



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY ON THE FOURTH CENTENARY OF THE CHARISM

*Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 14 October 2017*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good day!

Thank you for your warm welcome, and thanks to the Superior General for introducing our encounter.

I greet you and together with you I thank the Lord for the 400 years of your charism. Saint Vincent generated a zeal for charity which has endured through the centuries: a passion that came from his heart. For this reason we have his relic here today: the heart of Saint Vincent. Today I would like to encourage you to continue this journey, offering you three simple verbs which I believe are very important for the Vincentian spirit, but also for Christian life in general: to adore, to welcome, to go.

To adore. Saint Vincent made countless invitations to cultivate the interior life and dedicate oneself to prayer which purifies and opens the heart. It is the compass for every day; it is like a manual for life; it is — he wrote — the “great book for the preacher”: only by praying does one draw from God the love to pour forth on the world; only by praying does one touch people’s hearts when one proclaims the Gospel (cf. Letter to A. Durand, 1658). But for Saint Vincent prayer is not only a duty and much less a collection of formulae. Prayer is pausing before God in order to be with him, simply dedicating oneself to him. This is the purest prayer, that which makes space for the Lord and for his praise, and nothing else: adoration.

Once discovered, adoration becomes indispensable, because it is pure intimacy with the Lord,

who gives peace and joy, and dissolves the stresses of life. Therefore, to someone who was under particular pressure, Saint Vincent also advised praying “without mental strain, to immerse themselves in God by a simple consideration with no attempt to gain His presence by emotional efforts, to abandon themselves to Him” (Letter to G. Pesnelle, 1659).

This is adoration: placing oneself before God, with respect, calmly and in silence, giving the first place to him, abandoning oneself trustingly. Then to ask that his Spirit may come to us and let what is ours go to him. In this way too, people in need, urgent problems, burdensome and difficult situations and problems become part of adoration, such that Saint Vincent asked that one “adore in God” even the reasons that one struggles to understand and accept (cf. Letter to F. Get, 1659). One who adores, who takes up the living wellspring of love cannot but be left, so to speak, “contaminated”. And he begins to behave with others as the Lord does with him: he becomes more merciful, more understanding, more willing; he overcomes his own rigidity and opens himself to others.

And thus we arrive at the second verb: *to welcome*. When we hear this word, we immediately think of something to do. But in reality welcoming is a more profound disposition: it requires not only making room for someone, but being a welcoming, available person, accustomed to giving oneself to others. As God does for us, so we do for others. Welcoming means putting things into perspective, setting right my way of thinking, understanding that life is not my private property and that time does not belong to me. It is a gradual parting from all that is mine: my time, my rest, my rights, my plans, my agenda. One who welcomes gives up the “me” and allows “you” and “us” to enter his life.

A welcoming Christian is a true man or woman of the Church, because the Church is Mother and a mother welcomes life and accompanies it. And as a child resembles its mother, bearing her features, so a Christian bears the traits of the Church. So a child truly faithful to the Church is one who is welcoming, who creates harmony and communion without lamenting, and sows peace with generosity, even if it is not reciprocated. Saint Vincent helps us to appreciate this ecclesial “dna” of welcoming, of openness, of communion, so that in our life “all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander [may] be put away from you, with all malice” (Eph 4:31).

The last verb is *to go*. Love is dynamic; it goes forth from itself. One who loves does not sit in an easy chair looking on, waiting for the advent of a better world, but gets up and goes with enthusiasm and simplicity. Saint Vincent said it well: “our vocation is to go, not just to one parish, not just to one diocese, but all over the world; and to do what? To set people’s hearts on fire, to do what the Son of God did. He came to set the world on fire in order to inflame it with His love (Conference of 30 May 1659). This vocation is always valid for everyone. It poses three questions to each of us: “Do I go to encounter others, as the Lord wishes? Do I carry this flame of charity everywhere, or do I remain locked in, warming myself at my hearth?”.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you because you are moving along the world's streets, as Saint Vincent would ask of you even today. I hope you do not stop, but continue, from adoration, to draw God's love each day, and to spread it in the world through the infectious good of charity, of openness, of harmony. I bless you all and the poor whom you encounter. And I ask you, please, that you kindly not forget to pray for me.