

The Vincentian Family:

Vincent de Paul lived in France 1581-1660. 400 years later **his legacy** continues to be lived out in Ireland not only by the **groups which he founded** but also by groups which **take their inspiration from his life and example**. The legacy is so **rich** and multi-coloured and **varied** that in Ireland it takes 9 groups to **express the charism** of St Vincent de Paul. The 9 groups are called the Vincentian Family.

The **nine** groups are: the Daughters of Charity, (DC) The Congregation of the Mission CM (Vincentians), the Ladies of Charity, (AIC) the Society of St Vincent de Paul, (SVP) founded by Frederic Ozanam, The Association of the Miraculous Medal, The Holy Faith Sisters, founded by Margaret Aylward with support from Fr John Gowan CM, the Vincentian Partnership for Justice, De Paul Ireland, and Vincentian Lay Missionaries (VLM). Vincent de Paul founded first the Ladies of Charity in 1617; then the Congregation of the Mission in 1625; he worked closely with Louise de Marillac in the founding of the Daughters of Charity in 1633. All the other members of the family take their inspiration **from the life, work and example of St Vincent de Paul**.

Vincent founded a *Family*. His followers live his charism not simply as isolated workers in the vineyard, but as brothers and sisters who channel their common energy, their common love, their common creativity toward practical service of the poor. Collaboration is key. Ní neart go cur le ceile.

Under the leadership of Father Robert Moloney, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, the international Vincentian Family met for the first time in Paris on June 3 1995. The Vincentian Family officially **came together** for the first time in **Ireland in May 2017** in Dunardagh, Blackrock, Dublin, Provincial House of the Daughters of Charity. Father Joe Augustino, the international Vincentian Family coordinator in Philadelphia, chaired the meeting. The representatives of the different members of the Vincentian Family agreed to call themselves the **National Council of the Vincentian Family**. (NCVF). The Mandate given to the National Council is to **celebrate the charism of St Vincent de Paul** in Ireland, to **communicate the charism more widely** and to **develop new projects to alleviate poverty**. The National Council of the Vincentian Family meets every month in the Headquarters of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Sean McDermott Street. The **chairperson is Sr Claire McKiernan DC**. I am a member of the Council and I represent the **Vincentian Priests-** the Congregation of the Mission.

If you wish to know more about the Vincentian Family in Ireland, please see *Nine Faces: The Vincentian Family in Ireland*

Legacy of Vincent de Paul:

The legacy of Vincent is characterised mainly by a love for people living in poverty, compassion for those rejected by society who live on the margins, tolerance of difference and a non-judgemental attitude towards people in difficulty. Vincent's spirituality was a baptismal spirituality, and the holiness and mission of lay people was at the heart of his creativity. Right from the start in 1617 with the Founding of the Ladies of Charity collaboration was the key.

The Way of Vincent de Paul:

Vincent didn't have a set of doctrines that he applied to life. He started with life. Vincent did not have a spirituality, but he had a WAY. He came to believe that God is in this event or meeting and speaks to us through events, through people and through circumstances, along with a whole lot of other ways. Vincent's spirituality is dynamic, rooted in what is happening, and paying attention to the lead of Providence in events, persons, and circumstances.

Vincent's WAY, Father Dodin said, had three steps: Experiences, the Gospel and Action. The way of Vincent starts with experience as did the way of Jesus. The classic biographies of Vincent tended to separate his virtues from his life. His biographies speak about his "spirituality" after the story of his life has been told. Vincent's spirituality is distilled from his life, and the people he met.

Contemplation and Action:

Contemplation and action are at the heart of Vincentian spirituality. The contemplation happens in personal and community prayer while reflecting on the experience of mission. The work flows from the contemplation. The work leads back to contemplation. The work is coloured and enriched by the contemplation. The contemplation is coloured and enriched by the work.

In the fourth chapter, no. 42 of our Constitutions, we read, "Through the intimate union of prayer and apostolate a missionary becomes a contemplative in action and an apostle in prayer." Monsieur Vincent said several times, "*The life of a Missionary ought to be the life of a Carthusian in the house, and an apostle in the countryside.*"

Vincent de Paul: *Let's all of us really devote ourselves to the practice of meditation, since through it all good things come to us. If we persevere in our vocation, it's thanks to meditation; if we succeed in our works, it's thanks to meditation; if we don't fall into sin, it's thanks to meditation; if we remain in charity, if we're saved, all that is thanks to God and to meditation. Just as God refuses nothing in meditation, so he grants almost nothing without meditation.*

Letter Writing- Formation for Mission:

Vincent wrote thirty thousand letters to the confreres and the sisters, especially Sister Louise de Marillac. We have only about 3,000 in existence at present. The letters were an excellent formation tool. The letters were a way of getting those on mission to reflect on the experience of mission. Vincent's response was an integral part of the mission experience for those on mission. Letters to Vincent and his reply were a learning for Vincent himself and for those to whom he wrote. Those letters served as a way of reflecting on the experience of mission for the writers of the letters and for Vincent himself.

Following Christ as Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor

The keystone of Vincentian spirituality is this: following Christ as Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor. For Vincent de Paul, a single focus inspired everything: the person of Jesus. *"Jesus Christ is the Rule of the Mission,"* he told his confreres. Jesus was to be the centre of their life and activities. *"Remember, Father,"* he wrote to one of his closest friends, *"we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ, and our life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ."*

He understood his vocation was to continue the mission of Jesus in his time. Our vocation is to continue the mission of Jesus in our time. He spoke of this Christ again and again. In one of his most famous conferences, he states: *"He scarcely had a human face in His Passion and passed for a madman in the mind of the gentiles and a stumbling block in the mind of the Jews. With all that, he describes himself as the Evangelizer of the Poor: 'To preach the good news to the poor he has sent me.'"*

Vincent's spirituality flows from contemplation of *this* Christ. This Christ, the Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor, was the driving force that generated both the incredible activity and the daily prayer of Vincent de Paul. Vincent encouraged his confreres and the sisters to contemplate this Christ again and again.

When he spoke about Christ, he could be rapturous. In 1655, he cried out, *Let us ask God to give the Company this spirit, this heart, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, the heart of Our Lord, that disposes us to go as He went ... He sends us, like the apostles, to bring fire everywhere, to bring this divine fire, this fire of love ...*

Love of Christ and love of the poor are one:

For Vincent, the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of spirituality were meshed inseparably; love of Christ and love of the poor were one. There is a certain mystical quality about seeing Christ in the poor which Vincent talked about over and over again. Again and again, he urged his followers not just to act but also to pray, and not just to pray but also to act.

He heard an objection from followers who questioned the importance of giving time to pray: *But there are so many things to do, so many house duties, so many ministries in town and country; there's work everywhere; must we, then, leave all that to think only of God?* And he responded forcefully: *No, but we have to sanctify those activities by seeking God in them, and do them in order to find Him in them ... Our Lord wills that we seek above all His glory, His kingdom, and His justice, and, to do this, we make our primary concern the interior life, faith, trust, love, our spiritual exercises, meditation, shame, humiliations, our work, and troubles, in the sight of God our Sovereign Lord. Once we're grounded in seeking God's glory in this way, we can be assured that the rest will follow.*

Vincent was at times so caught up in the mystery of God's love, as revealed in Christ that his words reveal how closely united with God, he was himself:

Let us look at the Son of God; what a heart of charity He had; what a fire of love! ... Our Lord ... was so enamoured with the love of creatures as to leave the throne of His Father to come to take a body subject to weaknesses. And why? To establish among us, by His word and example, love of the neighbour. This is the love that crucified Him and brought about that admirable work of our redemption. Oh! if we had only a little of that love, would we stand around with our arms folded? Would we let those we could assist perish? Oh, no! Charity cannot remain idle; it impels us to work for the salvation and consolation of others.

Leaving God for God:

In fact, in the November 20th, 1646 document entitled, "Erection of the Company of the Daughters of Charity as a Confraternity," we read: *whenever necessity or obedience calls them to the service of persons who are poor and other duties, these must always be preferred to their devotional practices, and reflect that in so doing they are leaving God for God* (CCD:XIIIb:138).

Those words simply reflect and emphasize words that Vincent had previously spoken when he told the Daughters that *if the good pleasure of God were that you should go on a Sunday to nurse a sick person instead of going to Mass, even though that is a matter of obligation, you should do it.*

Vincent's Trust in Divine Providence:

Vincent's great discovery was his realization that God is here present in events, persons, and circumstances. God speaks to us through events and people. This is Vincent's understanding of Divine Providence.

A Mother General of the Daughters said one time: *Events. That's God.*

For Vincent, God loves us deeply as a "father and as a mother," and exercises a continual providence in our lives. Vincent emphasized the need to trust deeply in God's action in our lives: *"Grace has its moments. Let us abandon ourselves to the Providence of God and be on our guard against anticipating it. If Our Lord is pleased to give me any consolation in our vocation, it is this: I think it seems to me that we have tried to follow Divine Providence in all things...."*

Trusting in providence means the ability to see beyond particular events to a larger picture. Trusting in the Providence of God means waiting patiently for God to reveal God self. The Providence of God is to believe in the attentive presence of a personal caring God who knows us even in the extremes of human living: abundance and poverty, light and darkness, love and hate, grace and sin, plan and disruption, peace and violence, health and sickness, life and death.

Vincent to Edmund Jolly Nov 29, 1658: *God's Providence is responsible for these affairs (establishing a house in Lombardy). We must not desire nor search out any other way by ourselves or through others. The custom of the Company has always been to wait for and not anticipate Providence*

Vincent de Paul: June 22nd, 1650: *We will therefore not send sisters to Champigny because no one seems in favour of it. I fear however that you did not allow Providence a free hand but attempted something Providence didn't want. My God, Monsieur, how good it is to trust Providence on these occasions without wanting to anticipate her orders.*

Characteristic Virtues of the CM and DC:

When Vincent established the Congregation of the Mission, he gave the members of the Congregation **five characteristic virtues** to aim for and put into practice in their lives: **Humility, Simplicity, Meekness, Mortification, Zeal for Souls**. It is generally believed now that these five virtues were virtues which **Vincent strove to practise in his own life** to counteract his less desirable qualities. When Vincent and Louise set up the Daughters of Charity they gave the **Daughters three virtues to strive for: Humility, Simplicity and Charity**. Vincent was so deeply convinced of the **value of these virtues** for the **effectiveness** of the mission that he called his confreres to make those values the **core of their lives**. When we talk about Vincentian Spirituality, we are really talking about these seven virtues which permeate everything the members say and do. At least that is the theory. The men and the women have **two virtues in common Simplicity and humility**.

Being Passionate for the Truth (or what Vincent called "simplicity")

Vincent loved the truth. In fact, he **focused his whole live on it**. He called this passion for the truth "simplicity."

Simplicity "is the virtue I love most," Vincent told the sisters and fathers. *"I call it my gospel."*

In Vincent's eyes, **Jesus is utterly simple**. He **speaks the truth**. He **says things as they are**. His intentions **are pure**, referring all **things in life to God**, whom he regards as his father and mother.

Today, just as in Vincent's time, **simplicity means genuineness, transparency**. It remains very attractive to people in our world. Vincent would surely say to all the members of the Vincentian Family today: **have passion for the truth. Be true. Be Simple.**

Humility- Having an overriding Confidence in God

There was no virtue about which Vincent spoke more eloquently than about humility. *“It is the foundation of all evangelical perfection,”* he told his confreres, *“it is the core of the spiritual life. If a person has it, every good thing will come along with it. Those who do not have it will lose any good they may have and will always be anxious and worried.”*

For Vincent, **humility entailed the recognition** that all good comes from God. It involved an acknowledgment of our own **limitations and sinfulness**, accompanied by **confidence in God’s faithfulness and goodness**.

There is something **liberating** about being a servant of the poor and **living in simplicity, humility and charity**. In a poetic moment, toward the end of his life, he cried out:

Those detached from a love for worldly possessions, from the greedy desire for pleasures, and from their own will become the children of God and enjoy perfect freedom; for that’s to be found in the love of God alone. Those are the persons who are free, who have no laws, who fly, who go to the right and to the left; once again, who fly, who can’t be stopped, and who are never slaves of the devil or of their passions. Oh, blessed freedom of the children of God!

Serving in Company with Others; Community for Mission

Vincent organized and formed others for the service of the poor. With remarkable creativity, confronting the needs at hand, he founded the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission and with Louise de Marillac the Daughters of Charity. He brought together women and men, rich and poor, clergy and lay, younger and older, learned and unlearned. He wrote statutes and rules structuring these groups. Throughout his life he gave them ongoing formation in his talks, repetitions of prayer and letter writing.

His followers live his charism not simply as isolated workers in the vineyard, lone rangers, so to speak, but as brothers and sisters who channel their common energy, their common love, their common creativity toward practical service of the poor. Collaboration is key. Ni neart go cur le ceile.

The Lord is the source of all the good that we do. “Unless the Lord builds the house,” the psalmist tells us, “they labour in vain who build it” (Ps 127:1). Vincent called his confreres to pray together for one hour every day. He taught them to pray at the beginning of meetings; to pray together before visiting the homes of the poor in teams.

Secret of Vincent’s Success:

He put **God first**- he prayed for an hour every day
He was Man of great love. He loved people in poverty-
He saw the need and brought great organisational skills to bear to remedy the need
He was able to delegate, he had an ability to allow people the freedom to make mistakes and to learn from the mistakes.

He kept in touch with his many projects at home and abroad through letter.

He was a bridge builder –he was equally at home in the palaces of the Kings of France and in the hovels of the poor of Paris

He combined a practical Christianity with a certain mysticism which enabled him to see Christ in the poorest of the poor.

Conclusion:

We, in the Vincentian Family, have a tremendous heritage from Vincent and Louise. It is a heritage of loving service to our brothers and sisters who live in poverty and on the margins of society.

St. Vincent de Paul was very ordinary and very human. Yet he was extraordinary in what he did and in what he accomplished in his lifetime. He had a huge influence on church and society in 17th century France. So striking were Vincent's activities that the preacher at his funeral, Henri de Maupas du Tour, stated, "He just about transformed the face of the Church!"

That spirit continues in the different groups who owe their origin and inspiration to his spirit. He made holiness look attractive. His story of ongoing conversion is a source of hope and inspiration for us all. He continues to be a saint for our time.