

Reflection #1

The First Rule (1617)

First Theme: The Origin of the Confraternities or the Associations of Charity

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:**

Blessed are you Lord, God,
for through the inspiration and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit
you allowed Vincent de Paul to form this Association
in which Louise de Marillac would become a collaborator.
Through the participation of countless men and women who
during the past four hundred years have served as volunteers in
this Association,
the physical and spiritual needs of the poor and the needy have
been provided for.



Do not forsake us Lord but accompany us on our journey,
enlighten our path and give us the strength to not lose heart,
even during the most difficult moments of our apostolate. Amen.

Prayer written by Josefina de Palmieri
AIC Guatemala

❖ **First Theme: *The Origin of the Confraternities or the Associations of Charity***

○ Reflection:

In August 1617, Vincent de Paul, at the age of 37, began a movement that has continued to the present day.

On August 1st, 1617, Vincent de Paul was appointed as pastor in Châtillon-les-Dombes (known today as Châtillon-sur-Chalaronne)... a town with about 2,000 inhabitants.

A short time before, Châtillon had been an area that experienced much violence as a result of war... many of its buildings had been destroyed and many people had converted to Protestantism.

As pastor, Vincent faithfully served the people of that area. His primary sermon revolved around the theme of charity. As a result of this new method of instructing and inviting people to practice charity, Vincent was able to touch the most hardened hearts.

A short time after his arrival in Châtillon (August 20th), some parishioners approached him about the needs of a family whose members were infirm. This event sparked a change not only in Vincent's life but also in the lives of the people who surrounded him.

Let us allow Vincent to speak for himself: *while I was living in a small town near Lyons, where Providence had called me to be the Pastor, I was vesting to celebrate Holy Mass one Sunday when I was told that in an isolated house a quarter of a league away everyone was ill. None of them was able to help the others, and they were all in indescribable need. That touched me to the heart. During the sermon, I made sure to commend them zealously to the congregation, and God, touching the hearts of those who heard me, moved them with compassion for those poor afflicted people*¹.

In the evening Vincent visited this family and met many people on the road who were coming and going from the same house and each person brought some food for the family. Since it was a warm day, many people sat on the side of the road to rest and to refresh themselves. It appeared as though Vincent was participating in a pilgrimage. Vincent arrived at the home of the family and saw with his own eyes the extreme need of those people. He administered the sacraments to the more seriously ill and seeing the large amount of food that the parishioners had brought there Vincent reflected: *this undoubtedly shows that these people have great charity, but is it well organized? The poor sick family will be overwhelmed with so much in such a short time, most of which will spoil. Afterward they will be no better off than before*². It became clear that there was a need to organize this charitable activity.

That same evening Vincent put his plan into motion: three days later, on Wednesday, August 23rd, he organized the first group of pious women who were touched by the spirit of compassion. He encouraged them to create an association that would care for the infirm in their homes. Among these women were: Mlle. De la Chassaigne, Mlle. De Brie, Mme. Philiberte and Mme. Denise Beynier (CCD:XIIIb:3-4).

¹ 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), Mirian 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 IX, p. 192; 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:IX:192.

² L. ABELLY, *The Life of the Venerable Servant of God Vincent de Paul: Founder and First Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission*, 3 vol., edited by John E. Rybolt, CM, translated by William Quinn, FSC, notes by Edward R. Udovic, CM and John E. Rybolt, CM, introduction by Stafford Poole, CM, New City Press, New Rochelle, New York, 1993, volume I, p. 72.

Vincent provided these women with a provisional Rule (cf. CCD:XIIIb:3-5) that he had written and in which he defined their objective in the following manner: *to assist the sick poor corporally and spiritually*. Vincent then highlighted the reason for this: *charity toward the neighbor is an infallible sign of the true children of God* (CCD:XIIIb:8). The women committed themselves to begin this work following day and to do so in accord with the manner in which their names were listed.

The provisional Rule highlighted three essential elements:

1. The organization of the service that they were to accomplish;
2. The help (both physical and spiritual) that was to be provided to the infirm in their homes;
3. The gospel spirituality and professional competency that was to be developed through their caring and tender service.

This first Confraternity of Charity came into existence as a result of people being touched by the spirit of compassion: a pious woman, the pastor, faithful parishioners.

The fact that this occurred during the celebration of the Eucharist reveals the fact that the Eucharist is the source of charity and we can affirm the fact that the International Association of Charities was born during the celebration of the Eucharist ... it was the Eucharist that made it possible to organize the charity that in turn enabled countless men and women to serve the poor.

When Vincent distributed the official Rule (longer than the provisional Rule) to the members of the Confraternity in Châtillon, the Archbishop of Lyon officially recognized the Confraternity (November 24, 1617 and decreed such on December 8, 1617)

- Words of Saint Vincent:

Doing good isn't everything; we have to do it well, after the example of Our Lord
(CCD:XII:148).

Vicente de Paul.

(We attach, as an appendix, the provisional Rule of August 23, 1617)

Appendix:

Document 124a: Foundation of the Charity in Châtillon-les-Dombes (August 23, 1617) SVP 13b p. 3-5 Document 124a

Jesus, Maria!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

On this day, August 23, 1617, the Ladies named below have charitably joined forces to take their turn to assist the sick poor of the town of Châtillon, having decided unanimously that, for an entire day only, each will be responsible for all those whom they have decided together to be in need of their help. To do so, they propose two aims, namely, to assist body and soul: the body by nourishing it and tending to its ailments; the soul by preparing those who seem to be tending toward death to die well, and preparing those who will recover to live a good life.

And because, when the Mother of God has been invoked and taken as patroness in important matters, everything can only go well and accrue to the glory of Jesus her Son, the Ladies take her for patroness and protector of the work, most humbly entreating her to take special care of it, as they also entreat Saint Martin and Saint Andrew, true examples of charity and patrons of Châtillon.

Starting tomorrow, the feast of Saint Bartholomew, they will begin, with God's help, to function in this good work in the order in which they are listed here: First, the chatelaine on her day; Mlle. de Brie on hers; Mme. Philiberte, wife of M. des Hugonieres; Benoitte, daughter of M. Ennemond Prost; Mme. Denise Beynier, wife of M. Claude Bouchonr; One of the daughters of Mme. Perra; Mme. Colette; And, lastly, Mlle. de la Chassaigne.

After her the chatelaine will do the same service on another day, and the others will take their turns successively, according to the above order, unless one of them is unable for some justifiable reason to carry out this ministry on her day. In that case, she will notify the person next in line --- or have her notified --- that she will be unable to take her turn, so that she can replace her on that day in caring for those who are poor. If that Lady can do so, she should not refuse because, in so doing, she will be freed of the responsibility for the following day, which she would have had according to the above order.

They should daily ask our good Jesus to kindly maintain this order and to shower with His divine blessings all those men and women who will work with their hands or contribute from their resources for its support. He will undoubtedly do so, since He Himself is the one who assures us by His own mouth that, on the great, awesome Day of Judgment, those who assist persons who are poor will hear that gentle, pleasing voice of His saying: "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world," and, on the contrary, those who have taken no care of them will be rejected by Him with those other harsh, appalling words: "Out of my sight, you condemned, go into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

To the Father the Judge, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen