

The Paschal Mystery in the lives of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac

When we look at the crucifix we see the suffering, mocked, scourged abandoned, rejected and dying Jesus who gave His life in love and for love. As Christians and members of the Vincentian family we believe His crucifixion and dying on the cross on Good Friday is not the end of the story. Jesus rose to new life on Easter Sunday and it is the Risen Jesus that we meet in prayer, reflection and in the sacramental life of the Church. Day to day encounters in our own lives and with persons who are poor enable us to meet Jesus who is still suffering today. He suffers in persons and situations where there is oppression, injustice, hunger and poverty.

The cross was no stranger in the lives of the Patrons of the Vincentian Partnership of Social Justice. Margaret Avlward, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, St Louise de Marillac and St Vincent de Paul learned to walk in the footsteps of Jesus daily taking up their crosses to follow Him.¹ They did so with a courageous spirit knowing that Jesus was with them until the end of time.² When St. Vincent meditated on the Passion he admired the humility and meekness of the Lord. He internalised these values in his life and encouraged disciples that they die to self so that they might live to God. In her call to follow the suffering Jesus, St. Louise sought two specific qualities of Jesus-His desire to do God's will and His trusting abandonment to the Providence of God. This means to carrying our individual crosses are through mortification and self-denial. Therefore love and the cross are synonymous. For Jesus there was utter renouncement because there was utter love. It is only when the disciple gives him/herself in like manner that God will be able to make the best use of us. Then we will be the faithful instruments of His love for all those to whom he sends us and especially for persons who are poor. It cost them not less than everything as Bonhoeffer reminds us.³

Jesus in His life experienced the weight of the Cross. His ultimate poverty was the poverty of His Cross. He knew abandonment, rejection and isolation. As Jesus sought to do the will of His Father during His public ministry the Pharisees challenged Him and accused Him of Blasphemy.⁴ They continually tried to catch him out and we read that many times He slipped through the crowd and walked away from them as His life was in danger.⁵ In the Garden of Gethsemane He knew the pain of loneliness when the apostles fell asleep.⁶ Peter denied Him.⁷ Judas betrayed Him.⁸ Thomas doubted Him.⁹ On the road to Calvary Jesus accepted the Cross He was given. He fell under it three times finally He was crucified on it. He felt the pain and the abandonment as he cried out to His father "into your hands I commend my spirit."¹⁰

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¹ Mk 8: 34-35

² Mt 28:20

³ Bonhoeffer, D. Costing not less than everything

⁴ Jn 9:16

⁵ Mk 12:12

⁶ Mt 26: 36-46

⁷ Mk 14: 66-72

⁸ Mk 14:44

⁹ Jn 20:25

¹⁰ Jn 19:30