



SERVING IN HOPE MODULE V

Our Vincentian Rule

SESSION 5.2:

The Rule Captures our Spirituality

Learning Objectives

After completing this Session, you will have greater insight to:

- 1. Appreciate our call to draw close to Christ.**
- 2. Understand the spirituality of St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic.**
- 3. Recognize the Essential Virtues of the Society.**

OPENING PRAYER:

"We know that affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope. And this hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit..." (Romans 5:3-5)

INTRODUCTION:

(Each section is read slowly and reflectively, by different members.)

The Holy Spirit gave Frederic Ozanam and Vincent de Paul the gift of a clear vision of what it means to follow Jesus. Their understanding of who Jesus is and what we are to do as a Christian is a gift that is shared with us in our Rule. It is a blessing and a grace that has guided and guarded the Society for over 170 years. The Rule has been lived by ordinary men and women who have carried in their hearts and minds an extraordinary mission.

St. Vincent told the first Daughters of Charity: "Love your Rule and keep them as the road which God intends to lead you to Himself." Vincent knew that the Rule is the spiritual path to holiness. Therefore, the Rule is not just a written document, for indeed, the Rule embodies our heart and our soul. Therefore, we don't just read the Rule so that we can know it in our minds, we must meditate and pray with the Rule so that the words and spirit of our Founders can penetrate our hearts.

RULE, Part I-Section 2: Vincentian Spirituality and Vocation

Praying with the Rule let these words penetrate your heart:

As **Vincentians**, we draw close to Christ so that it is no longer we who love, but Christ who loves through us, and in our caring the poor can catch a glimpse of God's great love for them. We aspire to burn with the love of God as revealed by Christ as we deepen our own faith and fidelity. Indeed, being a Vincentian is a vocation for every moment of our lives, and it calls us to be more sensitive and caring in our family, work and leisure.

As **Vincentians**, we are called to journey together towards holiness, and this journey is made through visiting and dedicating ourselves to the poor.

The faith and courage of the poor often teach us how to live. We know the importance of attending the Conference/Council meetings in order to share fraternal spirituality which promotes a life of prayer and reflection.

As **Vincentians**, we are devoted to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary.

By meditating on our Vincentian experiences of service to those who are poor, we find a spiritual knowledge which transforms our concern into action and our compassion into practical and effective love.

Praying with the Rule, we ask... Are we inspired by Bl. Frederic to:

- seek to renew faith in Christ and in the humanizing effect of the teachings of the Church?
- envision the establishment of a network of charity and social justice encircling the world?
- attain holiness as a layperson through living the Gospel fully in all aspects of life?
- have a passion for truth, democracy and education?

Praying with the Rule, we ask...Are we inspired by St. Vincent to:

- love God, our Father, with the sweat of our brow and the strength of our arms?
- see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ?
- share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ?
- heed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?

Praying with the Rule, we ask...Do we practice our Essential Virtues:

Simplicity...by:

- our frankness, integrity, genuineness?

Humility...by:

- accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts and talents?
- knowing that all that God gives us is for others?
- knowing that we can achieve nothing without His grace?

Gentleness... by:

- our friendly assurance and invincible goodwill?
- our kindness and patience in our relationships?

Selflessness...by:

- dying to our ego through a life of self-sacrifice?
- sharing our time, possessions, talents and ourselves in a spirit of generosity?

Zeal...by:

- having a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

(Quietly read the following text)

DISCUSSION:

How are you inspired and challenged by Bl. Frederic, St. Vincent and our Essential Virtues?

CLOSING PRAYER:

O Lord, grant us the wisdom and integrity to faithfully live our renewed Rule of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Give us the grace to be committed to grow in holiness, to live in a community of faith and love, and to serve those who are poor and suffering. May all Vincentians be a visible sign of your boundless love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING: (For your prayer and reflection)

CHRISTOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF VINCENTIAN LEADERSHIP

Kathryn LaFleur, S.P.

"Who do you say that I am?" (Mt. 16:13-18)

When Jesus came to the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples this question: Who do people say that the Son of Man is? They replied, "Some say John the Baptizer, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "And you," he said to them, "who do you say that I am?" "You are the Messiah," Simon Peter answered, "the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blest are you, Simon son of John! No mere person has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father."

This question which Jesus posed to his disciples is a question that at some point challenges the heart and spirit of every Christian. For each of us it is a question that if entered into deeply may

call us to reevaluate our ministry, our leadership, our lifestyle; it might well bid us to a greater depth of conversion in our lives.

Indeed, for both Vincent de Paul and Frederic Ozanam, the personal lived reality of the unfolding mystery of the answer to Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" became the focus and force of their spirituality, and in turn of their mission.

The Christ that set Vincent on fire for the poor was Christ the evangelizer of the poor; the Christ announcing his public ministry in the words of Isaiah:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore, he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord."

(Luke 4:18)

St. Vincent's spirituality and mission flow from his contemplation of Christ the evangelizer, and it is here that Vincent sees a loving, trusting relationship with the Father, compassion for the poor, love for the sinner, and particular interior qualities that speak to his own heart.

It is Christ the evangelizer who came to liberate people from sin, from bondage of every type and to heal them spiritually and corporally that Vincent takes unto himself. The incarnate Jesus Christ of Vincent continues to live and to suffer in the poor. Vincent tells us: *"In serving the poor, you serve Jesus Christ... how true that is!"* And *"...the poor represent for you the person of Our Lord, who said: Whatever you do for one of these, the least of my brethren, I will consider it as done to me."*

In entering into the life and mission of Christ through prayer and lived experience, Vincent interiorized and held out to his followers certain qualities, interior attitudes or virtues of Christ the evangelizer that were to be hallmarks of their spirituality—the lived reality of their faith. In Christ, Vincent saw these virtues:

Simplicity: For Vincent, simplicity was his gospel. It was the virtue that Christ lived in word and deed. *"I am the way, the truth..."* In the Vincentian tradition it calls us to dedication to truth and to an avoidance of any duplicity, hence to singleness or purity of intention.

Humility: In his incarnation, and in his mission, Jesus exemplified the virtue of humility. Being God, he became like us in all things but sin. For us, humility calls us to recognize the gifts and talents that we have as coming from God, to acknowledge our weakness and to have a deep trust in God's Providence. Vincent lived this reality of humility and exhorted his followers to do the same. On the topic of motivations for humility, Vincent, in 1659 said to his

missionaries: *"But to honor the words and sentiments of our Lord, we shall merely say that it has been recommended to us by himself, "Learn of me who am humble."*

Meekness: For Vincent this virtue according to Father Maloney is the ability to handle anger either by suppressing it or by expressing it in a manner governed by love. It is approachability and affability. It combines gentleness and firmness. In Vincent's words:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ is the meek master of human beings and of angels. By the practice of this same virtue of meekness you will go to him and bring others to him as well."

Mortification: Jesus is the example of mortification. To follow Jesus, Vincent reminds us that we are called to take up our cross daily. We are called to die to ourselves, to empty ourselves as did Christ in service to others. We die to ourselves in whatever ways call us to leave everything to follow Jesus, to put on Christ. Vincent wrote to Antoine Durand: *"It is essential for you to empty yourself in order to put on Jesus Christ."*

Zeal: This is the virtue of missionary action. Vincent said, "If the love of God is the fire, zeal is its flame. If love is the sun, then zeal is its ray." Vincent writes: "Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God, but let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows."

As we pray and reflect on our renewed Rule for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, we see how Frederic Ozanam, and the Founding members, captured the heart and soul of the virtues recommended by St. Vincent, as we find in (2.5.1):

ESSENTIAL VIRTUES

Vincentians seek to emulate St. Vincent in the five virtues essential for promoting love and respect for the poor:

- **Simplicity** - frankness, integrity, genuineness.
- **Humility** - accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts, talents and charism, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His grace.
- **Gentleness** - friendly assurance and invincible goodwill, which mean kindness, sweetness and patience in our relationship with others.

- **Selflessness** - dying to our ego with a life of self-sacrifice; members share their time, their possessions, their talents and themselves in a spirit of generosity.
- **Zeal** - a passion for the full flourishing and eternal happiness of every person.

The question Jesus posed to his disciples, *"Who do you say I am?"*, continues to be asked today. Who is Christ for each of us? Who will continue his mission of evangelization? Will we have the courage to answer with our lives as did St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic: *"Here I am Lord, I come to do your will."*?