

THE PASTOR'S CORNER

SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING NECESSARY

It is one of those happy coincidences that the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in our “ordinary” liturgical year falls on the 27th of September which would require normally the celebration of the memorial of Saint Vincent de Paul. If we look to the saints’ (besides looking to one another) example and teaching to get a better sense of Christ’s presence among us, this priest (who lived from 1581 to 1660) cannot be ignored, even when his celebration is bypassed this Sunday. As the founder of Catholic confraternities working with the poor, he has much to say to us today.

The place of the poor in the life of the Church cannot be overlooked. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, wrote “We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them.” It’s not hard to find others in the Church’s life who have given us examples of service to the poor. St. Peter Claver, a contemporary of St. Vincent de Paul, whose memorial we celebrated on September 9th, inspires priests and the faithful yearly in the breviary in a letter recounting the story of their missions of mercy to the African slaves brought in chains on slave ships to Columbia. St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta eventually created a world-wide network of religious women who cared for the poorest of the poor after she had found a dying man in the gutter and brought him in. St. Jeanne Jugan, the foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor (you may have read of them in the news lately), began their work when she rescued an elderly woman who was homeless. Mother Rose Hawthorne, the daughter of the American author Nathaniel Hawthorne and a convert to the Catholic faith, found her calling when she took in an Irish woman who had been evicted from her home in the tenements of New York City because her face was ravaged with skin cancer. She started the Hawthorne Dominicans who care for the indigent suffering from terminal cancer. We can take especial pride that our namesake of our combined parish, St. Marianne Cope, recognized in the lepers of Molokai and Hawaii a way to find Christ in the least of his brethren (cf. Matthew 25:40).

In each of these women and men, and with many others, the necessity of a relationship with the poor to come to know the “whole Christ” must be heeded. St. Vincent de Paul’s voice is timely for us in that the heroic works of charity for which he became known began in the parish. Despite an early privileged and comfortable life as a priest serving in the courts of royalty and the wealthy, a six-month period as a parish priest on the outskirts of

Paris opened up a new path in his devotion to the Lord. Already influenced by the writings of St. Francis de Sales’ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he learned early on of a family in the parish that were in great need when all its members had fallen ill. The immediate response of the parish, providing more help than was needed, to create a confraternity of parishioners who would commit themselves to take turns to help the sick poor of the parish. From then on, the group, known at first as “Servants of the Poor” energized other parish communities in the area to do the same. They were formally recognized by the establishment of a Rule of fundamental principles which sought “to see Christ in the poor and to become holy through the practice of a personal charity that takes a person spiritually and materially into the very hovels of the poor.” (*Butler’s Lives of the Saints*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1999, vol. IX, page 248). He and his followers formed countless *Charites* dedicated to helping the poor and were known later as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Religious congregations to Vincentian Sisters and Priests were also founded by him.

For the last year and a half, our Star Youth Group and the Knights of Columbus have been providing on several occasions meals and supplies for the homeless poor of Newburgh, mostly through Newburgh Ministries. The need, we’ve been told, is considerable and those served have been very grateful. Because of that, our parish advisory council and our finance committee have decided that the parish can and should help the neediest who are “at our front door” in Newburgh and those who live among us. We have realized that we can never fully encounter Christ in the parish and be a sign of Christ’s presence for others, without attending to that “inseparable bond between our faith and the poor.” To that end, we have recently applied to the Cabrini Foundation for a grant (of \$100,000) to create a parish outreach to the poor that will be centered in the old parish convent and renamed the St. Marianne Cope Outreach Center. We are hopeful and ask for your prayers for its success and your involvement, that we will be able to continue the work already done and find new ways to serve Christ. There will be something for everyone to do. Whether the grant is awarded or not, your parish leadership has discerned this to be a direction for the parish that the Lord wills and I am confident it will make the parish stronger and more relevant to the spiritually poor in our midst who don’t readily believe in the possibility of finding real grace!