

A reflection on Vincentian motivation and process

In Mathew 25, we read that the righteous will possess eternal life because they have “fed the hungry, given drinks to the thirsty, received the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited the prisoners”. As we know, Vincentians, as individuals and collectively, have done all that. Are we therefore assured of happiness in heaven and eternal life?

In another well known text of the Gospel, Saint Paul’s first Corinthians 13, it says: “I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I gain nothing”. How is it possible then that one may do all the things that are required in Mathew 25 as an Vincentian or otherwise, but because one does them without love or may not be motivated by love, one gains nothing, including therefore everlasting life? It seems inconsistent, right? I think not. The way I understand it is that God Himself is love.

God created the universe out of love, He created us not because we can add anything to His glory but purely out of love. He later redeemed us and allowed us to participate in His act of redemption in our lives, also not because His redemptory act itself is in some way lacking but because He knows our human nature and wants us to fulfill our need to participate. In fact, the whole purpose of our existence is to learn to appreciate and reciprocate God’s love for us as unique individuals, and collectively as the body of Christ. We would fail in life if we do not recognize this truth and not be able to internalise a certain level of God’s love for us.

Although it is not restricted to the time and effort we expend as Vincentians, but as Vincentians, we are particularly blessed with the opportunities to learn of God’s love and to love through serving the weak and the vulnerable. Most of us Vincentians, if not all, understand this basic truth about God, ourselves and our relationship with Him. Being truthful to this basic principle is what differentiates our Society from other secular charitable organizations.

Nevertheless, it is not a given that we would inevitably sustain this motivation of love in our activities. We may fall into the illusion that our success is based on ever more activities and “results” and run the affairs of our Society like a no-nonsense enterprise on measures of efficiencies and scope. To remain truthful to our call to love, we not only need our personal prayers and spiritual focus in carrying out our Vincentian activities, we need also the support and encouragement through a deepening communal understanding and experience of God’s love among our fellow members.

Where, then, is a more practical opportunity for us to learn of and feel God’s presence and love than when we are together in our Conference meetings and other Society gatherings? We pray and believe each time that “when two or three of us are gathered together in His name, He shall be there in our midst”.

Indeed, what else, can we think of, is more important to Jesus who is in our midst than to see that we learn to love one another in the meeting process through sharing our actual living and Society related work experiences for the encouragement of one another to learn to love and to project His love for those we serve?

Should we not, therefore, treasure these gatherings as opportunities for membership nourishment and growth, and structure them accordingly in order that we may go forth to bring the same good news to the people we serve?

Even though the measures of scope and activities are important because they do indirectly reflect the extent of our effort and desire to respond to God's command as in Mathew 25 discussed above, I say that they are "indirect" because the direct result for a Society of our nature really should be that our members grow as individuals and as a group, in love, as demonstrated by the characteristic Vincentian virtues of Simplicity, Humility, Meekness, Mortification and Zeal for Souls and, to the extent that those we serve would come to assimilate these same virtues. As far as the latter result, we may never know, but we can be certain that if these people, and others around us, see that we do love one another as was spoken of among the early Christians, we will grow in numbers, in strengths and in spirit, as some two thousand years ago.

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