

## Advent from a Vincentian Perspective, Part 4: Mary: Model of Service and Surrender in Advent

Advent is a time of waiting, anticipation, and preparation. At the heart of this season, we find the figure of Mary, whose journey of faith and surrender to God's plan serves as a powerful model for our own spiritual lives. Her quiet strength, humility, and willingness to say "yes" to God offer profound lessons for us, particularly when we reflect on the call to service and surrender that marks Vincentian spirituality.



### Mary's Faith and Humility

Mary's story in Advent begins with the Annunciation, a moment that reveals her deep faith and trust in God. When the angel Gabriel appears to her, bringing the news that she will bear the Son of God, her initial response is one of wonder: *"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"* (Luke 1:34). This question reflects not doubt, but rather her humility and openness to God's will. Despite not fully understanding the implications of what is being asked of her, Mary surrenders herself entirely to God, responding with her famous "fiat"—*"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word"* (Luke 1:38).

This act of surrender is at the heart of what it means to live a life of faith. Mary did not know all that would unfold from her "yes," but she trusted in God's plan. In Vincentian spirituality,

faith is not merely an intellectual assent but a lived experience of trust in God's providence, even when the path is uncertain.

Mary's humility, evident in her response, also reflects a core Vincentian value. For Vincent, humility was the foundation of true service. It allowed one to recognize their dependence on God and their solidarity with the poor. Like Mary, Vincentians are called to humbly submit to God's will and to serve others without seeking recognition or reward.

## Mary as a Model of Service

After accepting God's plan for her, Mary immediately acts and serves others. The Gospel of Luke tells us that she went "with haste" to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child. This journey was not an easy one—Mary traveled about 100 miles to reach Elizabeth's home ... despite all the challenges, Mary's first instinct was to serve.

Her visit to Elizabeth can be seen as a profound act of charity, an example of how true faith naturally leads to service. In this way, Mary embodies the Vincentian call to "love in deeds, not words." Service, as taught by Vincent de Paul, must be concrete, personal, and active. It is not enough to feel compassion; one must move with the same urgency as Mary to meet the needs of others. We should not be content with just loving God and saying that we love him. We must show our love through our actions.

In her encounter with Elizabeth, Mary also brings the presence of Christ to others, quite literally. This is a key aspect of her role in salvation history, but it is also a model for us. We are called, like Mary, to bring Christ to the world, especially to those who are poor and suffering. Mary's service to Elizabeth was not only an act of familial love but also a manifestation of God's love for all humanity.

## The Marian Spirituality of Saint Vincent de Paul

Saint Vincent de Paul had a deep devotion to Mary, seeing in her the perfect example of humility, service, and obedience to God's will. In his Marian spirituality, Vincent emphasized that Mary's greatness came from her willingness to serve and her total surrender to God. He saw Mary as the ultimate servant of the poor, the first and most faithful disciple of Christ, and a model for all Christians to follow.

In reflecting on Mary's role, Vincent said, we "should take the example of the Blessed Virgin" (CCD IX:72) because "the Blessed Virgin, better than anyone else, fathomed the essence [of virtues] and showed how to practice them (CCD XII:110). For Vincent, Mary was not only a powerful intercessor but also a guide in living out the Gospel in everyday life. Her life of simplicity, humility, and service aligned perfectly with the Vincentian charism of serving the poor with love and respect.

Mary's role in Advent, then, is not just as the Mother of God but as a model of the kind of active, humble, and self-giving service that Vincentians strive to imitate. She teaches us that true greatness comes not from power or prestige, but from serving others in love. This is the essence of Vincentian spirituality—charity rooted in humility and expressed in concrete acts of service.

## Mary's Surrender to God's Plan

Another key aspect of Mary's example in Advent is her total surrender to God's plan. This surrender was not passive resignation, but an active and ongoing "yes" to whatever God asked of her. From the Annunciation to the foot of the Cross, Mary's life was marked by an unwavering trust in God, even in the face of suffering and uncertainty.

In our own lives, this kind of surrender can be difficult. We may face challenges that make us question God's will, or we may struggle to understand why certain things happen. Yet, like Mary, we are called to trust that God's plan is good, even when we cannot see the full picture.

Vincent de Paul often spoke of the importance of abandoning oneself to Divine Providence. He believed that trusting in God's will was essential to living a life of service. In his words, "Let us seek God alone and He will provide us with friends and with everything else, so much so that we will lack nothing." (CCD XI:31)

## A Call to Action

Mary's example of surrender challenges us to let go of our own plans and desires and to trust that God will lead us where we need to go. This surrender is not passive; it requires an active commitment to follow God's will, even when it is difficult.

---

## Questions for Personal and Community Reflection

As we prepare for the coming of Christ during this Advent season, Mary's example invites us to reflect on our own lives. Here are three questions to guide your personal and community reflection:

1. In what ways can I follow Mary's example of humility and service in my daily life, especially during this Advent season?
2. How can I deepen my trust in God's plan for my life, even when I face uncertainty or challenges?
3. How can my community more faithfully live the Vincentian call to service, imitating Mary's urgency in responding to the needs of others?