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“Singing Vincent de Paul’s Song” 100 Years in the Curitiba Province

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Fr. Robert Maloney, the 22nd successor to St. Vincent de Paul, visited the Curitiba Province from 1-5 July 2003 on the occasion of the centenary of the arrival of the first Polish missionaries to Brazil. His ministry, according to our Constitutions, consists in giving continuity to the mission of our Founder and maintaining the charism of St. Vincent so that it may always be alive in the Church.

Fr. Maloney stood before the orchestra, opened the score and announced: *Let’s sing the song of St. Vincent de Paul today.* Later, in the homily for the Vincentian Family on 2 July, he said: *I ask you to celebrate with me ... not just by remembering St. Vincent, but by making his holiness your own, by singing his song.* Afterwards he pointed out the words and the music of the song:

1. “Sing deeply spiritual song.”

It seems like a well-known refrain, but it needs to be lived out well. He said to the Vincentian Family: *If we learn to live in the presence of the Lord, to ponder his word, and to love him deeply, then we will surely sing a deeply spiritual song in life.* He pointed out certain notes: *Spend some time each day with the Lord in silent, meditative prayer.*

Following the arrangement of the composition, on 3 July, he “challenged” the confreres of the province to be “doers of the word” by playing seven notes of the musical scale: organizing collaborative projects with the members of the Vincentian Family in the service of the poor; editing a Vincentian Prayer Book adapted to our own culture; using the *Practical Guide for the Local Superior*; promoting MISEVI; forming the advisors of our Vincentian lay groups, especially youth groups; preparing well for the Provincial and General Assemblies; and promoting vocations.

He repeated his message several times. To the Vincentian students he said: *During the time of formation, make the person of Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor, the center of your lives.* To the students of the Vincentian Institute of Philosophy he insisted: *These years [of study] are a very important time in your lives, a unique opportunity to focus your time and energy on eating the word of God ... making it a part of yourself. Ongoing formation in the mystery of God must be a part of the life of every one of us. Only in this way will learn to say*

with the Apostle Thomas: *My Lord and my God*, and to say to others: *Let us go along with him, to die with him.*

In the centenary homily on 4 July, in Tomás Coelho, he said: *I ask you to let the Lord touch you, and me, on this anniversary.* Let him touch our eyes so our vision might be broader; our ears that we may hear the words of the gospel and the cry of the poor; our tongues that we may strengthen our brothers in the faith; our affectivity that we may be able to express our love for others in a mature and constructive way; our hearts that we may accept his love for us.

On 5 July, the Superior General suggested to the Daughters of Charity a higher range, more like first and second sopranos: *Nourish your friendship and love deeply.* Nourish your friendship with God, your friendship with the poor, your friendship the other Vincentian groups, your mutual friendship. Love with creative love, in the higher ranges, raising yourselves up as though on eagle's wings: respond to the call of the Vincentian Family with formation, prayer and practical service; form youth groups; create a vocation culture based on a positive image of yourselves and of your vocation, with the support of the community, by way of personal contact, by an invitation to *come and see* and prayer for vocations.

2. “Sing a liberation song.”

The invitation to the Vincentian Family was the invitation to be the echo of a new sound: a question of perceiving and carrying out new harmonies. *Be a bearer of good news. Bring the Spirit of the Lord with you wherever you go.* But one must be attentive to the chords: Be a bearer of good news. Bring the Spirit of the Lord with you wherever you go: *In the presence of a person filled with God's Spirit, people come alive. They dream new dreams and see new visions. The Spirit of the Lord inflames something in their hearts. They begin to hear the deepest voices of reality. They begin to see the possibility of a new heaven and a new earth. They become freed from the inner bonds that hold them back and become eager to pour out their lives with a new and deeper generosity.* In this time of historical ups and downs, of chaos and darkness, he has urged us all: *do not be afraid.*

To the students he left this refrain: *Allow the Lord to set you free.* Jesus wants his followers to rejoice with the *glorious freedom of the children of God.* Free, by means of your vows to be at the service of the poor, to be mobile and flexible, to be available. Freedom which implies a love at once *reckless but disciplined.* *Search for and find the crucified Lord today in his crucified people and live in solidarity with him in them.*

3. “Let your song be not just a solo, but a harmonious and mighty chorus.”

Sing with one another in prayer. Sing with one another in action. Let the Vincentian Family be, in a world influenced by individualism, a sign of how important it is to work and pray together. Let it be a harmonious symphony, a song of service, a liberation song, a wake-up song in the world. Join the poor in your song. Join young people in it too. Let it be a rousing, beautiful, melodic hymn, and let it be a mighty chorus resounding to the glory of God and ringing out as good news in the ears of the poor.

The Superior General reminded our Provincial Council that the future of the Church lies in the action of the laity. They are part of the essence of the Church. Our charism should be shared with the laity. We should work diligently for the formation of the laity, not only because of the shortage of vocations, but above all, because it is their right.

The orchestra members as well as the general public had their grandest moment when they were invited to dream new compositions, new chords, new symphonies in the way the 12 apostles or the first Polish missionaries in southern Brazil dreamed. And so, *as we celebrate this anniversary it is important for us to dream too.* Dream that the chains of poverty are broken, that the blind eyes of the world are opened to the hungry, that the silent ones who suffer oppression shout for joy because they are experiencing a real liberation. With regard to the Congregation, dream that our life makes known the Good News, that our community life is a sign of the Kingdom that is within reach, that our prayer be such that young people wish to be part of it, that our charism take root in new missions and new countries. *So our dreams must become true in life ... Wherever the Lord goes, wherever his missionaries arrive, wherever the Kingdom of God penetrates the lives of people they are renewed.*

And this was the final note: *Dream bold, adventurous dreams today as members of the Vincentian Family and ask the Lord to renew the heart of each of us so that we might be courageous as missionaries in making those dreams come true.*

4. Facts and Impressions

The Superior General's arrival was eagerly awaited, but he arrived on stage with the lights turned low. He was supposed to arrive at 11:10 p.m. on a flight from Sao Paulo to Curitiba, but he did not land until 3:00 in the morning. Because of thick fog the Curitiba airport was closed. The flight was redirected to Joinville, about 100 kilometers from Curitiba. The Visitor and the Provincial Treasurer went to pick him up by car. After almost 30 hours of travel the curtains of the stage were opened.

This particular spectacle had a kind of rehearsal ahead of time. The centenary of the arrival of the first Polish missionaries in Southern Brazil was opened on 25 October 2002, on the occasion of a CLAPVI meeting and with the presence of the Vicar General, Fr. José Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza.

The jubilee was celebrated on 4 July when the first four Polish missionaries (Frs. Boleslau Bayer, Francisco Chylaszuk, Hugo Dylla and Brother Alexandre Wengrzen) established themselves in the Polish immigrant community of Tomás Coelho area (Araucária, Parana). The Superior General, Fr. Maloney, presided at the Eucharist, which was concelebrated by the three Vincentian bishops of the Province: Domingos Wisniewski, Ladislau Biernaski and Izidoro Kosinski, as well as many confreres of the province. Frs. Eli Chaves, Ari Alves dos Santos, Arkadiusz Zakręta and Antonio González, the Visitors of Rio, Fortaleza, Poland and Venezuela respectively were also present. The Daughters of Charity and the coordinators of the branches of the Vincentian Family also participated.

Representatives of the 24 parishes that encompass the 430 communities attended by the Curitiba Province had their opportunity to celebrate the centenary on Sunday, 6 July, at a very festive mass presided by the Archbishop of Curitiba, Pedro M. Fedalto.

The Superior General gave a number of conferences to the confreres of Curitiba and also to the seminarians of the three Brazilian provinces who came together for the National Gathering of Vincentian Students. He celebrated the Eucharist with the Vincentian Family and with the students and faculty of the Vincentian Institute of Philosophy. He dedicated a day to the Daughters of Charity. He also unveiled the plaque commemorating his visit at the new buildings of the Vincentian Institute of Philosophy and he inaugurated the Centenary Memorial.

Unfortunately he could not be present for the performance of the complete work. Other people in other places awaited him. Just as his arrival was discreet, so was his departure. For at the same hour that Sunday, the Archbishop, with the participation of the communities, was celebrating the Jubilee Mass. But his presence in the partial performance of the work was more than enough to satisfy the audience and make them wish for his return.

(JOSEPH CUMMINS, C.M., translator)