



Reflection Paper

The First Rule (1617)

Third Theme: Serving people living in poverty means that we enter into a relationship with those who are poor.

N.B. This reflection invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

We propose using the method of *Lectio Divina*

1. Read this reflection
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant)
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God)
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

❖ **Prayer:**

Almighty and eternal God, you filled Vincent de Paul, our Founder, with a spirit of charity; listen to our prayer and bestow on us your love. Following the example of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise, enable us to recognize and to serve Jesus Christ, your Son, in our sisters and brothers who are poor; following your teaching enable us to learn how to love. Amen.



❖ **Third Theme: Serving people living in poverty means that we enter into a relationship with those who are poor.**

○ Reflection:

To serve those living in poverty is both a gift and a task; it demands humility, perseverance and a strong commitment. We have to be careful to protect ourselves, especially in situations where service on behalf of those living in poverty is threatened with being reduced to some selfish strategy. Indeed, we must remember that those who live in poverty are the beloved sons and daughters of God, our Father. To serve them, then, means that we value these sisters and brothers of ours, value every aspect of their lives.

Father Jean Morin states that the Rule that is preserved for us, that is, the Rule that was given to the first members of the Confraternity, contains two important elements: fidelity and stability. Saint Vincent viewed these elements as essential because they involve the development of a faith centered on Jesus Christ, caring for those living in poverty and deepening the relationship between faith and service or between Jesus Christ and the poor (cf. Matthew 25:31ff.)¹.

Vincent did not order people to reach out and to serve others; yet **he himself personally served others** on Sunday, August 20th, 1617... (cf. the First Reflection which narrates the events surrounding the establishment of the first Confraternity of Charity).

The Rule of December 1617 provided structure and organization for charity and did so from the perspective of service. It established in great detail the manner in which service was to be rendered to those living in poverty. In previous months we have reflected on the manner in which the Confraternity ought to function and we have also reflected on the responsibilities of its leaders: the prioress, assistants and treasurer.

Mission: *“to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually”*: to provide them with clothing, food and medicine, but also to invite them to confess their sins and to receive the Eucharist. During the first visit the patient was to be given a white nightshirt and some bed clothing (if it was needed) and at the same time a crucifix was to be situated in a visible place and other small items were to be made available.

Vincent’s tenderness and foresight is revealed in these small details which enabled the members of the Confraternity to provide material assistance to the infirm. Let us listen again to the beautiful words that Vincent has given us as a heritage: *“the person whose turn it is ... will prepare the dinner and take it to the patients, greeting them cheerfully and kindly. She will set up the tray on the bed, place on it a napkin, a cup, a spoon, and some bread, wash the patient's hands, and then say grace. She will pour the soup into a bowl, and put the meat on a plate. She will arrange everything on the bed tray, then kindly encourage the patient to eat for the love of Jesus and His holy Mother. She will do all this as lovingly as if she were serving her own son - or rather God, who considers as done to Himself the good she does for persons who are poor. If necessary, this person will also cut his meat or pour him something to drink. Once she has him beginning to eat she will leave if he has someone with him, and will go to find another patient, acting with him in the same way, remembering to begin always with the person who has someone with him and to end with those who are alone so she can spend more time with them”*².

This direct and personal encounter with those living in poverty is like a seal of quality, it is what characterizes men and women who consider themselves as heirs to the Vincentian charism. Therefore, we know the names of those we support, we know their story and situation; we are concerned about them and we make every effort to reach to them (and we prepare ourselves professionally and on a human level).

¹ J. Morin, *op. cit.*, p.24-27

² VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Miriam Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XIIIb, p. 12-13; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XIIIb:12-13.

In Saint Vincent's eyes, the poor gave meaning to his existence. Let us allow Vincent's words to echo in our minds and hearts, words that he spoke with regard to service on behalf of the sick poor: *"The first motive," said a Sister, "is that poor persons have the honor of representing the members of Jesus Christ, who considers the services rendered to them as done to himself. The second is that the souls of poor persons have the image of God imprinted upon them, and therefore we're bound to honor the Blessed Trinity in them. The third is that the Son of God has recommended this service to us by word and example. To show the disciples of Saint John that He was the Messiah, He told them that the poor had the Gospel preached to them and the sick were healed. The fourth is that to assist a soul to save itself is to cooperate in the perfect fulfillment of God's plan in the death of Jesus Christ"* (CCD:IX:51).

"You see, brothers, that the essential aim of Our Lord was to work for poor persons. When he went to others, it was only in passing. But woe to us also if we become lax in carrying out the obligations we have to help poor souls" (CCD:XI:122).

- Words of Saint Louise:

"Be careful about your service on behalf of the poor ... love the poor, honor the poor because in doing so you honor Jesus Christ".

Louise de Marillac