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The Eternal Weight of Glory**

Your Eminence, Cardinal Krol [*Archbishop of Philadelphia*]

Your Excellencies, Bishop Graham, Bishop Lohmüller and
Bishop Schulte [*Auxiliary Bishops of Philadelphia*]

Mother Rogé [*Superioress General of the Daughters of Charity*] and my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

A few months before St. Vincent died, he experienced the pain of losing through death two of his closest collaborators in the work of preaching the Gospel to the poor and of alleviating their sufferings. On the 14th February 1660 St. Vincent wrote: "It has pleased God to deprive us of the good M. Portail." Then just a month later God invited St. Louise de Marillac to enter into the joy of her Lord. Writing to one of his Confreres after the death of M. Portail St. Vincent remarked:

He died as he had lived – in the good use of suffering, in the practice of virtue, in the desire of honoring God, and of passing his days, as Our Lord, in the accomplishment of His Will. He was one of the first two Confreres to work on

**Homily preached by the Very Rev. Richard McCullen, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, at the Funeral Mass for Father William M. Slattery, C.M., in the Shrine Chapel of the Miraculous Medal, St. Vincent's Seminary, Germantown, Philadelphia, August 14, 1982.

the missions, and he always contributed to the other apostolates of the Company to which he rendered notable services. The Company would indeed have lost a great deal by his death, were it not for the fact that God has arranged all things for the best, enabling us to find our well-being even when we thought we were suffering loss. There is reason to hope that this servant of God will be even more useful in heaven than on earth. I ask you, Father, to offer for his soul the usual suffrages. (*Coste: Vol. VIII, no. 3058*)

That restrained but warm tribute of St. Vincent to his closest collaborator and friend in the Community would sit very easily on him who was to become St. Vincent's nineteenth successor and to whom we are saying farewell today.

As St. Vincent watched Father Slattery drawing to the end of his days on earth, he must have nodded his head often in heaven and said: "Yes, he is dying as he had lived in the good use of suffering and in the practice of virtue." For Father Slattery's sufferings in these last few months — and indeed these last few years — were plain to all. His stooped form, his failing eyesight, his arthritic pains and latterly his difficulty in breathing were sufferings of which he spoke little, but which required no medical eye to discern. What we did discern was his good use of them. "Cheerfulness," wrote Cardinal Newman, "is a Christian duty." It was a measure of the deeply Christian character of Father Slattery that he remained unfailingly cheerful even when the weight of suffering stooped and bent him low.

A number of his Confreres will cherish the memory of him sitting in the Community oratory here in Germantown with the Divine Office in one hand and a large magnifying glass in the other laboriously praying the morning office before the arrival of the Community, because, as he would

say with a cheerful smile, he was not able now to read as well as the Community. Some of the physical sufferings of Father Slattery these last few years and his uncomplaining acceptance of them were plain to see.

Perhaps not so evident, however, were the spiritual and moral sufferings of earlier decades of his life. These were not evident, because he was not wont to speak of them. What we do know is that he rose magnificently to a call which St. Vincent sets forth in the Rule of his Congregation that all should be prepared to renounce one's attachment to one's country and offices and persons when obedience and the interests of the Community demand it. Father Slattery's obedience was, what St. Paul would describe as, "the obedience of Faith." (*Rom XVI, 26*) We know, too, that his was a gentle spirit and that the cost of such renouncement must have at time weighted heavily upon him.

Such suffering was not sustained, however, in any stoical way. Stoics are not cheerful, and Father William Slattery was. We observed in him what St. Vincent observed in Father Portail: "a desire of honoring God and of passing his days, as Our Lord, in the accomplishment of His Will." The accomplishment of God's Will was something central to Father Slattery's thinking and living. Some of us here will recall the intensity and sincerity with which in a few short phrases he spoke on this subject at the General Assembly in 1968. The question for him at that time was not whether he should or should not continue in the office of Superior General. Humbly he sought and serenely he accepted what to him was the manifest Will of God. And he was at peace. And he became in the confessionals of this church a minister of God's peace and serenity to hundreds of people, until his physical strength would no longer carry him to this church which from the days of his youth he loved so much.

With the Perpetual Novena in this church and the Novena Band his name will always be associated, so much did he encourage these two apostolates. The encouragement he gave to the Novena Band which works under the aegis of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal was an indication not only of his devotion to St. Vincent's ideal of preaching the Gospel to the poor, but also of his personal devotion to the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church. It was at once touching and revealing, when visiting him these last few months, to find only one personal object on his little bedside table — his rosary.

No doubt his long association with the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity in the Rue du Bac, Paris, must have deepened his attachment to her who was conceived without the stain of original sin. It was significant that he should have been elected Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity during the very month when the Church canonized that faithful servant of Our Lady — Catherine Labouré. During the twenty-one years that were to follow that event the Daughters of Charity throughout the world were to come to know something of the personal holiness of Father Slattery, who became for them as well as for his Confreres in the Congregation of the Mission a sign of charity and a stimulus to it. By the grace of God he was enabled as Superior General "to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with his God." (*Micah IV, 6*)

"There is reason to hope," concluded St. Vincent, in his reflection on the life of Father Portal, "that this servant of God will be even more useful to us in heaven than on earth. I ask you, Father, to offer for his soul the usual suffrages."

We recognized great spiritual strength in the ascetic form of Father Slattery. For many years now, both inside

and outside St. Vincent's two Communities, a certain "*fama sanctitatis*" or reputation for remarkable holiness attached itself to the name and person of Father Slattery. Now he has been called to sustain what St. Paul in the second reading of today's Mass refers to as the "the eternal weight of glory" — the *pondus gloriae*. (*II Cor. IV, 17*)

Even at the close of a long life distinguished by suffering uncomplainingly endured, distinguished, too, by fidelity to the ideals of Jesus Christ as presented by St. Vincent, a man may yet not be strong enough to sustain "the eternal weight of glory," which the face-to-face vision of God brings with it. St. Vincent recognized that fact, and appealed for the prayers of the Community, so that what might be lacking in the strength to one member could be supplied by the strength and prayers of the others. This is what we are now asking, through this most efficacious of all prayers, the Mass, for this servant of God, Father William Slattery, who will undoubtedly be even more useful to us in heaven than he was on earth.

May this Province of Philadelphia, which gave him as Superior General to St. Vincent's two Communities throughout the world, be the first to experience the help of his prayers in heaven.

May God rest you, Father Slattery, may God rest you — and until we meet again — good-bye.