



## CONGREGAZIONE DELLA MISSIONE CURIA GENERALIZIA

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### SUPERIORE GENERALE

Rome, 22 February 2017



### LENTEN LETTER

To all the members of the Congregation of the Mission

My dear confreres,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

Let me take the opportunity, at the beginning of this letter, to thank each one of you wholeheartedly for your many Christmas and New Year's greetings, which I received by regular mail, e-mail, or through different social media! I admire the heroic witness and service of your ministering in difficult times and in remote areas of the globe. My heart is with each one of you as I accompany you daily with my thoughts and prayers.

The season of Lent is near at hand!

In my first letter as Superior General for the feast of our Founder on 27 September, I started to reflect on our main sources of inspiration besides the Holy Bible: our Common Rules and Constitutions. The Advent letter was a prolongation of it. In this year's Lenten letter, I would like to continue in the same direction by reflecting on the Common Rules and Constitutions. In fact, the Common Rules and the Constitutions will become the base and source of all the reflections in the Advent and Lenten letters, as well as the letter for the feast of our Founder, in the following six years, leading to our next General Assembly in 2022.

In both previous letters, I expressed my heart's desire, encouraged, and asked each member of our "Little Company" to embrace our Common Rules and Constitutions as an inseparable tool for the development of our vocation, our road to sanctity, and the mission entrusted to each one of us by Jesus, the Evangelizer of the Poor!

Since the first letter five months have passed.

Vincent himself, at the end of the Common Rules, asks each one of us to read them every three months. We now have our Constitutions, as well as the Common Rules. As I did in the past two letters, I would like to ask again, in this Lenten letter, the following questions of every single one of us:

- 1) Do I carry my Common Rules and my Constitutions together with my Holy Bible and my Breviary?
- 2) As I do with my Bible and Breviary, do I read-pray a small passage of the Common Rules or Constitutions every day?
- 3) Since the Feast of Saint Vincent five months ago, was I able to start reading-praying the Common Rules or the Constitutions in order to finish them at the conclusion of three months?

Dear confreres, with all my heart I encourage each of us to help one another to keep walking along this path, or re-embark on it. As I did in my Advent letter, I would like once more to encourage all the Visitors, as well as the Local Superiors, to be the source of inspiration, encouragement, and example to the confreres on the local and provincial levels.

If the responses to the above three questions are negative, can I ask myself why I did not start the above-mentioned tasks? Why do I not take into my hands our basic sources of inspiration to follow Saint Vincent's charism and spirituality?

Because the identity of a missionary, of a member of the Congregation of the Mission, is so crucial for our mission, I hope and pray that there is not a single confrere in the whole Congregation who does not read and reflect a short passage from the Common Rules or the Constitutions on his own or in community every day.

In my Advent letter, I reflected on “the Incarnation” as one of the central mysteries of Saint Vincent de Paul’s spirituality. In this year’s Lenten letter, I would like to reflect on the mystery of the “Holy Trinity” as another of the central mysteries of Saint Vincent’s spirituality.

Saint Vincent writes in the Common Rules:

*According to the Bull which established our Congregation, we are bound to honor in a special way the Most Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, mysteries beyond words. We should therefore try to carry this out most faithfully and, if possible, in every way, but especially in these three ways: (1) frequently honoring these mysteries by a prayer of faith and adoration, coming from our inmost heart; (2) dedicating certain prayers and good works each day to their honor and, above all, celebrating their feast days with special dignity, and the greatest possible personal devotion; (3) trying constantly, by our teaching and example, to get other people to know these mysteries and to honor and worship them (Common Rules X, 2; CCD XIII A, 454-455).*

In our Constitutions, we find the following words:

*As witnesses and heralds of the love of God, we ought to show special honor and devotion to the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation (Constitutions, IV, 48).*

What is the message of the Holy Trinity for me personally, for the community where I live and to which I belong, for the people Jesus is sending me to serve?

Jesus helps us understand the Holy Trinity: the identity, mission, and purpose of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus helps us to understand the relationship among the three Persons, the inner connectivity among them, and the influence of the Trinity on each individual person as well as on society as a whole.

As we discover and develop, with God’s grace, an unbreakable bond between the Trinity and the individual person, between the Trinity and the community, between the Trinity and humanity, we will get ever closer to the ideal model of “relationships,” basic components of our lives. We were created not as islands, separated from one another, but as social beings and as a family, where, in the depth of our being, we are one with God, which means, with the Trinity and with each other.

The Trinity remains a mystery for us. Jesus communicated to us what we know about the Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus presented the Trinity to us as the ideal model of “relationships.”

Our reflection on the Trinity needs to be accompanied by the wish and goal of incarnating that ideal model of “relationships” in the concrete life situation in which I find

myself, in the community where I live and to which I belong, with the people to whom Jesus is sending me to serve.

The Holy Trinity is the ideal model of “relationships”! Jesus shows us the ideal.

The mutual relationship between the Father and the Son.

The mutual relationship between the Father and the Spirit.

The mutual relationship between the Son and the Spirit.

The relationship among the Father, Son, and Spirit.

What can we see in these “relationships”?

- 1) We can see that the attention is always directed to the other person and not to oneself.
- 2) We can see that the priority is always given to the other person and not to oneself.
- 3) We can see that praise, thankfulness, admiration are always given to the other person and not to oneself.
- 4) We can see that each one of the three Persons of the Trinity always expresses the need for collaboration with the other Person to fulfill the mission.
- 5) We can see that each of the three Persons of the Trinity always clearly expresses that it would be insufficient and ineffective for each of them to act alone.

What does the model of relationships in the Trinity say to me about my own life in:

- a) my relationship with God,
- b) my relationship to the community,
- c) my relationship with those to whom Jesus is sending me to serve?

Because we are not islands, but beings belonging to the human family, “relationships” are an inseparable part of our mission. The ideal model of the Trinity, that Jesus left us, is the model to follow.

Saint Vincent de Paul made the ideal model of the Holy Trinity one of the foundations of his spirituality. In this year’s Lenten Season, we are invited to take new steps toward the ideal model of “relationships” given to us through Jesus.

If each of us would put the other person first, put him or her before oneself, before one’s own desires, before one’s own interests, before one’s own personal wishes; if each one would give attention to the other person, share time, thoughts, experiences, hardships, doubts, sufferings, joys, etc. by following the ideal model of “the Trinity’s relationships,” then someone would do the same for each of us. In this way, a wonderful and miraculous set of relationships will take shape, where we together, in the best and most effective way possible, will accomplish the mission entrusted to us by Jesus.

To help us reflect on this ideal model of “relationships,” let us use two more passages from Saint Vincent on the Trinity, as well as a short reflection by our confrere Getúlio Mota Grossi:

*If we want to have within us the image of the adorable Trinity and a holy relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, let's establish ourselves in this spirit. What creates unity and single-mindedness in God, if not equality and the distinction of the Three Persons? And what creates Their love if not Their resemblance? And if there were no love among Them, what would be loveable in Them, said the Blessed Bishop of Geneva? So then, there's uniformity in the Blessed Trinity: what the Father wants, the Son wants; what the Holy Spirit does, the Father and the Son do and act the same way; They have only one power and one way of acting. That's the source of holiness and our model. Let's make ourselves uniform; we'll be many as if we were only one, and we'll have holy union in plurality. If we already have a little, but not enough, let's ask God for what we lack, and see in what we differ from one another in order to try to resemble one another and be equal; for resemblance and equality engender love, and love tends toward unity. So then, let's all strive to have the same likings and to be in agreement regarding the things that are done or are allowed to be done among us (Conference 206 of 23 May 1659 on Uniformity; CCD XII, 210-211).*

*Live together as having but one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32) so that by this union of spirit you may be a true image of the unity of God, since your number represents the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.*

*I pray for this to the Holy Spirit, who is the union of the Father and the Son, that He may be yours likewise and give you profound peace in the midst of contradictions and difficulties, which can only be frequent among the poor. But remember also that this is your cross, by which Our Lord calls you to Himself and to His peace. Everyone has a high opinion of your work, and good people acknowledge that there is no other work on earth more honorable or holy, when it is performed faithfully (Letter of 30 July 1651 to Sister Anne Hardemont, in Hennebont; CCD IV, 238-239).*

Saint Vincent's devotion to the Trinity was not an intellectual exercise but a search from his heart. It led him and leads us, as a Congregation still living the charism of the Founder, to a two-fold experience:

a) **To imitate the mutual relations of the three Persons.** *The Church finds the ultimate source of its life and action in the Trinity. The Congregation, within the Church, does the same (Constitutions II, 20). We are called to be an image of the Trinity, the merciful and compassionate God of Love (cf. Conference 152 of 6 August [1656] on “The Spirit of Mercy and Compassion”; CCD XI, 308-309.), the God of the Poor, the least, the weakest, to whom we are destined by our charism. This is true for us, the Daughters of Charity, and the whole Vincentian Family.*

Called to union in love; uniformity in plurality; communion of life; unity in the diversity of gifts; animated by the Holy Spirit; sent, like Jesus, for the missionary charity of evangelizing the poor, a charism inspired by the Spirit in Saint Vincent, given to the Company and inherited by us, we are challenged to creative fidelity to the charism of following Jesus, evangelizer of the poor.

b) Therefore, our devotion to the Trinity, like that of Saint Vincent, **must be connected to the Mission** (cf. Conference 118 of 23 May 1655, Repetition of Prayer; CCD XI, 172-174), to the proclamation of the mystery of God's love for the poor, for their salvation (cf. *ibid*, 173). The Word was incarnated, sent out of love by the Father (cf. John 3:16), conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 1:35) in the womb of Mary, and anointed by the same Spirit to bring the good news to the poor. In the Incarnate Word, present in the poor, Saint Vincent saw the most perfect manifestation of the love of God (cf. John 3:16, 14:9), the preferential love of the Triune God for the least of this world (Getúlio Mota Grossi, CM).

We are celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Vincent de Paul's charism. May this Jubilee Year bring us abundant fruit. With total trust in Providence, through the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, Saint Vincent de Paul, and all the Saints and Blessed of the Vincentian Family, we continue the path inward toward our own self, and outward to our communities and to the people Jesus is sending us to serve, to those who may not know the charism yet or to those places where the charism has still to take root.

I hope and pray that this year's Holy Week, Easter, and Easter Season celebrations will bring additional joy and meaning to us and our life's mission as we reflect on the Trinity and take new steps toward the ideal model of "relationships."

May we continue praying for one another!

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM  
Superior General