



SERVING IN HOPE MODULE III

Our Vincentian Heritage

SESSION 3.6:

The Vision of Charity

Learning Objectives

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

- 1. Appreciate the “Vision of Charity” that is rooted in our Vincentian heritage.**
- 2. Identify the components of our “Vision of Charity.”**
- 3. Understand the “Vision of Charity” for the Vincentian Family.**

OPENING PRAYER: (Together)

"If I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything, I have to feed the poor and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not put on airs; it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13: 2-23)

INTRODUCTION: "Unifying Elements in the Vincentian Family" by Benjamin Romo, C.M.

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

We can describe our Vincentian heritage as a "Vision of Charity," a style of Christian life in the Church and in the world. It is a way of being.

It is not something that one adds to the person. It is not a garment that one puts on or takes off according to circumstances, opportunities or determined times. It is rather to live as Jesus, 24 hours a day. Our "Vision of Charity" is a gift that fashions and marks our lifestyle, our relationships and our actions, and it consists of:

1. Vincentians know Jesus Christ, Evangelizer of the Poor:

There is nothing more important in the spiritual experience of the Vincentian than the experience of Jesus, Evangelizer of the Poor. This is the foundation of the Vincentian "Vision of Charity" by which we discover and follow Jesus, eyes fixed on him who lived close to the poor, listened to them, helped and pardoned them, gave them to eat, journeyed with them and proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was for them.

2. Vincentians love Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ, and they serve those who are poor "corporally and spiritually":

Jesus in the poor and the poor in Jesus are the two supports of the Vincentian heart and its "Vision of Charity." A passion for Jesus commits us to an effective compassion toward the poor. To Vincentians, the tough and crude poor are the suffering sacrament of the Lord. That is why the poor, their homes and dwellings, the streets and hospitals are "holy Vincentian places," where the poor are served wholistically - "corporally and spiritually."

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

3. Vincentians serve the poor by personal contact:

In our "Vision of Charity" one serves the poor through direct personal contact. We are Vincentians because we are with the poor, and we know them personally; programs for assistance are not abstract but are developed after recognizing the wounds of the poor.

4. Vincentians have an affective, effective, inventive and communicative love:

Love is a deeply affective compassion that must become effective service carried out in joy. St. Vincent tells us that our love must be "inventive to infinity." Vincentians see and find resources, organize and invent forms of charity that become the gift of life to the poor. Vincentians are enthusiastic for this work of God, and they want to invite others to this holy and urgent work. Now, as in the time of St. Vincent, we can say that the poor who do not know where to go or what to do, the ones whose suffering gets worse every day, these are our "burden and sorrow," and the charity of Jesus impels us, sends us to serve them.

5. Vincentians allow themselves to be evangelized by the poor:

The poor come and deliver us from a life too centered on ourselves. They heal our wounds produced by our middleclass outlook, our near-sightedness. They give a sense of meaning to our lives. To draw near to the poor is to draw near to God.

6. Vincentians are missionary:

Being missionary signifies going out to meet others. St. Vincent called us to go where the needs are the greatest and where the poor are the "poorest and most destitute." Availability and mobility are the fundamental attitudes of our "Vision of Charity."

Pause in silence for reflection - underline the words/phrases that touched you - make notes in the space provided.

DISCUSSION:

Which element of the "Vision of Charity" is most meaningful to you?

CLOSING PRAYER: (Together)

Lord Jesus, deepen our "Vision of Charity," make us responsive to the Christian calling to seek and to find the forgotten, the suffering or the deprived so that we may bring them your love. Help us to be generous with our time, our possessions and ourselves in this mission of charity. Perfect in us your love and teach us how to live our Vincentian Heritage in faithfulness and love. Amen

ENRICHMENT READING:

(For your prayer and reflection before the next session.)

"LOVE IS INVENTIVE TO INFINITY": Vincentian Visioning By Gertrude Foley, S.C.

Is there any history more depressing than the history of the poor? Poverty, when it goes on and on and on, grinds away the human spirit. Poverty, when it goes on and on, dehumanizes the poor person and de-faces the poor in our midst. Poverty, when it goes on and on, generates still other social evils, and threatens us all with hopelessness and despair.

Vincentian Family Network: A World Wide Web

Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M. has inspired us with the challenge: "What a powerful force we could have by networking the various branches of the Vincentian Family, and those "infected" by the Vincentian spirit! What a tremendous impact we could have on the lives of the poor." The thought of networking is exciting! The potential synergy of the gifts and talents of all those "infected" by the Vincentian spirit inspires hope and awe.

We can envision what impact we could have on the lives of the poor, when in fact, we have a resource that our founders: St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac, St. Elizabeth Seton and Bl. Frederic Ozanam did not have. We have the potential for a "world wide web," not of electronic media but of men and women already aware, organized, equipped, and involved in service to the poor of our times throughout the world.

Nevertheless, we share something of our founders' experience: the questions, the doubts, the temptations to despair as they faced the enormity of this challenge. Certainly, we will ask how can we make a network happen? However, we will go on to ask how it is possible to look without despair at the seemingly endless destructive potential of poverty? How is it possible

never to give up on projects and programs that seem to be such weak attacks on such immense problems? Make no mistake about it, our founders had these same questions, doubts and temptations.

Our Vincentian Vision

Our founders generated the remarkable Vincentian Vision: the charism of service that is organized, practical, flexible and adaptable. This apostolic tradition is holistic in its emphasis on both physical and spiritual assistance. Deep in their hearts and spirits, our founders were seized by a profound truth. They listened and heard deeply the Good News of salvation addressed first to them. In their hearing, they then recognized and embraced the mutual identification that must exist among Jesus, the poor, and the servants of the poor.

Vincentians must clothe themselves with the spirit of Jesus, which is essentially a spirit of charity, compassion and tenderness; we must conform our actions and intentions to Jesus, especially in his commitment to the poor. But we would trivialize our charism, our Vincentian Vision, if we limit it to mean only works of service. Unless we are as passionate as our founders were to grow daily into this identification with Jesus and his mission, we cannot claim the name Vincentian.

Our founders felt empowered and responsible in putting on the mission of Jesus rather than powerless and guilty in the face of what have always looked like overwhelming odds. With intrepid, courageous love, a love that was effective-not merely affective, a love that was "inventive to infinity," they calmly invented new ways to address the urgency of need that they saw all around them.

Prayerful calm attentiveness

The Vincentian apostolates of charity emerged from St. Louise and St. Vincent's "prayerful and calm attentiveness" to the revelation of the urgent needs of the most abandoned of the sick, the most abandoned of the uneducated poor, the most abandoned of the aged, the most abandoned of the mentally ill, the most abandoned of the orphaned, the homeless and the hungry.

This "prayerful calm attentiveness" was handed down to Bl. Frederic, Bl. Rosalie Rendu, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and down to us today. The poor were not faceless and nameless; they were men, women, and children right in their own neighborhoods and parishes. The poor were

the children of God, and so the servant of the poor had to find ways to bring them closer to this God who loved them. They did not do it all at once and they did not do it all by themselves.

God's Providence

The Church of Vatican II offers us the right moment for the Vincentian Vision. The Vincentian network among the Ladies of Charity, Vincentian Priests and Brothers, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Charity and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul providentially calls us to envision the synergy that is possible in our efforts for those who are poorest in the world.

Standing in the empowering identification with Jesus and with the poor, clear-sighted and clearheaded about the size of the challenge before us, let us employ every talent, skill, and strategy in our power to focus this synergy on behalf of those who are poor. Go to the poor in the Vincentian way: start small with what is at hand and possible, seek good advice, actively listen, wait in discernment, then once you know what God's will is - act! And we can be sure of it: God our Providence, will go with us to create the future. ***And so, we must ask our-selves: How can we make the Vincentian network happen?***