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Pilgrimage to Vincentian sites in Paris
Homily in Clichy

Readings: Matthew 11:25-27; Isaiah 10:5-7; 13-16

by Bernard Schoepfer, C.M.
Province of Paris
17.VII.2002

It is rarely good to pass for someone who is “poor,” “humble,” or “self-effacing.” The first places go to “fighters,” “go-getters,” or “high performers.” It is not good if one is not profitable: one risks being left out of the game. It is not good to have a handicap: one risks being tossed along side of the road. They know all about that — the victims of the money king, lots of money. They know all about this — those who are subjected to the insane laws of this king! The taste for might, the search for power and strength, these are the realities that intoxicate those who let themselves be taken in by them. Let us recognize this race for power, which is at the heart of our humanity.

The gospel we have just heard, reveals Jesus as the one who does not seek power. He receives from Another: the Father. It is in encountering the little ones that he discovers the mystery of God. “What you have hidden from the wise and learned, you have revealed to these little ones.” The only ones to understand the mysteries of God are those who are close to God’s heart. Here we have the first Beatitude: “Blessed are the poor of heart.”

Already in the Old Testament, the heralded Messiah would not be a conqueror but a humble person, close to those who work by the sweat of their brows. On Palm Sunday, Jesus, entering Jerusalem mounted on a donkey, shows that he is the one sent by God. God’s mystery is surprising and disarming. Can we not affirm that the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus is already experienced in his relationship with the little ones? Jesus looks on them, loves them, listens to them. He loves them because they lack all the appearances with which we adorn ourselves. They are the “human person” themselves, in all simplicity and dignity.

These simple persons, these little ones are without cunning. Jesus affirms that they are the first to hear the Good News because their simplicity, their lack of façade for appearance’s sake, draws them to God’s heart. Their poverty keeps them from self-pride, from being haughty or pretentious and makes them sensitive to the words and parables of Jesus. In this way of life with the littlest, Jesus shows us the true face of God. In some way, without a real encounter with

the poor, I cannot truly know that God is the Father of Jesus, that God is our Father.

Along the path to the poor, Monsieur Vincent had the joy of experiencing in this very place, that to live with a people (children, young people, women and men marked by pain and burden) is the source of the blossoming of each vocation.

On 2 May 1612 Monsieur Vincent took up his assignment as Pastor of Clichy. It was the first time in 15 years that he found himself among these decent and simple country people. He was 31 years old!

I discovered joy in being pastor of such a people ... I had such good people who were so obedient in carrying out all that I asked them to do that when I told them that they should go to Confession on the first Sunday of the month, they never failed to go. They came to me and went to Confession and I saw from day to day how it profited these souls. This afforded me so much consolation and I was so happy about it that I used to say to myself: "How happy you are to have such good people!" And I used to add: "I think the Pope himself is not as happy as a parish priest in the midst of such kindhearted folk." (Coste, Conferences to the DCs, 27 July 1653)

In following Christ, as St. Vincent would do, let us ask God Our Father in this Eucharist to give us perseverance, courage and patience in our encounters with those wounded by life. Let us generously give ourselves, and through the little ones of the world, God will offer us his kindness and blessing. "Let us come toward Jesus; he knows the burden of our mission, our service and our lives."

(Translation: TRANSLATION CENTER – DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY, Paris)