomplished, and capable in everything. From such persons and from the wise and learned of the world, God withdraws a knowledge concerning the truths and virtues of Christianity. This knowledge He gives to simple and artless people, frequently to poor people—a fact which is verified by the difference apparent between the faith of poor people in the country, and the faith of persons in the society world.

“For my part — as I can affirm — long experience has demonstrated to my satisfaction, that a strong and practical faith, and a true spirit of religion, are more commonly found among poor and simple people. God is pleased to enrich them with fervent faith. They believe and relish the words of everlasting life that Christ has left us in His Gospel. As a general rule they bear illness patiently, privations, too, and other afflictions. Such things they endure without murmuring or complaining, except a little and rarely.

“Moreover, everyone feels an attraction for persons who are simple and candid, persons who refuse to employ cunning or deceit. They are popular because they act ingenuously, and speak sincerely; their lips are ever in accord with their hearts. They are esteemed and loved everywhere, even at Court. In all well-regulated communities they are treated with affection and confidence, and — what is worthy of remark — even people who are lacking in candor and simplicity of speech and thought, admire this excellent quality in the neighbor. Let us endeavor then, my Brothers, to become pleasing to God by the practice of this virtue; let us imitate the confreres who, with the aid of His grace, afford us the inspiration of their good example.

“But to understand and appreciate the excellence of this virtue, we must know that it brings us to God by making us like unto Him who in essence is absolutely simple. Hence what is natural to God should become our possession by means of this virtue so far as our weakness and misery will permit. We should be simple in thought, intention, affection, and action. We should speak simply, and act straightforwardly without guile or dissimulation, looking only to God whom only we should wish to please.

“Simplicity then comprises not only truth and purity of intention, but also the power of removing from us all deceitfulness and duplicity. And as finding expression chiefly in words, it obliges us to say what we think, with the purpose of pleasing God. Not that we are under obligation to disclose all our thoughts, to say everything we have in mind; not at all, for this virtue is controlled by prudence which determines what is good and appropriate, and when it is time to be silent; when time to speak.

“For example, if I make a statement that is good both substantially and circumstantially, I should speak just as I think. But if among the things to be spoken there is a useless or improper circumstance, that circumstance must be left unsaid. Circumstances of that nature include whatever would give offense to God or the neighbor, whatever would promote our praise, or procure for ourselves a carnal or temporal gratification.

“In regard to our actions, this virtue proceeds openly and straightforwardly, keeping God always in view, whether in business transactions, or activities and exercises of piety. It excludes all hypocrisy, artifice, and vain pretense. For example, a person gives a present under pretense of personal affection whereas the sole purpose of giving is to receive a return gift of greater value. According to the spirit of the world, this is permissible. Nevertheless it is contrary to the spirit of simplicity to pretend one thing while purposing another.

“We must conclude therefore that this virtue does not reside in persons who because of human respect wish to be other than they really are; or in persons who perform good works in order to appear virtuous, or in people who keep a number of superfluous books so as to be looked upon as learned; or in those who strive to preach well that they may win praise and applause. Now I ask you, my Brothers, is not this virtue beautiful and desirable, and are we not just and reasonable to be on our guard against all dissimulation and artifice in both work and action? But in order to acquire simplicity, we must practice it. We can become truly simple only by acts of simplicity, with the aid of divine grace which we should seek often in prayer.”

When sending a Missioner to a province where the people were noted for their shrewdness, he gave this advice: "You are going to a country where the people for the most part, are clever and crafty. For that reason, the best way to be of use to them is to act with great simplicity according to the maxims of the Gospel, and the spirit of our Lord."

Another Missioner regarded his friendly relations with externs as an opportunity of procuring advantage for the Congregation, and with that purpose in mind, he wished to publish what he wrote to certain persons. St. Vincent replied to the proposal as follows: "Alas, in what sort of amusement are you indulging? Where is the simplicity of a Missioner, which aims directly at God? If you do not see any good in these persons, do not say so, but if what you see is good, then speak of it so as to honor God from whom all good proceeds. According to the gospel account, a certain man, addressing the Savior called Him 'good Master,' but our Lord reprov'd him because the man's intention was not pure. How much more will He have reason to reprove you if you praise sinful men to win their favor, or to gain some other imperfect objective, although that objective be ordained to an ulterior purpose that is good. For I am convinced that when you seek to be esteemed and loved by other people, you do so for the purpose of procuring the glory of God. But remember that God does not like duplicity, and that if we are to be truly simple, we must consider only Him."

His insistence on simplicity had special reference to preaching, where all hankering after esteem and praise was to be discarded absolutely. "We desire to make an impression, to have other people speak about us; we love to be praised, to hear people say that we are succeeding well and are doing wonders. Behold the infernal monster! Concealing himself under some fine pretext, he poisons with deadly venom the hearts of those who listen to him. Accursed pride! Corrupter and destroyer of what is good! Source of what is evil! Because of you, a preacher speaks, not for Jesus Christ, but for himself, and so instead of building up, he wrecks and ruins."

CHAPTER 52 *Simplicity in Preaching*

"Today," said St. Vincent, "I was present at an instruction given by a prelate who was addressing a group of ordinands. At the conclusion of his talk I went to his room and said to him: 'Your Excellency, you converted me.' He replied, 'How is that?' 'Because,' I said, 'you spoke so plainly, so simply; I was really impressed; and I could not refrain from thanking God.' 'Well, Father,' he answered, 'I must confess to you that I might easily have said something more polished, more learned; but if I had spoken in that manner, I would have offended God.'

"Behold, Gentlemen, the sentiments of that prelate, sentiments that should animate everyone who truly seeks God, and sincerely desires to procure the salvation of souls. If you act in like manner, I can assure you that God will bless what you say, that He will inspire your words with force and virtue. Yes, God will be with you, and He will achieve His purpose by means of your labors, for He delights to dwell with the simple. He helps them, blesses their works and undertakings.

"On the contrary, it would be impious to suppose that God would wish to favor or assist a person who seeks glory from other men, and feeds on vanity. That however is the manner of those who preach themselves, and who, in their sermons, do not speak with either simplicity or humility. Such persons destroy themselves, and it cannot be asserted that God would assist a person to destroy himself.

"If you only knew how great an evil it is to intrude one's self into the teaching office with the purpose of preaching in a manner at variance with that of Christ, His Apostles, and many great saints and servants of God, you would turn away from it with horror. God knows that during three consecutive days, three times I knelt before a priest (he was then a member of the Congregation, but is not such any longer) to beg of him with all the urgency I could muster, to preach and speak simply and to follow the directions that had been given to him, but I was unable to gain

his consent. He delivered the ordination conferences, but they were ineffectual, fruitless. All that beautiful array of ideas and chosen periods, went up in smoke.

“In truth, it is not the fanfare of words, that is profitable to souls, but simplicity and humility, which draw down into the hearts of men the grace of Jesus Christ. What is there in us to attract the ordinands — theologians, bachelors, and licentiates of Sorbonne and Navarre, who come to our house? If truth be told, it is not the learning or doctrine that we offer them, for they have more of those advantages than we. No, it is the humility and simplicity with which, by God’s grace, we perform our services in their behalf. They come here to learn virtue, and once they perceive that the light of virtue is becoming dim, they will withdraw. Consequently we should wish and pray that God grant grace to the entire Congregation and to each one of us in particular, the grace of preaching the truths of the Gospel in the way our Lord was wont to teach them, for thus everyone will be able to understand what we say, and gain some advantage from it.”

To those who preferred an elevated and ornate style, he said, “Why all this vain display? What is the purpose? — to show that one is an elegant rhetorician or learned theologian? A person who acts in this manner, is going about it the wrong way. Perhaps he will be admired by persons who lack understanding. But if he wishes to gain esteem from the wise, and to convince them that he is an eloquent speaker, he must know how to persuade his hearers to accept what he approves; and he must be able to dissuade them from following what he wishes them to avoid.

“And such power of persuasion and dissuasion will not be found in nicely chosen words, well-rounded periods, or in an unusual manner of expressing subtle ideas, or in delivering a discourse in a declamatory voice that overshoots the mark. Do such preachers achieve their purpose? Do they persuade people to love piety? Are the people moved to repentance? Are the confessionals crowded with penitent sinners? Yet such things, presumably, these great preachers are endeavoring to accomplish.

“As a matter of fact, their objective is to acquire a reputa-

tion, to have people say: 'Truly, that man preaches well; he is eloquent; his thoughts are beautiful, and he expresses them gracefully.' Behold, that is the fruit of their preaching! They ascend the pulpit in order to preach, not God, but themselves. They employ — oh, what a crime! — so holy a thing, the word of God, to nourish and strengthen their vanity. My Divine Savior!"

Pursuing the subject, St. Vincent then answered certain objections to a simple style of preaching. Objection: "We shall forfeit all honor and esteem by this too simple and trivial a method." Answer: "You will thereby lose your good name! By preaching as Jesus Christ preached, you will lose your good name! He, then, the Son of God, had no honor! Does a preacher win a good name by avoiding the simple and familiar language of our Lord? Does he win a reputation by burdening the word of God with affectation, and covering it with a mask? Would it not be as well to say that He who is eternal Wisdom did not know exactly how to speak, that He lacked understanding in this matter? What a blasphemy!"

He said again: "Things of natural beauty are far more attractive than those that are painted and artificial; and similarly, simple and familiar discourse finds a more favorable acceptance than a mode of speech that is labored and affected."

He trained his sons in this simple style of preaching, and he himself practiced it even in old age. Each one in turn had to speak in his presence. In the evening he gave an account of the sermon, and invited analysis by the principal members of the Community, and when someone had spoken with studied carefulness, St. Vincent took pleasure in pointing out the vanity of the performance. Then with his usual charity, he would say: "Believe me, endeavor to preach according to the style of Jesus Christ. If He had wished, this divine Savior could have said marvelous things concerning profound mysteries, employing proportionate ideas and language; for He was the Word and Wisdom of the eternal Father. Nevertheless we know how He preached — simply and humbly so as to adapt Himself to the people, and to give us a model for our imitation in preaching His words."

When he sent ecclesiastics of his conference on a mission to be given in the Faubourg St. Germain, they took the liberty to explain that there was considerable difference between a mission given in a city such as Paris, and a mission preached in the country. "With different enemies, different arms," they said. "The simple and familiar language that succeeds with people of the rural areas, would be met with laughter and ridicule in the Faubourg."

"What is that I hear, Gentlemen?" interrupted Vincent. "You have spoken words inspired by human prudence, and perhaps by self-love. You wish therefore to destroy the power of the cross by depending upon purely natural means. Believe me, the method God has blessed in your country mission, is the one He will bless in the mission you are about to undertake. Your purpose is to combat the spirit of the world, which is the spirit of pride, and you will be victorious only through the spirit of Jesus Christ, which is the spirit of simplicity and humility. Like the divine Savior, seek not your own glory but the glory of His Father. Following His example, be ready to suffer contempt and, if need be, contradiction and persecution. When you speak the language that the Son of God has employed, it is not you but Himself who will be speaking through you. Thus you will merit to become instruments of that mercy which alone moves the most obdurate hearts, and converts the most rebellious minds."

CHAPTER 53 *A Mission in Piedmont*

Father Martin, Superior of the Vincentian house in Turin, Italy, was anxious to inaugurate his work in Piedmont, with an elaborate mission. The letter written by St. Vincent on that occasion will serve as an appropriate conclusion to the previous chapter.

"No, indeed," he wrote, "you must on the contrary, begin with a small mission that will not make a great showing. To begin thus conservatively will appear to you unfortunate be-

cause it would seem that in order to win esteem we should make a showing by a large and splendid mission indicative of the works and spirit that characterize the Congregation. May God withhold me from such a desire! In conformity with our poverty and the spirit of Christianity, our part is to avoid ostentation, and love retirement, to seek contempt and humiliation as Jesus Christ has done. When you resemble Him, He will co-operate with you.

“The late Bishop of Geneva understood this truth very well. The first time he preached in Paris, on the occasion of his last visit there, people flocked from all quarters of the city to hear him. The Court was present, and many others, an audience worthy of so celebrated a preacher. Everyone was expecting a discourse befitting the power of real genius. But the Bishop merely recounted the life of St. Martin. His purpose in so doing was to humble himself before many illustrious persons. He was the first to profit by that act of heroic humility.

“In relating the affair later to Mme. de Chantal and myself, he said: ‘Truly, it was a humiliation for our Sisters. They were expecting that before so fine a gathering of people I would speak eloquently. During the sermon a girl remarked: “See how poorly this mountaineer is preaching! It was a lot of trouble for him to come so far in order to say what he is saying, and to try the patience of so many people!”’ This is the way saints subdue a natural penchant for display and renown, and this is the way we should act, choosing lowly undertakings in preference to others that attract public attention. This is the way to choose abjection in preference to vain glory. I certainly hope that you and the members of your house will establish this holy practice as a foundation, so that the superstructure will rest upon a rock, and not upon shifting sand.”

PART VIII . PRUDENCE AND POVERTY

CHAPTER 54 *Prudence*

The prudence and wisdom of St. Vincent won for him universal confidence. During his lifetime St. Lazare was known as the house of the seer, and people came, whether in public or private capacity, to consult him concerning matters of Church and State. In France during fifty years, nothing of importance, religious or political, was done without his assistance or advice. In time of civil disturbance he was consulted by representatives of conflicting parties, such as the Court and followers of Cardinal Mazarin. In the days of Jansenist controversy, appeals were made to his prudent intervention, and it was mainly owing to him, that the truth of Catholic faith was victorious, that faithful communities were safeguarded, and that a number of those who had gone over to Jansenism, were brought back to the Church.

The Papal Nuncios, Bagni and Piccolomini, were accustomed to seek his advice in relation to important questions of the Church in France and throughout the world. Bishops, Abbots, directors of souls, proposed to him most serious and delicate matters. Major Superiors and local Superiors requested his help in the work of reforming religious orders, or local communities. At another time a simple novice might come to ask his advice concerning his vocation or a change from one state of life to a different state. Pastors and other priests proposed to him difficulties of sacred ministry and of personal conscience. Noblemen and ladies depended upon him to make decisions regarding their projects for the glory of God, plans for assisting the neighbor and for the advancement of their own sanctification. Generous persons, families, communities, everywhere felt the influence of his prudence.

The reason why confidence was placed in him universally was doubtless, his reputation for sanctity, the grace that accompanied his charitable assistance, and his habitual prudence. He was a truly wise man; his, in full measure, was the good sense which Bossuet terms the master of human life. He was a man of the middle way where what is true and good is to be found. He kept clear of both extremes which end in error and failure.

His prudence could not be misled by a pretext of good; in this connection he had initiated the saying, "What is better is an enemy of what is good," and again, "The human mind is active and restless. The keenest minds are not always the best unless they be also very circumspect. We walk safely when we walk in the path that has been trodden by the majority of wise men."

He founded his prudence on God whose will he was careful to consult at every turn; and on Jesus Christ whose teaching and example he studied in order to shape accordingly his counsel and his conduct. In a variety of situations he would propose to himself the question, "What would our Lord have said or done in like circumstances, in a difficulty such as this?"

According to the word of Divine Wisdom, "There is a time to keep silence." Vincent knew how to remain silent when speech would violate a secret, wound charity, compromise an affair, or when it would be simply useless. He could listen without ever interrupting—a rare accomplishment. When interrupted, he at once stopped speaking, but, as nothing could turn him from inflexible wisdom, he resumed the thread of his discourse as soon as the interruption ended.

From a habit of reflection he spoke slowly. His reasonings were clear and convincing, expressed plainly and with precision. Animated with a gentle warmth, they carried persuasion to the heart as well as conviction to the mind. If he was the first one to speak, he analyzed the question with such order, precision, such understanding and completeness, that his listeners would say to themselves, "That is the case." Moreover he exercised good judgment in adapting himself

to the minds he dealt with and in consequence a man of mediocre ability felt as much at ease conversing with him as with an equal; while, on the other hand, a person of unusual talent was not left with an impression of his own superiority.

St. Vincent was a discerning judge of human character as well as of doctrinal matters and external affairs. Perceiving the ability of others, he adapted his words and actions accordingly. According to their strength or weakness, good or bad qualities, he assigned proportionate offices and employments. He had a way of discovering the truth even when appearances were extremely deceptive.

Such intellectual strength and clarity imparted a sureness to his direction of conscience, a reliability to his decisions, a firmness and resolution to whatever policy he carried into effect. When consulted he was occasionally slow to respond, for his custom was to seek first the light of divine guidance, and the counsel of wise men. But when he gave his answer, it bore the mark of wisdom and experience.

Guided by good sense in virtue of which he felt the need of acquiring a previous knowledge of a project, its proper outcome, and appropriate means, he was inclined to be rather slow and deliberate in committing himself to an undertaking. His Missioners, especially the more youthful members of the Congregation, used to complain about his hesitations and his delays. The following letter is typical of his replies to any such protest (one to Father Codoing, Superior of the Mission at Annecy, Dec. 1641). "You will object that I am too slow, that sometimes you have to wait six months for a reply that might have been given within a month, and that meanwhile opportunities are lost, and nothing is accomplished. I answer by admitting the truth of your allegation. I take too long in answering letters, and getting things done. Nevertheless I have never seen any affair spoiled by delay of mine. On the contrary everything has been done in good time, and with necessary foresight and precaution.

"Still, for the future I purpose to answer your letters as soon as possible after considering the matter in the presence of God; for He is greatly honored by our taking time to weigh

carefully what pertains to His service. Meanwhile, you, in your turn, will correct your fault, if you please; I mean your haste in making decisions, and initiating action. Now, despite my embarrassment in saying what I am about to say, I must remark, in reference to the principal things accomplished in the Congregation, that if they had been done sooner than was actually the case, they would not — and this, I believe, is easily demonstrable — they would not have been done so well. And this is the reason I have a special devotion to following, step by step, the adorable providence of God. My own consolation is that our Lord — as it seems to me — and He only has done and is constantly doing whatever is accomplished in this little Company.”

St. Vincent therefore desired some assurance of divine co-operation and of ultimate success, some assurance of carrying a work to completion. But once he was assured of God’s will, and of resources provided by Divine Providence, nothing could arrest his advance. He was not dismayed at having to do a number of things, or at having to face difficulties. He worked at his undertakings with a strength of spirit, and a constancy of courage which obstacles were powerless to disturb, no matter what the nature of such obstacles might be, whether personal interference, or impersonal circumstance. He applied himself intelligently, systematically. He sustained the burden, the trouble, the hindrance, with a calm arising from a spiritual security, and with a perseverance deriving from a religious confidence of success.

Such traits of character are manifest in his establishment of the Missioners and the Daughters of Charity. He supplied them with written rules only after twenty-five or thirty-three years; for he wished to imitate our Lord who began to lead by personal example before teaching by the spoken word. He wished also to avoid the inconveniences that would have arisen from constitutions formed without mature consideration. Hence there was nothing unforeseen, nothing provisional in the Rules, and consequently nothing that needed revision. What was written into the Rules, had already been tested by experience, and found to be practicable. Similarly in the Council of Conscience he manifested admirable wisdom,

maneuvering amid intrigues and ambitions, to reform abuses, and conciliate the demands of the Court and of individuals on the one side, and the requirements of the Church on the other.

CHAPTER 55 *Administering an Admonition*

When administering admonition or correction, he prudently adapted himself to local circumstances and personal character so as to avoid pushing weakness to discouragement, or pride to revolt. He was careful not to offend personal dignity, and he knew how to practice the charity that covers up the secret faults of a neighbor. Father Soure, pastor of St. John on the Greve River, had been exiled to Compiègne. From there he wrote a letter, August 1659, to obtain from St. Vincent information concerning a priest, formerly of the Mission, to whom he wished to entrust for a time the care of his parish.

Vincent replied: "The ecclesiastic whom you mentioned entered and left our Congregation twice, but my knowledge of him is insufficient to give a recommendation." Fathers Portail, Horgni, and Almeras, who were present when he dictated the letter, remarked that the pastor would have reason for surprise upon reading that St. Vincent was poorly acquainted with a Missioner twice under his administration. "I see that clearly," was the reply, "but our Lord, despite His knowledge of men . . . will say to some people on the day of Judgment, 'I do not know you' because He will not know them with a knowledge of approval."

Vincent had occasion to employ both prudent approach and persevering zeal in his dealings with ecclesiastics who were suspected of having gone astray in matters of Catholic faith. One such, a great preacher, a man of aristocratic family, often came to see him. "Father," Vincent said one day, "since you are learned and eloquent, I wish to ask your advice." In our missions we find persons who do not believe the truths of our holy Religion, and we do not know how to

convince them? What would you advise us to do?"

"Why do you ask me that?" replied the Abbé with feeling. "Because," said Vincent, "poor people apply, in their need, to the rich, and we are only poor, ignorant persons whereas you are well supplied with knowledge." Pleased and reassured, the Abbé enumerated the usual proofs — Scripture, the Fathers, theological reasoning, etc. "Very good," commented Vincent. "Now I beg of you, put all that in writing, simply and without adornment, and send it to me."

Two or three days later the Abbé, in person, brought the requested manuscript. "Thank you, Father," said Vincent. "It is a great pleasure for me to learn that your ideas and convictions are entirely sound. For in addition to being of personal profit to me, this manuscript will serve to clear your good name. Unbelievable though it may seem, certain parties are of the persuasion and have asserted that you entertain wrong notions concerning matters of divine faith. Carry to completion therefore what you have so well begun. You have worthily defended the faith with your pen; make profession of it by an edifying life. Your obligation is the greater because you are a man of high rank and standing. A jewel is more brilliant in a setting of gold than in a setting of lead. And similarly, virtue is more effective when it adorns a man of noble birth." St. Vincent's prudent strategy gained the day; he had the consolation of seeing the Abbé acknowledge his mistakes, and persevere in good resolutions.

In adopting a means to the attainment of a worthy purpose, St. Vincent understood the value of ingenuity and courtesy; he had a deft and gentle hand. One of his friends, a certain Bishop, had spiritedly declared more than once that he would never abandon his beloved spouse — meaning his diocese — for any other diocese, no matter how attractive or wealthy the other might be. And as a symbol of his fidelity he showed his pastoral ring while quoting the Psalm, "If I forget you . . . may my right hand be forgotten" (Ps. 136:5).

Some time afterward, the Bishop felt inclined to accept the offer of a large and rich archbishopric. Vincent was aware of the situation. Chancing to meet his friend again, he saluted him courteously, and then, fixing his glance on the Bishop's

hand, he said: "Your Excellency, I beg of you to remember your pastoral ring." "Ah, Father Vincent," replied the Bishop smiling, "you have me there."

We must not forget to mention the prudence and humility with which the Saint extricated himself from an unusually difficult situation. In the year 1649 he made a journey to the city of Mans. Bishop Lavardin happened to be there at the same time. Previously, in the Council of Conscience, Vincent had opposed his promotion to the episcopacy. Lavardin was aware of the fact; he had complained of it frequently, and even vehemently. Vincent therefore was both surprised and embarrassed when he learned that the prelate, though the bulls had not yet been received, was already at Mans. What mode of conduct was he to adopt? It would be unbecoming to pass by without seeing him; dangerous to see him without some advance notice; impolite to inquire whether a visit would be agreeable to the Bishop. "If I go to pay my respects," said the Saint, "it is likely that he will be surprised, and perhaps unfavorably impressed. If I send to inquire whether he would be pleased with a visit, I do not know how he will receive the compliment. If I neither go nor send, His Excellency will have added reason to be angry with me; that contingency must be avoided, what then is to be done?"

Humility solved the problem. The next morning he sent two of his Missioners, the superior of the seminary and another priest, to inform the Bishop that Father Vincent, having arrived in the diocese the previous evening, could not presume to remain any length of time without the Bishop's permission. And he, Vincent, very humbly sought leave to spend seven or eight days at the seminary.

That compliment, coming from a man whose integrity and sincerity were well known to Lavardin, completely disarmed his resentment. "Say to Father Vincent," he replied to the messengers, "that he is at liberty to remain at Mans as long as he sees fit, and that if he had no dwelling place in my episcopal city, I would offer him the hospitality of my own residence." So courteous a response called for an acknowledgment, and Vincent was on the point of calling at the

Bishop's house when he learned that Bishop Lavardin had suddenly departed.

CHAPTER 56 *A Conference on Prudence*

Now let us listen to what the Saint has to say about prudence, in his conference of March 14, 1659.

"It is the function of this virtue," he began, "to regulate and guide our words and actions. It enables us to speak wisely and pertinently, to use judgment and circumspection in selecting subjects that are good both in their nature and in their circumstances. It knows how to be silent with reference to things that would be offensive to God, injurious to the neighbor, or conducive to self-praise or any other unworthy object.

"This virtue causes us to act with discretion, after mature deliberation, and from a good motive in everything we do, and that, not only in regard to the substance of the action, but also with respect to the circumstances. In consequence a prudent man acts in the proper manner, at the proper time, and with a good end in view.

"Prudence and simplicity travel in the same direction, purposing to speak well, and act rightly, with God in view, and since they need each other, our Lord has recommended them together. I am aware that, by a distinction of reason, a difference can be found between them, but in reality those two virtues are closely connected in both substance and object. The prudence of the flesh, with its quest of honor, pleasures, and riches, is in complete opposition to Christian simplicity and prudence whereby we are drawn away from such deceptive attractions, and urged on to grasp and hold the good things that are genuine and enduring. Prudence and simplicity then, are inseparable, and so necessary for our spiritual advancement, that whoever makes good use of them will certainly amass large treasures of grace and merit.

"On several occasions our Lord exercised these virtues in an eminent degree, in particular when an unfortunate woman, detected in adultery, was brought to Him for condemnation.

Unwilling to act as judge on that occasion but wishing to deliver the woman from her enemies, He said to the Jews: 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her' (Jn. 8:7). Herein He practiced two virtues: simplicity, in His merciful design to save that poor creature; and prudence, in the manner of achieving His purpose. Similarly, when the Pharisees tempted Him, asking whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar. For, on the one hand, He wished to sustain the honor of His Father without doing prejudice to His people. On the other hand, He did not wish to oppose the rights of Caesar, or give His enemies an opportunity to say that He favored exactions and monopolies.

"How then did He answer them so as to avoid saying anything malapropos, or giving cause for astonishment? He requested them to show Him a coin of tax money, and hearing them identify the image impressed upon it as the image of Caesar, He said to them, 'Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (Mk. 12:17). That answer shows the virtue of simplicity with respect to the intention of Jesus Christ, His desire to honor fittingly the King of heaven, and a ruler of earth; His response reveals prudence also, inasmuch as He wisely kept clear of the trap those evil men had set for Him.

"It is therefore the nature of prudence to regulate words and actions as means to attain the end proposed. And since this end is none other than God, prudence chooses paths that lead us to Him directly and with certainty. We are not speaking here of political and worldly prudence which, aiming at nothing higher than temporal and sometimes at unjust success, makes use of merely human and questionable ways of achieving it. We are speaking of the holy prudence that is recommended by our Lord in the Gospel, the virtue that induces us to select supernatural means proportionate to the divine purpose He sets before us.

"Now, means to an end can be chosen in two ways: either by reason alone, or by divine faith. The teaching of Christ is infallible, we can follow it without fear of being deceived. Hence genuine prudence follows as an infallible rule, to judge of all things as our Lord has done. Accordingly, when

the occasion presents itself, we propose the question, 'How did our Lord judge of such a case? How did He act under similar circumstances? What did He say?' And then we can conform our conduct to His maxims and His example.

"Let us therefore, Gentlemen, take the resolution to act in this manner. We may walk with assurance along the royal highway wherein Jesus Christ will be our guide. And let us remember His prediction that though the heavens and the earth will pass away, His words will never pass away. Let us bless the Lord, my Brothers, and let us endeavor to think and judge and speak as He thought and judged and spoke. Let us put on the spirit of Christ, that we may co-operate with Him, and accomplish His work. To do good, is not enough; we must do it well in imitation of our Lord who did all things well (Mk. 7:37). It is not enough to fast, to observe the Rules, to perform the functions of the mission; we must in addition, do these things in the spirit of Jesus Christ, that is to say, with perfection, for the ends and objects which He has appointed."

St. Vincent made his own prudent slowness, a rule for others to follow. "The works of God," he said, "are done little by little; they begin and they make progress. When God wished to save Noe and his family from the deluge, He commanded him to build an ark. It could have been completed in a short time, but the work was to be done gradually, little by little, and God's command was that Noe should spend one hundred years at the task. Similarly, when the Children of Israel were journeying toward the Promised Land, they could have reached their destination in a relatively brief time, yet more than forty years were spent in traversing the desert.

"So too, when God had determined to send a Savior into the world, His own Son to atone for sin, why did He delay for countless thousands of years? Because He does His work without haste; He does all things in their proper time, and when the Savior finally came upon earth, why did He not come as a mature man? Why did He spend thirty years in attaining man's estate and preparing for His public ministry? It was His plan to enter the world as a child, and to grow

in age, bodily development, and acquired knowledge, in order to advance little by little, toward the attainment of His purpose. Thus, more than once, He declared, 'My hour has not yet come.' And He acted in that manner to teach us that we should not advance with undue haste in matters depending more upon God than upon ourselves.

"Had He so desired, He could have established the Church throughout the earth during His own lifetime, but He was content with laying the foundations. The rest He entrusted to His Apostles and their successors. Accordingly, it is not fitting to aim at accomplishing our various works all at once, nor to imagine that all is lost when some people fail to show spirit or enthusiastic and generous co-operation in the little good we have to do. What then is the proper plan? Proceed quietly, pray much to God, and act in harmony with one another."

CHAPTER 57 *Justice and Gratitude*

St. Vincent regulated the exercise of justice according to the words of our Savior: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." As a man, a Christian, and a priest, he rendered all the duties of religion to God first of all and above all. To men likewise, according to their social and political position, the relation they bore toward him, he paid every debt of justice, "Tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor, owing no one anything except charity which he tenderly exercised toward all so as to fulfill the entire Law." "Gentlemen," he said one day to his Missioners, "let us be solicitous for the interests of other people as well as for our own. Let us act honestly, loyally, equitably, in our dealings with the neighbor."

With himself justice came first — before every other consideration. He wrote as follows: "Pray to God especially for me. Yesterday I found myself under the necessity of choosing between two obligations, one to fulfill a promise I had made,

the other to do an act of charity in behalf of a person who is in a position to do us a great deal of good, or a great deal of harm. I was unable to satisfy both obligations. So, leaving aside the act of charity, I fulfilled my promise and thus the obligation of justice. The other person is very much displeased. But I am not so much concerned about that as I am at having favored unduly my inclination — so it appears to me — in performing the act of justice.”

He paid with exactitude, the debts of his Community without waiting for the presentation of a claim, and often he sent the money to the residence of his creditors. “It is not right,” he would say, “to give them the trouble of coming to collect what is their due.” He paid full indemnification to those who had suffered loss on his account, even though his part in the affair had been quite accidental. Driving by a bakery one day, his coachman knocked some loaves into the muddy street. Vincent immediately reimbursed the baker, and had the loaves delivered at St. Lazare. On another occasion the same driver broke a rotten bar of wood that closed a carriage entrance. The Saint had him replace it with a new one worth four times as much.

He never accepted monetary recompense for services he had rendered. He never granted a favor that would obstruct the course of justice. For instance when some influential persons threatened to dispossess the Missioners of their establishment in a certain town, and when the governor of the place offered legal protection on condition that Vincent would reciprocate the favor, the Saint declined the offer. “If it is in my power to serve you,” he wrote, “I will do so. But as for the priests of the Mission, I beg of you, leave their case in the hands of God and of justice, for I have no desire to be in any place by the favor or authority of men.”

Although a Judge at law, he disapproved of legal contention, and litigation. In the court sessions that were held at St. Lazare, he dispensed justice free of charge, and he directed that cases presented for judgment be tried with a light hand. Whenever two families had a falling-out, he acted as a mediator, and seldom did he fail to soothe angry feelings, and safeguard the interests of both parties.

When consulted he advised against going to court. "A lawsuit," he said, "is a morsel that is hard to digest; at best, it is hardly worth the trouble. On the other hand, a mutual agreement out of Court, is so acceptable to God, that He says to each one: 'Seek peace and follow after it' (Ps. 33:15). He says not merely that we should welcome peaceful agreement when it is offered, but that we should go in search of it, and run after it."

For a greater reason he did not wish to have recourse to law either in his own behalf, or in behalf of Community establishments. To one of his Missioners who had lost a lawsuit, he wrote: "We do not go to law any more than is necessary. And when obliged to do so, it is only after taking counsel with the confreres, and with other people as well. Rather than disedify the neighbor, we prefer to relinquish what belongs to us."

In lawsuits that could not be avoided, his manner of acting was plainly characterized by charity. If he went in person, or sent a representative to speak with the Judges, it was less to present the merits of his own case than to encourage them in the impartial consideration of justice. At once plaintiff and defendant, he alleged without omission all that was in favor of his adversary as well as what was of advantage to himself.

One would have said that he was an impartial reporter who has no personal interest in the case. Or to speak more correctly, he was partial only toward his adversary whose arguments he supported more vigorously than he sustained his own case. Moreover, it was not a practice of his to confer with the magistrates, for he regarded solicitation of whatever kind as a violation of justice. "A judge who fears God," he would say, "should not be influenced by any such approach. For my part, when a member of the Queen's Council, I paid no attention to the persuasions of other people. My one concern was to determine whether the petition presented to the Council was just or not."

He spared the purse of his adversaries-at-law, more than he did his own. Some of his Missioners in trouble with intractable tenants, requested him to procure for them a com-

mitment as an instrument of intimidation, since the tenants were in bad faith. "Manage the affair as best you can," was the reply; "as for me I would not willingly oblige those poor people to travel so far to plead their cause."

The people who lived in the Puisieux Valley wished to lay a tax on the little farm at Fresneville, a farm that belonged to the Congregation of the Mission. And despite St. Vincent's counsel that they think better of it, they decided to invoke the law. So they came to Paris where Vincent received them as though they had been partisans of his own cause. He gave them lodging at St. Lazare, seated them beside him at meals, and paid the expense of their train journey home.

When the Court proceedings were nearing a verdict, he sent them notification so that they might advance any remaining argument for their case. They returned to Paris, and betook themselves to Vincent as to the patron of their case. Thereupon he brought them to an attorney, and assisted them to draw up reasons in support of their claim. They lost their case despite his charitable assistance. But he paid the court cost, invited them to supper, lodged them for the night, and finally bade them farewell after giving twenty sous to each one for the journey home.

When he himself lost a case he submitted to the decision as to a judgment of God. There was no murmuring or complaining against Providence or against the actions of men. "Long live justice," he wrote to a Missioner in Genoa, October, 1659. "You must believe that the loss of your case is according to justice. The same God who bestowed a favor upon you, has taken it away. Blessed be His holy Name! The more we resemble Christ upon the Cross, the more we shall partake of His spirit. The more we seek as He did, the kingdom of God, in order to establish it within ourselves and in others, the more will the necessities of life be given to us.

"Live in this confidence, and do not fear the approach of the destitute years of which you speak. If they should come and you should lack the means of subsistence, in the Name of the Lord let them come. Their coming will not be through

any fault of yours, but by the Providence of God whose ways are ever worthy of adoration. Let us therefore surrender ourselves to the guidance of our Father who is in heaven; let our concern here on earth be to conform our will with His will in all things."

Gratitude is closely allied with justice. Vincent therefore was grateful to God as the source of all good, and to fellow men as the agents of divine mercy. Every morning he gave thanks for the great glory of God, and for the finite glory bestowed upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, the holy angels, Apostles, and Saints. He gave thanks for the graces conferred upon the Church, religious orders, and in particular his own Congregation. He expressed gratitude for the assistance given to the poor, for the victories gained by French troops, and in general for Christian victories over infidelity, misery, heresy, and schism, and for every occurrence advantageous to Church or State.

Inviting children, devout persons and religious communities, to unite with him and supply his deficiency in this regard, he would say: "Join me in praising the Lord! Nothing more surely wins the heart of God than gratitude. We should spend as much time in acknowledging His gifts as in asking for them." He felt sad in reflecting upon man's ingratitude, and he would repeat the words that the Savior spoke regarding the nine lepers. And he strongly urged the avoidance of that particular vice which — he said — renders us unworthy to receive favors from God or men.

CHAPTER 58 *Gifts of God*

With tender affection St. Vincent gave thanks for the divine gifts bestowed upon himself; and year after year, on the anniversary of his baptism he enlisted the prayers of the Community so that his expression of gratitude might not fall short of the favors he had received from the Divine Bounty. His gratitude extended to everyone who had rendered a service either to himself or to a house of the Congregation. Feel-

ing convinced that no one really owed him anything, he regarded every honor, every kindness, as a favor, and he expressed his thanks with touching warmth and humility of heart. "How good of you," he would say, "not to despise my old age! to support a poor miserable sinner! to listen to me so patiently, and to endure my presence! May God bless you!"

One of the coadjutor Brothers brought him some holy water, and then knelt for a blessing. "Yes, my Brother," said the Saint, "may God bless and reward you!" That was his customary formula. Similarly he would write, "Since I am unable to thank you fittingly, I pray that God Himself will be my thanks and your reward."

He acted in like manner toward strangers, and even toward little children. He thanked them for the smallest service, as, for example, assistance in mounting his horse. And he would find fault with his companion for being too cold in this regard. Following the example of Christ he considered as done for himself the good that was done in behalf of even the least person among those who somehow belonged to him; for such things he was equally thankful.

He appreciated the efforts of the farmers and others who served him or his Missioners indirectly by furnishing the clergy with the means whereby to labor for the sanctification of the people. Having described vividly the sufferings they endured in times of public calamity, he said one day: "Alas, my Brothers, while they become weary and exhausted in working to supply food for us, we find a shady spot and seek repose. While we labor in the Missions, the churches offer shelter from the inclemency of the weather. We are not exposed to rain or wind, or the rigors of the weather.

"Assuredly, living as we do on the sweat of these poor people, and on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, we should always question ourselves when on our way to the refectory, whether we have earned the food we are going to eat. The thought often occurs to me, and gives rise to a feeling of shame. I say to myself, 'Miserable wretch, do you deserve the food you are going to eat, the bread that comes to you from the labor of the poor?' My Brothers, though we do not

earn our livelihood in the same fashion as they do, at least let us pray for them, not allowing a day to pass without offering them to our Lord, that He may deign to bestow upon them the grace to make profitable use of their sufferings.

“Some days ago we were saying that the priest is God’s chosen ambassador whose particular office is to lessen and restrain the divine indignation. He is appointed, as Aaron was, to station himself, censer in hand, between God and these poor folk; or like Moses, to intercede and obtain a cessation of the misfortunes that afflict them because of their ignorance and their sins. And it may be that they would not be suffering such afflictions if they had received instruction, and if there had been someone to work for their conversion.

“To these poor people therefore we should render the services of charity, as much to fulfill the office of our priesthood, as to show our gratitude for the benefits we receive by reason of their labors. While they are suffering, and struggling against want and misfortune, we, like Moses, must raise our hands heavenward in continual prayer for them. And if they suffer because of their transgressions and ignorances, we should be their advocates before the throne of divine Mercy; for charity obliges us to extend a helping hand, to effect a rescue. But if, on the contrary, we do not occupy ourselves with instructing them, even at the cost of our life; if we do not assist them to become reconciled and converted perfectly to God, we are, in a sense, the cause of all the miseries they are suffering.”

On a journey from Maine to Anjou in 1649, a young Missioner who was traveling with St. Vincent, preserved him from grave danger when they were crossing a river. Some time later it happened that the same young priest lost the first fervor of his vocation; he became less and less observant of Rule, and less obedient in relation with Superiors. At last, weary of the burden, he wished to be rid of it entirely. Vincent endeavored to dissuade him, but he withdrew from the Congregation.

When the year was out, he repented of his action; like the prodigal son, he cried out, “I will rise and go to my

father." Thereupon he wrote letter after letter to Vincent, asking pardon and begging to be numbered, if not among the sons, at least among the most lowly servants of the Company. But Vincent, both because of his unwillingness to accept anew, confreres who had once left the Congregation, and also because of his desire to test the sincerity of the penitent, remained unresponsive for a considerable time.

The Missioner multiplied letters and entreaties: "I am lost forever, my Father, unless you reach out a helping hand." To that appeal Vincent responded, not however to grant his entreaty but to point out the faults the fugitive had committed, and the impossibility of his being again admitted to the Congregation.

Having suffered a repulse at every advance, and finding himself at the end of his resources the poor Missioner made one final effort; he directed his plea to the heart of St. Vincent, appealing to his sense of gratitude: "Father," he wrote, "on a former occasion I saved the life of your body; save now the life of my soul!" That was the winning move. "Come," was the immediate reply; "come, you will be welcomed with open arms." But his return, as Vincent beautifully described it, was not into the Congregation of the Mission on earth, but into the community of heaven. On the point of beginning his journey, he fell ill and died, sustained by the hope he found in repentance and in the forgiveness that had been so generously accorded him.

The sequel to the foregoing misadventure on the river, is as follows: On getting out of the water, St. Vincent entered a farmhouse to dry his clothes. Always at home among the poor, he entered into conversation with the farmer, and learned that his host was afflicted with a rupture that caused him great suffering. Since he had been cured of a similar affliction, the Saint promised that as soon as he had returned to Paris, he would send a bandage that would bring instant relief. He then paid his host liberally, and having thanked him for the hospitality, he resumed his journey.

The time consumed on the journey far exceeded both his calculations and his desires. Nevertheless, he had hardly set foot in Paris when he recalled his host and his promise. He

sent the bandage, and with it a letter expressing his thanks once more. And since the ordinary way of reaching the farmhouse was unsure, he addressed the letter and bandage to Madam Schamburg, on whose land the farmhouse was located. And he requested that she co-operate in the good work, and also that she commend the farmer to the good will of her employees.

CHAPTER 59 *Benefactors*

Vincent held in affectionate esteem everyone who was, in a sense, a member of his religious family. And therefore he was grateful to the benefactors of all the houses of his Congregation. For instance he provided support, and paid rent twenty-five or thirty years for a poor woman because she had nursed one or two plague-stricken people at St. Lazare. The Jesuit Fathers of Bar received into their house a Missioner from Lorraine. The Missioner was with them when he died, and the Fathers laid him to rest in their church. Touched by such hospitality to one of his own, Vincent proposed to the Community as the subject of spiritual conference, the necessity of gratitude.

Even those who were benefactors by reason of obligation, learned, by personal experience, that he was grateful. "Though there be an obligation upon others to render services whereby we are benefited," he said, "we must not allow that consideration to hinder our giving of thanks, and offering of prayers as for our patrons. We observe how the Church herself grants exemptions from her disciplinary laws in favor of benefactors. In many places she grants to lay persons the right of patronage though that right pertains only to the Church."

A priest of the Sorbonne University, Louis Calon, had given a considerable sum of money to the Congregation of the Mission. He also founded a house of the Mission at Aumale, the place of his birth. Exhausted more by labor, penance, and mortification than by old age, he sought retirement with the Franciscan Fathers at Verona. They received him as an Apos-

tle, and as an emulator of their poverty. St. Vincent heard about his extreme poverty, and a desire of his to find hospitality at St. Lazare. Accordingly a year before Father Calon's death, he wrote the good Father in the following terms:

"I offer thanks to God, that you have given us hope of your coming here to rest after your great labors. How welcome you will be, and how gladly I shall embrace you! Come therefore, I beg of you, and do not delay. I assure you, we shall take special care of your health. You will be master of the house to do and say whatever you please. I shall be at your service, for I have always loved you more tenderly than my own father.

"If you need the 4000 livres with which you have endowed the Religious of St. Bernard, and which have been set apart for the Mission, we shall willingly return the money to you. For, it is just, I believe, that a founder in straightened circumstances receive assistance from the revenue of the foundation he has made. We are willing to go further, and restore the principal if it is necessary for your support in old age.

"We did as much for the Pastor of Vernon. He gave us a revenue amounting to 600 pounds. Afterward, judging that he had need of the money, he requested its return. Thereupon we gave back to him both the revenue and the principal. But if you have no need of the principal, make use of the revenue as you have been doing hitherto. We meanwhile will continue the missions that you instituted and maintained with so great success under the divine blessing."

Thus far the letter of St. Vincent. But the Sons of St. Francis were not willing that Father Calon accept the invitation of the holy priest. They kept him with them gladly, and when he died, laid him to rest.

The Saint never forgot the benefactors of his Congregation. In September of 1655 he wrote to one of his Missioners: "Never can we be sufficiently thankful to our founders. God has recently given us the grace to offer to a founder of one of our houses, the money he had previously donated. I made the offer because he appeared to be in want. It seems to me that his acceptance would have afforded me much consolation. And I believe that, in such cases the

divine Goodness, our first founder, would have taken care of our need. If not, we should have had the happiness of impoverishing ourselves for the sake of one who would have come to our assistance.

“On a former occasion God accorded us the grace to act in like manner. On that occasion we restored to a benefactor, the Pastor of Vernon, the money he had bestowed upon us. And as often as the recollection of it comes to mind, I experience unspeakable joy and consolation.”

The year following he wrote to a benefactor who apparently was in straightened circumstances. “I beg of you to make use of the property of the Congregation as though it were your own. In order to assist you we are prepared to sell all our possessions, even our chalices. And in so doing we would merely be acting in compliance with what is prescribed by the holy canons, viz., that we restore to our benefactor in his need, what he gave to us in his abundance. And I say this, not as a polite formality, but, in God’s presence, as an expression of what I feel in the depths of my heart.”

In the year 1654 Cardinal de Retz, who had been imprisoned at Nantes, gained his liberty, and fled to Rome. He had formerly been a pupil of St. Vincent; and thereafter, despite his political intrigues, and social escapades, he had always been a protector of St. Lazare. St. Lazare in turn was inclined to support the Cardinal in his misfortune. Since the Congregation was financially embarrassed at the time, St. Vincent borrowed 3000 francs for his maintenance. But the Cardinal, acquainted with the circumstances of the Congregation, refused the offer. Thereupon the Missioners in Rome received him as a guest, and resident in their house. On whose order, and at what cost they did so, is made clear in a letter that was written by Vincent, March 12, 1655, to Father Ozenne at Genoa. “Our house at Rome is in distress, as you may have learned from the Gazette. And the reason is that by order of the Pope, the Missioners gave hospitality to Cardinal de Retz before learning of the King’s prohibition against having any communication with him. Displeased by their act of obedience to His Holiness, and of gratitude to our Archbishop, the King had ordered Father Berthe and

the other French confreres to leave Rome, and return to France. They have done so. The affair may turn out as God wills, but it is better to lose all else than to lose the virtue of gratitude."

This virtue found expression in kindness rendered to the religious who had formerly occupied St. Lazare. Vincent wished to do for them whatever was in his power, for instance, that they share in the good works of the Congregation of the Mission. "All our meritorious actions," he said, "inconsiderable though they be, originate in their benefactions." Leading the way for those to follow, in word and action he showed a singular deference toward the religious whenever occasion offered. When the aged assistant Prior was prostrated by a contagious disease, Vincent visited and consoled him; he stayed with the sick man, rendering personal service. He would have remained at his post of mercy night and day if it had been possible.

His gratitude toward the Prior extended to the Prior's domestic servant who had left his employer, and returned to his native province. There his mind became seriously affected. Without money and without relatives, he wandered hither and yon, picking up a mouthful to eat wherever he could. Providentially he drifted into Paris one day, and there memories were awakened by the sight of many familiar things. He found his way to St. Lazare, and requested to speak with Vincent. Occupied at the moment, the Saint sent him to dinner, and promised to speak with him at leisure later on.

At the first interview, and especially at the first words, the holy priest understood the sad state into which the poor man had fallen. "It is the domestic servant of our benefactor," he said to himself; "we must have pity on him, and look upon him as a member of our family." As a matter of fact, he gave him a room at St. Lazare, and provided for all his wants until the man's death.

CHAPTER 60 *Detachment and Poverty*

The entire life of St. Vincent de Paul, considered either as a Christian, or as a founder or superior of a religious community, was characterized by detachment from worldly advantages. Having overcome the desire, though legitimate, of obtaining a benefice; and having declined one of the best parishes in the diocese of Acqs because he did not wish to acquire possession by means of a legal process, he followed a secret impulse that led him to renounce everything that might be regarded as a personal possession. He lived poor among the poor at Clichy and Chatillon, poor in the house of Gondi, and later on he consecrated himself in a state of poverty to the service of the poor.

He commenced all his works in a state of poverty. He accepted the foundation presented by Mr. and Mrs. de Gondi, only after several communities had refused a similar offer. After long unwillingness to accept the Priory of St. Lazare, he took possession only through obedience. There he was enthralled anew with poverty which he took unto himself with a love more ardent than the covetousness of a miser for his gold.

His room was plain, small and sparingly furnished. The walls were whitewashed, the floor devoid of carpet. There was a deal table with a cloth cover, two straw-bottom chairs, and a hard straw mattress. For ornamentation, a wooden crucifix and one paper picture. There was no fireplace until he was eighty years of age. His confreres then insisted that he occupy another room, that he might have a small fire, a little warmth whereby to dress his ulcerated legs. But he paid the price in self-humiliation. He found in his own sins the cause of his being subjected to such misfortune which he styled scandalous. How sparingly he made use of wood or whatever else he might have for he regarded such things as the property of the poor, and when finally he allowed the placement of a curtain about his bed, he reproached himself with indulging in luxury, though the curtain was of the poorest material. When rooms were inspected, he required

that his be included so as to remove whatever might be superfluous.

A similar poverty was evident in a lower apartment where he received persons of top rank. A Brother, on a certain occasion, placed a piece of old carpet in front of Vincent's door so as to exclude a cold wind. That same day the Saint had the carpet removed. The poverty of his attire at the Royal Court has been remarked. At home his clothes were no better. If he was told that his collar was frayed, or his hat antiquated, he would reply with gentle pleasantry: "Brother, the King can do no more than wear an unfrayed collar or a new hat." Equally unpretentious were all the things assigned for his use. His umbrella, for instance, was made of a coarse material dipped in wax.

His daily food was that of a poor man. Yet before partaking of his plain and meager fare, he was heard to say, "Wretch, you have not earned the food you eat." When he was in a rural district, and without money, he was well pleased because he could then go to the house of a peasant, and beg a piece of black bread for the love of God. He was liberal in what concerned the glory of God, and the service, whether spiritual or corporal, of the poor. In such things he was openhanded to the point of contracting considerable obligations.

St. Vincent had a spirit of detachment in relation to his Community as to himself. Of the things that belong to the Congregation, he said one day, "not a single possession has been donated through any word of mine. And though a single word would suffice to establish the Congregation in provinces and large cities, to enlarge its personnel, and enter upon important undertakings, I should not wish to speak that word, and I trust that our Lord would grant me the grace to remain silent. Such is my disposition, leaving all in the hands of Divine Providence."

He felt the same way about the Daughters of Charity. When they had gone to a particular place, he never made an effort to have them remain against the wishes of those who had requested their coming. On the contrary, at the slightest wish of a patron, he withdrew them. When the

administrators of the hospital at Nantes indicated a desire to release the Daughters of Charity from hospital service, and engage in their stead the Hospitaller Nuns, Vincent wrote immediately to say that he knew much good concerning those religious women, and that if the administrators wished to release the Daughters of Mlle. Le Gras, he humbly begged them to do so without ceremony. At the same time he wrote to Mlle. Le Gras who was in Nantes: "Our Lord would do the same thing if He were still dwelling visibly on earth. The Christian spirit urges us to act in harmony with the sentiments of other people. And if we place no obstacle, God will make use of this change to promote His glory."

Not only was it his principle and practice to abstain from seeking advantages for himself or his Congregation, but in a time of public disaster, he declined large donations, explaining that poor people were in greater need than he. On one occasion a gift of eight hundred thousand livres was presented to him for the purpose of building a church. He refused because, in his view of the matter, he could not accept the offer without working harm to the poor of Jesus Christ.

His detachment was manifested especially in the Council of Conscience. The Secretary of State has left the following testimony: "I was in frequent communication with Father Vincent. He has accomplished more good works for the Church and Religion in France than anyone else I have known. I have noticed in particular that in the Council of Conscience where he exercised the predominant influence, there was never any question of his own advantage, that of his Congregation, or of the ecclesiastical houses he had established."

Yet nearly all his establishments were poor. Moreover they were burdened with the gratuitous nature of their principal functions. The annexation of a few benefices for their support, would have solved their financial problems, but he was unwilling to employ that manner of solution. Benefices were attached to some of his seminaries only because the holders of such benefices, or people who were contributing to the

maintenance of the seminaries, were insistent that such provision be established. Even then the consent of St. Vincent was obtained only with difficulty and it was understood that the revenues were not to be expanded on the houses or their personnel, but must be devoted to the education of young ecclesiastics.

If he heard that the Queen intended to favor him in some way, he at once contrived to have the favor conferred on someone else. He was really dismayed when a rumor was circulated that Her Majesty wished to obtain for him a Cardinalial hat. He would have listened more willingly to his death sentence than to the compliments which some of his friends addressed to him in that regard. Truly, a Cardinal's robe would have been for Vincent the red of martyrdom!

CHAPTER 61 *Morality Versus Money*

St. Vincent's detachment was invincible. One of his closest friends, representing certain persons, came to him with an offer of one hundred thousand livres. As a member of the Council, he was to use his influence in favor of certain projects without prejudice to the people, but with possible damage to the interests of the clergy. Vincent might have said to his friend, what St. Peter said to Simon Magus, "May your money go to destruction with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20). He was content with the mild response, "God keep me from doing such a thing! I would rather die than speak a word in the Council on this matter."

Detachment is the proper word for his attitude toward property in his possession. When the title of ownership to St. Lazare was disputed by the Victorine Fathers, he was minded to relinquish possession rather than safeguard his right by having recourse to law. It was only in deference to wise counsel, that he changed his mind, resolving to defend his lawful title. As a general rule he was averse from resorting to strenuous measures when his houses were threatened with

intrigue, or armed force. After the Battle at Faubourg St. Antoine, the Vincentian house situated there was in danger of being pillaged by troops from both sides. St. Vincent ordered the Community to repair to the church, and there, prostrate at the feet of God, to offer Him all that they possessed. He said further that in case of eviction, they should give humble thanks to Him for having despoiled them.

His detachment from earthly things, in submission to the divine will, shines clearly in the happenings relative to a farm at Orsigny. He had acquired the farm under very difficult circumstances, and was improving it at considerable expense when an unjust court ruling deprived him of everything. His secretary, Brother du Courneau, brought the news. "Blessed be God," was his fervent and repeated comment. Then he retired to the church where he remained a long time in adoration and prayer. Upon leaving the church he said again, "Blessed be God!" Then he added, "The only thing that saddens me is that my sins have been the cause of this loss to the Congregation."

He wrote at once to a friend: "Sir, good friends confide in one another concerning their good fortune and their bad fortune. And since you are one of our best friends, I must inform you that a lawsuit has gone against us, and that in consequence we have lost our farm at Orsigny. However, I refer to it, not as an evil, but as a grace that God has bestowed upon us, and I beg of you to aid us in returning thanks.

"I term graces from God the afflictions He sends us, especially when they are well received. But in His infinite goodness, He has prepared us for this loss, and has given us the grace to submit willingly and, I dare say, with as much joy as if the decision were favorable. This would seem a paradox to one who, unlike yourself, is unacquainted with spiritual values, one who does not know that conformity to the good pleasure of God in times of misfortune is a greater good than any temporal advantage. I humbly request that you permit me thus to communicate to your heart the sentiments of my own."

Since the case was lost by only three or four votes among

twenty-one or twenty-two judges, he was advised to appeal. "No," he wrote, "we should be accused of being unduly tenacious of material possessions. That is an accusation already made against ecclesiastics, and by exposing ourselves to defamation in the Court House, we would be harming other communities, and scandalizing our friends. Besides, I feel a great repugnance to going against the counsel of our Lord who desires that they who have undertaken to follow Him, should not become entangled in cases at law. That we have already done so, was because I could not in conscience relinquish a property lawfully acquired, and belonging to the Community, a property of which I was only the administrator. My obligation was clear; I must do all in my power to retain possession.

"But now that God has released me from this obligation by a sovereign decree that renders further action useless, I am of the opinion that we should leave the matter as it stands. Moreover, if we should encounter an adverse judgment a second time, our legal failure would bear a mark of shame that might prejudice our work and the edification that we owe the public. One of our services in giving a mission, is to settle differences and disputes among the people, and there is reason to fear that if the Little Company should insist upon a new trial in Court, God would withdraw from us the grace to effect reconciliations."

Consequently Vincent renounced all claim to another trial. He gave up the farm at Orsigny, but not the obligations contracted through the original deed of acceptance. He continued to fulfill the spiritual commitments of the original donation.

In a conference to the Community he offered the Orsigny farm as a sacrifice to God. "And you, Gentlemen and my Brothers," he said, "I beg of you to add a sacrifice of praise. Let us bless the Sovereign Judge of the living and the dead for having visited us in our day of tribulation! Let us thank Him with all our heart, not only for having detached our affections from earthly goods, but also for having deprived us of what we already possessed. Let us beg of Him the grace to love this deprivation!

"I like to think that we all rejoice in our present loss. Our Lord says in the Apocalypse, 'Those whom I love I rebuke and chastise' (Apoc. 3:19). Must we not therefore welcome chastisements as a token of His love? Yes, Gentlemen, let us rejoice inasmuch as God has found us worthy to suffer. Like medicine, suffering is in itself distasteful, nevertheless it contributes to the good health of a soul, and of a Congregation.

"Our Savior agonized in the Garden of Olives. On the cross He was bereft of human assistance, and forsaken by His heavenly Father. Yet He rejoiced in doing His Father's will; that was His food, His delight. The first Christians were imbued with like sentiments. They bore with joy the plunder of their possessions (Hebr. 10:34). We too should rejoice in the loss of our property. My Brothers, God is pleased to see us gathered here for that purpose. Let us then look upon our loss as a great gain; for now that we are exposed to want in temporal things, the Divine Goodness wishes to inspire us with greater confidence in His providence, obliging us to trust Him absolutely both for the necessities of this life, and for the graces of salvation.

"What then are the fruits we should obtain from all this? The first is an offering to God of all that remains of our goods and consolations, temporal as well as spiritual. It is an offering of ourselves in general and in particular, that He may dispose of us according to His good pleasure, and also of all that we possess. It is an offering in such wise that we shall always be prepared to leave everything, and accept any inconvenience, ignominy or affliction in order to imitate Jesus Christ in His poverty, humility, and patience.

"The second is to abstain from having recourse to law. If we have no choice in the matter, and if our title is perfectly clear and evident, then we may present our case in court, but only after essaying every possible means of settlement out of court; for he who puts his trust in the judgment of men, is often deceived. We must follow the counsel of Christ, 'if a man intends by process of law to rob you of your coat, let him have your cloak as well' (Mt. 5:40). We should hope that if we are faithful in this practice, the Divine

Goodness will confer His blessing upon us, and that if He deprives us of something, with one hand, He will give something else with the other."

The same spirit of detachment is observable in circumstances where the services of the Missioners were no longer needed. To such Missioners he wrote: "After making a report to the Vicar General, and receiving an acknowledgment of what you have, you will take your leave courteously, without a word of complaint, or any remark of gratification at leaving the place. And you will pray that God may bless the city and the diocese."

He taught his Missioners, that when in the greatest misfortune, they should place their trust in Providence. When one of them was describing the poverty of his house, St. Vincent said, "Father, what do you do when you are thus in want of necessities for the Community? Do you have recourse to God?" "Yes," answered the priest, "I appeal to Him now and then." "Well," said Vincent, "that is an effect of poverty; it makes us think of God, and raise our hearts to Him, whereas, if we were in comfortable circumstances, we would perhaps forget Him. That is the reason I rejoice greatly that real and voluntary poverty is practiced in all our houses." "Yes," rejoiced the priest, "but while procuring assistance for other people, you neglect your own confreres!" St. Vincent replied, "I beg of God, that He may forgive you those words; I am aware that you spoke them in all simplicity. But you may be certain of this, that we shall never be better provided than when we resemble Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER 62 *Poverty of Spirit*

St. Vincent's Missioners had not yet secured a permanent residence in Rome when he wrote to them: "We cannot be better situated, or more pleasing to God than when we are as He wishes us to be. If we are not destined to remain, we have no need of a fixed habitation; nor should we possess

a house of our own if we wish to follow our Lord, and be like unto Him in this respect. Let us remain humble, and be content with poverty because in that case everyone, observing our lowly state, will hold us in contempt. And, on our part, we shall begin to be true followers of Christ. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' says the Gospel, 'for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' It is therefore in heaven that the poor will have lodgment. Is it not a beautiful place for us? My God, grant us the grace to choose the means that lead us to that place in preference to all the pretensions and conveniences of earth!"

Such was the spirit of the Mission from the very beginning. The Saint said one day: "The Congregation, when still in its infancy, was composed of only three or four members. With the exception of the miserable man who is now speaking to you—he was indisposed at the time—they went to Montmartre. And there they recommended themselves to God through the intercession of the holy martyrs, that they might enter into the practice of poverty. From those early days this virtue has been practiced faithfully by a large part of the Congregation."

He continued the subject in a conference: "You should know, Gentlemen, that this virtue of poverty is the very foundation of this Congregation of the Mission. Alas, what would become of the Congregation if attachment to worldly possessions were to creep in? Great saints have said that poverty is the bond of religious orders. Though living in common, we are not religious. Nevertheless we can say that poverty is a bond of communities, and in particular of our own. Releasing us from earthly things, it unites us to God. My Savior, grant us this virtue, for it will bind us inseparably to Your service, that henceforth we may seek You only and Your glory.

"Because our Lord, the sovereign Master and legitimate owner of all riches, perceived that the possession of these riches was the occasion of much disorder upon earth, therefore He wished to supply a remedy in the practice of poverty. And for the accomplishment of this purpose, He became so poor that He had no place whereon to lay His head. It was

His wish also that the Apostles and disciples should practice poverty. In a word this was the remedy that He prescribed for the possession of wealth which, for many people, is a source of destruction.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt. 5:3). This was the first lesson of Christ, bespeaking the thought that filled His heart, indicating a great love and esteem for poverty. The good pleasure of God is to be seen in His desire that they who love Him, love without reserve. Now, he who has made a vow of poverty does not retain an affection for anything. He is therefore compelled, as it were, to direct his love toward God, for man is unable to live without love. By the vow of poverty our affection is drawn to the uncreated good and things of heaven.

“Let this truth be well understood, that we give up the good things of earth in order to possess the treasures of heaven. I wish to make profession of this truth; by withdrawing my affections from a false god to love and possess the only true God, I surrender trifles and perishable riches to secure those that are imperishable and everlasting. My Savior, what happiness!”

Another day Vincent illustrated the danger of earthly attachments by this comparison: “A soul that is not detached from creatures is like a man who is bound, hand and foot to a tree. He is unable either to free himself, or to go in search of sustenance. He will either die of hunger, or be devoured by wild animals.

“A person attached to the goods and comforts of the world is held in similar plight. His thoughts are dwelling upon such things both day and night. He does not go in search of anyone who might rescue him, and save his life. He is in real danger of perishing. My Savior, is it possible that we would not endeavor to cast off such fetters? A small bird, ensnared in a trap, struggles and struggles to regain its freedom whereas when we are entangled by an evil attachment, we do not take the trouble to free ourselves. That little bird will condemn us before the judgment seat of God.”

Resuming the same theme, he added: “Alas for the Miser who allows himself to be attracted by the perishable

goods of this life! Yes, Gentlemen and my Brothers, such a one is to be pitied, for he will be ensnared. He will be unceasingly pierced by these thorns, and embarrassed by these bonds.

“And if this misfortune should befall the Congregation, what would the Missioners have to say thereafter, and what manner of life would they lead? They would remark, ‘We have a revenue of several thousand livres; we should live at leisure. Why should we go from village to village? Why should we work so hard? Let us not concern ourselves with the poor people of the rural areas. Let the parish priest take care of them if he wishes. As for ourselves, let us live quietly without going to all that trouble!’

“Behold, how idleness will follow upon a spirit of avarice. The only concern will be to preserve and increase temporal possessions, and to seek the gratification of self. And then there will be no more exercises of the Mission, and no more Congregation of the Mission, for both the one and the other will have ceased to exist. You need only read history to find many instances of how worldly wealth brought about the ruin not only of ecclesiastical personages, but also of individual communities, and entire religious orders that had lost their primitive spirit of poverty.

“My Savior, how can I speak of these things, I who am so miserable? At one time I had a horse and carriage. As of now I have a fire in my room, a curtain about my bed, and a coadjutor brother to wait on me. So good care is taken of me, that I am not in want of anything. Oh, what scandal I am giving to the Little Company by my abuse of the vow in all these things!

“I ask pardon of God, and of the Congregation, and I beg of you to bear with me in my old age. I have difficulty in bearing with myself, and it seems to me that I deserve to be hung at Montfaucon. May God grant me the grace to correct my faults, despite my old age, and retrench unnecessary articles of use as much as I am able.”

A faithful disciple of the Savior, Vincent de Paul could not fail to bear in his entire being the mortification of Jesus Christ. His life, like that of Jesus, was a continual

sacrifice; a sacrifice the more meritorious and pleasing to God as it was more humble and hidden. He was the founder of a Congregation that was destined to serve both clergy and people, and therefore the virtues he practiced in public were such as would be accessible to good ecclesiastics and true Christians. He contented himself with a well-regulated moderation that was equally removed from culpable weakness, and from a rigor too austere and forbidding. At the same time, the cross of Jesus Christ retained its rights, and the Saint honored it interiorly and in secret with a measure of homage and imitation less accommodated to public usage.

In his preference of the cross, he made a sacrifice of creature comforts, of honors he might win from his fellow men. Setting aside the suggestions of self-esteem, he spoke freely of his lowly birth, and of alleged weaknesses, both natural and supernatural. With him the requirements of his own reputation, demands made upon his gratitude for favors received, and no less his human desire and need for friendship, were subordinate to the stern voice of duty. He had no fear of the contempt, hatred, or vengeance that might be visited upon him. He loved his parents, brothers, and sisters and his native country. But he was ever mindful that, like Melchisedech, he had neither genealogy nor fatherland, and, like his Master, Jesus Christ, his first love and most absorbing interest was his ministry of the Gospel, his consecrated service of God.

The local clergy, representing the straightened circumstances of his relatives, urged him to assist them. He answered, "Are they poorer at present than they were before? Do they lack the means and strength to support themselves in a manner suitable to their state in life?" Reassured on these points, he added, "They are therefore truly blessed, for they are carrying out the divine sentence that man earn his bread by the sweat of his brow."

CHAPTER 63 *Family and Friends*

Immense sums of money for charitable purposes passed through the hands of St. Vincent, but the only share ever given to his family was a thousand francs; and it was given under extraordinary circumstances. The money had been presented to him by a friend of his, a Mr. Du Frense. Vincent accepted the gift, but suggested it would be better expended on a good mission that would be of advantage to the entire parish. His friend agreed, and accordingly the donation was laid aside for that purpose. But before the plan could be realized, civil wars were desolating certain provinces, and especially Guienne. Vincent's relatives lost everything they possessed; some of them lost their lives. These things occurred about the year 1656.

The Saint was deeply saddened by the tragic plight of his family. "They have been reduced to beggary!" he exclaimed, "to beggary! . . . But what is to be done? The property of the Community does not belong to me, and if I should dispose of it, I would give scandal." Then he recalled his friend's donation. "Blessed be the divine providence that did not permit me to send Missioners to Pouy," was his joyful exclamation; "God has evidently reserved this alms for my poor family." And so, he lost no time in entrusting the money to Father St. Martin, requesting that he would see to its distribution.

A man of universal charity could not be lacking in warm and generous affection for the members of his family, for those who, by nature's law, were inscribed upon his heart before all others. His feeling, the urge within, was to bestow gifts and benefits upon them. And consequently the virtuous restraint, and control of such natural tendency was a mortification that cost him very much. One day, under urging to help his family, he said, "Do you imagine that I do not love my relations? I feel for them all the affection and tenderness that anyone could feel for his family, and this natural affection impels me to aid them. But I must act according to the movements of grace, not according to those of nature.

I must think of the poor, the most abandoned, without being deterred by associations of friendship or family."

Voicing those ideals of piety and disinterestedness, Vincent may well have been reminded of a mission he gave in Bordeaux some thirty-three years earlier, and a memorable visit he enjoyed with his family after the mission was concluded. They lived near Bordeaux; and, against his better judgment, friends persuaded him to go and see them. Many good ecclesiastics, as he well knew, had thus become entangled in the affairs of their families. And their priestly spirit had been seriously weakened with unfortunate consequences to their ministry. But on the other hand there were good reasons for the visit. He would strengthen them in virtue, teach them to value their lowly state in life. He would awaken hallowed memories of his childhood, and renew the act of consecration he had made in those earlier years. These things he did indeed accomplish and more, during his visit, giving great edification to his family, his relations, and the villagers of Pouy.

History has recorded the farewell address, the brief and practical words he spoke as they all gathered about him, and knelt for his blessing. "You should live in holy poverty," he said, "and bequeath your lowly state of life as a heritage to your descendants. You will not see me again."

So he left them. But hardly had he begun the journey when he felt his heart breaking; tears flowed from his eyes. He had witnessed the poverty of nearly all his people; they had given of their hospitality, and he was leaving them as they were, when with a word he could improve their situation substantially. In consequence there arose within him a struggle the issue of which remained uncertain during a period of three months, a conflict which he regarded as a punishment of his "disobedience to the spirit of detachment and abnegation recommended in the Gospel."

In a conference delivered a year and a half before his death, he has left a moving account of his experience. "I spent eight or ten days with my relations to instruct them in the way of salvation, and to remove from them all desire of riches, explaining that for my part, material wealth, if I

possessed any, would be owing to God, and the poor. The day of my departure I was so overcome with grief in leaving my poor relations, that I wept almost incessantly along the way. Then arose within me a desire to assist them, and improve their situation. My heart, softened with pity, portioned out to one and another of my relatives what I possessed, and what I did not possess. And this unfortunate passion to improve the fortunes of my brothers and sisters lasted three months, a continual weight upon my poor mind. I prayed, and so earnestly that God finally had pity on me. He relieved me of all this immoderate tenderness for my relatives. They live in poverty, and I entrust them to God's providence, considering that they are happier than they would be if they were well off.

"These things I have said to the Community because there is something admirable in this practice that is much recommended in the Gospel. Jesus Christ excludes from His disciples all those who love father and mother, brother and sister, more than they love Him. And our Rule, following that instruction, urges us to renounce immoderate affection for family and relatives. Let us pray for them, and if we can assist them in charity, let us do so. But let us hold firm against our natural inclination lest otherwise it withdraw us from the school of Jesus Christ. Stand firm!"

From the time of that visit home (1623) till the day of his death, Vincent met again only one member of his family. Apparently the meeting occurred somewhat later in the same year when a nephew came to see him at the College. After a brief encounter with a feeling of shame at having to acknowledge kinship with an unschooled rustic, he entertained him cordially for a few days, and upon his departure, presented him with a gift of thirty francs. Afterward he was bothered by a scruple because of having housed the young man at the College; and, on his knees before the Community, he asked pardon for having sustained him with food that belonged to the poor.

Some years later a brother of St. Vincent, having lost a ruinous lawsuit, and wishing to re-establish himself financially, was minded to have an interview with his Reverend

brother. But in August of 1635, Vincent wrote to Father Fontenay, thanking him for the assistance he had given during the unsuccessful trial at law, but requesting him to persuade the impecunious relation to remain at home. "With regard to his intention of coming to Paris," he wrote, "I beg of you to dissuade him. He is advanced in age, and though he should come, I would be unable to give him anything, for what is in my charge, is not at my disposal."

At one time he had the idea of establishing some of the Missioners at his native Pouy. But suspecting, it would seem, that his choice was being unduly influenced by a natural feeling for his family rather than by a movement of divine grace, he said to himself: "Wretch, of what are you thinking? Should not all places be on a plane of equality? Has not the Son of God paid the price of redemption equally for all men? Why, then, this preference of yours?" He abandoned the project.

According to the testimony of the Apostle, mortification of the tongue is a veritable triumph. It was a triumph that must be credited to St. Vincent. A useless word never escaped his lips; much less a word of detraction, boasting, vanity, ridicule, or impatience that would have betrayed an undisciplined or vicious disposition. He never spoke about himself except from a motive of charity, to sustain the conversation. Then warned, as it were, by the attention he had attracted, he would strike his breast, and say, "I am a miserable person; full of pride and vanity, I do nothing but speak about myself." And he would ask pardon, on his knees, for the scandal he had given.

He listened willingly to others while they related what he already knew. In that way he mortified his own self-love with its inclination to appear well-informed. And at the same time he did not deprive the other person of the pleasure he experienced in his narration. To imitate the Savior in His Passion, he listened without retort or interruption when he was made the butt of reproach and insult. And, like the Savior, he prayed sincerely for those who injured him.

In troublesome affairs, in losses and other misfortunes, there was never a murmur of complaint, but only a loving

acquiescence in the divine will, resignation expressed ordinarily in these words: "God be praised! Blessed be God! We must submit to His good pleasure, and accept all He pleases to send us."

Up to extreme old age he sought occasions of suffering. It was a maxim of his that mortification could be practiced uninterruptedly, either by maintaining an uncomfortable though unaffected posture, or by abstaining from enjoyment of the external senses, or by enduring patiently the inclemency of climate or season. Such was his theory, and such too his practice.

In 1649, on a journey undertaken for the purpose of visiting the houses of the Congregation, he suffered the chilling cold of a severe winter — a severe trial for a man of seventy-three — making his way from farm to farm, badly housed, and poorly clad. To that penance he added a rigorous abstinence. Rye bread or bean bread was practically his only food. Other viands were set before him, but he distributed them among the peasants whom he made the companions of his table. And withal he ate so sparingly that after his light refection he had time to do a good share of the reading that graced the meal.

He did not fix his gaze upon beautiful scenery, or magnificent buildings. He never plucked a flower. To their perfume he preferred the bad odor of a hospital or sickroom. He mortified his hearing in regard to concerts and agreeable discourse. He took no special precautions against extremes of temperature, and in consequence his hands and legs were chapped and swollen.

CHAPTER 64 *Mortification and Atonement*

As to food and drink, St. Vincent seemed to resemble the holy precursor of Christ. In this matter he would never permit any distinction to be made between him and his brethren. Coming in late of an afternoon from charitable expeditions, he made a visit in the chapel, and then directed his steps to the refectory. If the community meal was finished, he contented himself with what remained, and the more meager or less appetizing it was, the more pleased he seemed to be.

As a matter of fact he gave no indication of preference, or even of distinguishing one kind of nourishment from another. When served raw eggs, he ate them without remark, and the mistake was not generally known till the cook mentioned it the following day. If everything had already been served and consumed, he partook of a little bread. He never asked for wine; he drank only water. Yet the repast as here described, was his first and frequently his only meal; for he ate nothing in the morning and returned to St. Lazare very late.

In old age he was urged to partake of some broth before going out. But Vincent, with vigorous words, put aside the thought as a form of temptation. He would not thus pamper his "miserable body." At the very end of his life he consented to take a medicinal drink in the morning, a meatless broth made with wild chicory and pearl barley without seasoning.

Yes, he had a healthy appetite. Indicating a two or three pound loaf of bread one day, he remarked, "If I indulged my appetite, I would eat all of that." He did not indulge, but abstained, and in order to increase his mortifications of taste, he sprinkled his meager fare with bitter powders. Now and then his bodily endurance gave way under so austere a

regimen, and on such occasions it became necessary, during the night, to bring a morsel of dry bread, the only refreshment he would accept.

For him every day was a fast, but on two days every week, and on all days appointed by the Church, his mortification was more than usually rigorous. When more than eighty years of age he was content with the salt fish that was on the Community menu. If he came in after the regular meal was finished, someone might offer him fresh fish, but he would then request what had been served at the Community meal, and if it was not forthcoming he simply declined the more appetizing food.

In the evening his collation was a piece of bread, an apple, and water tinged with wine. But if he happened to come in late of an evening, he would retire to his room without refreshment, or he would go to the church to preside at a spiritual conference. His confreres were disturbed by such rigorous austerity, and at their insistence Cardinal de Rochefaucault commanded him to take better care of a health that was precious to the Church.

After dinner and supper there was an hour for recreation, but St. Vincent never took part.* When everyone else had retired to rest, he kept vigil because night hours were devoted to answering the letters he found waiting for him. Frequently he was still at work when the clock sounded midnight. The correspondence completed, he took a severe discipline. A Brother who occupied an adjoining room affirmed that the practice had been in use for the past twelve years. Actually

* How frequently St. Vincent shared the regular hours of daily recreation with his confreres, at various periods of his life, would be difficult to say. That he did so whenever possible, may be concluded from the following statement of his in a letter dated February, 1653: "I take part" (at recreation) "almost always — quasi toujours. And I am greatly consoled to observe that these gatherings are no longer burdened with shortcomings that marred our recreations in former times, and that (the confreres) spend the two hours every day in virtuous relaxation, each one in turn speaking seriously and profitably though at the same time, cheerfully" (St. Vincent, Correspondence, par Pierre Coste, Vol. IV, p. 550).

it went back to the days of his pastorate at Chatillon where a forgotten instrument of penance was found under his pillow after his departure. It was a regular practice night and morning except when he happened to be ill or on a journey.

Such things were the constant matter of his daily mortification. But there were special penances for special occasions. In times of public misfortune, when the Congregation was in some special need, or when he heard of an unusual transgression committed in a Community house, he applied the discipline twice every evening, seven days, for the sins of others for which he felt a personal responsibility. "My sins," he said, "are a cause of all the evils that happen; is it not just that I should do penance for them?" Then he sought and applied a remedy. Part of his penance was the wearing of a copper belt armed with points. Now and then, as a variation, he donned a hair shirt of truly formidable appearance.

After the nightly discipline he knelt down and said prayers. Then, at last he lay down on a pallet of straw to find what rest he could. But often he was unable to sleep. Fever consumed him; his ulcerated legs were a torture; and he was bathed with perspiration. Nevertheless he was up at four o'clock in the morning, and at his place in church to resume the routine of labor and mortification.

The virtue that St. Vincent knew so well by personal practice, was properly stressed in his conferences. "Be firm," he would say, "be firm against nature, for if we give it an inch, it will take a mile. Let us be convinced that our advancement in the spiritual life will be measured by the progress we make in mortification. It is a virtue that is necessary especially for those who are laboring for the salvation of souls. It is useless to preach penance to others if we ourselves do not practice penance."

He redoubled his exhortations during times of general misfortune. And reducing his words to practice, he sometimes retrenched a dish at table, and sometimes served black bread. He would say, "God is afflicting His people. And we Missioners, should we not be at the foot of the altar, lamenting our sins? It is our obligation to do so. Furthermore we should

deprive ourselves of something from our ordinary fare in order to relieve the public want, to suffer with the people, and share in the general misery."

He said again: "Our Lord so loved affliction, that He wished to lead a life of suffering. For that purpose 'the Word was made flesh.' All the saints have known the same sort of life on earth, and those to whom our Lord did not send some painful malady or other, found opportunities to afflict and chastise their bodies. Such was the way of St. Paul who chastised his body, thus bringing it into subjection to right reason (1 Cor. 9:27).

"We who are in good health, we too should mortify ourselves to atone for our sins, and for the sins committed in the world against the divine Majesty. But, alas! man is so thoughtless and poorly disposed, that often he not only does not punish himself, but he does not receive with patience the illness and afflictions that God is pleased to send."

Mutual forbearance was one of the mortifications recommended to the Missioners and the Daughters of Charity. In August of 1650 he wrote to the Missioners: "It is not easy for us to love the evil that comes to us from other people. We are more sensitive to grief than to pleasure; the sting of a rose remains longer than its perfume. The way to equalize the disparity, is to receive willingly whatever mortifies nature, to be favorably disposed toward suffering, because of the advantages it brings; to be prepared so that when it comes, we may be neither surprised nor saddened by its coming.

"The Spiritual Combat advises that we picture to ourselves untoward circumstances we may have to face, that we strive to overcome them, exercising ourselves in imaginary combat until we seem to be victorious. We must resolve to endure such an occurrence willingly if it should actually happen. However it is not well to imagine terrible misfortunes, as, for example, certain tortures inflicted upon the martyrs. Let us rather picture ourselves as despised, calumniated, afflicted with fever, and the like."

In March of 1648, he wrote to the Daughters of Charity: "I beg of you, bear with one another. You are all together

in your journey to eternity; you are all spouses of Jesus Christ. Be united then more and more closely with one another. If one Sister is contradicted by another, or if people outside the convent speak or complain against her, let her not feel badly. There is no one who is entirely free from such trials. Even our Lord experienced that sort of thing among His disciples. We must either travel along this road, or live in a desert apart from our fellow men.

“But unfortunate is he who is alone. Let us therefore go along together cheerfully and sweetly! We belong to God, and so we are obliged to accept what He ordains and what He permits. For instance, we suffer a repulse; our actions are criticized; we are treated worse than servants. Or someone speaks about us to our disadvantage; others give credence to what is said; we suffer evil consequences. Savior, my God, what wonderful opportunities to exercise meekness and patience, to make ourselves pleasing to God, to become beloved of the glorious Virgin Mary and the heavenly court, and lastly to gain the hearts of those who are the cause of our suffering, for, sooner or later they will recognize their fault if only we perform our small assignment faithfully and diligently. Let us then go about our task in the presence of God, calmly, quietly, with consideration for others. In this way our actions will be of great worth, and our recompense will be magnificent.

“To make good use of these contradictions and vexations that God sends us, we must love them. We must reflect: First, that endurance of afflictions was the constant practice of our Savior, and of all the saints; second, that no one goes to heaven save by way of tribulation and penitence; third, that suffering is a necessity whether we like it or not, and that only those who love to suffer, are able in a sense, to escape suffering; and finally, that if Sisters of Charity whom God has chosen from among thousands to ennoble them with His love — if they are unwilling to honor the Passion of our Lord; who, pray, will do so? You are Daughters of Charity; mortification also is a daughter of charity. Mortification therefore should be your sister. Caress her then, visit her often in prayer, and think of her from time to time.”

CHAPTER 65 *Self-Denial*

To mortify an excessive tenderness for kinsfolk, Vincent rarely gave permission to visit them. "I cannot advise you to visit your parents," he wrote, "for, our Lord has left us an entirely different counsel. He would not allow a disciple to return home and bury his dead father, or another disciple to return for the purpose of selling his possessions for distribution among the poor. Yet the reasons advanced in these two cases, were good and urgent reasons. To this counsel He added His own manner of acting. He returned to His own country only once, and on that occasion His fellow citizens endeavored to cast Him down from a ledge of the mountain. One reason for His permitting them to act in that way was, I believe, to impress upon us the spiritual dangers we incur when we make similar visits.

"Consequently by foregoing this journey, and thus mortifying nature, you will be doing an action very pleasing to God. At the hour of death you will experience an indescribable consolation in remembering that you remained steadfast at your post when flesh and blood were endeavoring to draw you away. I assure you the advice I give you is what I would follow myself. We should be loth to leave the works of God for temporal affairs, especially when the objective is merely an ephemeral gratification such as being at home for a while and associating with the members of one's family.

"Such visits home are ill-advised, for when the time for parting has come, there is nothing but grief and tears. What is worse, memories of home often remain to be a distraction to servants of God in their work. Phantasms and ideas little in keeping with their state of life will sometimes cause them to lose the love they had for their exercises of religion."

St. Vincent has left two conferences on mortification: one delivered in January of 1657 to the Daughters of Charity; the other, to the Missioners in May of 1659. In the former conference he identifies the virtue with Christian perfection. "A river has its current," he said, "and a boat heading downstream is always moving forward, even without effort on the

part of the oarsmen, because the current moves it along. But if you wish the boat to travel upstream, you must make use of a towline, or ply the oars. And when oars are the means of propulsion, oarsmen must row without pause; otherwise the boat will be carried back in the direction whence it came.

“The case is very similar with souls who desire to serve God. If they desire to approach Him, they must labor unceasingly to make progress in virtue. Otherwise they will be gradually separated from Him; they will fall back, drift away.

“The reason is that the practice of supernatural virtue is not according to one’s natural inclination. Corrupt nature has a penchant for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures; it longs for esteem and praise. Divine grace, on the other hand, draws a soul toward the practice of virtue, and the things of heaven. It inspires a longing for mortification and self-renunciation.

“It is quite certain therefore that unless we mortify ourselves unceasingly by curbing and controlling our passions, these passions will gain the upper hand while we follow the propensities of corrupt nature. During earthly life we must never cease to practice mortification. Though one may be far advanced in readiness for God, a renewed addiction to self-indulgence could reduce the soul to a pitiable state of worldliness and unworthiness.”

In his conference to the Missioners the Saint explained the practice of mortification much as he had already explained it in the previous conference to the Daughters. His text was the word of the Savior, “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross” (Mt. 16:24). He then went on: “Our Lord says to us that if we wish to come after Him, we must conform our lives to His. Very good. But do we know that we must begin by renouncing ourselves, and continue by carrying our cross? This grace is not given to everyone, but to only a few. And that is why many thousands of people who followed Him to hear Him speak, turned away and left Him. They were not found worthy to be His disciples, because they did not possess the

necessary dispositions to deny themselves, and carry their cross.

“What is meant by denying one’s self? It is a renunciation of one’s judgment, will, senses, and one’s family. What a life it is! To renounce one’s self entirely for the love of God, to conform one’s judgment to that of someone else, to submit one’s will virtuously to a person in authority, and to the divine judgment which gives the true measure of things. Our Savior acted in that fashion. By judgment we mean to indicate knowledge and understanding. The Son of God would have it known that He had no judgment of His own, that His judgment was that of His Father. ‘My teaching is not my own, but his who sent me’” (Jn. 7:16).

“How profitable it is for a Christian to submit his intellect and reason for the love of God! To surrender one’s judgment is truly an act of self-denial. A question is proposed, and everyone expresses his opinion. A spirit of self-renunciation does not require that on such occasions we keep silence. The proper way is to express our opinion, and give reasons in support of our opinion. But where such reasons are not clearly decisive, a humble man prefers to accept the judgment of someone else in preference to his own.

“Following the example of our Savior, let us conform our judgment always to that of God as it is made known to us in Sacred Scripture. Where Community Rules and Superiors are silent we are free to figure things out as best we can. Under such circumstances, let us proceed ‘in the name of the Lord,’ heeding here also the sense and spirit of the Gospel.

“Our Lord renounced His own will: ‘I do always the things that are pleasing to Him’ (Jn. 8:29). By doing the same we shall be worthy disciples of His school. But as long as we seek our own will, we shall be ill-disposed to follow Him. We shall have no merit in bearing our trials, nor shall we have any part with Him.

“We should mortify our interior and exterior senses, subjecting them to the divine law. Curiosity of sight is a frequent and a dangerous fault. Curiosity of hearing has power to mislead our thoughts. Curiosity was the ruin of our first

Father who returned to God by way of penitence. Curiosity of touch may have evil consequences. We must control our passions, and our senses.

“When the Son of God requires of us, that we hate our parents, He has in mind a situation where they would hinder us from going to Him. If, on the contrary, they lead us to Him, or leave us at liberty, He does not wish us to oppose them. Moreover, the word hatred in this context is not to be understood in the strict sense. It means merely to resist or disobey our parents if they try to prevent us from obeying God, and following our Lord Jesus Christ.

“When the service of God requires, therefore, let us leave our parents and our country.” Then after recalling the now familiar days he spent with his family in the year 1623, the Saint went on: “Let us lay aside the recollection of our past life. Otherwise we shall find ourselves dwelling on the things we did in the days of our youth, on the friendships and infatuations. But memories of such pleasures would arouse a desire for unlawful things.

“Let us renounce the devil and his works. ‘But Father,’ you will say to me, ‘we are poor Missioners who have already renounced all that: our clothes are plain, our furniture poor; there is nothing that savors of luxury or extravagance.’ Gentlemen and my Brothers, let us not be deceived; poverty in personal appointments, is compatible with pride of spirit. To affect fine sermons, to seek publicity, to speak about our accomplishments — such things indicate a spirit of pride and ostentation. And if we are to combat this vice it is preferable to do a task less well than to pride one’s self on having done it well.

“We must put away from us vanity and human praise. We must give ourselves to God, my Brothers, in order to free ourselves from self-esteem and from the commendations that men bestow. It would be better to be bound, hand and foot, and cast on burning coals, than to do or say anything for the purpose of winning human applause. In this connection a celebrated preacher said to me a few days ago: ‘Father, when once a minister of the Gospel seeks the honor and applause that men bestow, he delivers himself up to the

tyranny of the public, and, imagining that he will gain importance by his beautiful discourses, he becomes the slave of a vain and foolish reputation.' Such a one, we may add, is in opposition to the word of Christ, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Mt. 3:5).

"Herein Eternal Wisdom makes clear how a servant of the Gospel should eschew entirely a grand manner in word and action, adopting instead the simple, humble, and common way of which He Himself is our exemplar. It is the evil spirit that would entice us into thoughts of human respect. It is he who, perceiving our intention to go about our business quite simply, whispers the suggestion that simplicity of style is trivial and unbecoming the grandeur of Christian truth. Beware of such a thought, my Brothers. In the name of our Lord I beg of you, reject such diabolic worldly ostentation.

"Always keep in view the simple and humble manner of our Lord. He could have imparted great brilliance to His works, and sovereign power to His words, but He did not wish to do so. Going still further to lessen our pride by His admirable humility, He willed that His disciples should accomplish greater things than Himself. 'He who believes in me, the works that I do he also shall do, and greater than these he shall do' (Jn. 14:12). Lord, why should it be so?

"The reason, Gentlemen, why our Lord permits others to excel in public actions, is that He may excel all others in those that are lowly and hidden. He desires the fruits of the Gospel, not the fanfare of the world; that is why He has accomplished more through His faithful servants than in His own person."

CHAPTER 66 *Humility and Health*

St. Vincent: "On one occasion St. Peter converted three thousand persons, and on another occasion, five thousand; the Mediterranean world and beyond was enlightened by the Apostles. But the Savior preached only in

Palestine. He preached in Jerusalem, addressing Himself to the Jews, a people who resented and contradicted Him.

“So it appears that, in a sense, He did little whereas His disciples, ignorant, uncouth men, but animated with His spirit, did more than He. Why so? To give us an example of perfect humility. Gentlemen, should we not follow the example of our divine Master? Should we not give to others the advantage, and choose the worse and more humbling part for ourselves? Assuredly, so to act, would be most pleasing to our Lord, and it would reflect honor upon Him. Let us therefore follow His example!

“Here is a public function I have to perform. I might exercise that function in such a way as to attract much attention, but I will not do so. I will avoid or eliminate circumstances that would lend brilliance to the action, and bring praise upon myself. Of two thoughts that occur to mind, I will give expression to the lesser one, for the sake of humility, and retain the more striking idea so as to make of it a sacrifice to God in the silence of my heart.

“There is another passion that is dominant in many people, a passion that must be brought under control. It is the immoderate desire to enjoy physical well-being; a desire that finds expression in the excessive care one takes of one’s good health. Such immoderate solicitude for earthly life, such fear of suffering and inconvenience, noticeable in certain persons, are great obstacles to the service of God, for they do not leave a man at liberty to follow Jesus Christ.

“Gentlemen and my Brothers, we are disciples of our Divine Savior; yet He finds that we are enslaved. Enslaved by what? By a consideration of health, an imaginary remedy, an infirmary that gives good service, a house that suits our taste, a walk that affords recreation, a repose that savors of laziness. Then there comes a protest: ‘But the doctor advised me not to work so hard, to go out more frequently, to live in another part of the country.’

“Oh misery and weakness! Do men in responsible positions leave their dwelling place merely because they are sometimes troubled with poor health? Does a circumstance such as that induce a bishop to leave his diocese? a governor,

his province? a citizen, his native town? a merchant, his place of business? Do kings change residence from one city to another? It happens very seldom. And when they are taken sick they remain where they happen to be. When the late King fell ill at St. Germain-en-Laye, he stayed there four or five months, in fact up to the time he died; and his death was truly Christian, worthy of a truly Christian monarch.

“Undue attachment to earthly life does not lack reasons of a kind; for instance, it is a participation of the Divine, and therefore it should be preserved. I answer, ‘Yes, but self-love may be urging its preservation.’ Our Lord has issued the warning, ‘He who would save his life will lose it’ (Mk. 8:35). And elsewhere He adds that the surrender of life for one’s friend is a great proof of love. Now, God is our friend and is not our neighbor also our friend? Would we not then be unworthy to enjoy the life God has given us, if we should refuse to employ it for love of Him and of our neighbor?

“Another way to practice mortification, is to put off the old self, and put on the new. And that renewal we accomplish by divesting ourselves of our evil passions and imperfections. In this way a soul in the sordidness of sin is purified. One addicted to pride is delivered by making acts of humility. In remedying my past negligence, and combating present cowardice, I purge out the old leaven, and infuse new life by the vigilance and attention I bring to the task. Consequently to labor an entire lifetime, not only in correcting evil inclinations, but also in raising our habits and activities to the level of the new man in Christ, is to lay aside the old self, and clothe ourselves with the new man.

“God grant that we may be like a good vinedresser. With his pruning knife always at hand, he cuts away whatever would be harmful to the vine, all superfluous wood, so that the sap may flow into the branches that are to bear fruit. In like manner we should get rid of whatever is produced by inordinate nature; and production of that sort is persistently issuing from human weakness. Changing to the Savior’s interpretation of the parable, we the purified branches, and united with the vine-stock which is Christ, will be fruitful in the practice of holy virtues.

“Courage therefore. Let us work at mortification. Let no day pass without our making three or four acts of that virtue. For thus we shall become true disciples of Jesus Christ.”

CHAPTER 67 *Chastity*

St. Vincent: “Chastity is the daughter of mortification because the flesh is perfectly controlled by mortification; and purity, like a heavenly flower, springs up from the ruins of inordinate passion. Purity is angelic perfection in human guise.” Such was the modesty of St. Vincent. From his heart it shone forth on his countenance, in his words and in his entire conduct. Though always charitable in speech and writing, when addressing a woman, religious or secular, he never made use of a word too soft or tenderly affectionate. He refrained from expressions which, though proper, might suggest the least evil thought.

He chose to make use of the term, purity, in preference to the word *chastity*, because it seemed to him that *chastity* carried with it a connotation of the contrary vice. When he had occasion to speak of a fallen woman, he referred to her transgression as a weakness or misfortune so as to avoid arousing an impure phantasm, and he spoke of the woman as a poor creature.

Though pure as an angel, and so confirmed in grace that he was no longer troubled by temptations of the flesh, he employed every precaution. Of such precautions, mortification occupied the chief place. He held his external senses under close control, especially his eyes, never fixing his gaze upon a woman. He never conversed with a woman in private, but always in the presence of witnesses, the room door left open. No matter what the social or official position of the person he was visiting might be, he was always accompanied by a coadjutor Brother. One day the wife of Marshal Schomberg came to the parlor of St. Lazare. The Brother who accompanied Vincent was on the point of retiring from the room when the Saint reminded him of his place as companion.

He maintained the same decorum with the Daughters of Charity, and he visited them only when it was necessary. He wrote to Mademoiselle Le Gras: "I must go soon to La Chapelle; if there is any need of my visiting you, please let me know. Otherwise I shall not see you, for that was our agreement from the beginning." When she was ill he sent this note: "If you desire that I have the pleasure of seeing you, send word. It is a rule of mine never to visit you unless my presence is required for some necessary or very useful purpose." When conversing with her or with her Daughters, he observed the same rules of prudence as in his associations with people of the world.

His purity was expansive and conquering. One of his charities was to provide for the safety of young girls whose virtue was imperiled by the lack of sufficient food, and the brutality of an undisciplined soldiery. He had a number of them brought in to Paris from the Province of Lorraine, and placed with Mademoiselle Le Gras. With assistance given by the Ladies of Charity, St. Louise obtained situations for them in the best families of Paris.

St. Vincent's charity extended to women and girls who had already met with misfortune. He favored all the penitential institutions of his day, and in particular an establishment called La Madeleine. To that house of rehabilitation he sent the Daughters of the Visitation as ministers of mercy because their sweetness and charity seemed to endow them with a special power to benefit the poor penitents. Toward the close of his life he formed a project of building a vast hospice for young girls and derelict women, particularly for prostitutes. He held numerous consultations on the matter, but there were considerable difficulties to overcome, and death intervened before he could carry the plan into execution.

Regarding his own Congregation and that of the Daughters, his objective was to promote and safeguard a high degree of religious virtue. He urged upon them the necessity of doing more than satisfy the demands of personal conscience. They must be circumspect and careful to the point of forestalling the faintest suspicion of the contrary vice, inasmuch as a suspicion of that nature, though unjust, would be ex-

tremely prejudicial to their priestly and charitable works among the people. The precautions he recommended included the omission, when occasionally such omission might be considered advisable, of charitable services such as visiting the sick and the poor.

When visiting the sick, a Missioner was to have a companion. St. Vincent explained: "When the Son of God ordained that His disciples should be together, journeying and working two by two, He doubtless perceived the considerable disadvantages of sending them alone. And who would be so imprudent as to diverge from a custom which He introduced, and which the Congregation has always followed? Communities of religious women have learned by experience the necessity of leaving the infirmary door open, and the bed curtains drawn back while the confessor administers the sacraments, and remains with the sick person."

He wrote on the same subject: "I have instructed the Daughters of Charity, that they must never permit men to enter their rooms, whether the visitors be laymen, or ecclesiastics; and no exception is to be made for members of our Congregation. They are to close the door on me also if I should wish to enter. In case of sickness the Sister infirmarian can conduct the priest; or the coadjutor Brother may accompany him."

One day a fellow priest inquired of him whether it was fitting to take the pulse of a sick woman so as to determine the need of administering the Last Sacraments. He replied in the negative, explaining that the practice might easily be a source of temptation to both priest and patient.

"At the hour of death," he said, "the devil attacks by whatever approach is left open for him, and passions may retain strength in a reduced and weakened body. If the pulse must be taken to determine the imminence of death, an attendant or someone else will render that service; there is less danger for him. Or else you can obtain medical opinion. But under no circumstance are you to touch a girl or a woman." He gave similar advice to a coadjutor Brother, counseling him to abstain from indulging in conversation with a person of the other sex. "Granted that your intention

is good, and blameless," he said, "there is always an occasion of thinking evil thoughts. The way to preserve purity, is to avoid occasions that may tarnish its luster."

However, a faithful soul was not to be alarmed by temptations of this nature. He wrote to a coadjutor Brother: "I have been consoled by your letter and the candid avowal of your interior state. I feel as did St. Bernard when he was informed that one of his monks desired to quit his Benedictine vocation, and enter a different order. The pretext offered by the discontented religious was that by the change he would find greater regularity of religious life. The holy Abbot assured him that the thought was a temptation, that abandonment of his first vocation would lead him, through prompting from the devil, to abandonment of the second, and that he would end by falling into a disorderly state of living — which actually happened.

"My dear Brother, if you are not content in the Congregation of the Mission, you will not be satisfied elsewhere; of that I assure you. There may be some levity or lack of consideration in your desire for change. If not, then you have need of prayer; after that, do some thinking; reflect that in every state of life one finds dryness and weariness and, sometimes, a longing for other things, for something different. Consider that since God has called you to the Congregation, He has very probably attached to this way of life, the grace of your salvation. And it seems equally probable that grace will not be forthcoming in some other state of life to which He is not calling you.

"The second remedy for temptations of the flesh, is to avoid association with persons whose presence gives rise to such temptations. Also to confide such troubles to your spiritual director who will guide you. I advise great confidence in the assistance of our Lord and the Immaculate Virgin, to whose care I shall frequently commend you."

As a powerful reason for purity, St. Vincent adduced our Lord's strong aversion from whatever has an appearance of being contrary to this virtue. "It was for that reason," he said, "that in taking upon Himself a human nature, Jesus Christ wished to be born, not in the ordinary way, but

in a manner entirely supernatural through the operation of the Holy Spirit, His Mother remaining always a chaste virgin. Lord, there must be something sublime in this virtue, since, by the divine will and power the order of nature was abrogated in the conception and birth of the Savior!

“During His lifetime our Lord permitted that calumny be directed against Him. Men called Him a troublemaker, a glutton and a wine drinker, a demoniac, and so on. But He did not permit even His bitterest enemies to accuse Him of transgression against chastity. My Savior, we address our prayer to You that we may acquire this rare virtue. It is above the power of nature which, on the contrary, arouses within us countless temptations against purity.

“Our Lord proposes the rule, ‘He who does not leave his wife, is not worthy of me.’ That is why the Apostles, wishing to enter upon a life of special consecration, separated from their wives to follow Him. Similarly, wives left their husbands. Many of the first Christians followed this example. A number of people, fearing that they lacked strength to live celibate lives in the world, betook themselves to the deserts of Libya and Egypt, there to follow a manner of existence truly angelic. Later on, monasteries were established for people who resolved upon separating from the pleasures and temptations of the world, and living a life of chaste, and consecrated service.

“There are two kinds of chastity. The first, which moderates the use of carnal pleasures, pertains to married people; it is called conjugal chastity. The other kind, pertaining chiefly to unmarried persons, inhibits all sexual indulgence; it is known as virginal chastity. The devil is active, doing his utmost to destroy this rare virtue in even the most holy souls. Under his instigation, even holy things can become sources of temptation. Lord, what is to be done in such terrible moments? Take refuge in God; seek shelter within the wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us then, my God, to pluck from our hearts these cursed affections, to efface from our minds all evil recollections!

“There is a purity of body, and a purity of mind. Purity of mind is the form and essence of chastity which drives

away all evil thoughts and imaginings. We should therefore endeavor to be masters of our mind and heart, lest we fall under the malign power of unchaste images and affections.

“There are various means of preserving chastity. First, watchfulness over the external senses, particularly sight and hearing. There is danger in the power of sight, and there is evil in looking here and there, fixing one’s gaze on all sorts of things. In that way the holy King David became an adulterer and a murderer. Hearing too, must be restrained, for it brings into the mind images of unchaste discourse and conduct. There is danger in listening to such things.

“The second precaution is to avoid idle and unnecessary conversation with persons of the other sex. Third: sobriety in eating and drinking, especially in the use of alcoholic beverages. Fourth: to keep usefully occupied; idleness is truly said to be the devil’s workshop; he fashions there his impure ideas and inclinations. And, finally, the avoidance of softly affectionate relations and expressions in correspondence and conversation.”

CHAPTER 68 *Composure of Spirit*

Living in absolute submission to the Divine will, Vincent maintained an even control over his faculties and emotions, a perfect composure of spirit. He was quiet and self-controlled in his manner of speech and action. This constant composure of attitude, countenance, and external action was observable in a variety of circumstances:

1. In his Christian undertakings amid contradictions and other trials.
2. In humiliations and honors: in the slave mart of Tunis, or the Royal Court of Paris, “Father Vincent was always Father Vincent.”
3. In losses of property, and adverse rulings of the Law, civic disorder and Provincial war.
4. In misfortunes at sea; and in grief at losing excellent members of the Congregation.

5. In perils to his own life and safety.

6. At the hour of death.

Everywhere and always, he manifested a characteristic equanimity of soul, and serenity of countenance.

As a member of the Queen's Council, he had no other ambition than to promote a love for God, and the welfare of the State. He was free from prejudice, and free from the emotional sallies of anger and invective that wound self-respect, and ruin diplomatic or business affairs. Under all circumstances he preserved in his soul, and manifested in his words, actions, and countenance, a calmness and serenity which is a safeguard of personal freedom and lucid reflection, wins popular favor, and leads men to travel confidently in the path of truth and goodness.

At once docile yet firm, he adhered unshakably to the judgments of conscience, and he was always ready to follow advice that was better than his own. Whether others agreed with him or opposed his ideas, he always maintained an imperturbable serenity. Confronted with opposition, he never gave utterance to complaint or harsh words. Content with having done his duty, he kept silence after the decision, leaving to God the glory of whatever good was done, and entrusting to His providence the success of the affair.

St. Vincent maintained self-composure in circumstances of misfortune. Toward the close of the year 1659 four Missioners, destined to work in Madagascar, left Paris for La Rochelle, the place of embarkation. Father Stephen, Superior of the Missionary band, accompanied by a coadjutor Brother, headed for the same destination by water. But a storm wrecked the vessel, and all the passengers lost their lives. Vincent received a report of the tragedy. He mourned the loss of the young apostle who, besides consecrating himself to the salvation of infidels, had also contributed 40,000 livres of his patrimony to the works of the foreign missions. There was reason to fear that the Madagascar Mission would suffer in consequence of the tragedy; for it seemed likely that the relatives of the young Missioner would henceforth use their considerable influence to prevent the continuance of so hazardous an enterprise.

Nevertheless Vincent remained calm and self-possessed both interiorly and in his external action and appearance. Neither by word nor by expression of countenance did he manifest the sadness that filled his heart. He had to discuss the matter with three of his brethren, but they were obligated to maintain secrecy. Arrangements had been made to send a replacement to La Rochelle, when two letters came from Bayonne and Bordeaux. Glancing at the envelope address, St. Vincent recognized — and how joyfully! — the handwriting of the shipwrecked Father Stephen who, as the letters disclosed, had been miraculously delivered from destruction. The emotional transition experienced by Vincent must have been great, yet there was no disturbance of his habitual calm and recollection. He rendered sincere thanks to the good God to whom, under the shock of a tragic report, he had so recently offered his entire submission.

It was fitting that one who exemplified equanimity in so perfect a degree should recommend that virtue to his brethren. He did so in a letter where he spoke about the death of Father Portail, his earliest and most dear companion. "It has pleased God to deprive us of good Father Portrail; he departed this life the fourth of this month. That good Father has always felt a great fear of death, but when the end was drawing near, he was able to look upon it peacefully and with resignation. Several times when I went to see him, he told me that he no longer experienced any of his former fear.

"He died the way he had lived, making good use of affliction, practicing virtue, and consuming himself, as did our Lord, in accomplishing the will of God. He was one of the two Missioners who were the first in mission work, and he contributed personal services to other works of the Congregation. By his death the Little Company would suffer great loss, were it not that God disposes all things for the best, enabling us to find some advantage where we imagined there would be nothing but harm and privation. There is reason to hope that our confrere in heaven will be of greater benefit to us than he could have been on earth. I beg of you to offer for him the customary suffrages."

The same spirit is manifest in another letter: "My dear

Confre: You have not then heard of the losses we have sustained? Not only in the number of men God has taken from us, but in their quality as Missioners and foremost workers in the Congregation, we have suffered great loss. They proved themselves to be men of heroic zeal by giving their lives in the service of their neighbor. Six of them, and also a coadjutor Brother, died of pestilence in Geneva while assisting the plague-stricken populacc. The others made the supreme sacrifice while laboring for the salvation of the people in Madagascar and the Hebrides Islands.

“They are now Missioners in heaven. There can be no doubt on that score, since there can be no greater charity than to give one’s life in behalf of the neighbor as Christ has declared by both His preaching and His Passion. May God be glorified with the glory which we have reason to believe He has bestowed upon our confreres, and may the fulfillment of His good pleasure bring peace and calm to our afflicted hearts! I say nothing of the grief I experienced upon receiving those distressful reports which came so close, one upon another; it would be impossible to express. With your tender love for the Little Company, you will be able to judge from your own distress whether I could be more grievously stricken without being utterly crushed.”

PART X . FORTITUDE

CHAPTER 69 *Courage and Patience*

It might seem that a man who is meek and humble would in consequence lack strength and courage. When the interests of truth or justice were involved, St. Vincent was invincibly strong and constant. In the Council of Conscience where his meekness was remarkable, there too he distinguished himself by the practice of unyielding fortitude. Undoubtedly his natural kindness inclined him to be obliging and serviceable to everyone, whether humble plebeian or titled nobleman, but if request was made in violation of conscience, his attitude was one of unflinching refusal. It was useless for intrigue, cupidity, and ambition to assail his virtue. Regardless of reasons that might arouse hope and fear, he did what lay in his power to safeguard the sacred offices of the Church against intrusion by the unworthy. Over a long period of time he withstood Cardinal Mazarin despite the Cardinal's increasing power. And the reason for his opposition was that, although a Churchman, Mazarin, by following either a personal ambition or what he considered reasons of State, was attempting to divert ecclesiastical goods from ecclesiastical purposes.

In a letter to Pope Clement XI, 1706, Archbishop Fenelon wrote as follows: "This man of God was conspicuous for an incredible discernment of spirits, and a singular firmness. Disregarding both the favor and the hatred that might be expected from persons in power, he stood strongly for the rights of the Church. And there was reason to do so when, in the Council of Conscience, in obedience to the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria, he gave his advice regarding the choice of candidates for episcopal office. If the other Coun-

selors of the Queen had supported his decisions with greater constancy, certain men who subsequently caused much trouble, would never have been raised to the episcopal dignity."

To the same effect is the testimony given by the Bishop of Alet. He speaks of Vincent's invincible firmness and fortitude of soul in face of threats and entreaties, of his refusal to approve the candidacy of persons who, whatever their secular position or dignity, were not worthy of holding prelatial office, or of possessing an ecclesiastical benefice. The President of the French Parliament declared that the Queen called Vincent to the Council of Conscience because of the public esteem in which he was held. Like other witnesses, President Lamoignon describes how Vincent spoke with a firmness worthy of an Apostle; how no consideration could induce him to disguise the truth in any way; and how the confidence placed in him by men of position or influence, was for him but a reason to inspire in them, sentiments of truth and justice.

Instances of his constancy are innumerable. A lady of high rank besought him to obtain from the King a benefice for her son. He answered: "Your pardon, Madam, if I have nothing to do with this matter." Astonished by this rebuff, and then carried away with pride and anger, the lady retorted: "Indeed, Sir, your assistance is unnecessary. There are other ways of achieving my purpose. I have honored you too much by appealing to you; and it is quite evident that you are as yet unacquainted with the proper manner of conducting yourself when conversing with ladies of my rank."

Vincent's only reply was complete silence from which insults were powerless to move him. Under similar circumstances he might say, "Madam, neither our regulations nor my conscience permit me to obey your wishes in this matter; therefore I very humbly beg of you to consider me excused." To alleged friendship, or unconcealed anger; to flattery or insult, he was content with responding: "Sir, I like to believe that you endeavor to acquit yourself worthily of your duty; and I, for my part, should fulfill my obligations."

He was in need of still greater firmness when approached by persons who spoke in the name of the Queen. A young

man of prominent family had requested her to endow him with an Abbey. She granted the request conditionally, the condition being that Vincent would not object. Accordingly the petitioner, accompanied by his tutor, made his way to St. Lazare. They opened the interview with the customary amenities, expressed the anticipated gratitude of the entire family, and enumerated several excellent qualities which, by their predication, then adorned or would subsequently adorn, the young man who desired an abbacy.

In contrast with this fair picture St. Vincent, who had been previously informed of the facts, meekly presented another and much different character-delineation. He concluded with this plain statement of disapproval: "Consequently, I beg of you, Sir, to accept in good part my disapproval of the project of which I should have to render an account before the judgment seat of God." At this point the tutor, infuriated by the words just spoken, advanced with clenched fist and vituperative epithet. But then, perceiving that the Saint remained unperturbed, he took his departure, while Vincent, with politeness under strain, accompanied the young man and his mentor to their carriage.

But what was to be done when Cardinal Mazarin, now all-powerful, following his own policy, named all candidates for prelatial office and sought ratification from the Council of Conscience only after appointments had been made? St. Vincent did what was possible under the circumstances. He endeavored to inform the Queen regarding ecclesiastical affairs, and he obtained from her that worthy men be chosen to fill episcopal sees. By so doing he merited the following testimonial from Pope Clement XI in the Bull of Canonization: "When noblemen recommended their sons, and sought his aid by entreaty or threat, he disdained alike their offers and their intimidations. Never would he stop to make powerful friends at the expense of the inheritance of Christ nor was he coerced into compromise by fear of the evils with which his enemies threatened him."

Again he manifested fortitude in his relations with the religious communities entrusted to his care. He closed the doors against whatever could introduce a worldly spirit or

the errors that were then prevalent in the Church. He refused admission to ladies of high rank, and even to members of the Royalty who wished to be received as boarders. In some cases their purpose was to gratify their curiosity, in others, to satisfy a mistaken devotion. The only exception to this rule of exclusion was made in favor of a benefactress; and Vincent had an accurate list of their names.

In his judgment generosity in rendering financial aid, was not a sufficient claim to the title and privileges of a benefactress. It had to be enhanced by pure faith and solid virtue. For instance a monastery located on St. Anthony Street had received 50,000 livres from a lady who was in residence with the nuns. But she wished to follow the guidance of contemporary heretics, and to procure admittance for her Jansenist director. Vincent arranged for the return of the 50,000 livres to the generous boarder, and then he dismissed her from the convent. He valued the spiritual well-being of a religious community more highly than temporal gain.

In consequence he often suffered hatred and persecution at the hands of disgruntled and resentful persons. A high-born lady to whom he had refused admittance to a convent in St. Denis, would not permit him to give a mission on her lands. In 1658, a messenger informed him that Madam Payen was at the gate of the monastery on St. Anthony Street. She wished to see a little girl who was dangerously ill and could not be moved. Vincent replied: "Madam's most humble servant, I sincerely desire to fulfill her wish. But my rule will not allow me to admit anyone. I have already refused such permission to Madam de Nemours, Madam de Longueville, and the Princess de Carignan; they will never forgive me. What would they say if they were to hear about my making an exception in your favor? Besides, to do so would be a violation of my conscience."

St. Vincent held his ground even under pressure of claims upon his gratitude, as happened on a notable occasion that involved Adrien Le Bon. It will be remembered that Father Adrien was the former Prior of St. Lazare, and an outstanding benefactor of St. Vincent and the Vincentian Congregation.

The incident occurred as follows:

Through Vincent's advice, and by order of the Queen, an Abbess of noble birth and scandalous life had been taken to prison. She appointed Father Adrien to obtain her release because he was indebted to her for various considerable favors. He consented to use his influence, and his willingness was full of confidence because he felt sure that Vincent would readily grant his request. He was greatly surprised and sorely grieved when not only his first request but his urgent insistence was met with a constant refusal.

Calmly and respectfully, but resolutely, Vincent simply answered: "I cannot betray my conscience; I beg of you to excuse me." Understandably, the Prior's feelings were wounded. "What, Sir," he exclaimed, "is this the way you treat the one who deeded over to you the Priory of St. Lazare? Is this your manner of expressing gratitude for all the favors I have done for you and your Congregation?"

Vincent, on his part, was no less grieved than his friend. "It is true," he said, "that you have bestowed upon us favors and honors most generously, and that we are obligated toward you as dutiful sons toward their father. But please take everything from us, take all back if, in your judgment, we are deserving of such favors only at the sacrifice of God and conscience."

CHAPTER 70 *Meekness Under Fire*

In some incidents patience appears as a companion of courage, for one virtue complements and supports another. Or to speak more precisely, patience, like courage and perseverance, is a function of fortitude. The patience practiced by St. Vincent was truly remarkable. Father Menard cites the following incident. The Queen had promised a bishopric to a candidate judged unworthy by St. Vincent who persuaded Her Majesty to withdraw the promise. Hearing the bad news from Vincent, a Duchess vented her ire upon him

first of all by hurling opprobrious epithets, and finally by throwing a footstool. Injured and bleeding, Vincent retired from the room without a word of recrimination, but only this one remark to his brother companion: "It is wonderful to see how far the tenderness of a mother for her son can go." Father Coste, C.M., classifies the narrative as a legend. We may at least observe that the patience and meekness delineated in the narrative are no more than the Saint would have shown if the incident had actually occurred. Witness his reaction when berated at the entrance of St. Lazare by an angry nobleman whose son he had refused to recommend for ecclesiastical preferment. "You speak truly, Sir," was Vincent's response, "I am a wretch and a sinner."

There are numerous instances of the manner in which he bore abusive treatment at the hands of poor people who blamed him for public misfortune, or complained that they had not received sufficient assistance. On such occasions he would say, "Go and pray to God." During the lawsuit that arose over the farm property at Orsigny, the prosecutor was voluble in slanderous abuse of the Saint and his Congregation. Vincent might have countersued for libel, but he would not permit his lawyer to reply. And his response to those who urged him to take defensive action, was merely to remark that the Savior had suffered more grievously. His patient restraint won the admiration of Court and prosecutor alike.

He exercised this virtue when property losses, which were often considerable, brought upon him a measure of contempt. His patience in such cases was not only resigned, but full of joy, for he found an opportunity of practicing humility and poverty as well. He was heroically submissive in the loss of subjects who were most useful and valuable. "Through the mercy of God," he wrote, "my soul is at peace because deprivation has come to us by the good pleasure of God. It is true I sometimes fear that my sins are the cause; but seeing the divine good pleasure even in such misgiving, I accept all with good heart."

"The state of affliction," he taught, "is not evil. God sends trials and troubles in order to exercise our patience, and teach us to compassionate other sufferers. The Savior,

for our sakes, was a High Priest who suffered and thus learned by experience how to compassionate our miseries, and encourage us by His example. An unmistakable sign that God has great designs on a person, is that He sends desolations and sorrows. Temptations and tribulations are a gauge of spiritual progress, for such trials reveal the presence or absence of solid virtue. They also furnish opportunities of acquiring more merit in a single day than would ordinarily be gained in many days of tranquillity."

In March of 1657, he wrote as follows to a Superior: "The difficulties that arise in your management of affairs do not indicate that your administration is at fault. On the contrary, our Lord wishes to show that you are doing well, and for that reason He is putting you to the test. A good ship is apparently sound in calm weather because it is quite safe under the circumstances. Its true quality is revealed when it is exposed to the pounding of rough weather. You would be happy and content if you had no trials to suffer in your present position. You will be still more so if, out of love for our Lord, you remain firm and undaunted amid the trials in which He has placed you. On a previous occasion I counseled patience. I now renew that recommendation."

On the same subject he said to the Daughters of Charity: "Observe a sculptor who wishes to carve a beautiful statue out of a rough and shapeless block of stone. First of all he deals heavy blows with a hammer. One might imagine he would shatter the stone into pieces. Then, having removed the rougher parts, he makes use of a smaller hammer. After that he takes up a chisel, and begins to carve the figure in its various parts. When the figure appears, he employs more delicate implements in order to give the statue its final perfection.

"God acts in like manner. When He withdraws a potential Daughter of Charity or a future Missioner from the corrupt mass of the world, they are worldly; they are like unwrought stones. He wishes to shape them into beautiful images, and for that reason He goes to work, and applies heavy strokes of the hammer, and this He does by making them suffer heat and cold, and the hardships that are en-

dured when visiting sick people in rural areas under biting winds and winter weather.

“Well, these are the heavy strokes of the hammer that God gives a poor Daughter of Charity; and whoever considers the situation superficially would say that Daughter is to be pitied. But if we cast our eyes on the designs of God, we shall see that all these hardships are only for the purpose of shaping and fashioning a beautiful soul. And when He perceives that the rougher qualities have been removed by great afflictions of mind and body through the practice of patience, then He takes up the chisel to make the work perfect. He delineates the features; He adorns and embellishes it. He takes pleasure in enriching that soul with His graces, and He does not cease until He had made it fully acceptable.”

In twenty different letters Vincent returns to the subject, especially in reference to temptations. In the following letter dated 1642, he wrote to a Missioner in Rome: “When God plans to employ persons in some great enterprise, some special service, He disciplines them with troublesome repugnances and movements of inconstancy. This He does to try them, to acquaint them with their own weakness, to detach them from creatures, and occasionally there is need of dispelling the miasma of self-complacency. The all-pervading purpose is to make them more pleasing in His sight.

“Have no doubt that the temptations you suffer will contribute to your spiritual advancement, provided you resist them. The devil rashly endeavored to induce the Son of God to worship him, the most loathsome temptation diabolic malice could conceive. Among Apostles and Saints was there anyone who had no need of mortifying his evil propensities and of thus overcoming assaults launched by the flesh and the world?

“Courage therefore; stand firm! Could it be possible that a trifling repugnance should cause us to abandon everything? May God forbid! The Apostle teaches that those who fall away after being enlightened, are unable to regain the state from which they fell. For although their intention be good, and their resolution strong, nevertheless when the time comes

for them to fulfill their determination, and overcome difficulties, grace is wanting to them because they were wanting to the inspirations of grace. Scruples harass them, and the desire for repose forms in them a conscience that easily adapts itself to sensuality. In a word, nature assumes the mastery."

CHAPTER 71 *A Letter to a Novice*

In a letter to a young Sister novice, he wrote, June 25, 1658: "I am not astonished at the repugnance you feel in your exercises of religion; on the contrary I would be astonished if you were free from such feelings of aversion. God calls men to His service, and sooner or later He puts them to the test by requiring them to endure sufferings of one kind or another.

"It is better for you to undergo such trials in the beginning rather than later on, or at the end of your earthly sojourn, because through suffering, you learn to know and humble yourself, to distrust self, and place all confidence in God. In a word, by means of trials that come soon, you amass a fund of patience, fortitude, and mortification, virtues of which you will have great need throughout your life.

"I have no doubt that you would be happy to retain your freedom, but such contentment, coming from nature, would not last. We cannot serve two masters. If you wish to enjoy the freedom that belongs to the children of God, you must follow Jesus Christ in the path of subjection that leads to salvation. So great is the inconstancy of our nature, that despite your commendable resolve to do what is right while traveling the broad way of human liberty, you would be in danger of going astray. And this commonly happens to souls that are united with God by threads of silk.

"I beg of you to consider, for a moment, the manner of the Savior's life on earth. He came into the world not only to effect our salvation by the sacrifice of His life, but also to obey the will of His Father, and draw us to Himself by the force of His example. While only an infant, He was

persecuted by King Herod. In exile He suffered, not only His own discomforts, but, by compassion, those also of His foster father and His virgin mother who suffered much on His account. Grown into boyhood at Nazareth, He obeyed His parents, and followed the regulations of a hidden life. His purpose was to offer Himself as a model for souls in religion, and inspire them to lead a life of obedience and regularity. Unquestionably you occupied a special place in His eternal design.

“If you look at this divine Savior, you will see how He suffered without ceasing, how he prayed, labored, and obeyed. ‘If you live according to the flesh,’ says the Apostle, ‘you will die’ (Rom. 8:13). But to live according to the spirit that gives life, you must live as did our Lord; you must renounce yourself, do the will of another rather than your own, make good use of contradictions, and look on sufferings as preferable to self-gratification. Speaking of His Passion, Christ proposed the question, ‘Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?’ (Lk. 24:26.) These words were spoken to teach us that, like our Savior, we should expect to enter heaven by way of suffering.

“There are different kinds of suffering. The Apostles and the first Christians suffered persecution and every manner of hardship. And it is written that everyone who wishes to follow Jesus, will have to endure trials. If you reflect upon your past life, you will see that you are no exception to the general rule. There are few persons in the world who do not complain about their state in life even though their lot seems a happy one. Surely, the best state in life is that which likens us to our Lord. When we are enduring temptation, praying, working and suffering, we are treading the path along which He guides those persons whom He wishes to raise to a high degree of spiritual perfection.

“Therefore if you do not find anything attractive in the practice of virtue, you must not become disheartened. According to the Book of Job, man’s earthly life is one of combat. We must do battle therefore if we are to be victorious. The devil will attack you in order to weaken your determination of belonging entirely to God. He will endeavor to dishearten

you because he foresees that your perseverance will be his vanquishment.

"It is therefore necessary to resist his offensive resolutely by means of prayer, an exact observance of Community exercises, and, above all, by means of a truly filial and vigorous confidence in God. His grace will not fail you. On the contrary it will be given in full measure proportionately to the trials that beset you, and your determination to overcome them. He never permits us to be tempted above our strength.

"For all these reasons it seems to me that you will do well to be resolute in your difficulties. The more you give to our Lord, the greater graces will you receive. His yoke is sweet to those who bear it willingly, and your burden will be light if you compare it with that of Jesus Christ who suffered for you; or if you consider the consolation and recompense He promises those who serve Him constantly in the place and in the manner He desires — as I trust you will do."

On another occasion: "The wisdom of God has arranged everything admirably. Night follows day; contradiction, applause; and sadness, joy; so that our minds may rest in Him who only is above all change. We all must be prepared to suffer in one way or another. Without such readiness we would not be disciples of the divine Master who submitted Himself to persecution. Consider it a blessing to be treated as He was treated, and endeavor, under such circumstances, to practice the virtues that He exemplified."

Again: "Your sufferings, which are various and of long continuance, affect me sensibly. They are a cross with outstretched arms, embracing both body and soul. But they are also a cross which raises you above the earth; and that gives me consolation. You may well find solace in being treated as was our Lord, and honor in the circumstances which resemble those in which He proved His love for us.

"His sufferings were both interior and exterior, and what He suffered interiorly was far the greater. But why, you may ask, does He treat me in this manner? And I answer: for the same reason that motivated His own sufferings, viz., to purify you of your sins, and clothe you with His virtues, that the

name of His Father may be sanctified in you.

“Remain at peace, therefore, I have perfect confidence in His goodness. Do not give attention to contrary feelings; mistrust your own sentiments. Instead, trust the knowledge I have of you, and believe what I say: you have every reason to rejoice in God, and to hope for everything from Him through our Lord who dwells in you.

“After the recommendation He has given you to reverence yourself, I do not see anything that should give you cause for apprehension — not even sin; for in the state of religion you do penance for the past, and, as for the future, you have a great aversion from whatever may be displeasing to God.”

To one of his Missioners who had suffered for the sake of justice he wrote: “Is not your heart greatly comforted with the reflection that you have been found worthy to suffer in the service of God? Certainly you should give thanks, and ask of Him the grace to make good use of your trial.” To an Abbess who complained that measures of reform within the Abbey were meeting with opposition, he said, “The sufferings endured in the performance of a good work obtain the graces necessary to succeed.”

He had this advice for his Missioners: “You have been experiencing difficulties; blessed be God! Under the circumstances you must honor the Savior in the contradictions He experienced while on earth. How great was the opposition! Through hatred of Him and His teaching, His enemies restricted His ministry, and at last deprived Him of life. He prepared His disciples for similar persecutions by warning them that they would be ridiculed, contemned, and maltreated; that fathers would betray their children; and children, their fathers.

“Let us profit by our trials as did the Apostles! More than that, let us rejoice in them as in something that is greatly to our advantage! If you act in this manner, you may be sure that the very measures employed by the devil for your frustration, will serve you in overcoming him. You will give joy to the blessed in heaven, and to all good souls who observe your conduct, or who hear tell of it. Even those who are now hostile, will one day sound your praise, and acknowledge

that you have been instrumental in securing their salvation. Meanwhile it is advisable to inquire into the causes of popular aversion, and to correct whatever may have given rise to justifiable disapproval."

He wrote to a confrere who complained of a confrere: "You must look upon his action, not as an offense coming from him, but as a trial issuing from God who wishes to try your patience. Your virtue will be more perfect in proportion as your feeling of resentment is more keen, and in proportion as you have given less cause for the injury inflicted. Prove therefore that you are a true child of Jesus Christ, and that your frequent meditations on His sufferings have been profitable to you."

To another Missioner he said: "We must go to God through evil report and good report. It is a manifestation of divine goodness, that we are permitted to fall into public reproach and contempt. I have no doubt that you are bearing what has happened, with patience. If the glory bestowed by the world is mere smoke, the world's contempt is indeed advantageous when accepted in the proper spirit. And I trust it will be so in your case, that you will profit greatly by this humiliation."

The beatitude of suffering was one of his favorite themes. To a priest in trouble: "Would you wish to be exempt from suffering? Would it not be preferable to have a demon in one's body? For a demon could not injure the soul whereas a person free from all suffering would not be conformed, either in soul or in body, to Jesus Christ. Yet, such conformity is the pledge of our predestination. Therefore, my dear confrere, do not be astonished that you should be suffering pain; the Son of God has chosen it as the instrument of our salvation."

CHAPTER 72 *Too Much Tranquillity*

St. Vincent was ill at ease when the Little Company seemed to be enjoying too much tranquillity. He said one

day: "For some time and frequently I have been thinking that the Congregation is not suffering at all, but enjoying everywhere success and prosperity. Let us express the thought this way: God is conferring His favors without any admixture of adversity. I began to mistrust this tranquillity, knowing that God is wont to try His servants, and chastise those whom He loves (Hebr. 12:6).

"I recalled to mind how St. Ambrose, while on a journey, came to a house where the master — so he learned — had never experienced affliction of any kind. Under divine enlightenment the Saint understood that a house so free from all suffering, was threatened with ruin. He said therefore, 'Come, let us leave this place, for it is about to feel the wrath of God!' As a matter of fact, he had hardly taken his departure when lightning destroyed the house and its occupants.

"On the other hand I have seen the occasional misfortunes of many religious orders. One in particular, among the largest and most virtuous in the Church, is at times in a state of consternation. At present it is undergoing a terrible persecution. I said to myself: 'Observe how God treats the saints, and how He would act in our regard if we were strong in virtue.' But, knowing our weakness, He nurses us, and nourishes us with milk as is done with small children. He sees to it that our enterprises attain success almost without our having to exert ourselves.

"And so I had reason to fear that we were unacceptable to God, and unworthy of suffering for His love, since He shields us from the afflictions and trials whereby He puts His servants to the test. It is true that we suffered some disasters in our embarcations for Madagascar, but God came to our relief. In 1649 soldiers caused wreckage amounting to 42,000 livres, but we were not the only ones to suffer. Everyone felt the effects of the public disturbances.

"But blessed be God, my Brothers, because it has pleased His adorable Providence to deprive us of the piece of property that was recently taken from us. The loss is considerable for the Company; yes, very considerable. Let us enter into the sentiments of Job, saying, "The Lord gave and the Lord has

taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!' (Job 1:21.) It is God who has judged us; let us humble ourselves. Let us adore His justice and mercy, that He treats us in this way for our good. 'He has done all things well.'"

Of calumnies and persecutions he said, "They are never lacking to souls who are faithful to God. They are graces that He lavishes on His true servants. Without doubt He only permits such things as trials and exercises of our patience and meekness. They are His work. He wishes to employ them as means of detaching His servants from everything that might hinder their going to Him. Therefore whenever it pleases His divine Goodness to send these opportunities of suffering, let us raise our hearts to heaven, and adore and praise His adorable Providence. Let us receive them with joy, and say in the fullness of our hearts: 'Welcome, dear persecutions! Welcome, beloved calumnies, crosses from heaven! I propose to profit by the visit you are making on the part of God.'

"Poor nature will suffer, but if we regard these things with the eye of Christian faith, we shall receive them, not as injuries from men, but as blessings from God. Truly blessed are they that endure calumny and persecution for the sake of justice (Mt. 5:10). If we have given cause for people to speak and act against us, we must humble ourselves under the avenging hand of God who sooner or later chastises the transgressors of His law. In such case the persecutors are the ministers of His justice. But the sufferings of just men sanctify them more and more.

"A physician may prescribe what is called a purgation. A gardener makes use of pruning; he lops off useless branches. When God sends persecution to purify us of sinful behavior, His action is a purging. But when He permits a just man to suffer calumny, His purpose is to make a good tree bear better fruit. The soul that is just becomes more virtuous, more closely united with God. Let us therefore be firm while awaiting opportunities to suffer according to the divine good pleasure; and let us bear the cross in the spirit of Jesus Christ:

"The manner of comporting ourselves worthily under trials, is as follows; First: To suffer patiently the trifling

afflictions and annoyances that arise from time to time, a sharp word — a hostile glance, a minor ache or pain. Unless we school ourselves in the endurance of small things, there is no likelihood that we shall experience a spiritual joy or even remain unmoved under calumny, insult, and humiliation. Second: To remain silent, uttering not a single word of recrimination or impatience against our calumniator. Is it not reasonable that we accept these visitations because they are according to God's will and because He permits them for our sanctification? Calumny can eclipse the luster of true virtue for a time, but meanwhile virtue continues undiminished, and its light will shine forth once more when God is pleased to scatter the clouds that conceal it from the eyes of men."

CHAPTER 73 *Patience in Sickness*

The exercise of patience in sickness characterized almost the entire adult life of St. Vincent, especially the final fifteen years. In 1645 death was threatening. Old infirmities and others of recent date, unremitting work, the strain imposed by his responsibilities in the Council of Conscience, exhausted his strength in the extreme. But faith and charity retained their full vigor. While in a spell of delirium he was visited by Father St. Jure who had heard of his illness. The visitor questioned him, and the sick man was heard to say, "In a contrite and humble heart, let us be accepted by you" (Dan. 3:39). The words were an echo of his life, rather than a response to the question.

Though delivered from death on that occasion by one of his devoted sons, Vincent retained a painful weakness. Henceforth his ailments never left him. He had always been sensitive to weather conditions, and subject to a light fever which lasted three or four days, and occasionally fifteen. During such attacks he would not make use of medicine, nor would he interrupt his daily routine of work and spiritual exercises. "It is nothing," he would say, "only my little fever."

The only remedy he consented to employ was a heavy sweat of several days duration, especially in summer. When the weather was excessively hot, he would cover himself with three blankets, and place two large vessels of boiling water, one on each side. Thus without sleep or even repose, he passed the night, enduring a sort of martyrdom. On his feet the next morning at four o'clock, he went as usual to the chapel, and made his prayer and meditation.

What sort of day would follow a night such as that? Drowsiness and weakness overcame him during his visits and occupations. But instead of yielding to the pressure of sleep, he would rise from his chair, and remain standing, or assume an uncomfortable position in order to keep awake. Occasionally nature would not be denied; Vincent slept, and afterward he begged pardon for his misery.

He was more than eighty years of age when his illness became stronger than his courage. He had long suffered from erysipelas, and that was followed by a fever which terminated in a suppurating lesion on one of his legs. In consequence he was bedridden for a period of time, and was unable to leave his room for two months. Under the circumstances he yielded to insistence that he occupy a room equipped with a fireplace. He could hardly object for he was so weak that he had to be carried to the warmth of the fire and back to bed like a child.

During the Lent of the following year, 1657, he was afflicted with an extreme distaste for food, so that he was unable to take more than a minimum of nourishment. In 1658 his eyes gave him trouble, and he was unwilling to seek a remedy. The physician had prescribed an application of warm pigeon blood, but when the brother-infirmarian procured a bird and was preparing to kill it, St. Vincent protested. "Absolutely no," he said, "I will never consent! That innocent bird represents to me my Savior; and God knows how to cure me some other way."

Toward the end of the same year he was returning from the city in company with one of the Fathers. The underslinging of the carriage broke, and he was thrown out, striking his head against the pavement. He suffered a severe

scalp wound which increased his fever and endangered his life. All such afflictions were borne with quiet and amiable fortitude. And worst of all was the swelling and ulceration of his legs.

The first symptoms had appeared in Tunis during his captivity forty-five years previously. In that long period of time the inflammation caused moments of such weakness and agony, that he could neither walk nor stand, but was obliged to remain in bed. For that reason beginning with the year 1632, he had to travel on horseback to the various places of his charitable ministrations, and in 1649 when that mode of transportation became too much for him — such was the weakened state of his health — he rode in the famous carriage which he called his ignominy.

By the year 1656 the ulceration had extended to his knees, so that the Saint could no longer bend them without difficulty, or straighten up except with great pain, or walk without the aid of a cane. Finally the swelling broke at the right ankle, and new ulcerations appeared; the pain in the knees went on increasing. Consequently, from the beginning of the year 1659 he was unable to leave the house. For a while however he went to the church for prayer and Mass. He went also to the conference hall to preside at Community exercises; or at the Tuesday Conference for ecclesiastics; or at the meetings of the Ladies of Charity who would not forego the pleasure of seeing and hearing him.

To celebrate Mass he was obliged to vest and unvest at the altar. "See how I have become a dignitary," he remarked, in smiling allusion to the episcopal privilege of donning Mass vestments at the altar. Toward the close of 1659 his offering of the Holy Sacrifice was restricted to the infirmary chapel. And somewhat later he was reduced to the necessity of being satisfied with assisting at Mass; and even that exertion cost him great suffering; for in order to go from his room to the chapel, he had to drag himself along on crutches, and the effort reopened his wounds and aggravated his pain. There was no sign on a countenance that was always serene, but his laborious, tottering walk carried a pulsation of his suffering to the hearts of all.

Moreover his confreres were fearful that he might fall at any moment when, in his condition, such a shock might be fatal. In mid-July of the year 1660, they urged him to have an altar set up in an adjoining room so that he might assist at Mass without having to leave his bedroom. But he declined, explaining that a domestic chapel should not be allowed except in case of great necessity. Their next recommendation was that the invalid be carried in a chair from bedroom to chapel, an arrangement that would remove all danger, and spare his children extreme anxiety. Again he refused; but on the Feast of our Lady's Assumption, six weeks before death, unable to move on crutches, the Saint permitted two coadjutor Brothers to carry him thirty or forty steps from his bedroom to the chapel.

Added to his other infirmities was a urinary occlusion. Under the excruciating pain, he was heard to utter this only cry, "Oh, my Savior! my good Savior!" At the same time he would cast his eyes on a small wooden crucifix where he found strength and consolation.

His days were extremely painful, but the nights were still more so. As he lay on his hard straw mat, he suffered a veritable torture in his knee joints. Acknowledging what he was enduring, he wrote to a confidant: "I have been concealing my condition from you as much as possible lest a knowledge of my illness might sadden you. But, dear God! how long shall we be so sensitive that we dare not speak of our happiness in receiving your visitation?"

"May it please our Lord to give us greater strength, that we may find our happiness in His good pleasure." And when one of his Missioners said, "It seems to me that your sufferings are increasing from day to day," he made answer: "It is true that I feel their increase from the soles of my feet to the top of my head. But what an accounting I shall have to render at the tribunal of God where I must soon appear, if I do not make good use of them!"

Compassion is truly Christian, but Vincent feared a pity in which whether in fancy or in fact he discerned a questioning against providence. The Missioner above mentioned, having entered the room one day, was moved to exclaim,

"My Father, how troublesome are your sufferings!" "What!" came the reply, "are you saying that the workings of God are troublesome, or that the afflictions visited upon a miserable sinner, are vexatious? May God forgive you those words, for they have no place in the language of Jesus Christ! Is it not right and just that the guilty should suffer, and do we not belong more to God than to ourselves?"

Meanwhile he became gradually weaker and more wasted, yet he would not allow himself any indulgence, and in his hours of most painful distress he was ingenious in turning aside the relief and respite that others would arrange for him. Madame d'Aiguillon and other Ladies of Charity were frightened by his altered appearance and his increasing weakness. Informed that the invalid was unwilling to take strengthening foods, they came to an agreement with the doctor to prepare a daily menu that included fowl and consommé. Then they presented the menu to St. Vincent for signature so that he would be obliged to eat what was prepared for him.

Out of charity he signed, and he fully intended to keep his word. But his stomach had been long unaccustomed to such nourishment, and after a day or two he was unable to continue. He begged of the Ladies and his confreres to permit him to live in his own way. And so he went back to Community fare.

CHAPTER 74 *Spiritual Strength in Bodily Weakness*

The mind of St. Vincent remained free and clear; his soul, strong and active in a wasted body. And so he continued to direct his Congregation and its works. From his armchair he was present in other places, and he presided over everything. There he received visitors, and was always calm and smiling, always meek and affable in word and manner. If questioned concerning his illness, he would answer, "It is nothing. What is it in comparison with the

Passion of our Savior, or with the sufferings of hell that I have merited?" Then he would skillfully change the subject, setting aside his own troubles, and remarking on those of his visitors to whom he offered sincere words of compassion and consolation. And despite the difficulty he experienced in talking, he would sustain the conversation for a half hour or so, speaking with all the vigor, grace, and logic of better days.

Needless to add, exercises of piety followed their usual course. In fact they were increased as death drew near. Yet many years earlier he had begun to prepare for the final passage, not only by meritorious labors, but by special practices of devotion. Every day after Mass he recited the prayers for the dying; and every evening he placed himself in the spiritual state in which he would wish to be found if he was to be summoned that very night.

These practices came to light through a providential circumstance. A priest of the Little Company wrote a letter to a confrere concerning Vincent's precarious condition of health. The venerated Superior read the letter according to a provision of Community rule, and, at the words, "Father Vincent is failing visibly; in all likelihood we shall soon lose him," he became agitated and ceased reading. "It is a warning," he reflected, "to hold myself in readiness."

Then fearing lest he had possibly given scandal he sent for the priest who had written the letter. "You have done me a kindness," he said, "and I beg of you to complete your charity by calling to my attention any other faults you may have remarked in me." Disconcerted, the Missioner protested that the words in question were not intended as an instruction either directly or indirectly. "Set your mind at rest," replied the Saint. "I would only have loved and honored you the more." Then came the disclosure of a secret: "Regarding the admonition which I thought you wished to give, I will tell you in all simplicity that through the grace of God, I have no need of it. I say this that you may not be scandalized in observing that I am not making any extraordinary preparations. For eighteen years I have never gone to bed without preparing to die during the night."

Death was for him a frequent and familiar thought. "One

of these days," he said, "the miserable body of this old sinner will be laid in the earth; it will crumble into dust, and you will tread upon it." When questioned about his age, he answered, "For many years I have been abusing the grace of God. 'Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged.' Alas, I have lived too long, because there is no improvement in my life, and my sins multiply with the years." When announcing the death of a Missioner, he added, "You leave me on earth, my God, while you call your servants to Yourself. I am the darnel that spoils the good grain You are gathering; in vain do I occupy the earth. Nevertheless not my will but Yours be done!"

Toward the end, a chronic and crescent weakness, together with sleepless nights, brought on a heaviness against which he could not struggle any longer. It was the forerunner of approaching death, or, in the phrase of St. Vincent, "the brother who is here to await the sister." When the sister arrived a few days later, he received her with the same gentleness and patience that had characterized his attitude toward all the maladies that had preceded her coming.

The example of his own trials was a means of encouraging sick persons, especially if they were young people. "Do not be afraid, my Brother," he would say, "when young I had the same illness, and I recovered. I was afflicted with asthma, but now it is gone. I had a rupture, and God cured me. I suffered from neuralgia; it has disappeared. Lung trouble, and stomach weakness were among my afflictions, but I have outlived them. Be patient, there is reason to hope that your sickness will pass away, and that God plans to make use of your services.

"It is true," he wrote to a confrere, "that our character is more clearly manifested in sickness than in health. Impatience and melancholy attack the most resolute souls during a period of illness and suffering. You have derived advantage from your illness because our Lord has confirmed you in the spirit of abandonment to His good pleasure. I trust that henceforth you will endure your pains with joy and gladness."

He said to his Community: "We must admit that the

state of sickness is troublesome and insupportable to nature. Nevertheless it is one of the most powerful means that God employs to bring us back to our duty, remove us from sinful ways, and shower upon us His gifts and favors. My Savior, through Your great sufferings grant us to understand the immense good that is hidden in sickness!" It is an efficacious means to purify the soul, and acquire virtue.

"We should praise God because, through His mercy, there are sick and infirm confreres in the Congregation, persons who manifest patience and other virtues in all their luster. We shall return thanks to God for having given us such persons. I have often remarked, and I now repeat, that we ought to consider those who are ill as a blessing to the Congregation. Let us then regard ill health and various afflictions as coming from God. Death, life, health, and sickness, all these things come by the order of His providence, and no matter how they come, they are for the benefit and salvation of man.

"Yet there are persons who endure sufferings with impatience. This attitude is a serious fault. Others give in to a desire for change of place. They wish to go here or there, to this house, to that province, to their native section of the country, under pretext that the climate there is better for them. Now, what does that mentality indicate? It shows that such persons are childish and self-seeking, that they are loth to suffer anything — just as though bodily ills were evils that must be avoided. To run away from the state in which God has placed us, is to escape from our own happiness. Verily, suffering is a state of happiness, and it sanctifies the soul.

"I was acquainted with a Brother Anthony who could neither read nor write. His portrait is in our hall. He possessed in abundance the spirit of God. It was his custom to call everyone brother, or sister — even the Queen. Everybody desired to see him. One day the question was proposed, 'What do you do in visitations of illness?' 'I receive them,' he answered, 'as trials that come from God. For instance, when visited by fever, I say: "My sister malady, or my sister fever, you come in the name of God; I bid you welcome. And then I allow God to do His will in me."'

“Behold, Gentlemen and my Brothers, such was his manner of acting. Servants of Christ, lovers of the Cross are wont to act in the same way. At the same time they do not fail to make use of the remedies prescribed for their relief, and for the cure of every ailment. By so doing, they honor God who has created the plants, and has endowed them with curative properties. But excessive solicitude for self, unreasonable alarm over some trifling indisposition — my Savior, we must be rid of all such inordinate concern for ourselves.

“Alas! wretch that I am, what poor use I have made of the maladies and small inconveniences it has pleased God to send me! How many acts of impatience I have been guilty of! Wretch that I am, what scandal I have given to those who have seen me behave in that manner! Assist me, my Brothers, to beg pardon of God for what is past, and grace to make better use of whatever His divine Majesty deigns to send me in my old age, during the little time that remains to me of life on earth.”

PART XI . COMMUNITY ADMINISTRATION

CHAPTER 75 *Administration*

Like Jesus Christ Vincent prepared for his public ministry by sanctifying himself. His holiness made him an effective agent of God in the work of sanctifying others. His administration was attentive, vigilant, solicitous, provident. He was prudent and circumspect in word and action. In giving spiritual direction he was not dictatorial or absolute. He proposed thoughts, submitting advice to the judgment of the one who sought his counsel. It was not his way to make decisions immediately, presumptuously. He would not say, "This is the truth of the matter, this is the right way." He preferred the more humble phrase, "Here is what I advise; this, in my judgment, is according to God's will." By way of necessary exception, he was quite categorical whenever the question proposed was answered clearly and directly by a maxim of the Gospel, for in such case there could be no possibility of divergent opinion.

In matters of practical decision he moved slowly unless immediate action was absolutely necessary. In such cases he would pause a moment to invoke the divine guidance, or to seek a comparable incident in the words or actions of Christ. In the year 1653 there was need of a consul at Tunis, and Vincent thought of a certain Martin Husson as a desirable candidate. Mr. Husson was a retired barrister who had formerly practiced law before the French Parliament. St. Vincent wrote him a letter stating the situation, and enumerating reasons why the worthy barrister should accept the consular post; and other reasons why he would be better advised not to do so. Not a word was added that might incline toward either acceptance or a refusal.

A much puzzled Mr. Husson journeyed to Paris from his home in Montmirail, and stated flatly that Vincent must make the decision. Vincent advised him to consult wise and prudent persons, but the barrister insisted that Vincent must assume the responsibility. After much thought and prayer St. Vincent finally counseled him to accept the consular office. "But," he added, "you may go or not as you wish." "God wishes me to go," was the reply, "and I shall go."

In the case above may be seen an indication of the Saint's preference to wait until a missionary expressed a desire to serve in the foreign missions. Not only that; he wished to see repeated signs of a vocation for that sort of Apostolate. And this policy was particularly noticeable in making appointments to the Madagascar Mission.

He was firm in the maintenance of Community discipline, requiring exactitude and regularity. At the same time his administration was tempered by suavity and gentleness, like the higher Providence that "reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well" (Wisd. 8:1). He was kind and considerate, expressing regret for having to disappoint a confrere by refusing an unreasonable request. In his phrasing, a command bore the appearance of an appeal to good will and kindly readiness to be of service. And for that reason his authority was more sincerely respected, his wishes more promptly and faithfully fulfilled than would otherwise have been the case.

In regard to any difficult assignment Vincent was concerned about the dispositions of the confreres who might be chosen to enter upon the work in question. In a letter to a Missioner he inquired about the state of his health, and his attitude regarding the proposition contained in the letter. "We have been called to Blanktown," he explained, "to take charge of an establishment, and I have thought of appointing you as Superior of the group chosen for the work. Please send me immediate information on your bodily health and mental disposition regarding this holy enterprise, and pray also that God may grant us grace ever and everywhere to obey His holy will."

He sometimes manifested a charming gaiety. Witness this conversation with one of his Missioners: "Are you the man to undertake a long journey for the service of God?" "I am ready," was the response. "Your destination is outside the French Kingdom." "That makes no difference." "You will have to cross the sea." "To go by land or water is all the same to me." But, added the Saint with a smile, "The place is one thousand two hundred leagues distant." "If it were two thousand leagues away, I would still be willing to go." "Well, then, take your departure; they have need of you in Rome."

The authority and influence of St. Vincent were effectually supported by his own exemplary conduct. He was faithful in attendance at all Community exercises. And his fidelity was all the more edifying by reason of the obstacles he had to overcome — the harassment and perplexities of business affairs, the cloying weariness that followed sleepless nights, and the painful infirmities that crippled him in old age. An outstanding aspect of his personal holiness was the exercise of charity in administration of fraternal correction. Ordinarily he deferred reprehension until nature had become tranquil both in himself and in the other party. He reflected before God, considering carefully the temperament of the person at fault, and the remedy to be applied. If the patient was evidently irreceptive of correction, Vincent made his meditation for as much as three days consecutively on how he would best manage the affair.

When the moment had come for action, he began with a profession of esteem for the person whom he wished to admonish. He might praise his good qualities, or excuse his transgression by putting the blame on a natural impetuosity or an emotional disturbance. Then he would accuse himself, acknowledging responsibility for the greater part of the fault. He would say, "You and I have need of working for the acquisition of humility; we must practice patience, and bear with others as we wish them to bear with us; we should accustom ourselves to exactitude and regularity."

Sometimes he appeared as the culprit before acting as judge. On one occasion, having noticed that a young semi-

narian was carrying a strange book to Office in common, he called him and said, "Have you at any time remarked in me something that gives offense?" And when the seminarian had answered in the negative, the Saint continued, "Well, my dear Brother, would you like me to tell you something that I have observed in you?" Then followed a calmly spoken admonition. He added, "May God bless you, my Brother!"

When the person at fault was well disposed by such humble and charitable advances, St. Vincent went straight to the point, and firmly pointed out the circumstances of time, place, and person. If the fault in question was a serious matter, he would properly emphasize its gravity, and its consequences in relation to God, the good of the neighbor, the future of the Congregation, or the success of a special work.

He could be severe when severity was in order. Here is a case in point. Having administered an admonition, he continued in this fashion: "If you maintain that you are not conscious of these defects, it is a sign that you do not possess much humility, for if you had as much as our Lord requires in a priest of the Mission, you would regard yourself as the most imperfect of all; you would acknowledge that you are guilty of these things, and you would attribute to a hidden blindness the fact that you do not notice what is quite visible to other people; especially since these things have already been called to your attention.

"I have also been informed that you can scarcely bear to be admonished. If that be the case, then truly you have reason to fear, for such a state is far removed from that of the saints who humbled themselves before men, and rejoiced when their faults were pointed out to them. And He who is the Saint of saints permitted men to reproach Him publicly with malefactions of which He was innocent; and He uttered not a word that would shield Him from the resultant shame.

"Let us learn of Him to be meek and humble of heart. Meekness and humility are virtues which you and I should beg of Him without ceasing. We should give particular attention in order that we may not be carried away by the opposite passions. May it please the same Lord to enlighten us that we may perceive our spiritual darkness, and follow the

guidance of those whom He has appointed for that purpose. And may we be animated with a meekness which, animating our words and actions, will make us agreeable and helpful to our neighbors."

The admonition finished, Vincent reanimated weakened courage by renewed assurances of esteem and affection. "I experience intense distress in saying the least thing that would cause you pain; in the name of God bear with me." Or again, "I am unable to express the sorrow I feel in grieving you. I beg you to believe that if this matter were not so important, I would have much preferred to bear the pain myself than inflict any on you." Such affectionate consideration was irresistible. Self-love expired almost without feeling its wound. There was a saying, "Father Vincent is like the Grand Turk; he strangles self-love with a silken cord."

CHAPTER 76 *Administration of Temporalities*

Notwithstanding a complete detachment from things of earth, the Saint was careful to preserve and administer economically the temporal possessions of the Congregation. He was well aware of his obligation to co-operate with the generous designs of Providence. As father of a religious family, he must provide for his children. As the leader of a spiritual army, he must furnish weapons and rations for his troops.

Consequently his first concern was to realize a good profit from the properties of the Little Company. Not content with appointing intelligent procurators, he reserved to himself the general superintendence and the chief administration. He did not allow anyone to act without his advice. In advance, and often day by day, he designated the duty of each official, and from each one he required an accounting. When he learned that his orders had been anticipated, exceeded, or violated, he removed the unfaithful agent, even though the one at fault happened to be a local Superior. His reasoning was plain: "If everyone should follow his own

ideas, the dependence that God has established would be destroyed, and there would be nothing but insecurity and confusion in our houses."

He appointed coadjutor Brothers to superintend the farms of the Congregation; they directed the work of herders and farmers. He gave attention to the most minute details with regard to crops and herds, the kitchen-garden and orchard. He ably conserved and increased the revenues of such properties, by skillful management and prudent marketing. He recommended rigorous economy, took precautions against needless waste, and in years of general depression or misfortune, he reduced ordinary expenditures.

Works of charity seemed to be administered without the usual calculations. Though acting with prudence, he there manifested an openhanded liberality. Meanwhile within the Little Company, providing for his Missioners, himself, and Community houses, he would have only what was strictly necessary. This flair for economy was one reason why he disapproved of personnel changes — involving costly journeys from one house to another, or from one section of the country to another section. He made allowances for necessary changes, of course, but not for changes based on insufficient reasons, such as insalubrious climate, a difficult assignment, or incompatibility of temperament.

Another matter of economy with St. Vincent was time, the hours of each day. In order to serve his pious undertakings more efficiently, he never spent a moment in idleness. The two hours of recreation prescribed by Community Rule were part of his working day which extended further into night hours that others gave to needed sleep.* Personal visits were strictly on a basis of business, gratitude, or charity. In attendance at charitable assemblies, his conscious valuation of time could be sensed in a customary remark of his — "Come, let us return to the subject; let us try to resolve the question, and conclude our meeting." According to Madame de Lamignon, Vincent's good use of time explains how he accomplished more good works than are credited to any

* Refer to footnote on page 251.

twenty other Saints — a justifiable hyperbole in view of his prodigious activities.

A religious vocation is God's way of turning time to good use. Vincent spoke on the subject to the Daughters of Charity, September 22, 1647. "Vocation is a call from God to do something. He says, 'I wish that this soul be sanctified by serving Me in a particular occupation.' His divine goodness often calls us by means that are unknown to us, but more often He gives us a strong desire to enter a particular state of life, and a will to persevere in seeking admission. When that happens, you must no longer doubt that your vocation comes from God. When you allow yourself to entertain such a doubt it is ordinarily because you find some difficulty in the practice of poverty, humility, and obedience; the demon tries to make them appear impossible.

"But God is constant in His judgments, and the salvation of a soul is of such importance to Him that He places the soul in the safest and easiest way to attain everlasting life. We must not turn aside from the road into which He has directed us; for if a person on a long journey leaves the highway, he runs the risk of having to travel along byways which only lengthen the distance.

"Let us suppose that a man has an orchard planted in good, fruit-bearing trees. If he transplants them year after year, he incurs the danger, not only of losing the fruit — since it would not ripen — but of killing the trees. Judas was called to the Apostolate, and he participated in the graces of God. But he was not satisfied; and he imagined he could better himself some other way. You know the story, how he was lost. Let us then remain in the place to which God has called us.

"Did you ever hear of a soldier who, without an order from a superior officer, left the post assigned to him? Whatever the circumstances — rain, cold, gunfire — he is not allowed to leave his position. And if for lack of courage he abandons his post, he is executed. Similarly, a soul unfaithful to its vocation is no longer at peace. It would have been better for that soul never to begin, for in that case there would be no need of answering for many graces

received and abused. On the other hand, perseverance puts the demons to rout, and gives glory to God. He rejoices in witnessing that a soul is persevering in what has been undertaken for His love, despite all manner of difficulties and the deceptions of the devil."

On the same subject — vocation — he wrote to a lawyer in March, 1659: "It is a misfortune to enter the priesthood by the window of personal choice, and not by the door of a legitimate vocation. Yet there are many priests without a vocation because they look upon the ecclesiastical state as an easy manner of life where they seek their own comfort rather than the works of the ministry. Hence ignorance, sins, and heresies have invaded and ravaged the Church.

"In consequence St. John Chrysostom declared that only a few priests would be saved. Why so? Because the graces necessary to fulfill priestly obligations are given only to those whom God has called. He does not call souls in whom He does not perceive the necessary qualifications, or on whom He does not intend to bestow them. As for all who are not qualified, He permits them to advance and, in punishment of their temerity, to effect more evil than good, and finally to destroy themselves.

"The call to this holy profession must therefore come from God, and this may be seen in the case of our Lord who did not presume to perform His priestly duties until His eternal Father had declared, 'This is my beloved Son; hear him' (Lk. 9:35). This example, together with my knowledge of the disorders caused by unworthy ministers of the Gospel, induces me to issue a caution. There are those who seek my advice regarding the reception of holy orders. I caution them not to proceed unless they have a true vocation from God, and a sincere intention of imitating the virtues of Christ. And this feeling is so strong within me that if I were not a priest, I would never presume to enter the sacred priesthood. I frequently make this assertion to ecclesiastical aspirants, and I have so spoken more than one hundred times while preaching to the people in rural areas."

To his Missioners he said: "Behold God's design in your regard; you were born when the Little Company was being

founded. Like soldiers chosen to lead an assault, you are the first chosen." Then, addressing the Brothers: "Like the Missioners, you lead a life similar to that of our Lord. You imitate the hidden years He spent in the corporal labors of the carpenter shop, and the domestic duties of the home. You honor Him in His external occupations while the Missioners honor Him in His priesthood. Moreover by reason of the close union existing between the various members of the Mystical Body, you labor with the confessor in the confessional, and with the preacher in the pulpit."

He concluded: "Let us continue our voyage to heaven in the ship where God has placed us. The grace of perseverance is the most important of all inasmuch as it crowns all the others. And the death that finds us, weapons in hand, is the most glorious and most desirable. Naturally people desire to die at home amid relatives and friends, but not all indulge that inclination, for it savors of softness. Our Savior chose to die as He had lived — in hardship and suffering without looking for human consolation. And that is why many of His followers have chosen to die alone, abandoned by their fellow men, but sustained by trust in God."

St. Vincent was proportionately saddened whenever he learned that a member of the Little Company had the thought of giving up his vocation. He wrote, July 18, 1659: "May God grant them the grace to see the danger they are incurring by following the inclination of rebellious nature; for the inclination of nature is not in accord with the spirit of Christ. On the authority of Sacred Scripture, it is difficult for those who have once fallen after being enlightened, to rise again. They have every reason to fear that they will wander about miserably if they leave the path where God has placed them. For, how will they fulfill their duties in the world with its many difficulties and obstacles if they are not faithful in the state where they receive so many spiritual and temporal helps unavailable outside their vocation?"

"Nevertheless it is not surprising that some waver and turn back. They are to be found in communities the most holy; and God permits such defections in order that men may understand human weakness, that virtuous persons may

stand firm under temptation, and that resolute souls may have reason to mistrust their own strength. Let those who are wavering conceive a great sorrow for past faults; let them resolve upon amendment, humble themselves under the guidance of obedience, and expiate the bad example they have given. As for you others, make it your endeavor to assist them."

CHAPTER 77 *Dismissal of Unfit Members*

In a letter St. Vincent writes as follows: "It is only just that the Congregation should cut off gangrenous members; and prudence demands it. But in this respect we exercise patience, forbearance, and charity even without hope of their improvement. We try various remedies for the evil — kindness, threats, entreaty, and admonition — and all without hope of any other good result than that which God may please to effect of His own power. Our Lord did not expel Simon Peter for having denied Him more than once, nor did He excommunicate Judas though the unfaithful Apostle was to die unrepentant. And therefore in my judgment His divine goodness is pleased that we treat refractory members with kindness, acting justly while not omitting anything that might win them over to God" (July 15, 1650, to Father Almeras at Rome).

When someone had left the Congregation, St. Vincent, though distressed, enjoyed a substantial measure of consolation. He reflected on such a case as follows: "After our confrere had left us, I began a sorrowful reading of my Breviary. But God was pleased to console me by giving me to understand what was done in the army of the Israelites. A trumpet sounded before battle was joined, and a proclamation went forth that soldiers who were afraid, or married, or engaged with civic business, should withdraw from the ranks. For it was considered that such persons would be of more harm than help in the ensuing conflict.

"Then I was struck by the following consideration: Some of those who are no longer of the Congregation became discouraged through the bad example of a single confrere who loved the things of the world. Such was the disastrous influence of one man. Now, if those erstwhile confreres had remained in the Congregation an entire lifetime, how much evil they would have done! By that reflection it pleased God to give me great comfort. Perhaps He took into account the fact that I had been a full half hour on my knees before one of the parties, trying, though unsuccessfully, to alter his determination. We must remember the many that followed our Lord, and the few that remained with Him. We should remember it so as to honor the thoughts and feelings He experienced on such occasions" (Annecy, August 26, 1642).

St. Vincent did not always wait for a confrere to make a final decision, and leave of his own accord. He took the initiative when he had sufficient reason to refuse admission, or to dismiss a confrere unsuited to religious life in the Little Company. He wrote: "Where is the community that receives applicants not possessed of requisite qualifications, or that retains unruly members? Some time ago I was conversing with a great Prelate who understands the workings of religious congregations. One of our group spoke in praise of a certain community on the ground of its never having dismissed anyone that had been received. The Prelate, expressing astonishment, remarked, 'Unfortunate community! you scarcely advance toward perfection when every manner of subject wins your approval.'

"Not every sapling takes root; not every seed germinates. The Kingdom of God is compared to a net containing good fish and bad. The bad fish are thrown back into the sea. The Son of God did not receive every applicant into His chosen company of Apostles. He did not employ His authority to retain those who desired to depart. To those who remained He offered a choice, 'Do you also wish to go away?' (Jn. 6:68.) He did not dismiss Judas, but His reason for not doing so was that the Iscariot was to be the principal instrument of His Passion.

"The Son of God instructed the Apostles regarding the

dangers they would encounter, and I believe that our Missioners would do well to act in like manner. It may be objected that many will be scandalized by this way of acting, that they will not enter the Congregation. My answer is this: If a custom that obtains in all well-regulated communities can be called scandal, the scandal in this case will be taken, not given. Furthermore, if our Lord is calling aspirants, the fear of being sent away will not deter them from coming; and if He is not calling, we should be well pleased that they do not come, for those who lack a vocation will never be of any advantage to the Congregation" (Aug. 28, 1656).

In regard to the dismissal of dangerous members, he wrote as follows: "Our Seminary is filling up. I think that our Lord is granting us this favor as a reward to the Little Company for faithfully purging itself of incorrigible members. We must cleanse the Congregation. Ten confreres of the right sort are worth a hundred who are not called, or who do not correspond with the designs of God" (Dec., 1642). "When God wished to destroy three thousand men because they had adored the Golden Calf, and when Moses endeavored by prayer to stay the hand of divine justice, the voice of God was heard: 'Let me alone, that my wrath may be kindled against them, . . . and I will make of thee a great nation' (Exod. 32:10). Accordingly, to diminish the number of Community members that offend God, is to augment the Community in both virtue and number; for, well-ordered and virtuous communities attract new members.

"It may be objected that they who are either not received, or not retained, will write unfavorably, and rouse the public to resentment against the Congregation. I answer: "They will do no more harm than God permits. And the injury will turn to our benefit. Moreover we would not be worthy servants of God if, to protect ourselves against evil, we were willing to permit that the service and glory of God be dishonored among us. Remember that the most frequent cause of decay in communities, is the cowardice of superiors in that they do not hold firm, and do not rid the community of refractory and incorrigible members" (Mar. 20, 1643, at Rome).

Meanwhile the main objective was a sound seminary training to develop a generous community spirit. "Whoever desires to live in community," he said, "should resolve to live as a pilgrim on earth. He should be satisfied to become, as it were, a fool for the sake of Christ; to change his manners and habits; to mortify his passions, and make the good God the sole object of his quest. As the least of all, he should be willingly subject to all authority, in the conviction that he is here, not to be served, but to serve, not to pass the days in pleasure and idleness, but rather to bear the burden of labor and suffering. He should be familiar with the basic truth that a servant of Christ is tried as gold in a smelter, and that perseverance is achieved by humbling one's self for the love of God. Such is the way of true contentment in this world, the way that leads to everlasting life."

The testing came in the field of Apostolic labor. He said on that point: "God grant, my Brothers, that everyone who seeks admission into the Little Company, may come with the thought of martyrdom, with the desire to labor and suffer death in the service of God. It may be in foreign countries or here at home, as God may please. Yes, with the thought of martyrdom! We should often beg this grace of our Lord. Ah, Gentlemen and my Brothers, is there anything more reasonable than to be consumed for Him who has so generously given His life for us?"

"Many popes were martyrs. Is it not astonishing to observe how merchants embark upon an ocean voyage, and incur many dangers just for the sake of a small financial gain? Last Sunday one of them told me that he had accepted a proposition to go to the Indies. In response to a question he admitted that there would be several considerable dangers, and that though a merchant friend of his had returned safely from such an expedition, another merchant had not returned. I then reflected: If this man, in search of a precious stone or pecuniary profit, is willing to face many dangers, surely we should be ready to face many more so as to bring the precious Gospel to the nations, and immortal souls to Jesus Christ."

On the subject of seminary studies he wrote: July 18,

1659: "The desire to learn is good if it be moderate. St. Paul's advice is sobriety in learning. Moderate excellence is sufficient, and for laborers of the Gospel, a higher ambition is to be feared because it is dangerous; because it leads to self-conceit and ostentation; and because it begets a shirking of simple and ordinary duties which, though humble, are the most useful.

"Our Savior chose disciples who were not capable of any but simple and familiar works. If in our work for souls we are animated with the spirit of Christ, He will give us the light and grace to succeed. If your one desire is to know Christ crucified, and live by the power of His life, you need have no doubt that He will be your wisdom and your accomplishment."

He feared the transition from the spiritual exercises of the novitiate to the studious occupations of the scholasticate. Wishing to minimize the danger of a diminution in piety, he said: "Glass is in danger of breaking when it is removed from the heat of a kiln, and set in a cold place. And similarly, when passing from a place of recollection, supervision, and prayer, to the activities of a classroom, a seminarian runs the risk of becoming distracted and upset.

"Strive therefore to maintain your first fervor, and be on your guard lest nature gradually reassume the upper hand. Exert your will to profit spiritually by increasing knowledge, and so employ study as a means of drawing nearer to God. Let the light of the mind become a fire in the heart. Avoid inordinate curiosity, an uncontrolled urge to acquire the sort of knowledge that parches devotion, and shuts the soul against lights from heaven."

CHAPTER 78 *Science and Sanctity*

With regard to moderation in learning, St. Vincent remarked: "Uncultured and ignorant persons as a rule pray better than do people of learning. God is pleased to communicate Himself to simple folk because as a rule they are

more humble. I would wish you to have the learning of St. Thomas, but on condition that you have also his humility. Pride is the ruin of learned men as it was the ruin of majestic angels. Knowledge without humility has always been harmful to the Church. Therefore love humility, and do not become conceited. God rejects the learned when they are proud. By preference He chooses the simple to do His work.

“Employ well the days of youth to prepare yourselves for serving the neighbor. Do not lose any time, for the need is urgent, and the work that is waiting to be done, far exceeds the number of workmen. People in rural areas are being lost for lack of instruction, and the greater part of the earth is still buried in the darkness of infidelity. Apply yourselves to study, therefore; work strenuously to acquire knowledge, but at the same time remain humble.”

Another warning concerned sensuality: “Woe to him who seeks his own comfort, and avoids the cross! He will find another cross so heavy as to crush him. He who minimizes the importance of exterior mortification on the pretext that interior mortification is more perfect, indicates clearly that he does not practice either one.” On another occasion: “In most of those who lose their vocation I have remarked two things, viz., inexactitude in rising, and a certain effeminacy in particulars of personal appearance.”

A long letter is devoted to these kindred subjects — rising and meditation. (To a Superior, January 15, 1650): “You know that creatures are subject to change. And God often permits deterioration to take place in holy communities. This has been happening in some of our houses where some of the confreres, reposing longer than the Rules allow, are absent from Community prayer. Hence they deprive themselves of the advantages that are the fruit of prayer in common, and frequently what prayer they make in private is little if it is not omitted altogether. There ensues a languor and lack of watchfulness; and irregularity invades community practices.

“The remedy for this disorder is to recommend exactitude in rising, and to show firmness in enforcing the recommendation, so that little by little individual members may

become more solicitous about their own spiritual advancement. This matter has furnished me with a subject for the first conference of this New Year: exactitude in rising at four o'clock.

"The first advantage of promptitude in this matter, is that we obey the rule and consequently the will of God. Second: a prompt obedience at that hour, draws down the divine blessing on the other actions of the day. Third: by consecrating the first action of the day — the first fruits — to God, we honor Him in a special manner. Fourth: custom becomes habit; we respond to the signal with alacrity, and leave our bed without difficulty, whereas indulgence encourages nature to set up a contrary requirement.

"Fifth: our Lord had no place to lay His head. Should we not rise from sleep and go to Him? Sixth: regular sleep is beneficial to both body and mind, but one who sleeps too much becomes effeminate. Seventh: time is precious. A merchant rises early on account of business; shall we be less diligent in promoting the good of souls? Worldings make morning calls. What a shame if we should fail our engagement with the Lord of Lords, our help, our all! Eighth: when assisting at prayer and repetition of prayer, our Savior communicates Himself to us abundantly since, by His own assurance, He is in the midst of those who are assembled in His name.

"The morning is most appropriate for prayer, and it is the most quiet period of the day. Hence the ancient hermits and saints chose it as their time for prayer and meditation.

"Since to us all God has granted the grace to rise at the same time, we observe greater punctuality, recollection, and modesty, and these results give reason to hope that, with the continuance of good order, virtue will make progress, and each one will be strengthened in his vocation.

"Carelessness has caused several confreres to leave their vocation; they could not love a manner of life where they were not permitted to pamper themselves. How can one go willingly to prayer if he rises with reluctance? How is it possible to meditate profitably if we are in church half-heartedly and only for the sake of decorum? On the other

hand, they who rise with alacrity, ordinarily persevere; they rarely become remiss; and they make satisfactory progress. The grace of prayer is associated with promptitude in rising.

“If then we be faithful in this matter; if we all assemble before our Lord as did the first Christians, He will give Himself to us, He will enlighten us, and work through us the good we are called to do in His Church. It will be objected that the rule of rising should permit of exception in behalf of persons who are of weaker health, and who in consequence have need of longer sleep. My answer is: (1) the judgment of doctors; they maintain that seven hours of sleep are sufficient for such persons; and (2) the custom of all ecclesiastical communities; they limit the time of sleep to seven hours. Some of them do not allow that much, and the greater number interrupt the night’s repose in order to assemble for Choir service.

“There will be cases of indisposition — headache, toothache, fever — but you must get up unless you are in the infirmary, or unless you have permission to remain longer in bed. It is true that your pain might be alleviated by repose; nevertheless it is fitting that you glorify God with the Community. When you have come to chapel, you can make known your illness to the Superior. Otherwise we would always be at the starting point, because frequently there are some who feel indisposed, and others would pretend illness in order to pamper themselves. Thus there would be a source of continual disorder. If a person has gone sleepless a single night, nature will make up for it the following night.

“After a journey there should not be any extra repose in the morning. If there be need of more than seven hours sleep, the Superior will have the traveler retire earlier than usual. But if a confrere arrives very late and very tired, there will be no harm in allowing a morning repose, for in that case necessity is the rule.

“The custom of rising at four o’clock does not endanger good health. To suppose that anyone will become ill because the rule is observed without exception, is a figment of the imagination. Since the day when all the confreres began to rise regularly at the appointed hour, there has not been a

single new case of sickness — in this house or in any other.

“A final objection is that some necessity may arise of remaining up till ten o’clock or later. In such case, it is argued, a confrere might reasonably sleep late in the morning. I answer that so far as possible the confreres must avoid obstacles, and go to bed on time. But if that is not possible, the necessity of late retiring will be so seldom, that the recuperation of one hour or two hours of sleep would not compensate for the scandal given by lying in bed while the other confreres are at prayer.

“I have spoken too much on the importance and usefulness of rising, since perhaps your Community is most fervent and regular in this matter? If so, my purpose is to inspire gratitude for the fidelity that God has given. But if your house has fallen into irregularity, I invite you to correct the abuse. Now here are the means to be employed by you and the members of your house. For the Community: First: a conviction that exactitude in rising is of great importance. Second: before retiring, prayer to God and the Blessed Virgin for the grace to be faithful; invocation of the Guardian Angel. Third: reflection that the sound of the rising bell is as the voice of God; to get out of bed immediately, make the sign of the cross, kiss the ~~door~~^{door}, and adore God.

“The general means dependent on the Superior and the officers of the house: to appoint an excitator who will go from room to room, and say in a loud voice, ‘Benedicamus Domino.’ The one appointed should fulfill his office faithfully.”

CHAPTER 79 *Uniformness in Community Functions*

The Saint recommended uniformity and moderation in the exercise of Community functions. “We must be on our guard,” he said, “against endeavoring to surpass others, for ambition of this kind destroys friendship, begets envy, and engenders aversion. If I am capable of delivering a learned

and eloquent discourse, I will moderate both matter and style. Our Savior, though all-powerful, adapted Himself to the understanding of ordinary people. If two thoughts should occur to me, the one beautiful and penetrating, the other common and less attractive, I will choose the common thought. Let the learned man employ his learning with moderation, and let the man of power labor humbly.

“So far as common folk are concerned, intricacies of imagination, and subtleties of reason are wasted effort; they pass overhead like a wind that sweeps over the housetops. Let us endeavor to deliver our exhortations less learnedly, and less eloquently so as to resemble others who preach but have less knowledge and less ability. Everyone can preach moderately well, but only a few can attain the heights of excellence. There is a middle ground where the more talented and the less talented can work together without rivalry, envy, or detraction. Like the three persons of the adorable Trinity who are equal in power and operation, we should endeavor to resemble one another in a status of equality that engenders love and thereby produces unity” (May 13, 1659).

As an aid to observance of Rules, Vincent enjoined mutual admonition. On the advantages of the practice, he spoke as follows: “If we had a smudge on our face, we would wish to be informed, to be spared the laughter that would otherwise be provoked by our ludicrous appearance. Under such circumstances, silence would not be regarded as a friendly attitude. As a rule, we are not aware of our faults. And therefore we have reason to complain if the person charged with directing us, refrains from calling our defects to our attention. He may doubt our ability or humility to take an admonition. But, considering the advantages of admonition, and the disadvantages of being denied that charity, who will not say, ‘Most assuredly I wish to be admonished! I consider it a very great favor. Should others know my faults, and I alone remain ignorant of them?’

“Of course you must not be surprised when you experience a feeling of repugnance under actual admonition; that feeling is natural. But nature must be habituated to fraternal correction, and we must do penance when, having com-

mitted a fault, we fail to receive the charity in good part. By receiving it humbly, we shall be accorded that favor again, and little by little we shall attain great perfection" (to the Daughters of Charity, March 15, 1648).

On the same subject: "Someone will say: 'John Doe accused me of committing a particular fault, but the accusation is false; or he added a circumstance not in accord with the facts.' My answer is this: if the accusation is true, we should humble and correct ourselves. If it is false, we have a providential opportunity of suffering, and of practicing heroic virtue. If the accusation is in the nature of an exaggeration, or if it has been embellished with some circumstance, we should suffer it patiently. Tell me, my Brothers, in what manner did the Son of God receive the false accusations lodged against Him?

"It is true that we are not always masters of ourselves, not always able to prevent a spontaneous emotion — indicated, for instance, by a blush on the countenance. But if the mind, regaining control, does not repress that feeling, one is guilty of sin. For my part, I have cause to humble myself before God, and all the more so because I am culpable of all the sins committed in this house" (June 9, 1656).

On one occasion a Superior complained about one of his subordinates. St. Vincent replied: "Our Lord is giving you practice in the proper manner of exercising your office in regard to the confreres under your charge. Herein you will understand His kindness in bearing with His disciples on earth, and the things He had to suffer from the bad and the good. Like Him, Superiors who wish to fulfill their obligation both by word and by example have much to suffer even from the best of their subjects. Therefore let us serve God for the love of Him. He will be our compensation if we remain faithful, especially in the exercise of humility and mortification.

"It seems to me, that you would do well to request of this good priest, that he make known to you your shortcomings. You are doubtless guilty of several faults, not only in your capacity as Superior, but also in your position as Missioner, and Christian. I recommend also that you inform

the members of your house from time to time that you wish to be admonished by the one officially appointed, and that you will feel aggrieved if he neglects his duty in this respect or fails to write his report to the Superior General according to the established custom. Moreover you should assure them that you will not read the letters they write to me, or those I write to them.

"In conclusion I commend myself to your prayers, that God may pardon the considerable faults that I commit every day in my position, a position of which I am completely unworthy, more so than Judas in relation to the Savior."

He attached great importance to the obligation of fraternal correction. He said one day: "I affirm that those who notice faults — faults tending to the establishment of irregularity, and the ruin of the Congregation; those who, though noticing such faults, do not admonish, are themselves guilty of that irregularity and ruin. Consequently I should welcome admonition, and if I do not correct myself of scandalous behavior that could bring disorder and destruction to the Congregation, or if I teach or hold anything contrary to the teaching of the Church, the Congregation in assembly should deprive me of office, and send me away."

Regarding the method of admonition, St. Vincent gave the following instruction: "Admonition should be given in public in three cases, viz., first, when the evil is so inveterate that a private admonition would be useless. Second, when the person to be admonished, though good, is weak and unable to bear correction, no matter how gently given. In such case, a general recommendation will suffice to effect the desired correction. Third, when there is danger that others will be led astray unless the fault is called to their attention.

"When a subject is to be admonished for some fault committed against the person of the Superior, two things should be observed: first, the correction should never be administered immediately except in case of necessity. Second, it should be done apropos and with meekness. Third, the admonition should take the form of explanation and reasoning, to show what inconveniences result from the fault in question. And in reprimanding, the Superior should make plain that

he speaks, not from injured feeling or self-interest, but for the good of the subject and the Community" (August 13, 1650).

Further instruction and admonitions: "The first admonition should be given with great gentleness and kindness, and at a time well chosen; the second, with severity and gravity yet with meekness and entreaty. The third should be administered with force and firmness, stating what consequences will be incurred by pertinacity. Whatever its form, the reprehension should not be animated by antipathy, self-interest, or a spirit of revenge; it should always be in spirit of humility and charity" (October 29, 1638).

Speaking to confreres in administrative offices he said: "I do not know how I shall speak to you on this subject, for it concerns myself." Here the Saint paused a moment. "Nevertheless here are my thoughts on the subject. Although our Lord was the master of all creatures, He chose the lowest place, permitting Himself to be made an object of opprobrium, the outcast of men. Following that example a man humbles himself by taking the last place, the place chosen by our Savior. One who desires to command, cannot have the spirit of our Lord who came into the world, not to be served, but to serve. He practiced obedience at Nazareth; later on He cared for the Apostles, washing their feet, and inviting them to rest and relax after a strenuous day.

"In the same spirit He rebuked His Apostles for disputing among themselves as to who would occupy the first place in His Kingdom. Their proper place is that of service (Mk. 10:44). Accursed pride urges men to ambition offices of authority and command. Such pride makes them kin to the Evil One, for he is father of the pride whereby they are possessed. Administrative office is dangerous even though it be acquired unsought. Its distractions divert the mind from the love of God, from recollection and union with Him in prayer.

"Today a Superior spoke to me about some persons whom he destined for offices of authority. I said to him: 'Alas, you are destroying them.' However it is a necessary evil. Cardinal Berulle remarked, and I have experienced the same thing

myself, that a position of priority is malignant; it infects the soul and the faculties to the extent that when removed from office, one feels much difficulty in practicing submission and obedience. Such is the result unless a man be deeply absorbed in God."

CHAPTER 80 *Responsibilities of Administrative Office*

St. Vincent was deeply impressed with the thought of the strict accounting that must be rendered before the judgment seat of God by those who have charge of other persons, how lowly soever those others might be. "Alas!" he said, "what answer shall I make for myself, especially since my time in office has been very long? May God forgive me! Yes, an accounting must be given of words and actions that may have scandalized inferiors, and of the transgressions that have been committed because of our weakness and neglect.

"When Cardinal Bellarmine was Archbishop of Capua, word came to him that a bishop of his province was dangerously ill. He went to visit the sick prelate, and, finding him in great peace of mind, he feared a fatal illusion. 'Your Excellency,' he said, 'how does it happen that you are so tranquil and undisturbed? That is unusual in persons of our position and circumstances. Have you carefully pondered upon the words of the Apostle, "Reprove, entreat, rebuke with all patience and doctrine"? Is it possible that you find yourself guiltless before God in this so important matter?' These words moved the bishop to tears of contrition. He became so perturbed that the archbishop had to pay him another visit in order to restore peace of mind.

"My God, who will not tremble when that fearful moment is at hand, particularly if he has sought to be in a position of administration? Recently I inquired of a bishop whether he felt the burden of office. 'Alas,' he answered, 'I do feel the burden, but not now for the first time. Three weeks after my consecration I experienced so bitter a remorse, that

if it had been possible I would have wished to be starting again at my priestly ordination.' Sooner or later such is the state of those who have worked their way into a position of ecclesiastical dignity. Our task therefore is to banish from the Congregation this detestable and diabolical spirit of ambition. And there are ways of doing it.

"First, if any one of us feels the urge of ambition for office and authority, he should seek the divine mercy by means of mortification and other discipline. He should pray in humble and penitential spirit before the Blessed Sacrament, petitioning to be delivered from so deplorable and diabolical a spirit. Second, we should give thanks to God that the spirit of command and superiority has not invaded the minds of those who are in official position. All the superiors of the Little Company urge me to release them from office, and when I accede to their request, their professions of joy and gratitude leave no doubt of their sincerity.

"My Brothers, God will bestow great blessings on the Congregation so long as the confreres, responding to His grace, continue in this humble spirit, the spirit of our Lord. Third, when obedience calls us to a position of authority, we should submit. The Bishop of Geneva has ordained as follows: 'When a Sister is elected to office, let her obey and receive the blessing. Though unworthy in her own estimation, let her trust in God for the grace necessary to fulfill her duties properly. For when God calls to an employment, He has found in us the requisite dispositions, or, if not, He will supply them.'

"Those who are in office feel oppressed by the burden because they sense their weakness, and believe that they are incapable of guiding others. Such sentiments are a good sign of humility and other graces necessary to give consolation and good example to the confreres. The gifts of God are manifold and variously bestowed. One person is learned but unable to govern. Another makes progress in personal sanctity, but has not the gift of guiding others. Accordingly it is for the Divine Providence to employ us in the work for which He has given us the talent; it is not our business to choose our occupation" (May 5, 1658).

He gave good advice to appointees: "It is not wrong to take advice," he said; "on the contrary, it is fitting and necessary to do so when the matter under consideration is important, or when we are uncertain what should be done. In regard to temporal affairs one should seek advice from lawyers or other intelligent externs. When domestic business is in question, we should confer with the proper officers and, if expedient, with other members of the house. This manner of acting, due precautions being observed, enhances the God-given authority of Superiors, and promotes love and respect for good order. I beg of you to act in this manner. Changes and extraordinary matters should first be proposed to the Superior General."

He wrote to another Superior: "Live cordially and simply with your confreres in such wise that someone seeing you gathered together would be unable to tell who is the Superior. Before making decisions, especially in matters of importance seek advice; in particular the advice of your assistant. For my part I assemble my (house counselors) whenever a problem of administration arises, whether in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters, or in temporal affairs. In regard to temporal things, I consult the persons who have charge of them. In whatever relates to the department in charge of the Brothers, I seek their advice because of their knowledge in such things. God bestows His blessing upon decisions that are thus made in co-operation with one another."

Once a decision has been made, there should be no further uncertainty; the moment has come for action. "When we have recommended an affair to God, and have taken counsel, we should hold firmly to our decision. An incident in the life of Pope Clement VIII presents a case in point. He had to consider and determine an affair of grave importance. Throughout an entire year, couriers were dispatched to him, with various representations bearing on the matter, but the Holy Father made no answer. Meanwhile he recommended the affair to God, conferred with trusted counselors, and finally, after much consultation, he made a decision favorable to the Church.

"Later on he was greatly distressed because he had a dream

in which, as it seemed to him, our Lord appeared and, with severe countenance, reproached him for what he had done, and threatened him with punishment. But Cardinal Tolet, having considered the matter in the sight of God, assured the Pope that the apparition was an illusion caused by the devil, and that there was no reason to fear, inasmuch as the Pope had recommended the affair to God, and had taken counsel. Accepting the Cardinal's advice, His Holiness was not disturbed by any further misgivings."

The Saint recommended firmness. "Those who are in office must be firm in seeing that the rules are observed. Among the things that cause a decline of discipline and fervor in a community, I have not seen anything more dangerous than a certain weakness and softness in Superiors and other officers who desire to please the confreres, and win their affection. A religious community is comparable to an army in this respect, that the faults committed by the rank and file are as a rule owing to the negligence of their commanding officer; and, vice versa, the meritorious conduct of the men traces back to the sterling character of their leader. I have seen a community decline in less than four years owing to the negligence and laxity of a Superior. We should pray to God fervently for those who are in office."

Referring to Seminary training, he wrote to a Superior: "Train the seminarians in the true spirit of their calling; especially in the interior life, the practice of prayer and virtue. Chant, ceremonies, and moral theology are not sufficient; the principal thing is advancement in piety and devotion. And with this in view, the members of the faculty should give good example without which, instruction would be almost useless. Let us therefore beg of God this grace, and give ourselves to Him, that we may conform both our conduct and our instruction to His. If such be the case, your Seminary will exercise a beneficial influence inside the diocese and outside as well; an influence that will cause the institution to grow in numbers and in blessings.

"To act as a taskmaster, to neglect those under your care, or to disedify them would prove a serious obstacle to such good. We must be firm, and not harsh in administration.

On the other hand, we must avoid an insipid mildness which serves no purpose. We shall learn from our Savior's way of acting, how our manner should always be characterized by humility and courtesy so as to attract all hearts, and not alienate anyone."

A word on the missions: "My great hope is that with the help of God's grace, you will do much for the salvation of the people, and that your good example will engender in your confreres a liking for the work. Their love for the missions will induce them to apply themselves to the work in the places, at the times, and in the manner you direct. Like Moses, you will consult God, and receive from Him the law which you pass on to your Missioners. Your administration, like that of the Holy Patriarch, should be gentle, patient, forbearing, humble, and charitable.

"You will have charge over the Missioners who accompany you. And I pray our Lord to inspire you with His spirit. Honor His prudence, foresight, meekness, and exactitude. Begin with exactitude in the hours of rising and retiring, in prayer, the Divine Office and other exercises. Fidelity in these things is a treasure. Why then will you not go to the trouble of acquitting yourself of these duties for the love of God? We rarely see tradesmen fail to open and close their shops at the usual hours. We ecclesiastics are the only ones to come and go as we please."

CHAPTER 81 *Difficulties of Administration*

St. Vincent spoke of the difficulties a Superior may have to face. "I compassionate you in your trials," he wrote. "However, difficulties should neither surprise nor dishearten you; they are to be encountered everywhere. Two men living together are enough to try each other's patience, and if you were entirely alone, you would be a burden to yourself. I am thankful to God that you are making good use of your trials, and I feel sure that your so evident wisdom and meekness will not fail you in these untoward circumstances. You

may not satisfy everyone, but what of that? Our Savior Himself had His accusers and His critics."

On another occasion he wrote: "I know well enough how much there is to suffer in the position you occupy, and I pray that God may strengthen you in your difficulties. They are the matter of supernatural merit, and where there is no suffering, there is not much merit. If we were equally disposed to accept whatever office is conferred upon us, we would then have assurance of doing God's holy will. May He grant us that grace!" (December 8, 1649.)

Humility was a virtue of supreme importance and closely associated with true success. "I have remarked the humble estimate you entertain of yourself. This is a necessary virtue in those who are in administrative position. But diffidence in your own strength should be the foundation of the confidence you place in God. With that sort of confidence we can do a great deal, or rather God accomplishes what He expects of us. Think of our Lord as near you, ready to give you a helping hand as soon as you turn to Him for assistance; then all you do will prosper" (December 19, 1646).

He recommended forbearance in the administration of a Community house. "You should bear with your confrere. If he were free from those faults, he would be guilty of others. If you had nothing to endure from other people, you would not have much occasion to practice charity in which therefore you would not sufficiently resemble our Savior. He was pleased to gather about Him a band of uncultured followers, men of many shortcomings. He did so in order to exercise meekness, humility, and patience toward them, and so, by example, to show us how to govern a house. Aid your confreres to correct their faults. What is needed is not the toleration of evil, but the prudent application of a remedy.

"The virtue of a particular confrere is a reproach to others who are less regular and punctual, and little concerned about their own advancement or that of their brethren. Zeal and exactitude are judged amiss by those who lack such virtues. It is true that virtue may be carried to excess, but in comparison with laxity, excess is less to be blamed. These Missioners — the two in question — carry their virtue to a degree

of perfection which others are unable to attain. In consequence the men of lesser virtue imagine that the more perfect are guilty of excess whereas before God it is not so. The less perfect souls remain on their lower level because they lack the courage to climb higher. God grant us the grace to adjudge as good what is not patently evil!" (July 18, 1659.)

A Superior wrote, among other things, that he would rather be in charge of animals than of men. The Saint replied: "What you say will bear explanation. It is true of Superiors who wish that everyone bow before them, that no one oppose them, that everything go according to their ideas, that men obey them without reply or delay, and, so to speak, that everyone adore them. But the preference you express is not to be found in Superiors who regard themselves as servants of their brethren; Superiors who love contradiction and contempt; Superiors who strive to imitate our Savior in His forbearance under the rudeness, rivalry, and weakness of faith that appeared in His followers; Superiors who reverence and emulate His ardent will and purpose to serve those whom He had come to save.

"I know, my dear Confrere, that, thanks be to God, this same Blessed Lord has led you to act with humility and patience. I know furthermore that you have employed such language only in order to express more forcefully the distress you feel, and to persuade me to relieve you of your office. Accordingly we shall try to appoint someone in your place."

Good men were to remain in office despite minor shortcomings. "The reasons you allege for my releasing you from office are not convincing. On the contrary they strengthen my resolve that you continue in your present position. Your consciousness of your faults and limitations, should serve to humble you, as in fact it does, but you should not allow such deficiencies to discourage you in regard to what our Lord plans to accomplish. He possesses enough virtue and capacity for you and for Himself. Let Him guide you, and rest assured that so long as you remain in your present sentiments of humility, and put special trust in Him, He will sanctify your administration" (April 10, 1658).

In a time of scarcity and want he said: "We must lament

over the distress of the poor, otherwise we would not be disciples of Christ. But what else shall we do? The inhabitants of a beleaguered city take stock of their provisions from time to time, and then dole out a daily ration of bread according to the number of people, and the probable duration of the siege. Now if mayors of cities employ precautionary measures lest the people perish, why should not we act in like manner? Yesterday after consulting with the older priests of the house, we finally decided to reduce, for this year, the Community allowance of wine to one gallon for each meal.

"This restriction will be displeasing to some of the confreres because they think that they need a little more wine. But since they are accustomed to submitting to the decrees of Providence, and to controlling their appetite, they will turn this privation to their profit just as they do in regard to other mortifications. Others will perhaps complain because they are sensual and attached to their gratification, unwilling to deny themselves a little pleasure, and murmuring against whatever is not in accord with their inclination. My Savior, preserve us from that spirit of sensuality!"

In the interest of economy he wrote to a Superior who was minded to erect a new building: "You speak of beginning to build. My dear Sir, you must not even think of it! Through His great mercy our Lord has given us a lodging, such as it is. And we must be content while waiting for His divine Goodness to send us assistance. In regard to the attendant inconveniences of which you speak, since we are unable to prevent them, we shall not be their cause."

There is also an economy of labor in connection with the good use of time. St. Vincent has this to say on the subject: "First, God has given an express command, that man gain his food by the sweat of his brow, i.e., by hard work. From that general law no one may claim exemption. Second, in Sacred Scripture it is written that the just man lives by the labor of his hands. The Holy Spirit intimates that the just man will receive a blessing, he will not be reduced to beggary, nor will he become a burden upon anyone. He will always have sufficient for himself and his family, and his every interest will prosper, for God will be with him.

“On the other hand, the unjust man, since he does not work, is frequently a burden to others because he is reduced to begging his bread, or because he turns to theft. Third, God is always working, and He will never cease to labor. He is active within Himself, the Father engendering the Son, Father and Son spirating the Third Person. The heavens are constantly in motion, and the earth continually produces multitudinous forms of life and lifeless matter. The seasons follow each other in orderly and constant sequence. God works in all His creatures, and were He to withdraw His hand, the entire universe with all its force, beauty, and immensity, would vanish. It is reasonable therefore that we should labor under the command that God has imposed upon us.

“Fourth, the life of our Lord on earth was one of labor. During His boyhood, and up to His thirtieth year He worked at the carpenter’s trade in the shop of St. Joseph. Would we then wish to spend our time doing nothing? And what was the status of Christ throughout the years of public ministry? He was occupied incessantly with giving instructions, preaching the Gospel, and performing other good works. He went from village to village, without ever a vacation. He lived as do the poor, and He received alms from the pious women who followed Him and ministered to Him. On one occasion He made a supper engagement where He knew there was a soul to gain. On another occasion He visited a sick person, that He might confer, first, bodily health, and then spiritual soundness.

“The Apostle St. Paul was engaged in extensive occupations. Nevertheless he lived by the work of his hands, taking the necessary time either during the day or at night so as not to be a burden on other Christians. He held the poverty of Jesus Christ in so high esteem that he scrupled to eat a morsel of bread that he had not earned. In the early days of the Church everyone had an occupation of one kind or another. After assisting at the reading of the Divine Office, members of religious communities made mats or baskets out of rushes or rattan, as a means of making their livelihood. In the time of St. Bernard that custom was still in

vigor, and the religious lived in exemplary faithfulness to their vocation. Later on the custom was abolished, and in consequence there has been a considerable relaxation of regular discipline, for idleness is the nursing mother of all vices."

CHAPTER 82 *Advice to a Newly Appointed Superior*

To a newly appointed Superior, Vincent offered the following advice: "God has called you to the office of guiding souls; it is the most excellent of arts. It was the employment of the Son of God while on earth. For this cause He employed every moment of His life, and suffered, at last, an ignominious death. Yours therefore is a truly great assignment. You will be employed in leading souls to God, eradicating the vices of a people, curing the faults of a seminary, and inspiring sentiments of ecclesiastical virtue in those who are under your care. This is a work, not of man, but of God, a great work!

"For its accomplishment Jesus Christ must be united with us, and we with Him. We must speak as He spoke, in the spirit that animated His words and works. We must work and speak in Christ just as He was in the Father, and preached the doctrine that He had learned from the Father. This is the phrasing of Sacred Scripture.

"Consequently, you must put off your self, and be clothed with Jesus Christ. An effect follows the nature of its cause; men beget other men. And if the preceptor who guides others, and forms their character, is himself animated with a merely human spirit, those who see him, listen to his instructions, and endeavor to imitate him, will be animated by the same purely human spirit. No matter how orthodox his teaching, he will infuse into them, only the shadow, not the substance of true virtue.

"On the contrary, if a Superior be all in God, thoroughly imbued with the maxims of Christ, his every word will be

efficacious; virtue will go out from him, and all his actions will be salutary instructions to influence everyone that has knowledge of them.

“A very important thing in your work, is to have frequent communion with God in prayer. Here is the reservoir of the wisdom you will need to perform well the duties of your office. When doubt arises, have recourse to Him, say to Him, ‘My Lord, you are the Father of light, teach me what I am to do.’ This I advise you to do, not only in the difficulties you will have to solve, but also in the instructions you will have to deliver.

“Moreover, you should have recourse to God in prayer so as to preserve yourself in the fear and love of Him. For I must inform you, and you should be in possession of this truth, that men often destroy themselves while contributing to the salvation of other souls. Such persons do well in providing for their own spiritual advancement, but when engaged in external activities they forget and neglect themselves. Saul was worthy of kingly dignity because he led a good life in the house of his father, but when raised to the throne, he fell away from the favor of God.

“To avoid the misfortune of Saul and Judas, we must unite ourselves inseparably with our Lord, saying frequently: ‘My Lord, do not permit that while working for the salvation of other souls, I lose my own. Be my shepherd, guide me, and do not withhold from me the graces which, through my ministry, you confer upon others.’

“Again prayer is the way to obtain graces for those who are under your charge. Be assured that this is the best way of producing good fruit. Jesus Christ, your exemplar, was not content with laboring, teaching, offering Himself in Sacrifice. He had recourse to prayer; He prayed for us all, and by so doing He has taught us to do the same both for our own affairs, and for whatever concerns the persons whom, in union with Him, we are trying to assist.

“Another thing I recommend to you, is humility. Say often: ‘My God, what have I done to merit such an employment? Where are my good works that would correspond with the responsibility that has been placed upon my shoul-

ders? My God, I shall spoil everything unless you direct all my words and works.' Considering all that is human and imperfect in us, we shall find more than enough to humble ourselves not only before God, but in the presence of men, including those who are subject to our authority.

"Above all do not indulge a desire to manifest your authority. A person who spoke to me a few days ago, expressed the opinion that a Superior should act in that manner, but our Lord Jesus Christ never taught such doctrine, but the contrary by word and example. He declared that He had come to serve, and that the one who desires to be the leader, should become the servant of all the others.

"Be as one of the group. Say to your confreres that you have come to be of service to them. Still more we should acknowledge that God is the source of the good accomplished through our instrumentality. At the same time let us attribute to ourselves all the evil that happens in the Community. Yes, keep in mind that all disorders arise principally from the Superior who, either by negligence or by bad example, is the cause of irregularity.

"Humility should warn you to shun all self-complacency which easily insinuates itself, especially in functions that attract attention. Oh, how dangerous to all good works is that form of poison! It corrupts the most sacred of occupations, and soon results in forgetfulness of God. In His holy Name, beware this pitfall! I do not know of any that is more dangerous to progress in spiritual perfection.

"That you may avoid this danger, give yourself to God, that you may speak with the humble spirit of Christ, avowing that your doctrine is not from you, but from the Gospel. When speaking to the people, imitate especially the simplicity of language, and the similies of Christ, as recorded in Sacred Scripture.

"What marvelous things He could have taught the people! What secrets concerning the nature and admirable attributes of God, might have come forth from Him who was the eternal wisdom of the Father! Yet how understandably He spoke, making use of familiar comparisons such as a husbandman, a field, a grain of mustard seed. That is the way to

Speak if you wish to be understood by the people when you make known to them the word of God.

“Another thing that deserves special attention, is the Savior’s manner of acting. When there is question of doing some good work, say to Him: ‘Lord, if You were in my place, how would You handle this matter? How would You give this instruction? How console this person sick in both body and mind?’

“This dependence should include a great deference to Superiors as representing our Lord in your regard. Believe me, their experience in office has taught them a great many things. And I make this observation so that you may be induced not to undertake any important or extraordinary affair without acquainting us with what you are planning to do. If the matter is urgent, and there is not enough time to await our decision, consult the local Superior, requesting his advice. We know from actual occurrences, that God has blessed the confreres who followed this rule. On the other hand those who acted otherwise, not only placed themselves in difficulties, but embarrassed us as well.

“I beg of you to banish any desire of distinguishing yourself in administration. Do not affect anything singular, but always travel the Royal Road in order to walk securely and without blame. By this I mean to say that in all things you ought to follow the Rules and pious customs of the Congregation. Do not introduce anything new, but conform to the instructions drawn up for the use of Superiors, and do not abridge any of the practices observed in the Congregation.

“Hold yourself to the observance of the Rules, and require that the confreres be faithful, for if you fail in this matter, all will go wrong. Like the Savior whom you represent, you must be a light that both warms and illuminates. ‘It is the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world’ (Jn. 1:9). To do this you will have to be filled with grace, with light and with good works.”

At that point of the conference a coadjutor Brother entered the room. He had something to say about a temporal matter. Vincent listened, and when the Brother had left, he took occasion to make the following remarks. “You see,

my dear Confreres, how we must turn our attention from the things of God to temporal concerns. Hence you can understand the duty of a Superior to give his attention to both the one and the other, to provide for the needs of both body and soul. God Himself has given the example, for besides the internal operations of the Father in begetting eternally His only Son, and of the Father and the Son in originating the Holy Spirit, He created the world outside Himself; and He is constantly occupied with preserving the universe and everything it contains, grain in the fields, fruit on the trees, and so on.

“His adorable providence reaches out to the smallest particulars. Not a leaf can flutter from a tree to the ground without His directive decree. He counts the hairs on our head, and feeds the smallest worm. And similarly a Superior, who represents the providence of God, must devote his attention to the least of temporal affairs and not imagine that the care of such things is unworthy of his position.

“When first the Son of God commissioned His Apostles to go in advance and prepare the villages for His coming, He instructed them not to take money with them. But afterward when the number of disciples had increased, He appointed one to have charge of the purse; his duty would be not only to feed the poor, but also to provide for the wants of the Apostolic family. In addition, He allowed women to follow along for the same purpose — that they might minister to the material needs of Himself and His Apostles. Though in the Gospel He has issued the instruction that His followers be not anxious about the morrow, that should be understood as a caution against inordinate concern and solicitude for the goods of this world, and not as a counsel to neglect the means of procuring food and clothing.

“With that observation I conclude; enough has been said for today. To repeat once more — you are about to undertake a truly great work. I beg of our Lord to impart His blessing to your administration. Be good enough to join your prayers with mine, that He may forgive all the faults I have committed in the office that I hold.”

LETTERS AND FRAGMENTARY WRITINGS
OF
ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC

PART I . "THE GREATEST OF THESE"

CHAPTER 1 *Love for God*

"And I, once I have been lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:32).

"This word of our dear Master and Beloved, teaches us that we can and should aim at the perfection of true love. His clearly expressed intention is to draw us to Himself, and He has the power to fulfill His promises. Is there need of anything else, dearest One, to move us to love You above all things? How does it happen that vanity has prevailed, and still prevails despite truth? Let us have more courage, dearest Sisters, and do our utmost to accomplish the will of God. And pray that He fulfill in us His promise to draw all men to Himself. Our co-operation will give universal domination to the Author of all things.

"Is it not just and glorious to co-operate with God in the execution of His designs? Let us then submit to the will of our dearest Love, that His word may be verified in us. While seeing Him raised above the earth for the purpose of drawing us to Him, shall we remain so shackled by the ties of earthly affection as to give no response to His pure love? Draw us, Lord! We shall run after You, and the perfume of Your ointment will hold us so firmly that nothing will ever separate us from Your love.

"It is Your wish to attract us; grant that we may be deeply impressed with this word. If we belong to You, we no longer belong to ourselves, and so we would be guilty of theft, were we to withdraw ourselves, even slightly, from the

possession You exercise over us. Your desire is to draw us to Yourself. I wish the selfsame, my beloved Spouse, and in proof thereof I am following You to the foot of the cross which I choose as my cloister.

“There I wish to lay aside all earthly affections. I am invited thereto by Your voice urging me to incline my ear, and forget my people, that I may be filled with the greatness of Your love. There at the foot of this holy cross, never expecting any joy except in subjection to Your good pleasure, I sacrifice everything that might alter the purity of the love that You require of me.

“Do not be frightened, my dear Sisters. The Spouse of the Canticle, preceding us in this holy love, says that the well-beloved was white and ruddy. Do not allow thorns to prevent us from wearing a bouquet of roses. But since a property of love is to create in the person loving, a resemblance of the person loved, let us imitate His purity and charity. The one is represented by the white of the rose, the other by its crimson. The purity of God within Himself is indicated by His simplicity; His disinterestedness, by the favors and graces He bestows. The charity of God within Himself may be seen in the unity of His essence, and the distinction of the Divine Persons; His love for men is proved by His will that His divine Son should become man. The Son of God takes pleasure in being with the children of men, and He accommodated Himself to their way of life in order to show that God has loved them from all eternity.

“Let us then love this Beloved and hold Him fast, for our keeping Him with us depends on ourselves. He is not content with loving all equally. He desires that some be very dear to Him, that they be elevated to a love more pure and perfect. Admire in this the goodness of our Beloved, and with the simplicity of a dove, ask Him if He desires that we be numbered among such privileged souls. My Lord, I have experienced an inexpressible suggestion of an uncommon love. It is the special charity You desire of souls, that they may show on earth the purity of Your love.

“We are a small group; may we aspire to this love? It seems to me that the desire is in every heart, but the knowl-

edge of our weakness, a knowledge derived from past infidelities, engenders the fear that You may refuse. On the other hand, the recollection that You have not limited the number of times we are to forgive our enemies, leads us to believe that You will be merciful in our regard. And we believe that in Your mercy You are loving too.

"You love us truly because You are one with the Father, and the Father so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son. We are convinced that You desire our love, because in both New and Old Testaments You command us to love You, and because You have promised in recompense, that the Father will love us, and that You and He will come and dwell within us. Oh, the power of love, wonderful treasure hidden deep within the soul! Pure love, how I love You! Since You are strong as death, take from me everything that is displeasing to You.

"Behold us, Lord, at the foot of Your cross, ready to be drawn to You according to Your promise! Were it not that Your word is all-powerful, I would fear the weight of earthly affections. Act then with power, and unite our love with Yours, our life with Your life, and our death with Your death."

CHAPTER 2 *Practices of Devotion*

"Our interior converse with God should consist in the thought of His holy presence. We should adore Him at all hours, eliciting acts of love toward His divine goodness, and recalling as much as possible the motives that most impressed us in prayer. We should recall especially our affections and resolutions, in order to correct our faults, and advance in His holy love.

"Second, on all occasions painful to nature we should reflect upon the paternal bounty of God. Like a good father, He permits us to feel His divine justice. Sometimes He wishes to show greater love for us by giving us a share in suffering, and thereby applying to us the merit of our Savior's

Passion, and to excite in us acts of gratitude. Third, when we experience what pleases us, and when success attends our efforts, we should turn interiorly to God, and express our gratitude and love, for we have received this consolation from His mercy. Having thus given thanks, we may then enter upon sentiments of rejoicing.

“Fourth, we should do all we can to make every object of sense an occasion of elevating our hearts to God. Sometimes we may regard them as created by His all-powerful hand; at other times we may reflect on the purpose God had in making them, viz., that man might make use of them, and give thanks to the Creator. Fifth, let us consider the excellence of our nature, and then rise above the baseness of corrupt inclinations, and affections, to avow that we desire nothing on earth but God only. Finally, when overwhelmed with difficulties, we hope for aid from creatures and are disappointed either by a dispensation of Divine Providence or the fault of creatures — when this happens we should immediately think of the divine will and, accepting the privation as a sign of His good pleasure, have recourse to God alone. Let us consider that from all eternity He is self-sufficing, and that in consequence He will suffice for us.

“Since we are so favored as to be in a state wherein we should have Him as our only consolation, we ought to make an act of love by accepting the privation of what is wanting to us, even though the good that is lacking seems very reasonable and necessary. Let us remain at peace alone with God. Let us make no complaint against creatures, for even though leagued against us, they are unable to harm us unless God allows them to do so. But in order that our mind be perfectly submissive to God’s good pleasure in every eventuality, we should become habituated to make frequent acts of desire. Our desire should be to know God and consequently to love Him, to give Him what we owe Him and to despoil and deny ourselves of whatever is displeasing to Him. We should often abandon ourselves to Him, and show Him our heart filled with confidence and gratitude.”

PART II . "AS WAYFARERS"

CHAPTER 3 *Earthly Pilgrimage*

"One purpose of God in creating souls was to place them as pilgrims upon earth where soul and body will be companions only for a time. That is why most of the ancient fathers did not make permanent residence in any one place. They made pilgrimages of devotion, and their motive perhaps was to impress upon their mind the truth that their lasting domicile was not on earth. To strengthen them in this truth it pleased God to send angels to accompany them frequently on their journeys. This reflection should move me to accept changes of place willingly when Divine Providence permits that I be sent from one house to another, with my guardian angel as my invisible companion.

"Our first father, having transgressed the command of God in order to perpetuate his place on earth, brought upon himself death instead of life. To remedy the situation the Son of God became a pilgrim upon earth, and his pilgrimage should be the model for us to imitate."

CHAPTER 4 *Change of House*

"By going to another house, and fulfilling the duties there assigned to us, we honor the Divine Providence that leads us to that place. By changing residence, and recalling with a sense of gratification, that our true home is not on earth, we honor the journeys of Jesus and the holy Virgin from Bethlehem to Egypt and other places."

PART III . "AND DWELT AMONG US"

CHAPTER 5 *Morning Meditation*

1. Fidelity to Rule; morning prayer. "Blessed be God, my dear Sisters, for it is the sacred manna that God gives to those who rise early. If only you could know the sense of contentment I feel when I hear you coming to the chapel! The sweet consolation that one enjoys is generous recompense for the difficulty one must overcome to get there. We must rise promptly without arguing with the pillow, then go on our knees, and so forth.

2. At the beginnings of conference: "Blessed be God, my dear Sisters, because we have reason to hope that our Lord is with us; for He has said, 'Where two or three persons are gathered in My name, I am in the midst of them.' What has He done, my dear Sisters, but send forth His rays of light, as from a divine sun, to enlighten and warm our hearts? We should therefore assemble here to honor the groups of people that gathered in the presence of our Lord, and also to advance in perfection, and correct the faults of which we accuse ourselves.

3. "I was greatly consoled these past few days, my Sisters, when I learned that a poor man had struck one of our Sisters, and that by the grace of God, she did nothing to defend herself. Granted, the attack was somewhat boorish, but it was fitting to suffer such correction, for we are servants of the poor, and we should endure everything at their hands."

4. While bestowing the simple and poor habit worn by the Daughters of Charity, she recommended love, purity of intention, interior and exterior mortification. Putting the coronette in place, she said: "Let us close our ears to the converse of the world and open them to the everlasting

truths. May this white coif be a reminder of purity. It is given last of all because the last thing we give up is our own judgment which is enacted within the mind."

CHAPTER 6 *Recreation*

1. "Let us keep in view the presence of God, and the equality of all human beings at the moment of their creation. The least estimable in the judgment of men, may be the first in God's love.

2. "Let us regard this time as given by the goodness of God to unite us in sincere communication of thoughts, words, and actions so that we may honor the unity and distinction of persons in God, and the society of saints in heaven.

3. "Our conversation should be truly gay and cordial toward everyone. Whether others agree with us or not, let us reply graciously, without quarreling or taking offense. Let us in this matter, recall how meek Jesus Christ was when He was often adversely criticized concerning His holy words and actions. Let us not banter sister companions who speak less appropriately, unless we are sure they will receive the banter good-naturedly. And let there be no thought contrary to charity.

4. "Charity requires that we receive in good part the small pleasantries directed our way, remarks that are made in fun; for we regard our sisters as better than ourselves, and as more pleasing to God. It should be our pleasure to serve them.

5. "Let us raise our hearts to God, considering that recreation is a time for us to relax in order to be more capable of serving Him. Let us think about the joy of heaven, and the heart of Christ as the bond of our affections.

6. "We should form our conversation on the example of Jesus Christ and the spirit of charity, proposing what is of interest to others. We should not concern ourselves with the actions and intentions of others, and we should avoid particular friendships.

7. "Let us be kind to everyone, honoring the superioress

who represents Jesus Christ in our regard. Let us not find fault with her actions or instructions; for the spirit that governs is that of God rather than her own.

8. "Let us speak in defense of those who are absent, putting ourselves in their place, and admitting our own faults.

9. "The subjects of our conversation should be such as to foster observance of the Rule, for every other devotion, without this, would be prejudicial rather than profitable."

CHAPTER 7 *Christmas*

"It is not enough to have our intellect enlightened by a knowledge of our faults; we must have our will purified so that we may reject them. Enlightenment of mind serves to cleanse our conscience in preparation for the birth of Christ in us, and the purification of will adorns and beautifies it so that we may receive Him. Cleansing is done by an entire confession of our sins; adornment, by the exercise of the virtues, principally by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. For persons of the world, these three, viz., almsgiving, fasting, and prayer take the place respectively, of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

"We also can offer them at the crib as regal presents: alms, as gold; fasting, as myrrh; and prayer, as incense. These three also represent the most Holy Trinity: prayer, the Father; fasting, the Son; and alms, the Holy Spirit. So, by these gifts we shall adore our Incarnate God with angels, kings, and shepherds."

PART IV . "YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES"

CHAPTER 8 *A Mission in Poland*

"At last the moment has come which Divine Providence has chosen for the departure of our Sisters, and it is with grief that we see them go, because we are being separated. But at the same time there is a feeling of joy because of the assurance that they are going to do the will of God, and to be one with you for the accomplishment of His plans in the Kingdom of Poland. My dear Sisters, the designs of God are of supreme importance. I pray that God in His goodness, will grant you the grace of understanding because I am sure that this realization will inspire you with great humility when you reflect that you have been chosen for such a work, and you will conceive a desire to become less unworthy.

"My very dear Sisters, how shall you and I accomplish this work? By the mortification of our senses we must cause our passions to die within us; and we must empty our hearts of everything, that they may be filled with God's love. Thus His divine Bounty will accept the sacrifice which you will often make of yourselves, and the services which, under the Queen's direction, you will render to the poor. In this respect, our Sister Margaret will communicate to you whatever instructions our most Honored Father will have given her.

"My dear Sisters, you have informed me that in honor of the most Holy Trinity you were but one heart in your three persons. Now I beg of you to enlarge this heart, and allow our three other sisters to enter that cordial union so that there will not be any distinction between you and them. I assure you that they are going to you with the sincere desire of always trying to please God, and of being detached from their own interest. Nature will sometimes furnish even the

most perfect with occasions for having to 'fight the good fight'; such occasions are a test whereby to prove the fidelity of those who desire to belong to God. Do not be surprised at that. It is then that our hearts should be all the more generous, and despite nature, practice humility in order to prove our genuine Christianity, and to honor Jesus Christ in the virtues of His sacred humanity.

"My dear Sisters, would you like me to draw your attention to a point that seems to me essential? It is this, that you never speak Polish to each other without explaining in French to our Sisters what you have been saying. That will enable them to learn the language more quickly, and it will prevent inconveniences that could otherwise occur.

"It seems to me that I shall not be able to rejoice sufficiently at the union that is to thrive among you, unity in word and action. It will be a source of edification both to your own community, and to others who may witness it. Let there be no secrets among yourselves but keep secret from externs everything that goes on within the house. We may look for the accomplishment of much good. I beg of our Lord to bestow upon you an abundance of grace for everything that He requires of you, and I remain, in His love, etc.

"I believe that you have the pleasure of being with the Queen at Fontainebleau. If her Majesty should wish to speak with you, do not raise any difficulty even though the respect you owe makes you fear to approach her. Her kindness and charity inspire the most humble persons with confidence in representing to her their wants.

"Do not forget to present frankly the needs of the poor. I need not recommend the modesty and reserve that should characterize your converse with personages of high station; I know that you have a singular esteem for those virtues. Do all you can for the poor, particularly in regard to the spiritual ministration that you owe them.

"I think you do all you can to comfort our Sister Blanche, and that you look upon her as a young plant from which you may one day gather good fruit to place on the everlasting table of our good God."

CHAPTER 9 *Mutual Cordiality*

“It seems to me that I see you both in great peace, and animated with the desire of exciting one another to union and cordiality. It is a cordial union that consists in being open with each other, telling each other what each has done when alone, and informing one another whither you go when you leave the house — one in a spirit of submission, the other through kindness and condescension.

“When one happens to be sad and melancholy, let her overcome herself that she may contribute to the recreation of the other, and let her that is cheerful moderate her joy in order that, humoring the other for the love of God, she may little by little drive away her melancholy. You should act thus that you may not listen to the temptation of seeking comfort elsewhere, and of discharging the burden of your poor heart on strangers — a thing that would be the ruin of the holy friendship existing between two Sisters.”

CHAPTER 10 *Superior and Subject*

"How does it happen, Sister Barbe, that, by the little cordiality you manifest toward the Sister God has given you, by your little disdains and the want of kindness to her in her weakness, you have come to forget that, when you were appointed her superior, you assumed the obligations of a spiritual mother? And those obligations are far greater than those of a natural mother; for you, more than she, are bound to care for the salvation and perfection of those under your charge. Your office obliges you also to exercise great meekness and charity such as the Son of God recommended while on earth. When you accepted the appointment, did you not perceive immediately that humility was required of you, since you have reason to know your own incapacity? When you give a command, should you not remember always that your right to do so comes from your office, not from yourself?

"But I trust the evil is not beyond remedy. Resolutely place your faults before you without trying to excuse them in any way, for of the evil we do, there is no other cause than ourselves. Acknowledge this truth before God. Excite in your heart a great love for your Sister Louise; and in view of the merciful justice of our good God, throw yourself at her feet, and ask pardon for all your coldness and all the pain you have occasioned her, promising that with God's help you will love her as Jesus Christ wishes you to do. Show her all the consideration you should have for her, and with this feeling in your heart, embrace her.

"And you, my dear Sister Louise, see how you have fallen again into your bad little ways! What do you think of your state in life? Is it a life of liberty? Not at all. It should be one

of continual submission and obedience. Is it possible that you never reflect on this truth? Or, if you do, have you so little love for God, and so little fear for your salvation, that you neglect to do what you are obliged to do? My daughter, do violence to your natural inclination. . . . Do you not remember that you should not do anything or go anywhere without the permission of Sister Barbe whom, before leaving here, you accepted as your superior, and whom you ought to love as much as your natural mother, or even more?

“In remarking your faults, my own rise up before me, and this impels me, my Daughter, to express what is now uppermost in my mind. It is the bad example I have given you in the practice of the virtues I have recommended. I beg of you, my good Sisters, to think no more of it, and ask pardon for me, and the grace that I may correct myself” (October 28, 1639).

CHAPTER 11 *Disunion and Discouragement*

“The principal object of this letter is to testify the displeasure I feel in seeing the evil disposition of our Sisters and the lack of union that appears among them. I am quite astonished to learn that there are those who, because of slight contradictions, allow themselves to entertain the idea of coming to Paris before obedience calls them. My dear Sisters, there is good reason to say that they do not know what obedience requires of them.

“Well, then, you are a little hurt when the Fathers (of the poor) embarrass you before your masters, the poor. Do not give them reason, and carry out your duties so well that you will not have anything of which to complain. And sometimes if you think that you have not failed, or if one of these gentlemen reproach you too harshly for your liking, and if you think that you are being discredited in the presence of the sick poor, humble yourselves by bearing it patiently. Later on give them your reasons, and beg of them to make known to you your faults . . . I beg of you,

my dear Sister, to give the first example of the virtue which you desire that all should practice.

"I have seen the small aversion that you bring to my attention in regard to one of our Sisters. Blessed be God, it is necessary that your charity be united with much compassion and patience. Are you not aware that ordinarily aversion is one of our natural emotions, and that we are not entirely in control of it. But it is the duty of those in charge to go to the assistance of those who are manifesting aversion, and help them overcome their feeling without their perceiving that you are helping them.

"We should not be so sensitive as to feel hurt if someone does not speak to us, or does not smile in passing, but we should endeavor to win all hearts by patience and cordiality. And finally, my dear Sister, those who have the care of others, should not be at all concerned about their own satisfaction. I know, my dear Sister, that there is much difficulty in properly discharging the duties of our office, but God who has imposed these obligations will not refuse us His assistant grace. To obtain that grace, let us humble ourselves very much by a holy diffidence in ourselves and a great confidence in His mercy. And let our confidence be such as to find expression in prayer that He bestow upon us whatever He wishes us to give our dear Sisters whom we shall regard as His dear creatures and servants" (To Sister Turgis, Angers, August 24, 1643).

CHAPTER 12 *A Letter to the Sisters at Nantes*

"How does it happen that weeds seem to be choking out the good grain? My dear Sisters, I have great cause to fear that my bad example has made a harmful impression on your minds. If it be so, do me the charity of asking pardon of God on my behalf. Also I beg of you to pardon me by doing better than I have done, for in that manner you will no longer sadden our good God by giving what is rightly His to His enemy. Thus also you will not lose the recompense

which His bounty promises to those who, being in His grace, perform works of mercy; for He rejects the good gifts of those whom He sees to be filled with their own will.

“Finally my dear Sisters, we must belong to God, and entirely to God. And with a view to this objective, we must deliver our better selves from our lower selves. And believe me, if without flattery we probe our troubles and difficulties, we shall discover that self-love is our greatest enemy, the cause of our finding so much fault with others, and the reason why we so much desire to gratify ourselves in everything.”

PART VI . "UNTO THIS YOU ARE CALLED"

CHAPTER 13 *Patience in Trials*

"In the name of God, my dear Sisters, do not grow weary in your troubles, or disconsolate when you are deprived of all consolation save in God. If we knew the secret reasons why God places us in these circumstances, we would find there occasion for our greatest consolation. Well then you see a number of poor people whom you are unable to assist. God also sees them, and He does not relieve them. Bear their burden with them; do your best to give them some little aid, and then remain at peace.

"Perhaps you share in the distress. If so, that is a consolation for you; for if you have plenty, your hearts would be pained in the possession and enjoyment while seeing your lords and masters suffer greatly. Besides, God chastises His people for our sins. Is it not reasonable that we should suffer with others? Who are we that we should be exempted from public misfortunes? If the mercy of God does not permit us to experience the most severe distress, let us be sincerely grateful, and look upon His goodness as in no way a consequence of our merit.

"The majority of our Sisters in the environs of Paris have been obliged to seek shelter elsewhere, but, thanks be to God, up to the present they have not suffered any injury or vexation. You know the beautiful ceremony that takes place today at the exposing of the reliquary of St. Genevieve. How good it is to be faithful to God who, as a mark of His eternal affection, causes such honor to be rendered to His faithful servants!" (To Sister Barbe, Angiboa, Brienne, 1652.)

CHAPTER 14 *Tribulations of Office*

“I have learned that our Lord still continues to favor you by permitting your infirmities to keep you constant company, and that occasionally — as at present, I believe — they cause you great suffering. It is clear that God wishes you to go to Him by the royal way of His cross. I am sure that you will cheerfully and willingly allow yourself to be led along this road so as to accomplish His holy will. I like to think that such was your attitude when His providence imposed upon you the care of your little family.

“It is ignorance that causes us to regard administrative office as an honor and a pleasure. If we understood what it is to be a Sister Servant, we would be greatly humbled in the knowledge that we are a burden to the house, that everyone must be patient with us, and that we assume responsibility for all the duties of the house. We must give good example in everything, we must look to the needs of the other Sisters, and our heart must include them all. Let us endeavor, my dear Sister, to realize these principles. Let us give preference to the wishes of our Sisters when they are not contrary to the most holy will of God” (To Sister Charlotte, Richlieu).

CHAPTER 15 *A Final Illness*

“My dearly beloved Sister, I adore with all my heart the order of Divine Providence in the disposition He seems to be making of your life. If it be His holy will to call your soul to Himself, blessed be His holy Name! He knows the regret I feel in being unable to assist you in this last act of love which you will make by returning your soul to the eternal Father, and by the desire so to honor the death of His Son.

“Our good Sister Elizabeth will give you assurance of the affection which all the Sisters have for you, and of their

hope that you will remember them in heaven when God shows you that mercy. In particular Sister Anne Marie says that she is very sorry that she cannot be with you at the last moment. Remember, dearest Sister, the needs of the poor Community to which God has called you. Be our advocate with His Goodness, that we may please Him by accomplishing His will in our regard. And if His bounty permits, beg of our good angels to help us. Au revoir, my very dear Sister; I pray with all my heart, that Jesus crucified may bless you with all the virtues He practiced on the cross."

PART VII . "GOD . . . COMFORTS THE HUMBLE"

CHAPTER 16 *Relief in Distress*

"At last it has pleased our good God to give some relief to the distress you all have been suffering for a long time, and especially you, my dear Sister, whom our Lord has chosen to bear this heavy yoke. But since it was His own, I am confident that His mercy has assisted you very much. Blessed forever be His holy Name! I trust also that His grace will continue to give you strength and courage until His goodness brings this work to completion.

"You are aware that our well-being consists in surrendering ourselves entirely to His guidance . . . I desire with all my heart that you enjoy perfect repose and consolation in a well-established tranquillity, but I beg of you not to feel uneasy if you do not obtain it at once. You know that good is accomplished little by little. The Evil Spirit plays his tricks, but he will not attain his purpose provided you become closely united near the cross like chicks under their mother's wing when a cat is on the watch."

CHAPTER 17 *Mutual Forbearance*

"Alas, my dear Sisters, from whom shall we suffer if not from those with whom we live? Will it be from persons at a distance, from those whom we have never seen and probably will never see? From what does a member of the body suffer if not from the evil caused by another member? From whom did our Lord suffer if not from His Apostles, His

disciples, and the people among whom He lived, the people of God? This is to show you, my dear Sisters, that our daily crosses come from those with whom we are constantly associated" (To the Sisters at Nantes, April 24, 1649).

CHAPTER 18 *Courage and Other Virtues*

"My good Sister, are you very brave? Are you like the good shepherd who endangers his life for the welfare and security of the flock entrusted to his care? Yes, I believe you are; for though we do not always have the opportunity of endangering our lives, we have opportunities of giving up our own will in order to be in accord with others, and to overcome our evil habits and inclinations, that we may give good example to our Sisters. This is what we are obliged to do, my dear Sister, in order to maintain cordiality, to exercise patience, and to be in close union with Christ crucified.

"Please say to Sister Mary Martha that I trust she will be Mary Martha in effect as well as in name. The name, Mary, obliges her to great purity, meekness, and modesty, and it requires her to be ever ready to do a favor for others. Her name, Martha, calls for great exactitude and fidelity to the rule in all its points. As for Sister Cecelia, what calm and tranquillity she should possess so that, after the example of her patron saint, she may sweetly sing the praises of God!

"Our Sister Bridget should love to suffer in the accomplishment of God's designs upon her. I hope that He will grant to Sister a strength of mind that may supply for the weakness and smallness of her body; but for this — tell her — she has need of great courage. I sincerely trust that her sickness is entirely gone and that she is completely cured.

"What is good Sister Catherine doing? Do the exertions required by so much labor terrify her? Has she sufficient love for God, like her dear patroness, to be faithful in all things? Tell her that the same dear Spouse has as much grace and love to give her, provided she is faithful, as He gave to the great St. Catherine. I say the same to Sister

Barbe to whom I wish perseverance and an increase in perfection, as also to you all, my dear Sisters. Be always mindful of the wants of the Community, for it has need of your prayers and especially of the merit that God gives to actions performed in service to the poor."

PART VIII . "THAT YOU . . . MIGHT KNOW THE LOVE I BEAR YOU"

CHAPTER 19 *Concerning a Letter From St. Vincent*

"My dear Sisters, I must tell you in all simplicity the thoughts that come to my mind while reading this letter. Oh, the sweetness of his style, his remarks on the graces God has bestowed on you and me, and the instructions which his charity so gently gives you — all have inspired me with such dread, that I cannot express it. For I recall how often through him, God has warned us of our obligations, how often he knew and kindly overlooked our faults and shortcomings, never wearying with inciting and encouraging us, taking all fatherly care of us, and giving himself as much trouble for us as if we were persons of merit.

"What return have we made him, unfruitful soil that we are? Nothing but displeasure and annoyance by reason of our infidelities toward God for whom he wishes to win our hearts. At times it was grief over the departure of some member of the Community, or some grievous fault committed against her vocation. At others it was the decline of the entire body that worried him. We are all stupid. It seems that all the admonitions God has caused to be given us have proved only so many useless words given to the wind. And, what is worse, I greatly fear that, having been pronounced in the presence of God and His angels, those admonitions will reappear, to our great confusion, at our final judgment.

"Is it not with reason that my heart was seized with fear and just apprehension? Do not imagine that I say all this to frighten you, or that I speak to you alone. I refer to myself and all who, like me, have not made good use of their voca-

tion. I beseech you all for the love of our crucified Lord, to renew yourselves in His resurrection, and receive the peace He has so often given us in the person of His Apostles. But I would have you notice that He does not give it to us while we are idle, but while we are laboring, and in memory of the wounds He has suffered for us. Thereby He teaches that it is impossible for us to have peace with God, with our neighbor and ourselves unless Jesus Christ gives it, and moreover, that He will not grant it except through the merits of His wounds and sufferings.

“Now, these merits will never be applied to us except through mortification, and this we shall attain by imitating Him in doing the most holy will of God. How happy you are in comparison, not only with other young persons like yourselves, but even with ladies of rank who seek to be employed in the service of God and His poor, and who have such an ardent desire to do the will of God and to be assisted in their work! Nothing is wanting to you; nevertheless you seem dissatisfied, and, instead of making use of the means God gives you for your perfection, you spurn them.

“Forgive me, my dear Sisters, if my affection for you employs such language; for I myself have often been guilty of shortcomings similar to those which I suspect of you. But once and for all I wish to be faithful to God, and to this end I shall often beg His grace. Join me in that prayer. Esteem and read with affection your Rules and instructions, desiring to put them into practice; and labor in all earnestness to do so for the love of God. Most of all, profit by the advice, the last perhaps, that God is giving you concerning what He desires of you. My dear Sisters, I have no thought of threatening you with the judgment of God, but let us fear — you and I — let us fear His indignation if we neglect to accomplish His will.”

PART X . "THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE"

CHAPTER 20 *Apostolic Benediction*

"Louise de Marillac, twenty-seven years a widow, a servant of Jesus Christ, and in will if not in reality servant of His members the poor, entirely attached to the Holy Father by obedience; the same Louise de Marillac, in quality of Roman Catholic, and on account of a long-cherished desire, wishes to receive at least once in her lifetime the Apostolic Benediction. She therefore makes humble request of Father Berthe, Priest of the Mission, that he would present her in spirit at the feet of the Most Holy Father, true Vice-Gerent of Jesus Christ by reason of the zeal which His Holiness displays for the faith of the Church. She begs the Apostolic Blessing in order that she may obtain from our good God the grace of doing His holy will in all things for the rest of her days. In return for this charity, she will be under obligation to pray to God for His Holiness."

CHAPTER 21 *Last Will and Testament*

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Humbly prostrate in the belief that God is everywhere, the only Creator of all immortal souls, with a true knowledge of my own nothingness, I very humbly implore His mercy, that He would forgive my great ingratitude toward His goodness. Though I have so often offended this goodness by my wretched sins as to be unworthy to share in the merits of Jesus crucified, nevertheless it is in these blessed merits, that I place my hope.

“I beseech the Blessed Virgin to be my true Mother and protectress, and at the moment of death to obtain for me pardon for my abuse of God’s graces. Subject to the divine good pleasure, I implore my holy angel guardian, St. Louis and all the saints, to help me by their intercession in this very important passage. And even if I were not under obligation, I would receive death willingly for the love of God, and in honor of my Savior’s death on the cross. He desires the salvation of my soul, that I may eternally glorify Him together with His Father and the Holy Spirit.

“I declare before God and all creatures, that I wish to live and die in the bosom of the Holy, Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church; and I command my son, so far as I am able, to do the same, for I believe that so to live and die is the only way to heaven for which we have been created. In the hope that God will grant him this grace, I beseech His bounty to take entire possession of all that he is, and to do in him and with him whatever suits the divine good pleasure. I likewise pray Him to render efficacious for time and eternity the blessing which He has empowered me, as mother, to bestow, and which I do now bestow in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen. I implore the sacred humanity of our Savior to have pity on our sinful souls at the hour of our death.

“My guardian angel and my most honored father and director, by the mercy of God have kept me willingly intent upon the accomplishment of His most holy will. I ask their pardon for the little correspondence and fidelity I have shown with regard to the charitable care with which they have honored me to assist me in the work of my salvation. I acknowledge that without their assistance I would often have turned wretchedly away from God.

“I also very humbly beg forgiveness of all my dear neighbors whom, by my sins, I have disedified and scandalized; and of those whom I have displeased or offended in any manner. I abandon myself to God for the purpose of making restitution in this world or in the next according as it will please His merciful justice to ordain.

“My obligation as mother, together with the strong natural

affection I always had for my son, urges me to recommend to him that he always remember the education which the good God provided for the sake of his salvation. I urge him to be grateful all his life for this favor, and always endeavor to live in accord with God's holy will. To aid you in this, my Son, in all your affairs take counsel of persons who are capable and of good moral character. And that the advice you receive may be of greater use, always seek advice before you make a decision, for otherwise you will deceive yourself by not presenting the case as it actually is. So fully do I trust in the generosity of Father Vincent, that I am certain he will never refuse assistance in your wants whether temporal or spiritual.

"You well know that you and I are under obligation to him, and therefore I beg of you that if ever you have the happiness of being presented with an opportunity of serving his Company, you would do so with all your heart. Remember that you are particularly obliged, not only by gratitude for the benefit we have both received, but also by reason of the service he renders the Church, our Mother.

"I beseech you, my Son, remember often to pray for the repose of the soul of your father, and keep in mind his good life, how he feared God, and was careful to live without blame. He suffered patiently the great misfortunes which befell him during the later years of his life; and in general he was a very virtuous man."

Here follow various legacies; First, to the Priests of the Mission for Masses and good works for the benefit of her and hers on the anniversary of her death. Second, to her confessor. Third, to her goddaughter. Fourth, to the confraternities of which she was a member. Fifth, to the Sisters of Charity, "as a help toward preparing the remedies they use for the sick poor who come to their house; though I affirm that I am under obligation to do far more for them if God had given me the means. Hence I implore my son to be grateful to them for the charity they have shown me, and to look upon it as a very great blessing if God should give him an opportunity of doing them a kindness. I exhort him most earnestly not to fail in this."

Sixth, to the poor, that some charitable priest will preach a sermon to them. "I beg him in the name of our Lord, to speak only for their instruction, teaching them their obligation to know God, the difference between virtuous poverty, and unvirtuous poverty; also how beneficial to their salvation is poverty if they only know how to make use of it. Let him teach them also what they should do before seeking alms; in what humility they should make the request; their obligation to serve God, and hear Mass on Sundays and festivals. And let him induce them to say their night and morning prayers, all for the glory of God and the salvation of souls who are so frequently lost through ignorance of their state and of their obligations.

Seventh, to her son: "As my sole heir, my son, at my death, will enjoy my property after my debts and legacies have been paid. At his death all I leave to him will pass to the poor whom I substitute my heirs after him. In case he marries and has children, he and his children will enjoy it according to the law regulating substituted successions. But I intend and will that if he should not have legitimate offspring, the poor inherit the little God has given me.

"For this purpose I humbly beg Father Vincent and, after him, his successors, to attend to this disposition so that, if the substitution should take place, they may collect the revenue and make an annual distribution; for I know that their principal function is to labor for the salvation of the poor; and for this same purpose, were it possible, I would be willing to give up my life. But in case God gives to the Sisters of Charity of the parishes the blessing of a solid foundation whereby they can subsist, as they have been doing for some years, while remaining under the direction of the said Fathers of the Mission, my intention and last wish is that, with the exception of a yearly rent of a hundred livres which the said Fathers of the Mission will enjoy, the Sisters of Charity inherit, for the ends and on the conditions aforesaid, the little that I leave, so that thus they may have more means wherewith to assist the sick poor in the country places where they may find less aid. Should it please God to give any merit to this disposition, I pray that His Goodness will

apply it as a means to bring down His mercy on the soul of my son and on my own at the moment of death because we have great need of it for our salvation.

“By the charity that God has given Father Vincent for his neighbor, and by the love he bears the Sacred Humanity of our Redeemer, I humbly beg him to pardon my neglect of gratitude regarding all the charity he has shown toward my son and myself. I now thank him from the bottom of my heart, and I beg him to continue his holy affection for my son, to be a father to him, giving him good counsel and assistance in his every need.

“I return and willingly abandon my soul into the hands of God, my Creator and last end, while I leave my body on earth to await the resurrection. The place of my burial I leave entirely to the direction of Father Vincent, simply begging him to remember my great desire to be buried alongside a wall near the Church of St. Lazare in the small courtyard which appears to be a cemetery, since bones of the dead were found there. I greatly desire to be buried there, and I ask it of his charity, for the love of God.

“I request also that, as soon as possible, there be placed against the wall a large wooden cross with crucifix attached, and at the foot of the cross a piece of board with the inscription, The only Hope! This fixture is to be at the expense of the small amount of money I am leaving, which God has given me to dispose in this my testament.

“For my funeral I declare that I do not wish any greater expense to be incurred than is usual in the interment of our deceased Sisters. . . . To do otherwise would be to signify that I was unworthy to appear as having died a true Sister of Charity, servant of the members of Christ.

“Behold, my God, your poor creature prostrate at the feet of Your Majesty, acknowledging that she is a criminal deserving of hell. To that punishment Your justice should have condemned me except for the generous love which brought Your only-begotten Son to earth for my deliverance. May it please Your divine Goodness, that with my son I may be numbered among those who, by reason of His merits, will eternally glorify You! And vouchsafe to look with kindness

on these acts, desires, and dispositions made in this testament. They are here drawn up in the belief that such is Your divine will, the will which has ever directed mine, the will which I am resolved ever to follow faithfully, and in which I desire to terminate my life as I have terminated this document, made and signed with my hand this Friday, December 15, 1645. Louise de Marillac, being sound of body and mind."

On May 11, 1656, a baby girl having been born to her son, she added a special legacy of eighteen livres a year in favor of her granddaughter, "to be employed in giving a little dinner to the poor of her parish, at which meal she will serve them."

