

Liturgy of the Hours Roman Missal

Proper of the Congregation of the Mission

January 25

Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Apostle

Anniversary of the Founding of the
Congregation of the Mission



January 25

CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL, APOSTLE

Anniversary of the Founding of the Congregation of the Mission

Feast

Today we traditionally commemorate the founding of the Congregation of the Mission. Saint Vincent considered the sermon on general confession, which he preached in the village of Folleville on this day in the year 1617, as the beginning of the missions to the Christian people and the origin of the Congregation itself.

Everything as in the Liturgy of the Hours for this day, except for the prayer. In the Office of Readings the following Second Reading may be read, if preferred.

Office of Readings

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Office of Readings

SECOND READING

From the spiritual conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, priest.

(Conf. 180 and 2 to the members of the Congregation of the Mission: *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, Paris 1920-1925, Vol. XII, pp. 7-8; Vol. XI, pp. 4-5.)

The origin of the Congregation of the Mission

One day I was summoned to hear the confession of a poor man who was dangerously ill and who had the reputation of being the most upright man, or at least one of the most upright men in his village. It appeared, nevertheless, that he was burdened with sins which he had never had the courage to mention in confession, as he himself loudly declared later in the presence of the late wife of the general of the galleys: "Madam, if I had not made a general confession, I would have been condemned because of the grave sins I had not dared to confess."

It was in January 1617 that this happened, and on the feast of Saint Paul's conversion, which is the twenty-fifth of that month, that same lady asked me to preach a sermon in the church of Folleville to urge the villagers to make a general confession, which I did. I pointed out the importance and the usefulness of general confession, and then taught them how to make it well. And God had such high regard for the confidence and the deep faith of that lady (for the great number and the seriousness of my sins would have prevented any fruit from that action) that he blessed my sermon; and those good people were so touched by God that they all came to make their general confession. I continued instructing them and preparing them for the sacraments, and I began to hear their confessions. But there was such a great crowd that I could not handle it with just the one other priest who was helping

me, and Madam, therefore, sent word to the Reverend Jesuit Fathers at Amiens to ask them to come and assist us. Two Jesuit Fathers helped us with confessions, preaching, and instruction, and in that way the same work was carried on for several years in the other parishes on the territory of that lady. Ultimately she wished to provide for priests who would carry on the missions, and for that purpose she obtained the *Collège des Bons Enfants* for us, where Father Portail and I took residence, taking with us another good priest whom we paid fifty crowns a year. From there all three of us would go around from village to village, preaching and giving missions. When we left, we would either give the key to one of the neighbors, or we would ask them to spend the night in the house. Meanwhile I preached only one sermon everywhere, which I would reshape in a thousand ways: it was on the fear of God.

That is what we were doing, and in the meantime God was doing what he had foreseen from all eternity. He bestowed some blessings on our labors; when good clerics saw that, they joined us and asked to live with us. O Savior! O Savior! Who would ever have thought that all that was to develop into what it is today? If someone would have told me that at the time, I would have thought that he was making fun of me, and yet that was the way in which it pleased God to cause the beginning of what you see now.

RESPONSORY

1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 21

Christ sent me to preach the Gospel,
but not with the wisdom of this world
in which the cross of Christ loses all its meaning.

— For the message of the cross is foolishness
to those who are on the way to destruction;

but to us who are on the way to salvation
it is the proof of God's power.

The world did not come to know God through wisdom;
it has pleased God to save those who believed
through the foolishness of the message we preach.

— For the message . . .

Prayer

God our Father, the beginning and the end of human vocation, you chose Saint Paul the apostle at his conversion to spread your name throughout the world. On this day also you brought forth through the zeal of Saint Vincent a spiritual family to preach the Gospel to the poor. May we walk faithfully in the way of our vocation; as we imitate the work of the Apostle of the Gentiles, may we preach confidently the Gospel of truth and peace. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

February 18

**BLESSED FRANCIS REGIS CLET,
PRIEST AND MARTYR**

Memorial

Francis was born at Grenoble August 19, 1748, and ordained a priest at Lyon March 27, 1773. He taught theology in the seminary at Annecy, and occupied the position of novice master in the Motherhouse of the Congregation. As the disturbances of the French Revolution increased, however, he sought assignment to the foreign missions, and after landing on the Chinese coast at Macao, he labored vigorously in the missions of China for thirty years. He was put to death by strangulation near Wuchangfou February 18, 1820, and was beatified May 27, 1900.

From the common of one martyr, or of pastors.

APPENDIX

A. SOME OPTIONAL TEXTS FOR THE OFFICE OF READINGS

The following texts may be used as second readings, at one's own choice, instead of those given in the respective Offices.

I

FOR THE OFFICE OF SAINT VINCENT, OF SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC, OR OF JANUARY 25

1. From the spiritual conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, priest.

(Conf. 195 to the members of the Congregation of the Mission: *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, Paris 1920-1925, Vol. XII, pp. 74-80.)

He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor

Our Lord, who had come into the world to save mankind, began to do and then to teach. He did the first by practicing all the virtues; but all the actions he performed were as many virtues befitting a God who had made himself man in order to set the example to the rest of mankind. And he did the second by instructing the poor people in the divine truths, and by giving the apostles the knowledge necessary for the salvation of the world, for guiding the people, and for making them truly happy.

The end of the Company is to imitate Our Lord, in-so-far as poor and worthless persons can do that. What does that mean? It means that the Congregation intends

92* Optional Texts for Office of Readings

to make itself like him in its conduct, its actions, its functions, and its goals. How can one person ever resemble another without having the same features, lineaments, proportions, appearance, looks? That is impossible. Therefore, if we intend to make ourselves similar to that divine model, and feel in our hearts that desire and that holy fondness, we must, *we must* I say, try to conform our thoughts, our works, and our intentions to his.

It is our end, therefore, to work at our own perfection, to preach the Gospel to the poor, and to teach ecclesiastics the knowledge and the virtues necessary to their state. As far as the first is concerned, we are invited to that by the Gospel, in which priests and all Christians find a rule for perfection, not just any perfection, but a perfection similar to that of the eternal Father.

The second thing we have to do, according to our rule, is to instruct the rural people; that is what we are called to do. Yes, Our Lord requires of us that we preach the Gospel to the poor: that is what he did and what he wants to continue through us. We have every reason to humiliate ourselves here, in view of the fact that the eternal Father is using us for the plans of his Son, who came to preach the good news to the poor and who presented that as proof that he was the Son of God and that the expected Messiah had indeed come. We are much obliged to his infinite goodness, therefore, for being associated with him in that divine employ and because he has chosen us among so many others who are much worthier of that honor and much more capable of being successful at it than we are!

But, Father, we are not the only ones who instruct the poor; are the pastors doing anything else? What are the preachers doing both in the cities and in the country? What are they doing during Advent and Lent? They

preach to the poor, and they preach better than we do.— That is true, but in the Church of God there is no other Company which has the poor for its share and which devotes itself entirely to the poor without ever preaching in the big cities; the missionaries promise that by vow; it is their specialty to be dedicated to the poor, like Jesus Christ. Our vocation is a continuation of his, therefore, or at least it corresponds to his in its circumstances. Oh, what great blessedness, my brothers! But what serious obligations for us to love it! A great incentive we have for that is its grandeur: to make God known to the poor, to preach Jesus Christ to them, to announce to them that the kingdom of heaven is near and that it is for the poor. Oh, how great that is!

2. From the spiritual conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul, priest.

(Conf. 211 to the members of the Congregation of the Mission: *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, Paris 1920-1925, Vol. XII, pp. 302-310.)

The five fundamental virtues of the Congregation

"Although we ought to observe, as far as we can, all the above-mentioned evangelical maxims as being most holy and beneficent, nevertheless, because some of them are more suitable to us, namely those which recommend in a special way simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal for souls, the Congregation shall apply itself very diligently to the cultivation and practice of them, so that these five virtues may become, so to speak, the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation, and so that all the actions of each of its members may always be animated by them." (*Common Rules II, 14.*)

Because there are a great number of evangelical maxims, I have chosen mainly those which are more appropriate for missionaries. And which are they? I have always thought and taken for granted that they were simplicity, humility, meekness, mortification, and zeal.

The first one is simplicity, which concerns God; the second one humility, which concerns our submission: through that virtue we are an offering to God to whom we owe every honor and in whose presence we should efface ourselves and act in such a way that he take possession of us; the third one is meekness, which makes us bear with our neighbor and his faults. The first one concerns God, the second one ourselves, and the third one our neighbor.

But the means to acquire these virtues is mortification, which cuts out all that could prevent us from acquiring them.

The fifth maxim is zeal, which consists in a pure desire to make ourselves pleasing to God and useful to the neighbor. Zeal for extending the kingdom of God, zeal for procuring the salvation of the neighbor. Is there anything more perfect in the world? If the love of God is a fire, then zeal is its flame; if that love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is that which makes our love of God purer. But, my brothers, how are we to acquire that spirit of simplicity, of humility, and of meekness if we do not have mortification, which makes us accept everything? And how are we to acquire that mortification without zeal, which is our support in overcoming all sorts of difficulties, not only by force of reason, but by that of grace, which makes us find pleasure in suffering, yes, pleasure.

These five virtues should be like the faculties of the soul of the whole Congregation; as the soul knows through the intellect, wills through the will, and remembers through

memory, so a missionary should act only by means of these virtues. The goodness of the Congregation of the Mission will be judged by its simplicity, its humility, and so on and so forth. By the same standards, my brothers, we ought to judge ourselves, and we ought to delight in them; I should act according to these virtues if I am to accomplish anything; and, in a word, all that God requires of us in the evangelical maxims is found in these five virtues.

Let us try, then, every single one of us, to enclose ourselves in these five virtues like snails in their shells, and let us see to it that our actions taste of these virtues. He who practices them in that way will be a true missionary; he who acts differently will not.

3. From the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the modern world (nn. 26-28).

The voice of the Second Vatican Council urges us to emulate Saint Vincent's universal charity

The Spirit of God, who, with wondrous providence, directs the course of time and renews the face of the earth, assists at this development. The ferment of the Gospel has aroused and continues to arouse in the hearts of men an unquenchable thirst for human dignity.

Wishing to come down to topics that are practical and of some urgency, the Council lays stress on respect for the human person: everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as another self, bearing in mind above all his life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way lest he follow the example of the rich man who ignored Lazarus, the poor man.

Today there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every man, no matter who he is, and if we meet him, to come to his aid in a positive way, whether he is an aged person abandoned by all, a foreign worker despised without reason, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons: all these and the like are criminal: they poison civilization; and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims, and militate against the honor of the creator.

Those also have a claim on our respect and charity who think and act differently from us in social, political, and religious matters. In fact the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through kindness and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.

The teaching of Christ even demands that we forgive injury, and the precept of love, which is the commandment of the New Law, includes all our enemies: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your ene-

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of mutual aid for the alleviation of all kinds of human needs, are held in special honor in the Church.

Today these activities and works of charity have become much more urgent and worldwide, now that means of communication are more rapid, distance between men has been more or less conquered, people in every part of the globe have become as members of a single family. Charitable action today can and should reach all men and all needs. Wherever men are to be found who are in want of food and drink, of clothing, housing, medicine, work, education, the means necessary for leading a truly human life, wherever there are men racked by misfortune or illness, men suffering exile or imprisonment, Christian charity should go in search of them and find them out, comfort them with devoted care and give them the helps that will relieve their needs. This obligation binds first and foremost the more affluent individuals and nations.

If this exercise of charity is to be above all criticism, and seen to be so, one should see in one's neighbor the image of God to which he has been created, and Christ the Lord to whom is really offered all that is given to the needy. The liberty and dignity of the person helped must be respected with the greatest sensitivity. Purity of intention should not be stained by any self-seeking or desire to dominate. The demands of justice must first of all be satisfied; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity. The cause of evils, and not merely their effects, ought to disappear. The aid contributed should be organized in such a way that beneficiaries are gradually freed from their dependence on others and become self-supporting.

The laity should therefore highly esteem, and support as far as they can, private or public works of charity and social assistance movements, including international

schemes. By these channels effective help is brought to individuals and nations in need. They should collaborate in this with all men of good will.



Proper of Roman Missal

Conversion of Saint Paul, Apostle Anniversary of the Founding of the Congregation of the Mission

Feast

As in the Roman Missal, except the following prayers.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, the source and goal of human vocation, you choose the blessed apostle Paul at his conversion to spread your name throughout the world. On this day also in your providence you raised up a spiritual family through the zeal of Saint Vincent to preach the Good News to the poor. May we walk faithfully on the path you have called us, and, imitating the work of the Apostle to the Gentiles, may we courageously announce the Gospel of peace and truth.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

PRAYER OVER THE GIFTS

As we offer you this this sacrifice of praise, O Lord, may the Spirit fill us with the light of faith by which you continually enlightened the blessed apostle Paul to spread the faith for your glory.

We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Lord our God, may the sacrament we have received kindle in us the same fire of love by which the blessed apostle Paul cared so deeply for all the churches.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.