



September 2020 – AIC Training

Texts of the videos produced for the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul

Simplicity

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Saint Vincent and Simplicity

In order to speak about simplicity in Saint Vincent, I have consulted the dictionary about the meaning of this word and found the following:

Simplicity is the **quality of being simple** (uncomplicated, lacking ostentation and subtlety).

Simple people are natural and spontaneous, reject protocol and prefer informality; they respect others above all else, they do not feel superior to others, they do not belittle anyone, they have no desire to stand out or boast and they do not need to feel admired.

Vincent de Paul's understanding of simplicity:

Simplicity is recognized as the main characteristic of the life and thought of Saint Vincent, who, before proposing the message and practice of simplicity, adopted it in his life and ministry. Simplicity was one of his primary themes of reflection and he has transmitted his understanding of this virtue to us.

From Scripture Vincent learned a fundamental lesson, namely, God is simple and reveals himself to those who are simple: *"I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to the childlike"* (Matthew 11:25).

Saint Vincent tells us that simplicity is pleasing to God. Furthermore, as Scripture says, God is also pleased to encounter and enter into a relationship with those who are simple at heart, with those who have their hearts in their hands. At the same time, simplicity brings us closer to the poor. Indeed, Vincent insisted that through the practice of this virtue his followers would be able to touch the hearts of the poor who have no education and who can be led to the Gospel only with very simple words and gestures. Vincent was convinced that duplicity is a plague that can easily infect his followers!

In a conference to the Missionaries, Vincent stated: *"the world is awash in duplicity... the world is so corrupt that all we see everywhere is artifice and deceit"* (CCD:XII:246). What would Vincent think about the present state of the world?

Simplicity, for Saint Vincent is to speak the truth; it is to speak about things as they are, without hiding anything, (NB: simplicity is not about living and acting in a reckless manner, without discernment, that is not virtue!). In a letter (November 6, 1634) addressed to François du Coudray, Vincent stated: *"simplicity is the virtue I love the*

most, and to which, I think, I pay the most attention in my actions; and, if it is permissible for me to say so, I would say that I am practicing it with some progress by the mercy of God” (CCD:I:265).

Certainly this was the virtue that Vincent was most attentive about and in 1617, in the Rule for the Confraternity of Charity, he stated: **“They will take care in practicing humility, simplicity and charity”** (CCD:XIIIb:19). In February 1653, Vincent spoke about the three virtues that should characterize the life of the Daughters of Charity: **“It is God’s will that the Daughters of Charity devote themselves particularly to the practice of humility, charity and simplicity”** (CCD:IX:469).

For Saint Vincent, simplicity was a rule of life that allowed him to interact with people from different social classes. He related with the rich and the poor with a certain finesse and delicacy while, at the same time, inspiring respect and trust.

During the conference of February 24, 1653, Vincent exhorted the Daughters of Charity to speak with all simplicity, not to worry about what they would say and to say things with truth and transparency. He added: *“As for myself, I do not know, but God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my gospel. I have special devotion and consolation in saying things as they are”* (CCD:IX:476).

Simplicity also consists in attributing things to God, in living with the right intentions, in other words, in doing everything for the love of God and not seeking applause or a reward.

Simplicity is a virtue that includes more than truth and purity of intention; it is also a quality through which all deception and duplicity are removed from our words and actions. Simplicity implies living an unadorned lifestyle. Vincent spoke to the Daughters of Charity and stated: *“the spirit of true village girls is extremely simple --- no slyness, nor words of double meaning; they are not opinionated nor obstinate because in their simplicity they believe quite simply what they are told. Daughters of Charity should be like that...”* (CCD:IX:68).

Vincent also stated: *“having rooms that are well appointed, decorated with statues, paintings, and superfluous furniture is also contrary to this virtue”* (CCD:XII:145).

In the heart of Saint Vincent, simplicity is closely linked to humility and is inseparable from prudence, which gives an integrity to our being and to our activity. It is *to speak well and act well*, to live in such a way that our words are in accord with our actions... this requires us to live in accord with the maxims of the gospel.

For us, as members of the Vincentian Family, simplicity must become a lifestyle in which by assuming a series of qualities and virtues, we configure ourselves permanently with Jesus Christ who is meek and humble of heart. Let us recall that in simple people we find humility, sincerity, rectitude, modesty... all of which make them transparent, spontaneous, truthful, close, kind, happy. Let us not forget that we also find simple people to be welcoming and respectful. Saint Vincent wanted that spirit, that lifestyle, as a reaction against the trend of his time, and surely wants us today, through a simple life, to counteract the tendencies to falsehood, corruption, and the deception that this age offers us.

Let us ask the Lord, through the mediation of Saint Vincent, to grant us the grace of simplicity so that we become a living reflection of his love in the midst of the poor and wherever we are.

Happy feast of Saint Vincent!

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