



# JUST.NOW

September - October 2010 Justice Briefing

This year The Vincentian Family celebrates the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the deaths of St. Vincent and St. Louise. As the 27<sup>th</sup> of September is the feast of St. Vincent this edition of Just.Now focuses on the life of the man whose name became synonymous with reaching out to people suffering from poverty, illness and exclusion.

He was declared by the Church patron of all who work for, and with, people in poverty. Vincent was deeply moved by the 'cries of the poor' in his day. His profound spirituality enabled Vincent to recognise the face of Jesus in the face of all who suffered. As a result he was 'infinitely' creative in his response to human suffering.



This edition of Just.Now contains suggestions about 3 ways in which we can respond to the challenges for our day in the spirit of St. Vincent.

1. Sign the enclosed petition against poverty which will be presented to European leaders asking them to commit themselves to the eradication of poverty.
2. Choose to live simply thereby protecting the earth's resources and sharing what we have with those who have less.
3. Participate in the 17<sup>th</sup> October, UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty - Famine Memorial, Custom House Quay, Dublin 1. Time: 12 o'clock - for more information [www.oct17.org](http://www.oct17.org)

If Vincent and Louise were alive today in Ireland they would be at the Famine Memorial on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October standing in solidarity with the people who will tell their story of struggle, poverty and exclusion.

## St. Vincent de Paul Patron of all Works of Charity

St. Vincent de Paul was born in April 1581 in the south of France near Dax in a village that now bears his name. He was the third son of a peasant family. Having received an excellent education in Dax he later attended university in Toulouse before his ordination in 1600. As a child St. Vincent benefited from the experience of growing up in a loving family, one that was neither wealthy nor living in poverty. They owned the land that they worked but their income depended upon the weather and the absence of war.

As a young priest in Paris St. Vincent suffered temptations against his faith for some years. Through his friendship with Cardinal de Bérulle he obtained a position of tutor to the sons of the very wealthy and influential de Gondi family. In February 1617 while in Folleville with the de Gondi family he had an experience that prompted a gradual change in his life. He was asked to hear the confession of a dying elderly man, who was greatly respected in his village. In the days before his death the man spoke of the profound effect on his life of the absence of confessing his faults fully and the peace and grace he received from his last confession. St. Vincent too reflected on the experience of having heard that confession and the call to assist others as far as possible.

Later in the same year St. Vincent was the Parish Priest in Châtillon; on one particular Sunday he was told of the plight of a family in desperate need. The response to his request for help was overwhelming but disorganised and wasteful. His reflection on this generosity without structure prompted him to found the Confraternities of Charity.

Through these two experiences St. Vincent began what we call today Systemic Change. He had an experience upon which he reflected, evaluated and realised that it was necessary to attempt to address the causes of the poverty as much as it was to give relief to those suffering from poverty. St. Vincent came to understand that service of those most in need involved the challenging of structures that promote poverty in all its forms. For St. Vincent service of others was not just about charity, but that charity was the concrete expression of justice - a demand of the Gospel. St. Vincent in his correspondence writes, *"God will grant you the grace, Monsieur .....of realizing that in helping those in poverty we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy,"* and again, *"There is no act of charity that is not accomplished by justice or that permits us to do more than we reasonably can."*

Justice for St. Vincent is practical and straightforward. In a time when the wealthy were disconnected from the poor Vincent invited them to serve the poor. St. Vincent reminded the members of his communities that their material goods are to be used in a manner that puts the poor first - all is for those who suffer poverty. St. Vincent's involvement in political life was an invitation to the wealthy and the power brokers of his day to be in connection with those who were poor and to serve them - by effecting change in the structures that promote and permit poverty to exist.

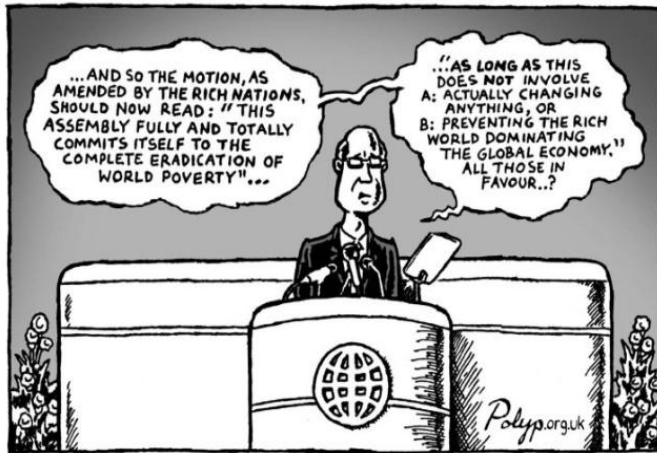
St. Vincent's invitation to us at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is ever the same, to work for the promotion and dignity of all people and for real and lasting change in the society in which we live. *Sr. Carmel Ryan D.C.*

*"But see the other side of the picture and you will see with the light of faith that the Son of God who became poor is present in the person who is suffering today".*

St. Vincent de Paul



## Following on from St. Vincent De Paul Two Practical Steps



'SUMMIT UP'

### Do you know..

614,672 people in Ireland are below the relative income poverty line (Social Justice Ireland)  
79 million people are at risk of poverty in the EU and one in five children lives in poverty.  
Over 900m people in the world live on less than \$1 a day (EAPN Ireland, Review Feb, 2010 'An agenda for new Ireland Socio-Economic Review '2010, p42  
Behind each of these numbers is a human being like us.

### When you live in poverty you

- ❖ are hungry
- ❖ suffer from poor health as a result of poor diet and increased stress
- ❖ live with the constant worry of trying to find money to pay the bills
- ❖ lose your sense of well being and self-esteem
- ❖ are excluded from the social life of your peers
- ❖ have limited opportunities and choices in life and more.....

### Two steps we can take to be in solidarity with people who live in poverty

Like St. Vincent you can take action. Each small act when combined with the actions of others has a greater impact.

So why not begin by adding your name to the enclosed petition raising the voice of European citizens against poverty in this year against Poverty and Exclusion in the EU.

A second step might be to make changes in your lifestyle. As Christians "we are our brothers and sisters keepers, where ever they live. We are one human family." How we live affects others. If we want to, and choose to, live in solidarity with the poor we need to live simply, for true human progress is greater than economic growth. To live simply begins by taking the risk of examining your own way of living and deciding to make changes.

### Some questions to help us on our way.

What sort of world do I want to help create and live in?

To create this world am I willing to make changes?

What do I spend most of my money on?

How often do I use what I possess?

Have I got too much of anything - How do I decide how much is enough?

How much of the earth's resources do I use each day, fuel, water etc? Where do I waste energy?

Will future generations be pleased with how I cared for my neighbour and took care of the earth while I lived?

What things can I change to live simply so that others can simply live?

(CAFOD: Live Simply, 2008)

*When will we (I and you) begin to live more simply:*

*Today? Tomorrow? Never?*

### Some suggestions to help us live simply.

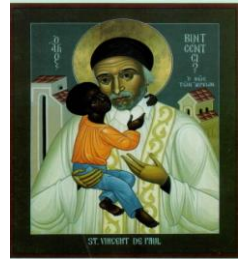
- Walk or use public transport when we can
- Use the back of printed computer pages
- Buy fair trade products
- Make do with what we have or mend things rather than throw them away.
- Choose between what we "need" and what we "want"
- Shop locally
- Buy vegetables that are in season in our country
- Re-discover the art of face to face conversations.

# Reflections for the Feast of St. Vincent

## The Face of God

**Prayer:** Lord as we gather we are aware of your invitation to be your eyes, ears, hands and feet in our world today and to be carriers of your word to those who most need your touch in their lives. Following St. Vincent we seek to respond to this call.

**Ant:** *O God, may we see your face in those we meet.*



There are faces that shook us, faces whose sorrow shakes our well being.  
There are faces that comfort us, faces whose goodness makes us secure.  
There are faces that leave us cold, closed faces, ones that say “don’t bother me.”  
And there are faces that frighten us, the result of violence.

There are kind faces, gentle, wise and loving ones,  
Young and old, untouched by love, worn with pain, loneliness and poverty  
Unseen faces hidden, ignored, judged and found wanting.  
All these faces each one sacred, each one calls to us.

Connected to each face, reflected in each one is a heart,  
A heart that may ache, need healing that hungers  
That bears the pain of inhumanity  
And in each face is an image

An image of God who calls, who invites, who moves us to respond.

*(Source unknown - adapted)*

## The Five faces of Vincent

- Father of the Poor:** This was the face through which the world came to know of Vincent. In a world where many remain indifferent to organised religion, the language of works is increasingly relevant. Lord, help us to always reveal your love through, and by, our activities for justice.
- The Missionary:** Vincent’s mission activity began after the conversion of a farm worker. Lord help us to work for the conversion of minds and hearts in order to develop more just political, economic and social systems.
- The Formator:** Vincent enabled those who worked in the service of the poor to “put on Christ” and to share their gifts with their confreres. Lord, help us to share the wisdom of what we have learned from our ministry with people in poverty or experiencing exclusion with each other.
- The Contemplative in Action:** Vincent was a man whose “spirit was continually attentive to the presence of God.” Lord, help us to recognise and hold the tension between prayer and activity in our lives.
- A gentle and compassionate man:** Vincent grew in gentleness as he matured in his following of Christ. Lord, help us to approach our vulnerable brothers and sisters with his gentleness and compassion.

**Prayer:** Most loving God, make us instruments of your love. Help us grow in practical love, gentleness, and compassion as members of the Vincentian Family. Strengthen us so that, in the footsteps of St. Vincent we may recognise you in the faces of those we serve in the building up of your reign in our midst. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

*Maloney CM; R.P. Faces of Holiness, SVP USA, 2008 – adapted)*