

“Charity is love received and given. It is ‘grace.’ Its source is the wellspring of the Father’s love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ and poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>i</sup> As recipients of God’s love, we are called to love others in return. We are called to share God’s grace with others through corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The Patron Saint of Catholic Charity is Saint Vincent DePaul whose feast day we celebrate on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September. As a young priest, he was captured by Turkish pirates and sold into slavery. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and that is exactly what Fr. Vincent did. Having received love from God, Vincent shared it with the man who bought him as a slave. After two years of captivity, Fr. Vincent converted his owner to the Christian faith and together they escaped to freedom.<sup>ii</sup>

Fr. Vincent also received love from the people he served. They had a profound impact on his life as a priest. Although as a priest he was inclined to live a life of privilege, “he underwent a change of heart after hearing the confession of a dying peasant. Moved with compassion for the poor, he began undertaking missions and founding institutions to help them both materially and spiritually.”<sup>iii</sup> Nor did he forget his own poverty as a slave. He ministered to convicts who were often treated worse than slaves.

There is a limit to what one man can do. Vincent de Paul was inspired to call others into service through the Congregation of Missions (known today as Vincentian Priests) and through the Daughters of Charity in collaboration with the future Saint Louise de Marillac. Working collaboratively, they cared for abandoned children, helped with a hospice for the elderly, and aided 40,000 poor people with a network to help with lodging and work. He also worked to help refugees and free those sold into slavery in foreign lands.<sup>iv</sup>

True charity is more than rescuing people from hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases, and unjust social conditions. Charity rooted in the Gospel recognizes the dignity of every human person:

- In the words of Pope Benedict: “Man does not develop through his own powers, nor can development simply be handed to him... Development requires a transcendent vision of the person, it needs God: without him, development is either denied, or entrusted exclusively to man, who falls into the trap of thinking he can bring about his own salvation, and ends up promoting a dehumanized form of development. Only through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature, to recognize the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discover him or her and to mature in a love that ‘becomes concern and care for the other.’”<sup>v</sup>
- In the words of Saint Vincent DePaul: “A doctor who keeps a person from becoming ill deserves more merit than one who cures him.”<sup>vi</sup>

Love of God gave Fr. Vincent the energy and the drive to serve the poor. In humbly serving the poor, Fr. Vincent saw God in the face of each person he served. “Lavishly he gives to the poor, his generosity shall endure forever” (Ps 112:9).

---

<sup>i</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas In Veritate*, #5

<sup>ii</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-vincent-de-paul-607

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas In Veritate*, #18

<sup>vi</sup> kidadl.com/articles/st-vincent-de-paul-quotes-from-the-generous-french-priest