

Homily: Monday, June 27, 2016

Readings:

Amos 2:6-10, 13-16

Matthew 8:18-22

For these past twelve years as superior general, I have spoken with you on many different occasions. Each year I have written an Advent and Lenten message and I have addressed letters to you and to all the members of Vincentian Family on significant feast days and on other important days in our history. There is not much that I could say that you have not already heard. Therefore, today, in my penultimate homily as superior general, I would like to continue to do that which I have attempted to do during my time as superior general, namely, I want to encourage and animate you, the Missionaries of the Congregation, to give witness to this Church that goes forth.

Is not that what Jesus did? In today's gospel Jesus responds to various individuals who want to follow him. Jesus makes it clear that such a commitment will demand sacrifice and will also limit their availability to engage in other activities. In other words, there is a certain unconditional nature implied in Christian discipleship and therefore, one must avoid allowing family ties and other obligations to distract one from proclaiming the Good News.

Go forth, Jesus says, go forth and proclaim the Gospel; feed the hungry, give drink to those who are thirsty, clothe the naked, care for the infirm, visit those imprisoned, welcome the stranger into your midst, provide for the poor, the widows and orphans (cf. Matthew 25:31-46).

Go forth, Jesus says, go forth and proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free and proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord (cf. Luke 4:18-19).

Why are you still standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus has been taken up from you into heaven. Therefore, go forth, and proclaim the good news that Jesus is in your midst (cf. Acts 1:11).

Did not Vincent do the same? *God is telling us, Vincent said, go forth, you Missionaries, go forth! What? You are still here and there are poor souls waiting for you, people whose salvation*

depends perhaps on your preaching and catechizing! (CCD:XI:121)¹. Go forth and visit a chain gang, you will find God there. Go forth and look after those little children, you will find God there. Go forth into the homes of poor men and women and you will find God there (CCD:IX:199).

Did not Frederic Ozanam do the same? Let us go forth and look after the people who have too many needs and not enough rights, who demand with reason a fuller share in public affairs, security in work and safeguards against poverty ... Let us go forth and climb the stairs to the poor person's room, let us sit by their bedside and feel the same cold that pierces them, let us listen as they share the secrets of their lonely hearts and troubled minds².

Go forth, however, is not an end in itself. In fact, going forth is the first step in a life-long process of developing a more intimate relationship with God and of strengthening the bonds of solidarity with our brothers and sisters, with our lords and masters, with all of creation.

What more, then, does this going forth involve? Since the time that Robert Maloney was superior general, we have become involved in various international missions. While this has been a recent development in the Congregation, nevertheless we can trace its roots back to the time of Vincent de Paul who sent the Missionaries to Madagascar, Ireland and Scotland, Poland, Italy, Tunis, Algiers. Yes, we are a Congregation composed of individual Provinces, but we are first and foremost an international congregation, and that reality characterizes the way in which we go forth.

What else does this going forth involve? This fundamental stance of our Congregation means that you and I are willing to get involved in the daily life of those people who are marginalized and living on the peripheries of society. We do not, however, act or minister alone. Rather we go forth and minister as members of a large Vincentian Family. We go forth and minister from a systemic change approach. That is why I have taken the time to dialogue with the larger Vincentian Family in all my visits to the different Provinces. I have absolutely no doubt that as a Vincentian Family we have the potential to transform the world. Furthermore, I have become more grounded in that conviction as a result of my conversations with you, as a result of my

¹ VINCENT DE PAUL, *Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translators: Helen Marie Law, DC (Vol. 1), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 1-14), James King, CM (Vol. 1-2), Francis Germovnik, CM (Vol. 1-8, 13a-13b [Latin]), Esther Cavanagh, DC (Vol. 2), Ann Mary Dougherty, DC (Vol. 12); Evelyne Franc, DC (Vol. 13a-13b), Thomas Davitt, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Glennon E. Figge, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), John G. Nugent, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]), Andrew Spellman, CM (Vol. 13a-13b [Latin]); edited: Jacqueline Kilar, DC (Vol. 1-2), Marie Poole, DC (Vol. 2-14), Julia Denton, DC [editor-in-chief] (Vol. 3-10, 13a-13b), Paule Freeburg, DC (Vol. 3), Mirian Hamway, DC (Vol. 3), Elinor Hartman, DC (Vol. 4-10, 13a-13b), Ellen Van Zandt, DC (Vol. 9-13b), Ann Mary Dougherty (Vol. 11, 12 and 14); annotated: John W. Carven, CM (Vol. 1-14); New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 121; future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials [CCD] followed by the volume number, followed by the page number, for example, CCD:XI:121.

² Louis Baunard, *Ozanam in his Correspondence*, translated by a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Ireland, Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, Dublin, 1925, p. 279

awareness of the reality that we journey along a common path, as a result of sharing the Word and breaking Bread with you.

Let us continue to break the Bread and share the Bread during this celebration of the Eucharist and let us also break that same Bread as we encounter Christ in our brothers and sisters who are marginalized and living on the peripheries of society.