

# REMEMBERING VINCENT AND LOUISE

## - The Story of Two Great Prophets of Charity

Celebrations are a collective remembering of events that are significant for groups and communities. They bring together within a given moment the past, the present and the future. They evoke gratitude for the past, strengthen commitment to the present and generate hope for the future.

When we celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of St Vincent de Paul and St Louise de Marillac, it is not so much their death in itself that we want to remember. But their death as the culmination of their lives that left a mark in history because of what they stood for in their lifetime. They were icons of charity. They were two great **prophets of charity**.

### Rekindling the Fire

In their life stories, their letters and conferences (i.e. talks given to the Vincentian Priests and Brothers and the Daughters of Charity) Vincent and Louise come across as ordinary persons with their frailties and gifts but who were able to attain great heights of holiness. They show in a remarkable way, how the power of grace can transform fragile earthen vessels into efficacious instruments of the divine project.

Vincent was an adventurous young man of rural origin who continually searched for wider horizons. He nurtured early ambitions for social promotion through the priestly ministry to help his family whom he dearly loved. He was gifted with an amazing capacity to enter into relations with a wide variety of persons – poor and rich, Church leaders and politicians, nobles and peasants, men and women, religious and lay. He would later put this gift to good use to realize his dream of serving the poor. People of our time, who are constantly searching for “more” in life, can draw courage from Vincent’s life.





Although Louise was born and raised with suffering as a constant companion, she did not allow this to deter her from pursuing her life goals. She was a loving wife, a devoted mother continually preoccupied with an only son. When she was widowed, she continued to reach out to others, especially the poor. Having discovered her life vocation with the help of Vincent, she became his faithful friend and collaborator. Together, they founded the Daughters of Charity, a radically new way of living feminine consecrated life in their time. Many women today – religious and lay, single, widows and married – will find in Louise an inspiring model, one who eventually “made it” notwithstanding limitations imposed by birth, by nature and circumstances.

After 350 years, Vincent and Louise continue to touch and to inspire generations. The fire of their charity still blazes and ignites many others. Celebrating their death anniversary rekindles this fire in us. It turns the past into a living present that transforms.

## **They Dared to Dream**

In their lifetime, Vincent and Louise pursued with relentless passion a dream they believed in... a dream that was like a fire that consumed them. They dreamt of giving themselves completely to following Christ by evangelizing and serving the poor of their time. This dream was like the North Star that guided every decision they made and every step they took.

Vincent and Louise, however, were not born with this dream. In fact they had other dreams when they were young... dreams like we all have. But as they tried to realize these early dreams, they were constantly hounded by disappointments, failures, unexpected twists and turns as though an unseen hand was standing in the way of their realization.

Gradually, Vincent and Louise discovered the meaning of these events that seemed to turn them away from the fulfilment of their dream. They were in reality God’s mysterious ways of revealing to them their vocation in life. Vincent and Louise were open to this revelation and allowed themselves to be led by the Spirit.

Both Vincent and Louise had been tormented by profound doubts of faith for some time... doubts that became veritable “dark nights” for them. But an experience of illumination for Louise and a firm resolve by Vincent to serve the poor changed the course of their lives. From then on, God became their all. They set aside their earlier dreams in order to follow God’s call for them... a call that unfolded through the mediation of events and persons. Having put their hands on the plough, Vincent and Louise never looked back.

In an epoch of never ending wars fought for religious and political reasons and of a poverty that defied imagination, Vincent and Louise dared to dream ... a seemingly impossible dream. But with Providence guiding and sustaining them, with the remarkable gifts with which nature had generously endowed them and with the blessing of circumstances, the dream of Vincent and Louise slowly took shape.... the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, the Ladies of Charity and the Daughters of Charity.

As they pursued their dream with resolute single mindedness, Vincent and Louise were blazing new trails unaware, trails that contributed significantly to renewing the Church and the society in 17<sup>th</sup> the century in France ... and beyond.

### **Reflection Points**

- 1. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac were people who, through openness to God’s presence in their ordinary lives, were able to do extraordinary things. Identify the signs of God’s presence in your life and, with prayerful reflection, see where the Lord is inviting you to be Good News to people around you.*
- 2. Vincent and Louise experienced great doubts of faith and through them came to understand that the God they struggled to believe in sustained them. Trace the ups and downs of your journey of faith to see the times when God was both important and not important in your life and ask yourself why.*

## **Prayer of the Vincentian Family**

Lord Jesus,  
give us eyes and hearts  
directed to the poor;  
help us to recognize you in them –  
in their thirst, their hunger, their loneliness and their misfortune.

Enkindle within our Vincentian Family  
unity, simplicity, humility  
and the fire of love that burned  
in St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac.

Strengthen us,  
so that we may reverence your presence  
in the poor and disadvantaged  
and serve you in our service of them. AMEN!

