

Rome June 3, 2012

To all members of the Vincentian Family:

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ live in your hearts now and always!

As you know, each year we propose a theme for reflection and study as a Family, related to the celebrations of our Holy Founder. Last year, we considered the fruits that the celebrations of the 350th anniversary produced in us as a branch of the Vincentian Family at the local level as well as at the General level. We can say that what we experienced together, the fruit of our creativity, enriched us enormously as Family in the following ways:

- mutual relationships were strengthened, other relationships with new forms of spiritual expressions close to our own emerged,
- Vincentian Formation was deepened,
- creativity enabled celebrations that were expressed with cultural and artistic differences,
- our Vincentian vocation was affirmed,
- we grew spiritually,
- seeking proximity with those who are poor was intensified,
- the missionary dimension was strengthened,

So these were some of the fruits that were shared following last year's invitation.

This year, in line with the mystique of our Family, I invite you to broaden our Vincentian Collaboration. To this end, I propose as a theme: **Collaboration and Evangelization**, and as a slogan: **“Let us work together to share the Good News and communicate life to those who are poor.”**

Allow me to begin by recalling an event, certainly well known to everyone, but which is the beginning of everything for us. Just as we say with regard to Jesus: “Everything began in Galilee,” we can say of Vincent: “Everything began in Folleville and in Chatillon.” As the confession of the peasant who, after the Sermon in 1617 at Folleville, opens the eyes of Vincent to human misery in all its dimensions, it is the experience of solidarity aroused in Chatillon, after having recounted the needs of a family, that reveals to him the necessity of organized action in order to meet the needs of people. It is in this same way that we were born as a Family, a Family that wants to help those who are poor with their immediate material needs, but also sees to their spiritual needs, which make them even poorer. I would even say: a Family which, by our life style, calls out and denounces the structures which cause poverty.

Through baptism, we are part of a plan, the plan of God, revealed through his Son Jesus Christ, and which the Gospels recount clearly: it is the plan of the Kingdom and its Justice. As a Vincentian Family, we have the privilege and the blessing, of having a spirituality which allows us to live this plan of Life today. Our spirituality comes from a man who asked himself each day: “What would the Son of God do in such or such a situation?”

However, this Family is plunged into a world which, day by day, is moving away from the concept of family, and prefers an individualistic, competitive and egocentric life style. This is a life style which is inhuman, because to be human, in the most profound sense, has no sense without the Other.

In response to this, we offer an alternative proposal to this world. Not only because our way of living seeks to transform this world so that it might become good news for human beings - a transformation which is accomplished by announcing the Good News to those who are poor - but also because we can and want to be a model by our way of working together as a team. Each branch is very different, and this enriches us, but what unites us is Jesus Christ and each one lives that out in a different way. That’s the way it has been for four hundred years: it is the Vincentian style, that is, “*Jesus Christ here and now.*”

In practice, I invite you to:

1. strengthen the local and regional organizations which makes us one Family. If there are no such organizations, we must lay the ground work for creating them,
2. strengthen projects for those who are poor, projects done as Family.
The projects each branch undertakes are good, but if we do them together as a Family, they will be even better,
3. organize times and places of celebrations and prayer together, as a Family, enjoying the various local and regional events: anniversaries, jubilees, Vincentian celebrations, etc.

I know that each branch, just like the Family in general, has different situations which often discourage the members and at times can make the work difficult. Sometimes, they are even tempted to follow the inhuman plans which we spoke of earlier. However, the Vincentians were not born for this; they were born to bring Life, and as our Master said, “*life in abundance.*” That is why I would like us to go beyond the qualities that are found within each branch and each member. If we unite these qualities, we can do great work, and our masters will benefit from it.

In conclusion, I would like us to reflect on this metaphor that surely many of you know. However, each time that we think about it, we can find something different in it.

Meeting in the Carpenter's Shop

In a woodworking shop there was a strange meeting; the tools held council to solve problems about their differences. The hammer was the first to hold the presidency, but the assembly informed him that he should resign; he was too noisy, he spent his time striking blows. The hammer acknowledged his fault; he asked that the wing nut be expelled because he had too many turns doing things.

The wing nut agreed to withdraw, but he, in his turn, requested the expulsion of the sandpaper; he was too rough in his relationships and he always caused friction with the others.

The sandpaper agreed, on condition that it be the same for the tape measure who spent his time measuring others, as if he were perfect.

At this point the carpenter entered. He put on his apron and began to work, using in turn, the hammer, the sandpaper, the tape measure, and the wing nut. When he was finished, the piece of wood had become a beautiful piece of furniture.

When the carpenter's shop was again silent, the tools continued their deliberation. The saw interrupted: "Sirs, it is so clear that we have faults, but the carpenter works with our qualities. That is what gives us value. So, let's forget our weaknesses and look at our virtues." The group found that the hammer was strong, the wing nut united and gave solidity, the sandpaper filed down the bumps and the tape measure was precise and exact. They felt like a team capable of making beautiful furniture and their differences took on a new light.

The Church exists to evangelize, to spread the Good News. In our Vincentian spirituality, this Good News is for those who are poor. May God grant us the grace to continue to be this Good News, so that our Masters in Jesus Christ may have Life and that it be abundant!

Your brother in Saint Vincent



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