

Seeing the Face of Christ in the Poor

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL—HELPING THE POOR

Each Sunday, we hear St. Vincent's name mentioned along with St. Louis and St. Rose Philippine Duchesne during the Eucharistic prayers. St. Louis we know was the King of France. We know St. Rose was a teacher and brought education to all children, especially the Native American Indians. We have heard of St. Vincent and we know he is associated with the poor and that the St. Vincent de Paul Society provides resources to those in need. St. Vincent was involved in the formation of priests and set up missionaries to go out among ordinary people and tell them about Jesus. About 150 years after his death, his missionaries came to the St. Louis area. They asked his intercession on their great mission of reaching out to the people in the wilderness of St. Louis, asking him to be our patron.

In 1581, St. Vincent de Paul was born to poor farmers. He was the third son and learned how to tend the animals. His father thought this would be good for him, but Vincent was smart and everyone noticed. The neighbors convinced his father to send him to school and let one of his other brothers tend the animals. Therefore, Vincent went away to school. He got along very well and taught others. His teaching ability would become an asset to him and allow him many opportunities to bring others to Christ. Although, he lived almost 500 years ago, St. Vincent had a very interesting life. While making a journey by boat to a new city where he was assigned, St. Vincent was captured by pirates and sold into slavery. After years as a slave, his master decided to help him escape and chose to go with him. St. Vincent's Christian example would lead his master to repent and return to the Catholic Church.

Everywhere St. Vincent lived and worked the example of his life would bring others to Christ. He was a tutor in a very rich household. He affected the parents of the children he tutored. In the 1500's, dueling was the answer to any offense. Honor was everything. One day, the father of his students was in church praying before going off to duel. St. Vincent convinced the father that taking another's life in a duel was cruel and God did not approve. The father amended his ways and followed the example of St. Vincent. The father and mother became St. Vincent's greatest supporters and after the mother's death, the father would go on to become a priest.

This was the effect St. Vincent had on people. People would change their behaviors and amend their ways to live according to the church doctrines and follow the ways of Christ. St. Vincent had no desire to be rich or famous. Although he had influential friends, he was happy to stay working with the poor in every community. In a time when people lived extravagant lives with no regard to how the poor people lived, he would remind them of the vast differences in lifestyles. He found priests to be missionaries and formed Lady's Charities. While volunteering for these charities, wealthier women would work alongside not so wealthy women to feed and shelter the poor. They founded hospitals and orphanages. Where there was a need, St. Vincent found ways to go to these people and meet them where they were. One day he decided to visit the prisoners who served their sentence rowing the large ships. The inhumane way in which these prisoners were treated saddened and shocked him. He appealed to the ship owners and gained permission to take care of these men. It was difficult work, but St. Vincent managed again to convert souls and bring more people to the Church. He said to his followers, "Love makes us see God and nothing else but God in each of those whom we love." St. Vincent gave his life for others and taught everyone by his example.

Each month our Pope has special intentions. He has general and missionary intentions. In September 2012, he asked God to send: "Help for the poorest Churches that Christian communities may have a growing willingness to send missionaries, priests, and lay people along with concrete resources to the poorest Churches." On September 27, we celebrate St. Vincent de Paul's feast day. This is an appropriate time to ask God to help the poorest. St. Vincent would approve, he once said, "By mutual support the strong will sustain the weak, and God's work will be accomplished." St. Vincent wants everyone to be an example of Christ in the world. To love all people as God loved us.

Q. How do I show God's love to others?

Q. Do I live my life as an example to others, so that people can see by my actions that I love Jesus?

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