

# Mutual Service



Icon by Meltem Aktas

**Call to Prayer Leader:** Let's pause to reflect, as we focus our hearts and minds on God and on the gifts we have received in our service to our families and to persons living in poverty.

**ALL: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Reading** The above icon presents an oval movement of the beggar, resembling a Palestinian Jesus, and an aged Vincent de Paul. The two figures interacting form the heart of the message: the discovery that the beggar is Christ. We find Christ in the poor who in turn transform us into Christ. And "once we find Jesus in the poor, the poor have as much to give to us as we do to them"

Brusatti, Louis, CM and Swift, James, CM, adapted from "Reading the Icon of St. Vincent"  
<http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1179&context=vhj>

## Hymn "The Servant Song"

1., 6. Will you let me be your ser - vant,  
2. We are pil - grims on a jour - ney,  
Let me be as Christ to you;  
We are trav - 'lers on the road;  
Pray that I may have the grace to  
We are here to help each oth - er  
Let you be my ser - vant too.  
Walk the mile and bear the load.

Text: Richard Gillard, b.1953 Music Richard Gillard, b.1953  
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**Antiphon ALL: "It is in giving that we receive."** Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

**Side 1:** "The gift you have received, give as a gift. Matthew 10: 8

**Side 2:** "The one who gives to the poor suffers no want." Proverbs 28: 27

**Side 1:** "... in serving persons who are poor, we serve Jesus Christ.

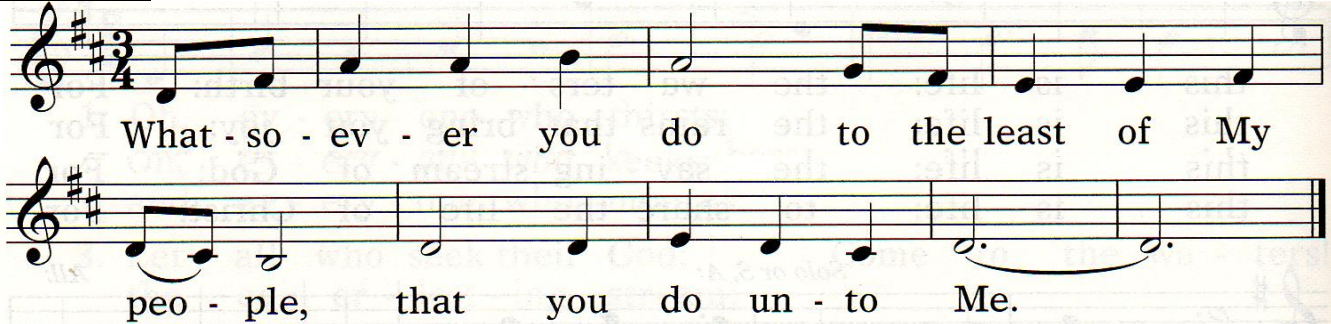
**Side 2:** God "... accepts services [we] do for [poor] persons ... as done to Himself."

Conferences Vincent de Paul Coste, Vol. 9, C24, page 199

**Reading** "Give and it shall be given to you. Good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over, will they pour into the fold of your garment. For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you."

Luke 6: 38

**Response** "Whatsoever You Do" refrain



Text: Willard F. Jabusch, b.1930 Music: Willard F. Jabusch, b.1930  
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**Personal Reflection and Sharing**

Where, when in my ministry as a Lady of Charity have I found Jesus?  
 What gifts have I received in my service to others?

**Intercessions**

**Leader:** Let us pray to God who sent Jesus as an example of service,

**Response: ALL: O God, let us give and receive in love.**

- + that we may follow Jesus' example in availability to others, we pray ...
  - + that our prayer may accompany our gift of self to persons who are poor, we pray ...
  - + that our service may open our eyes and the eyes of others to see Jesus, we pray ...
- (Spontaneous prayers are invited.)



**Prayer ALL: We praise and thank you, O God, for your call to ministry. Grant us the grace to love you with all our hearts. According to the gifts and talents that we have received from you, allow us to share generously with others, especially those living in poverty. Grace us to see your presence in them and to accept all they offer us. Then, in mutual service, with Jesus in Your Holy Spirit, we will help build your reign on earth. Amen.**

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**Prayer Texts**

John 13: 1-17 ... as I have done, so you must do.

Colossians 3: 23-24 ... you will receive an inheritance ... as your reward.

# Iconography: The Icon of Saint Vincent de Paul <sup>1</sup>

Commentary by James Swift, CM and Louis Brusatti, CM

This icon was commissioned by Rosati house, a residence for the Vincentian Community at DePaul University in Chicago, on the occasion of creating its new chapel. The icon was written by Meltem Aktas. Ms. Aktas, a native of Turkey, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has worked as a graphic designer and a gallery director and has exhibited in both Istanbul and Chicago. She recently taught icon painting to the monks at Christ in the Desert Monastery in New Mexico. Ms. Aktas began copying classic icons in order to learn and experiment with glazepainting techniques. Writing icons soon became an experience of faith for her. Now it is out of deep faith and love that she continues to work in the classical mode, striving to give it contemporary incarnation. In preparing to write this icon of Vincent, Ms. Aktas read and studied about Vincent and developed friendships with a number of Vincentians in the Midwestern Province, listening to their own heartfelt stories about Vincent and his way of spirituality.



Central to an understanding of Vincent and Vincentian spirituality is the mystery of the incarnation. This icon of Vincent celebrates that mystery. Creation is diffused with the light of incarnation; there is little contrast between the heavenly plane and the plane of earth. And within this incarnational setting, the central action of the icon takes place.

Two figures interact, Vincent and a beggar. Yet, upon closer examination, the beggar is seen to resemble a Palestinian Jesus. These two interacting figures form the heart of the icon's message, the core of Vincentian spirituality, that we find Jesus in the poor and that our interaction with Jesus in the poor transforms us.

Knowing our own poverty, we assume the position of the beggar and with him look intently at Vincent. Vincent's eyes focus on the bread. While Vincent is probably giving the bread to the beggar, it is difficult to tell just by looking at the hands of the figures. It is possible that the beggar is about to place the bread in Vincent's hand. Here lies another truth of Vincentian spirituality, that, once we find Jesus in the poor, the poor have as much to give to us as we do to them. A transformation has occurred: the poor person has become Jesus and we have become Vincent, receiving from the poor as much as we give.

The beggar's deformed hand parallels Vincent's awkward left foot suggesting a relationship between the poverty of the beggar and the poverty of Vincent. The tattered edges of Vincent's coat and the beggar's poor garb enhance the parallelism. Vincent stands with a listening attitude. He experiences something of his own weakness, brokenness, and poverty, awareness affirmed as he enters the world of the beggar and hears his gift. Again, a transformation: in coming to the poor with our wealth, we encounter our own poverty. As Vincent remarked, "It is only because of your love, only your love, that the poor will forgive you the bread you have given them."

The sharing of bread evokes a eucharistic theme in the icon. The exchange of "bread" takes place literally against the backdrop of cloud-like divinization. God has penetrated the world of earth with bread from heaven. Jesus, the poor man, offers us in our plenty the true bread. The cluster of stones and barren branches at the far right recall the story of Jesus' temptation in Luke's gospel. The devil said to Jesus, "If you are God's Son, order this stone to turn to bread." Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Man cannot live on bread alone.'<sup>2</sup> The bread the two figures exchange is more than earthly loaves. Vincentian spirituality leads from caring for physical needs to sharing the good news of our salvation in Jesus, the true bread from heaven. The green tree at left, positioned next to Jesus the poor man, recalls Jesus' revelation of himself as the vine and of ourselves as the branches, another sacramental reference.

Vincent and the beggar step out from three horizontal planes. The lower plane is the ground upon which they stand, ground suffused in the light of the eternal come down to earth. The middle plane, cloudlike in presentation, upholds Saint-Lazare, the motherhouse of the Congregation of the Mission in Vincent's time. The top section is the realm of heaven. Saint-Lazare, represented in a stylized manner recalling the new, heavenly Jerusalem, seems to be coming down from heaven: the mystery of the incarnation is renewed in the charism of Vincent and his family. And against this backdrop occurs the exchange of bread between the beggar and Vincent, the transforming encounter between Jesus and the man or woman steeped in the Vincentian tradition and spirituality.

Heaven comes down to earth. Jesus takes flesh in the poor. Those who minister to the poor find Jesus, receive as much as they give, and are transformed. The eucharist becomes true daily bread. These are themes central to an understanding of Vincent and Vincentian spirituality. They focus on the mystery of the incarnation, and this icon of Vincent celebrates that mystery.

<sup>1</sup> Text of this meditation is adapted from an article, "Reading the Icons at Rosati House," in Environment and Art Letter, 8, no. 6 (August 1995), 69-70. It represents a collaboration between Rev. Louis Brusatti, CM., and Rev. James Swift, CM.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 4: 3-4.



**Icon of St. Vincent de Paul**  
by Meltem Aktas