

## Reflection

Sept. 27, 2023

Memorial of St. Vincent DePaul

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Texts: Ezra 9:5-9; Luke 9:1-6

Today is the Memorial of St. Vincent de Paul. He was born on April 24, 1581 in the village of Pouy which is in the far southwest corner of France. His parents were peasant farmers and Vincent was the third of six children. Vincent wrote his name as one word, Depaul, since he wanted no one to think that he was from the nobility class. There was a stream nearby called Paul and it is believed that the villagers used this name, De Paul meaning *by the stream*.

As a child, Vincent worked herding his family's cattle, but his father recognized that he had a talent for reading. At the age of fifteen, his father sent Vincent to a local seminary, selling the family's oxen to pay for his tuition. Vincent spent three years there, and then in 1597 he studied Theology at the University of Toulouse, paying his way there by tutoring other students. On September 23, 1600, he was ordained to the priesthood at the age of nineteen. He continued his studies for the next three years and received his Bachelor of Theology from the University of Toulouse.

In 1608, Vincent moved to Paris to study for the Licentiate in Canon Law at the University of Paris. It was there that he met Abbe Pierre de Berulle who eventually became Vincent's spiritual director. Vincent reformed his rather lax priestly life after hearing the confession of a dying peasant. He resolved to work with very poor tenant farmers, very poor peasants who migrated to Paris to find work. Berulle approved of this since he thought that Vincent needed a bit more humility and compassion for the poor. He served the poor in Paris, bringing them *food* and *care* and *compassion* and enlisting the wealthy women of Paris to collect money among their wealthy friends to help Vincent feed the poor. It was there that he met Louise de Marillac, a woman of wealth who *did* belong to the bourgeoisie class.

Vincent eventually became Louise de Marillac's spiritual director and after her husband and only son died, she and Vincent co-founded the Daughters of Charity in 1633. Louise knew that when the ladies of noble status dressed in their finery visited the poor, they made the poor feel uncomfortable. She decided to seek peasant women from the country suburbs of Paris and she began to train them to care for the poor and also the sick in Paris hospitals. The Daughters of Charity received papal approval in 1655. They are distinguished by their large white headdresses, very usual for peasant Breton women to wear in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1625, Vincent also founded the Vincentians trained and dedicated to teaching theology in the seminaries and to develop a proper and disciplined spiritual life centered on Jesus Christ to overcome laxity among the seminarians.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes from Vincent de Paul:

*If God is the center of your life, no words are necessary.*

*Your mere presence will touch hearts.*

*We should strive to keep our hearts open  
to the sufferings and wretchedness of other people,  
and pray continually that God may grant us  
that spirit of compassion which is truly the spirit of God.*

*We must love our neighbor as being made in the image of God  
and as a person that God loves.*

*The poor are your masters. You are their servants.*

And from Louise de Marillac:

*Gentleness, cordiality and forbearance  
must be the practices of the Daughters of Charity just as  
humility, simplicity and the love of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ,  
who is perfect charity, is their spirit.*

*It is not enough for these maxims to be in our minds;  
we must bear witness to them by our gentle and charitable care.  
As for your conduct towards the sick  
never take the attitude of just getting the task done.  
You must show them affection; serving them from the heart;  
enquiring of them that which they might need;  
speaking to them gently and compassionately;  
procuring necessary help for them  
without being too bothersome or too eager.*

*For the love of God, my dear Sisters,  
practice great gentleness toward the poor and toward everyone.  
Try to satisfy as much by words as by actions.  
That will be very easy for you if you maintain  
great esteem for your neighbor: the rich because they are above you,  
the poor because they are your masters.*

*We are leaving God for God  
if we leave one of our spiritual exercises  
for the service of the poor.*

*O my God, why am I unable to reveal to the world  
the beauty which you have shown me  
as well as the dignity of the Blessed Virgin?  
Everything is comprised in her title of Mother of the Son of God.  
How admirable are her deeds!  
With good reason the Church addresses her as the Mother of Mercy  
because she is also the Mother of Grace.*

The words of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke certainly apply to Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac: *“The disciples set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and curing diseases everywhere.”* We too are called to preach and teach and heal as Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac did. Just as the Daughters of Charity have been called to *“humility, simplicity and the love of the holy humanity of Jesus Christ,”* so

we too have been called to “*humility, simplicity, zeal and love for Jesus Christ*” and thus “*we hear the cry of all God’s children and especially of the poor and the abandoned.*” (IHM Constitutions Chapters 1:8; 2: 10)

Let us steep ourselves then into contemplative prayer, into the heart of our loving God who loves us *always* and *immensely*, so that we too may serve those who are excluded from both our church and civil society – migrants, LGBTQI+. persons of color, women, and our poor. To quote Vincent and Louise and Jesus, “*the poor are our masters and we are indeed their servants!*”

And so let us pray to our loving God  
to help us to see the truth in these words!