

## REFLECTION FOR DECEMBER:

*The Dreams of Saint Louise and Saint Vincent**What are your dreams?*

Text: Sister Carolina Flores and Alicia Duhne --- Translation: Father Charlie Plock

**Introduction:**

We can all dream and in fact we all ought to have dreams. We could spend all the days of our life doing those things that are immediately in front of us or we could become enthusiastic and energetic about making our dreams a reality.

Following the example of our Founders, perhaps we can gain some insight into how to work so that what seems impossible becomes possible.

**Development of the Theme:**

- ***Saint Vincent's Dreams***

Vincent's earthly journey continued for eighty years. His first steps involved searching, restlessness and uncertainty. Thirty-six years would pass before he acquired the certainty that molded and characterized the rest of his life.

**Vincent had three primary dreams: 1) evangelization through charity; 2) reforming the life of priests; 3) serving the poor, the beloved of Jesus Christ, with love.** Those dreams were envisioned and made real during Vincent's lifetime.

**As a young man Vincent dreamt of obtaining an income that would enable him to support his family.** His family was poor and as a child, Vincent knew what it meant to go without. He thought that as a priest he would be able to contribute to the support of his family. He had not yet envisioned his own mission. We can read the beautiful accounts of how the Lord called him through the dying man whom he ministered to in Gannes (1617) and through the abandoned infirm family in Châtillon. The Lord provided Vincent with a great dream. Indeed, it was through his encounter with the poor that Vincent began to envision a more encompassing mission, namely, to contribute to the building up of a world that would be more intimately related to God and, as a result, a world in which material goods would be more equally distributed. In 1617 Vincent realized that the lack of evangelization and organization was the cause of the chaos that surrounded him. Thus, he began to look for solutions.

Vincent discovered the poor and this led to a radical change in his life. He began to understand the meaning of Jesus' words when he said: "whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). **Vincent's dream was expanded: he wanted to serve Jesus Christ by serving those men and women who were poor.**

Vincent was not satisfied with providing people with alms, but rather he always attempted to give to each person that which was needed so that tomorrow they could provide for themselves. **Vincent's dream was not focused on evangelization alone, but rather he joined together with the poor in their search for a path that would enable them to put their situation of poverty behind them.** Thus, in 1617 he established the Ladies of Charity (now known on the international level as AIC and in other places where they minister they are known as *Voluntarias Vicentinas, Equipes Saint Vincent, Ladies of Charity*). The members of the Association provide for various groups of poor people who have different needs because of the situation in which they find themselves.

Vincent also became aware of the needs of many priests and he decided to share his dreams with some priests and this ultimately led to the formation of group of Missionaries who “go from town to town, passing from village to village, preaching sermons and exhortations to the people. They teach everyone, catechizing them both publicly and privately, about the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation, of which most of the people are completely ignorant. They prepare them for general confession... and establish the Confraternity of Charity where it is necessary for the corporal and spiritual relief of the sick poor” (CCD:I:49). In 1625 these priests became members of the newly established Congregation of the Mission.

Providentially, as Vincent journeyed through life, he met Louise de Marillac and in 1629 he asked her to coordinate the Confraternities of Charity which were becoming more and more numerous throughout France. Louise was the first coordinator of the Confraternities.

Vincent and Louise shared their concerns with one another: the Ladies, because of their family and social obligations, were often unable to provide direct assistance to their brothers and sisters living in situations of poverty and so they sent their servants. As a result of that situation Vincent and Louise began to envision the establishment of another group that would become known as the Daughters of Charity. This dream became a reality as a result of the efforts of Louise de Marillac and thus, “the Ladies” and “the Daughters” complimented one another in their vocation and service and ultimately, prolonged the insight of their common founder.

When Vincent and Louise discovered the poor members of their society and country, they were tempted to ignore the poor who lived and died in other parts of the world. During the first thirty-one years of his apostolic ministry, Vincent only envisioned serving the poor in France. But as Vincent continued to look at the reality that surrounded him, his horizons were expanded and he began to send Missionaries to other countries: Italy (1642), Tunis (1645), the British Isles (1646), Madagascar (1648) and Poland (1651). Vincent dreamt of extending his work throughout the world... indeed, **Vincent initiated that work during his own lifetime** and we, the member of the Vincentian Family, continue that ministry today.

- ***Saint Louise de Marillac's Dreams***

Louise's life was directed by one dream: **to be faithful to the will of God**. Her letters and her writings enable us to discover her journey in pursuit of that great dream which was concretized in daily enthusiastic commitments.

Louise's writings place an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Her Pentecost experience of 1623 gave a direction to her life and became part of the spiritual heritage that she passed on to the Company. At the beginning of their relationship Vincent wrote: “The kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit. He will reign in you if your heart is at peace” (CCD:I:111) and on another occasion: “The Spirit of Our Lord will be your rule and your tact” (CCD:I:118). Louise offered her whole life to the Spirit.

Louise dreamed of **being a servant on behalf of the poor**. Her contributions to the Church of her era were so important, so noteworthy and so organized that Pope John XXIII declared her to be the Patroness of all Social Workers. In the conferences that Vincent gave after Louise's death, the first Daughters spoke eloquently about Louise and her service on behalf of the poor: “she spoke very gently to the poor” (CCD:X:583); “she always showed a cheerful, contented countenance” (CCD:X:584).

**Soon after meeting Vincent, Louise began to dream about collaborating in the organization of the Confraternities.**

In early 1629, Louise made a decision that changed her life and changed her into another woman: she decided to commit her life to serving the poor. She became responsible for visiting the Confraternities, observing their ministry, encouraging the members and then, writing a report on each visit. Louise reorganized and provided a new dynamism to many Confraternities. She sent many reports to Vincent and redacted and reformulated many of the Rules for the Confraternities.

**Louise was passionate about teaching...** when Louise visited the Confraternities, one of her primary concerns was to reinforce the need for education, especially among the girls and the young women since “if they remain steeped in ignorance, it is to be feared that this same ignorance will be harmful to them and render them incapable of cooperating with the grace of God for their salvation” (SWLM:50 [L.41]). Louise was insistent on the fact that the instruction that was to be imparted should be simple and practical and above all she wanted the girls to learn how to read and write.

Louise was a woman of detail and this characteristic was manifested in her deep realistic love. **Her dream with regard to organization** was also revealed in her redaction of the Rules which were always formulated from the perspective of her life experiences and therefore, those rules were viewed as essential for the functioning of those groups and for the future of the works that were undertaken.

**Louise dreamt about the Daughters of Charity...** she became the focal point for those who wanted to join and to be formed in order to serve the Charities. The young women received personal, religious and technical training that enabled them to engage in a competent material and spiritual service on behalf of the poor. The establishment of the Company was due in great part to the insight of Louise and from 1633 onward she carefully guided this institution that she so loved.

**Louise dreamt of establishing relationships with all people...** each of whom had a unique dignity. Louise’s warmth, rooted in trust and respect, enabled her to enter into the life of many individuals as she provided for their well-being.

### **Personal and Community Reflection:**

Vincent and Louise, like us, had dreams... our challenge is to respond to the dreams that God has for us. How can we make our dreams a reality?

### **Activities and Questions:**

At this stage of our development:

- ❖ What are our dreams as a group?
- ❖ What are our dreams with regard to AIC’s mission?
- ❖ Do you, as a member of AIC, have some other personal dreams with regard to your ministry?

### **Prayer:**

*Lord Jesus, we have many concerns and we also have many dreams that we want to make real so that we can live in a world that is guided by love and justice. Enlighten us as you enlightened Vincent and Louise and help us to see the path that you have marked out for us. May our life be meaningful so that at the end of our years we can say with calmness: we have done what you requested and we have contributed in some way to making your dream (which is also our dream) a reality! Amen.*

### **The Spiritual Testament of St Louise:**

*My dear Sisters, I continue to ask God for His blessings for you and pray that He will grant you the grace to persevere in your vocation in order to serve Him in the manner He asks of you.*

*Take good care of the service of the poor. Above all, live together in great union and cordiality, loving one another in imitation of the union and life of Our Lord.*

*Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin, that she may be your only Mother.*

### **Hymn**