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Very Reverend William M. Slattery, C.M.

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Very Reverend
William M. Slattery, C.M.



The Very Reverend William M. Slattery, C.M., 87, the first American to lead the Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul (Vincentians) and the Company of the Daughters of Charity, died on August 10, 1982 in Philadelphia.

As Superior General of the Congregation, he guided the work of some 5000 Priests and Brothers and more than 50,000 Daughters of Charity across the world.

Father Slattery was elected to the post of Superior General in 1947, the 19th successor of St. Vincent de Paul who established the two Communities in 1625 and 1633 respectively.

He retired in 1968, having asked the Congregation's General Assembly in Rome to release him because of his advancing years.

Freed from his rigorous duties and carrying the Community's title of Superior General Emeritus, Father Slattery returned quietly to St. Vincent's Seminary in Philadelphia, the Vincentian headquarters for the Eastern Province of the United States, where he had studied for the priesthood. As long as he was able, he served neighboring convents as chaplain, offering Mass, hearing confessions, and conducting religious conferences.

A gentle man known for his humility and kindness, Father Slattery was a member of the Order for 69 years and a priest for 63. He served as Superior General for 21 years.

Born in Baltimore May 7, 1895, he came to St. Vincent's Apostolic School to study in 1913. He took his vows in the Congregation on June 11, 1915, and was ordained on June 8, 1919 by Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, D.D., Archbishop of Philadelphia, in the Chapel of St. Martin, St. Charles Seminary, Overbrook, Philadelphia. After graduate studies at the Collegio Angelico in Rome, he returned and was assigned to St. Vincent's Seminary. He remained there for twenty-five years, first as Master of Novices, then as Superior of the Motherhouse, and finally as Provincial of the Eastern Province. In 1946 he was called to Paris to serve as an Assistant General of the Congregation. One year later, at the age of 51, he was elected Superior General of the Order, at the first meeting of the Congregation's General Assembly since the outbreak of World War II.

For the next 21 years Father Slattery traveled the world, visiting the places of work and worship of his Priests, Brothers and Sisters. He used his influence to effect many changes. One major move was the 1963 transfer of the Vincentian world headquarters from Paris to Rome.

As head of the Congregation, Father Slattery attended all sessions of Vatican Council II, where his influence was felt on various occasions.

In 1957, Father Slattery was named a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by President Rene Coty of France in recognition of his "enlightened and prudent direction" of activities of the Congregation.

In the presence of John Cardinal Krol, D.D., Archbishop of Philadelphia, and the three auxiliary Bishops of the Archdiocese, a *Mass of Christian Burial* was offered for Father Slattery on August 14, 1982 at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Philadelphia, with the Very Reverend Richard McCullen, C.M., the present Superior General, as the Principal Concelebrant and Homilist. Also present at the Mass, in addition to many Vincentian Priests and Brothers, a large representation of Daughters of Charity, and members of other religious communities, was Mother Lucie Rogé, D.C., the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, who makes her residence in Paris, and the Very Reverend William W. Sheldon, C.M., the Procurator General of the Congregation at the Holy See, who resides in Rome.

Father Slattery was laid to rest in the Community Cemetery at St. Joseph's Preparatory Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey.

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Rev. Frederick J. Easterly, C.M.
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Dear Father Easterly:

May the grace of our Lord be with us forever!

It is very fitting that the Editors of VINCENTIAN HERITAGE should have decided to devote this issue of the review to the memory of Father William Slattery.

It is a tribute to a Confreere who, during his long life, contributed notably and generously to enriching the heritage bequeathed by St. Vincent and which we presently hold in trust for the generations that are to come after us.

Each of us is called upon to preserve and enrich that heritage during the brief span of our lives in the Community. It was Father Slattery's achievement to have done that in an outstanding way through the quality of his entire life, and particularly during the years when he served St. Vincent's two Communities as Superior General.

The means which Father Slattery adopted to preserve and enrich the Vincentian heritage were quite simple, - personal holiness of life. Not that he was self-consciously holy. Far from it. One felt very much at ease in his presence, even when one was only too well aware of being much less ascetical, much less disciplined and much less closer to God than he. "Unconscious holiness", wrote Cardinal Newman, "is of an urgent, irresistible nature; it persuades the weak, the timid, the wavering and the inquiring; it draws forth the affection and loyalty of all who are in a measure like-minded". (University Sermons p. 95).

Because the two Communities of St. Vincent are like-minded in the basics of their spirituality, Father Slattery effortlessly drew forth the affection and the loyalty of his Confreeres and Sisters throughout the world. The expression of that affection and loyalty in the simple and traditional ways of our Communities served in itself to preserve and enrich the heritage which is ours and which can be so valuable to the poor of our times.

Father Slattery's protracted sufferings at the end of his life baffled him somewhat. He wondered why God was leaving him so long on earth. His wonder, however, was full of reverence before the mystery of God. Not only Father Slattery but others wondered too. A Confreere was heard to remark, "I often wonder what God is saying to us all through the long life and present

suffering of Father Slattery." His life and his sufferings have thrown into relief for us all some of those truths which St. Vincent in his conferences and correspondence returned to over and over again: prayer, the five virtues, indifference, conformity to the Will of God in all things.

Many of Father Slattery's contemporaries have already "gone before us, marked with the sign of faith". They cannot now, but many of them would gladly have contributed to this issue of VINCENTIAN HERITAGE. To those who have evoked Father Slattery in the pages of this issue, all of us are deeply grateful, for "Men are we, and must grieve when even the shade Of that which once was great is passed away."

8 December 1982

Richard McCullen, C.M.

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Dear Father Easterly,

May the grace of Our Lord be always with us!

Let me congratulate you on your plan to publish a Memorial volume concerning Father William Slattery, C.M., the best known to me of the Superiors General of our Little Company.

The best way, perhaps, for me to begin writing something from my own memory is to say that we first met in July, 1936, at St. Vincent's as I was going to St. Louis. A priest answered the doorbell, heard me introduce myself and offered to show me the house, which he did very patiently and kindly, introducing me to priests and brothers along the way; one of them finally identified my guide as Father Slattery, The Visitor. Then there was a four-month stay at the Rome international house in 1967-1968, on the floor above the General Curia, when several of us were putting together some material for the 1968 General Assembly; this time there were several opportunities to be with Father Slattery, the Superior General, and among other things he arranged a week's visit in Paris for Father McClain and myself. During the critical time of elections at the General Assembly held the following summer, Father Slattery was indescribably kind and understanding with me. He also consented to remain at the Curia until December of that year, helping me by counsel and encouragement. Within a short time, Superiors General of other communities talked to me of their very high esteem for our Father Slattery; one of them in particular, whose Congregation was "clerical" but not "exempt," told me that Father was the one largely responsible that all of their group became members of the second Vatican general council. Finally, during several visits to the United States, it was possible for me to have extended private conversations with Father at Germantown.

My reason for describing somewhat a few very personal contacts with Father Slattery and with people who knew him well is to give a sense of reality to my own estimate of his wonderful character. (Here you find no direct mention of the Daughters of Charity, because others can speak for them much better than I.) I have never known a confrere who exemplified so completely what St. Vincent wrote for us in the Common Rules. This refers, of course, not only to our small practices but to the very spirit of these rules; that is, for instance, to

the substantial spiritual doctrine of St. Vincent in the second and twelfth chapters and in particular articles where the heart of our first Superior General speaks to us. Then there are Father Slattery's human priestly virtues recommended to us by the second Vatican Council and by our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II: honesty, forthright speaking, fidelity to one's word, kindness, tolerance, patience, courtesy and moral courage. For me, these were remarkable and constant characteristics of the last Superior General of our Congregation to be elected for life. I suppose that Father had some personal failings and I am certain - this from personal knowledge - that he did not please everyone. Yet I can sum up by saying that I have never suffered from anything that he has done and that I have repeatedly thanked God that he was our Superior General for more than twenty-one years. What a rare privilege for me to have known such a man.

Believe me that I write this carefully and deliberately before God, happy to have the opportunity to say what has been my opinion for a long time. May we all profit, Father, from what we will read in your memorial volume concerning this confrere, who - I think - has been your Superior and Visitor, as well as the Superior General of most of us.

Your devoted confrere,

James W. Richardson, OSB



FR. RICHARD MC CULLEN, the twenty-first successor of St. Vincent de Paul as Superior General, chats with Fr. Slattery at St. Vincent's Seminary.

I sympathize with all my heart in your sufferings, which are great, varied, and prolonged; it is a cross on which your mind and body are stretched, but it raises you above this earth, and this is what consoles me.

St. Vincent de Paul



St. Vincent tells us that our sick are the treasure of the Community. I am sure that in every house which possesses this treasure they are treated with the veneration, the affection and the devotion to which they have a right. May they in return, unite their sufferings to those of Jesus-crucified for the good of the Company which looks for this last and most precious testimony of love from them!

Fr. Slattery