

## **My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

Greetings of peace and joy of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. This article helps us to reflect on a saint whose name is synonymous with care for the poor. St. Vincent de Paul was born into a poor farming family in 1581. He was ordained at the age of 19, although the council of Trent required priests to be at least 24 at ordination. Accordingly, he resigned his parish assignment and continued his studies for four years, receiving a bachelor's degree in theology.

The following year, on a short voyage in the Mediterranean, Fr. Vincent was captured and sold into slavery- having three masters over two years. His third master was a former priest who'd also been kidnapped and enslaved by Muslims, but he converted to Islam to gain his freedom and was living with three wives when he brought Fr. Vincent to farm for him. Vincent's freedom and return to France was secured after he converted one of the Muslim wives who then challenged her husband to return to the true faith. He spent two years studying in Rome, eventually earning a licentiate in canon law. Vincent's next experience was as chaplain to the queen, but left to serve in a parish, where he organized a number of pious women into the "ladies of charity" to support mission work. He served as chaplain to the galley-slaves in Paris. Later, he became a tutor and spiritual director for a wealthy family in Paris. He began organizing conferences for lay Catholics to encourage them toward greater charity for the poor, as well as retreats for priests, inspiring them to minister to the poor. In time, he founded the Daughters of Charity through which pious young women could serve God and their fellow man in consecrated life, working in hospitals, hospices and orphanages and providing other service to the poor. Fr. Vincent worked closely with St. Francis de sales and St. Jane Chantal in their works of charity, becoming superior of the visitation convents in the city. He later established his own order of priests and brothers to work with those in need of education and other essentials of life- the congregation of the mission, more commonly known as the Vincentians. His priests traveled throughout France and the rest of Europe, giving missions to encourage Catholics to witness to their faith through acts of charity and to contribute financially to the work of the missions. Vincent de Paul died in 1660, and was canonized by pope clement XII. Pope Leo XIII proclaimed him patron of all charitable works within the catholic world.

In every nation, city, village, and in each generation we find the need, in particular, the uneducated, the sick, those who are alone, outcasts, and all those who "slip through the cracks." St. Vincent de Paul and his dedicated companions brought material comfort to the poor and gave them a spiritual education and direction that strengthened them and enabled them to live with hope, and with and active faith. Vincent treated the poor as friends and family. He looked upon service to them as a privilege; he was serving Christ in his neighbor. He brought the presence of Christ to them with charity that was genuine, gentle, and joyful. The poor were not burdens, but men, women and children with hearts and souls, and minds. If only we could look upon the needy with the same love and compassion, how the world would begin to change. How we could begin to change, for our love for others, this sharing in God's life, could transform us into the Christ like persons we are meant to be.

May God Bless you, Fr.S.Vinner HGN.