

REFLECTION FOR AUGUST:

The Words and Deeds of St Vincent de Paul

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Introduction: Jesus Christ, An Example of Authenticity

Authenticity is closely related to **honesty**. Persons who are honest can easily be recognized because they are sincere in their behavior, their words and their feelings. Jesus of Nazareth was an authentic person and that characteristic gave him great authority. People knew that he spoke the truth and that he said what he was thinking. Vincent de Paul, our founder, **in imitation of Jesus Christ**, was also an authentic person: **“Nothing pleases me except in Jesus Christ”** (Abelly I:103). There is no doubt that the imitation of Jesus Christ was his constant desire; according to the Bishop of Rodez, it was **“his light and mirror”** (Abelly III:88).

Development of the Theme: Being like Vincent de Paul, an evangelizer in word and deed

Vincent was a gifted man who had an amazing ability to establish relationships with a great variety of people: men and women, rich and poor, ecclesiastics and politicians, nobles and plebes, religious men and women, lay men and women. Later, he would place this gift of God at the service of those persons most in need.

Let us reflect on some phrases (**words**) of Vincent de Paul and explore the relationship of those words to his actions (**deeds**).

“To be Christian and to see our brother or sister suffering without weeping with them, without being sick with them! That is to be lacking in charity; it is being a caricature of a Christian; it is inhuman; it is to be worse than animals” (CCD:XII:222).

Let us recall the events that occurred in Châtillon: Vincent de Paul, filled with love for God, responded to one of the great needs of that era and established the first Confraternity of Charity. All the works that he accomplished (and there were many works) were inspired by his great love for Jesus Christ whom he really and truly saw in every poor person that he met during his lifetime. It was for that reason that he asked the first **volunteers**, and then the members of the **Congregation of the Mission** and the Company of the **Daughters of Charity**, to care for the poor with true love and to be aware of the fact that Jesus Christ is present in each and every one of those poor men and women.

“Do what we will, people will never believe in us if we do not show love and compassion to those whom we wish to believe in us” (CCD:I:277).

Vincent was able to obtain the confidence, respect, admiration and affection of those persons whom he knew, especially the poor who felt truly loved by him.

“It is not enough for me to love God, if my neighbor does not love him” (CCD:XII:215).

Vincent experienced the urgent need to **evangelize** so that everyone who was close to him might come to a knowledge of God. In 1625 he established the Congregation of the Mission.

“How happy will those be who, at the hour of death, can say those beautiful words of Our Lord: the Lord sent me to bring the Good News to the poor. You see, brothers and sisters, that the essential aim of Our Lord was to work for poor persons” (CCD:XI:122).

Those words of Vincent could be applied today to each one of us and could be seen as an invitation to engage in the process of evangelization. Hopefully we have all read the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Here I would like to present some of the ideas that Father Celestino Fernández, CM expressed in his presentation entitled: “**Vincentian Contributions to the New Evangelization**”.

Evangelization is like a rainbow and the evangelization that is done by the members of the Vincentian Family is like a color that beautifies. We do not seek to create divisions but rather, from the perspective of our Vincentian charism, we seek to make a contribution to the process of evangelization.

In 1979 during a visit to his native Poland, Pope John Paul II coined the phrase, “the new evangelization”. Pope Benedict XVI established the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization and for Pope Francis, the new evangelization is the fundamental focus of his papacy. Why do we call this process of evangelization “new”? We call it “new” because we are living in new times and this means that we have to evangelize anew because the world has become pagan. Gospel values have been absorbed by secular values: hedonism, consumerism, competitiveness, etc. The pulpits have disappeared and been replaced by the internet; the cathedrals have been replaced by commercial and financial centers (Wall Street). That is the reason why **we must proclaim the good news of the gospel with creativity, with new methods and strategies that are adapted to the new world in which we live**. Evangelization is not a war or a crusade, but rather it is an offer of salvation. In the process of evangelization we do not attempt to conquer but to propose and persuade. We have to go out to the “**peripheries**”, to those places where those living in poverty have been confined. We have to go out to the geographical peripheries and also to the moral and spiritual peripheries.

In the introduction we spoke about authenticity and with the following words, which are quite strong, Vincent invites us to be authentic: “**[Be careful], do not undo by your actions the progress you have made by preaching**” (CCD:XI:252).

By way of conclusion, let us reflect on the following words of Vincent and view those words as wise counsel:

- ❖ “**Doing good is not everything; we have to do it well, after the example of Our Lord, of whom it is said in the Gospel that he did all things well**” (CCD:XII:148).
- ❖ “**The Church is compared to a great harvest that requires workers, but hardworking ones**” (CCD:I:33).
- ❖ “**We cannot better assure our eternal happiness than by living and dying in the service of the poor**” (CCD:III:384).

Personal and Community Reflection:

May the Holy Spirit enlighten us so that we might reflect on what we have read and make a firm decision to better our service... recognizing of course that it is Jesus Christ whom we are serving.

Activities and Questions:

Individual Response:

- ❖ Like Vincent, do I see Jesus Christ in those living in poverty?

Group Response:

- ❖ Do those living in poverty guide our service and plans?
- ❖ In our service as members of AIC what can we do in order to participate in the new evangelization?

Prayer:

Lord, Jesus Christ, may your presence fill us with your grace and may your image inspire our hearts so that we might walk in the light of your life. May we think as you thought, act as you acted, speak as you spoke, dream as you dreamed and love as you loved.

May we live as you lived: unconcerned about ourselves and concerned for others, self-sacrificing in order to encourage and to provide hope to others and selfless in order to heighten our sensitivity to others.

May we live as you lived: compassionate and merciful; patient, humble and gentle; sincere and truthful. May your chosen ones, the poor, be our chosen ones and may your objectives be our objectives. May those who see us see you and may we be a reflection of your life and your love. Amen.

Hymn