

Let us persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2)

Rome, June 10, 2013

To all the members of the Vincentian Family:

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill our heart, now and always!

Brothers and sisters, each year at the time of the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul we reflect on a theme that enables us to deepen our spirituality and to strengthen our commitment to the poor. This year we want to reflect on the theme of faith, the central theme of our Christian identity and a theme that has been proposed by the Church.

In the context of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, the great *'aggiornamento'* of the Church in the twentieth century, Pope Benedict XVI has called us together to celebrate a Year of Faith (a year that was initiated on October 11, 2012 and will conclude on the feast of Christ the King, November 24, 2013). Pope Benedict, in his Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, tells us that this is a time *to set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance (#2).*

Throughout the history of the Church Christians have been called together to deepen their understanding of some specific theme ... all of which are important and necessary for faith. This time, however, our coming together is most important because we are being called to reflect upon that which is the central theme of our relationship with God, namely, faith.

It is impossible to believe in God without faith and it is impossible to follow Jesus Christ without faith and it is also impossible to be a member of the Church without faith ... all of this is obvious. What is so obvious, however, on

the one hand, is not always that obvious as we live out our life. Therefore, to celebrate a year of faith implies that, as Christians, we celebrate Jesus Christ as the center and the culmination of our faith.

The starting point and the objective of faith is Jesus Christ. The letter to the Hebrews tells us: *Let us persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith* (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus is the basis for our faith and is also the content of our faith ... Jesus, the Son of God who reveals the Father to us. As a man Jesus is also the model believer. He is *the leader* because he has initiated a new manner of believing in God. He is *the perfecter* because he lived the fullness of faith. Jesus is truly man because he is a true believer and, as the letter to the Romans tells us, through his faith we are saved (cf., Romans 3:21-26).

Throughout the history of the Church there are many people who have walked the way with Jesus and as a result these people have become models for us. One of these important models is Mary, our Mother. The gospels highlight Mary's faith when it is stated: *Blessed are you who believed* (Luke 1:45).

Vincentian spirituality is centered on Jesus. Vincentians are those men and women who ask: what would Jesus do in this situation? Therefore, with regard to this theme of faith, Vincentians should ask: how did Jesus live his faith? We see that Jesus unconditionally handed over his life to God, to the one whom he called, "Father". Jesus' life was one of absolute trust and abandonment to the Father's hands. Even during times of great suffering Jesus remained confident and overcame every temptation to renounce that trust and thus rely on his own effort.

For us this means that Jesus is not only a person in whom we believe but he is also "the way", a model of how to believe. In this, then, Jesus is a leader who goes before us, who points the way ... indeed Jesus himself is the way, the leader, a man of faith. Therefore our situation as believers involves an act of profound confidence. Like Jesus, we are invited to abandon ourselves to the hands of God, even when we experience loneliness and suffering.

Throughout the history of the Vincentian Family many individuals have given this witness of faith and today some of these persons are honored as saints, blessed and/or servants of God. These same individuals have become reference points for our life. Therefore with Jesus Christ as our starting point

we are invited to live our life from the perspective of God; we are invited to live in the same way as Jesus did. Vincent reminds us that *faith means seeing in the way that God sees* and that *faith allows us to discover Christ in the poor*. The poor are the beneficiaries of our spirituality and Jesus is the means to reach them ... but only through faith in Jesus and through the faith of Jesus can we open the path that allows Jesus to enter. Therefore, as we seek to find Jesus we discover the poor because we cannot understand Jesus without establishing a close relationship with those who are poor. Jesus said the same thing when he told the people that he had come to be good news for the poor. Saint Louise also reminds us of this fact when she writes: *The neighbor has been given to me in the place of Our Lord, by means of a love which his goodness knows and which he has revealed to my heart, although I am unable to put it into words* (SWLM: 821 [A.26]).

Jesus Christ teaches us the way of fidelity that enables us to live our life from the perspective of God ... faithfulness to God in Jesus Christ and faithfulness to Jesus Christ in the poor. Elisabeth de Robiano (the founder of the Servants of the Poor of Ghyseghem) tells us: *God will not fail you if you have truly handed yourself over to God ... and done this forever*. Our commitment to God is not time limited but is done forever ... this is the most difficult dimension of faith because ever before us we see things that are disposable and temporary. We would like our commitment to have some specific time limitation but true faith is forever. Thus fidelity involves self-sacrifice, self-renunciation, the handing over of self, etc... Fidelity, also, involves courage to endure all things for the love of God who is revealed in the poor. Ignatia Jorth (the founder of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul of Zagreb) refers to this idea when she tells us: *We are at the service of the poor. The poor are children of God and we are called to serve them, which is a most noble task. If our ministry results in a lack of gratitude and insults, it is because this allows us to follow more closely in the footsteps of our Divine Teacher*. It is not always easy to be faithful to God. Being focused on God results in a certain satisfaction but also involves the cross and not everyone is willing to confront the cross. Therefore the way of faith is a path that requires daily conversion.

Today, Vincentians, revitalized by faith, must make a contribution to the world. In some places people believe in no one and nothing and in other places people believe in too much ... but material things do not give life but only result

in death. Our creative fidelity ought to be a living witness of faith in the midst of a world that needs to be strengthened and healed in so many different ways. We are invited to live a faith that is capable of transforming the world. Blessed Frederic Ozanam stated: *Our faith, always young, is able to satisfy the needs of every era and heal the wounds of all people.*

Let us allow Jesus Christ to be our teacher and let us allow Jesus Christ to be the path that leads us to the Father. May we not only believe in Jesus Christ, but rather may we believe Jesus Christ, May we also follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ that enable us to be faithful to the God of life, to the God who wants to give life to those who are impoverished.

Your brother in St. Vincent,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Gregory Gay, C.M." with a stylized, cursive script.

G. Gregory Gay CM
Superior General