

THE VINCENTIAN MISSIONARY SPIRIT

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**Catechesis for the youth
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*God calls us to a new moment /to sing together with his people¹.
This is the time to transform those things that are no longer useful,
but alone and isolated no one can bring about this transformation.*

*Therefore, come, join in the circle with us
You are also very important, come!*

*We cannot believe that everything will be easy.
Death has much power and causes pain and sadness and desolation.
We need to create unity.*

*The power that gives growth to life moves within us in the form of grace
It is God who calls us to work and to share our love and to unite our efforts.*

Bishop Hélder Câmara, a deceased Brazilian bishop who was very committed to the poor and affiliated with the Vincentian Family said: *the secret of eternal youth is to have an ideal to which one is dedicated.* Dear young men and women, I would like to share with you a great ideal that will always keep us young; an ideal that will rejuvenate the Church and give a youthful meaning to our lives. ***In light of the example of Saint Vincent de Paul I invite you to reflect on the call that Jesus extends to us to be missionaries/disciples.***

- I. Today the Catholic Church invites us to renew our faith and to proclaim it with enthusiasm. It is for this reason that this year has been set aside as a Year of Faith. We are called to engage in a new evangelization. Pope Benedict XVI has told us: We cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden (cf. Matthew 5:13-16). The people of today can still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (cf. John 4:14) ... there is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith (Motu Proprio Porta Fidei, #3 and #7).

¹ Free translation of a song that is well known in Brazil and that can be used during this catechetical moment.

- A. Jesus, sent by the Father and inspired by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed to us the Kingdom of God. With words and actions Jesus called to himself many men and women and communicated to them a new lifestyle, a new way of living in community, and a new way to love. As the result of a profound relationship with Jesus, his followers discovered that they were chosen by God to live a new life, a life intimately related to the person of Jesus, a life that committed them to make all things new. As participants in the life and the mission of Jesus, these disciples received the following proposal: *Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature* (Mark 16:15); *the love of Christ impels us* (2 Corinthians 5:14). In love Jesus called his disciples, the Church, and entrusted them with the gospel, with a command that is always new ... Today, like yesterday, Jesus sends us forth on paths throughout the world to proclaim his gospel to all the nations of the earth (cf. Matthew 28:19).
- B. With regard to faith in Christ, when the awareness of belonging and membership [in the Body of Christ] increases, so also does the impetus to communicate to everyone the Gift of this encounter. Mission is not an optional task but, like many other tasks, is an integral part of our Christian identity. When the disciples are in love with Christ, they feel impelled to communicate to the world that only in Christ will people find salvation, happiness and the fullness of life. To be a disciple and to be a missionary are two fundamental dimensions of the Christian life. Mission is a question of faith and is an exact measure of our faith in Jesus Christ and in his love for us. Mission means that we share with everyone the gift of faith in Christ.
- C. The disciples are called to live in communion with Jesus and in communion among themselves. Communion and mission are intimately bound together ... communion is missionary and the mission is for communion. To bring the gospel to all people and to all places is the specific missionary task that Jesus entrusted and continues to entrust to his Church. This command is given so that all people will live in communion with God and with one another. Mission is the essential task of the church and it is an action of communion that ought to be done freely, in dialogue and with charity ... this in turn leads to solidarity, justice and love.
- D. The disciple/missionary, guided by the Holy Spirit, seeks to make visible the merciful love of the Father and seeks to do this in every place and with everybody, especially with those persons who are poor and suffering. To live in a state of mission means that the disciple seeks greater holiness. The disciples' task of evangelization consists of the proclamation of the Good News in a way that takes into consideration the joys and sorrows, the hopes and anxieties of the world and of people today. This proclamation is done in a respectful manner, in dialogue with the world and with an awareness of the social and cultural diversity. Therefore the mission always has the power to transform life and society. Mission, however, has to be constantly updated, not simply repeating things that might have been understood at one time but now are incomprehensible to people. Mission cannot seek refuge in some form of spiritualism and thus avoid confronting the concrete problems of the world.
- II. We live in an historic time, a change of eras in which one world is crumbling and a new world is emerging. It is a time of crisis in both a positive and a negative sense, a time filled with enchantment and disenchantment, filled with new values and problems and possibilities that challenge the disciples and missionaries of Christ. It

is in the midst of this reality that God calls us to live and to renew our faith and to give a new, enthusiastic response. Our Vincentian Family has in its patron, Saint Vincent de Paul, a living model who enlightens us and helps us to affirm our vocation as disciples missionaries of Christ.

- A. Saint Vincent lived and ministered during the seventeenth century, in the midst of a society marked by great social inequality and much poverty and injustice. Throughout his life he allowed himself to be questioned and challenged by the reality and the events of his life. He listened to the cries of the poor. The reality of poverty, interpreted in the light of faith, revealed to him God's will as he discerned it in the cries of the poor. Vincent discovered the proclamation of the Good News of the liberation of the poor as the center of Jesus' life and mission. Sent by the Father and anointed by the Spirit, the Son of God became poor in order to proclaim the Good News to the poor. Jesus identified himself with the poor and those whose faces are disfigured and whose bodies are in pain ... those poor men and women are the sacrament of Jesus' presence. Jesus is the evangelizer of the poor: *And if we ask Our Lord, "What did you come to do on earth?" "To assist the poor." "Anything else?" "To assist the poor" ... his [Jesus'] principal aim in coming into the world was to assist poor people and to take care of them (CCD:XI:98).*
- B. The encounter with Christ in those persons who are poor revealed to Saint Vincent the reality that *the poor are our lords and masters (CCD:X:215; XII:4)*. In men and women who are poor Jesus reveals the true face of the Father, *the gracious God* of love and mercy, the protector and defender of the poor. True faith ought to make us committed to the mission and to charity. Saint Vincent said: *[we are to] make God known to poor persons; to announce Jesus Christ to them; to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and that it is for persons who are poor (CCD:XII:71); to evangelize is a noble activity, one that is, par excellence, the activity of the Son of God (cf. CCD:X:161-162); we are to run to the spiritual needs of our neighbor as if we were running to a fire (CCD:XI:25)*. The poor are the privileged beneficiaries to whom we proclaim the gospel. The Vincentian mission expresses and reveals a clear preference for the apostolate among those persons who are poor, which also means that we are attentive to the social reality especially to the causes of the unequal distribution of wealth in the world. Evangelization of those persons who are poor is a sign that the Kingdom is close at hand.
- C. In Christ, the evangelizer of the poor, Saint Vincent encountered *the true model and that great invisible portrait on whom we must fashion all our actions (CCD:XI:210)*. *Christ is the Rule of the Mission (CCD:XII:110)* or, to state it in another way, *Christ is the life of our life and the only aspiration of our hearts (CCD:VI:576)*. It is necessary to clothe ourselves in Christ's sentiments and attitudes and also necessary to live his teachings. To clothe ourselves in Christ, the evangelizer of the poor, is the path that allows the missionary/disciple to live and fulfill the mission. In Christ, the servant of the Father and the missionary among the poor, we discover the virtues that constitute the spirit and the methodology of the mission. Saint Vincent highlighted five virtues: simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal. These are personal and community virtues, paths that lead to personal sanctification ... they are practical attitudes that should characterize our ministry. They are indispensable tools that today will allow us to renew our faith so that we might draw closer to and dialogue with those who are poor, so

that we might discern the challenges of the present era, the paths of the mission and thus develop a transformative ministry.

- D. Saint Vincent developed the mission as an act of life-giving love, an act of generous and integral service on behalf of the poor. We are dealing with a service that is *material and spiritual, affective and effective*, a service that involves *words and actions* and that should lead us to the practice of true love. *Charity is above all Rules, and everything comes down to that* (CCD:X:478). Saint Vincent did not limit himself to preaching or providing some form of material assistance. Through his proclamation of the Christian message Vincent brought about numberless works of charity. Besides giving alms and immediate assistance Vincent created conditions that led to the human promotion and the development of those who were poor. Vincent did not limit himself to satisfying the social needs of people but rather he engaged in a process of evangelization and education which allowed people to live more human lives ... he engaged in a process of faith formation and the promotion of human and religious values. In the Vincentian mission we see that service of the word is closely related to charity because it is the Word that seeks to liberate and to save and to build a new community and to transform the causes that create poverty and injustice.
- E. Missionary service on behalf of the poor is done in a spirit of communion and participation. The ministry that Saint Vincent engaged in was a broad service of solidarity, a diversified and creative ministry that was accomplished with the collaboration of many people. It was a community and participative ministry, teamwork or, as we would say today, a ministry that involved networking. In communion and in collaboration with the bishops and the clergy, Vincent brought together rich and poor, the clergy and the laity, men and women. He mobilized and formed “good volunteers”, he established various institutions, involved public and religious officials in his ministry and realized that collaboration was the key to successful ministry on behalf of the poor. More specifically, Vincent mobilized the poor themselves and learned much from them. Vincent collaborated with the poor and with the laity (especially women) and with them engaged in a reciprocal activity of missionary service. Vincent also engaged in the formation of collaborators (clergy, laity, his Missionaries and the Daughters of Charity) and provided them with a spiritual and human formation for ministry, thus making these collaborators effective agents in the missionary endeavor. In this community work, he had the important collaboration of Louise de Marillac, who was decisive in the formation and animation of large network Vincentian of the charity. In the collaboration between St. Vincent and St. Louise was a real exchange of gifts, reciprocal friendship cultivated by fruitful, for mutual aid and the mystique of the charity.

The missionary experience of Saint Vincent is really a light, a guide for our activity today. We are dealing with a sure path that requires commitment and generosity ... one that helps us to live our condition as disciples and missionaries of Christ. Saint Vincent invites us to read and understand the present reality, with all its challenges and opportunities and from there we are enlightened to live a life-giving and incarnated faith, a faith that arises from a transforming encounter with Christ, a faith of effective and affective love, a faith that leads to a service that is both generous and a sign of our solidarity with the poor. Saint Vincent invites us to experience and share the joy of the encounter with Christ by proclaiming the Good News, by making our lives an offering to

Christ in the person of those who are poor, by uniting our efforts in a common mission, by committing ourselves to build a world of justice and solidarity and peace.

This Vincentian spirit of faith and mission allows us to live in a fruitful way this “Year of Faith” and also allows us to develop a “New Evangelization”. This ideal rejuvenates and makes us joyful. So then, following Saint Vincent, let us reach out to the poor! With great faith let us be true missionaries! Let’s go to work!

*Let us seek to make the God of the poor loved²
with zeal let us proclaim Jesus Christ
Let us say this his kingdom has come/and that heaven is our destiny. (2x)*

***The mission of Jesus Christ has been given to us
Today we continue his saving ministry***

*Let us sing hymns of praise to God who has called us to said mission
We are those instruments that proclaim the plans of God (2x)*

*Oh what happiness my brothers and sisters/no one has greater joy
Not even the Holy Father could feel
the peace and the joy that we have been given (2x)*

² This is a free translation of a well known Brazilian Vincentian hymn and can be used during this catechetical moment.