

Spiritual Reflections for the month of September 2023

Giving thanks to God

In his monograph on Vincentian spirituality, *Turn Everything to Love* (2008), Fr. Robert Maloney writes that *gratitude* should characterize our spiritual lives. Emphasizing that “[t]hanksgiving is an indispensable theme in prayer,” Maloney asks us to “*Give thanks* to God for life, health, talents, opportunities, family, friends, coworkers, your contacts and friendships with the poor, your insights, and anything else that you are aware of.”¹

Maloney is right to point to the importance of gratitude in the Vincentian tradition. Among other authors, Frederic Ozanam (founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul) wrote near his death in 1853:

*If I recount to You all my years of bitterness, it is because of the sins with which I have stained them. But when I consider the graces with which You have enriched me, Lord, I recount to You all my years in the gratitude of my heart.*²

Reflection Questions:

For what do you have gratitude in your life?

How might your gratitude inform, or be informed by, your engagement with Neighbours in Need?

Have there been occasions in your life where you remember not feeling grateful?

- Vincentian Alex Damm, St. Jerome Conference, Peel North PC

Celebrating the Feast Days of our Founder and Patron:

¹ Robert Maloney, *Turn Everything to Love: A Rule of Life for Lay Members of the Vincentian Family* (Madrid: La Milagrosa, 2008), 61-68.

² “His Last Will,” in *Ozanam in His Correspondence*, ed. Louis Baunard (New York: Benziger, 1925; Dublin: Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, 1925), 385.

September 9: Feast of Blessed Frederic Ozanam

Frederic Ozanam was born in Milan in 1813, the son of French parents. His father, a doctor, had been in Italy with the French Army under Napoleon and had returned to Milan to practice, after he qualified as a doctor. Two years after Frederic's birth, the family returned to the French provincial town of Lyon, and it was there that Frederic grew up.

We can get some appreciation of the kind of Christian household that Frederic grew up in, when we look at the example set by his parents. His father a doctor of medicine, in his practice, insisted on visiting the poor and sick in their homes. Often with little or no recompense. His wife would accompany him on these visits, a practice that they continued in spite of sickness and old age. Madam Ozanam urged her husband to retire from practice because of his illness and old age. But he replied "there are too many sick poor in the city, to justify such self indulgence."

Coming from a home filled with such a spirit of Christian charity we can imagine what Frederic's feelings must have been when he entered the hostile world of Paris, where, even in the university classrooms, it was quite the thing to ridicule Christianity and Catholicism, and preach the new freedom that science had brought to the world. Perhaps in former days, his classmates would say, "the church has done some good, but nowadays, all it is good for is pomp and ceremonies, splendid buildings, and the protection of its royal partners".

But the young law student, although by nature shy and reserved, was not prepared to quietly accept such attacks against his religion. He, himself, spoke out in the lecture halls defending Catholicism and several times forced the lecturers to retract their anti-clerical remarks. As well, he found a few kindred spirits among his fellow students and they gathered to discuss how they could combat this anti-religious attitude. They decided to form a debating society, known as the Conference of History, at which they and their anti-Catholic fellow students could debate their differences.

Ozanam and his fellow Catholics met between sessions of the Conference of History, so that they would be better prepared to defend their religion against the attacks of its enemies. Le Taillandier, like Ozanam a Law student, expressed the view, following one of these meetings, that he would prefer another type of meeting which would avoid all contention and simply concentrate on doing good works. Shortly after this, following a particularly acrimonious session of the conference of history, Ozanam himself echoed this idea: "Don't you think", he said, "that it is time for us

to join actions to our words, and to show by our works the vitality of our faith?". The personal service of the poor would be the answer to those who declared that the church did nothing for the poor.

They decided to call their charitable group the Conference of Charity. In order to find out about the poor of Paris, they approached Sister Rosalie, a Daughter of Charity, an order founded by St. Vincent de Paul who was working in the Paris slums. The group later adopted St. Vincent de Paul as its Patron Saint and expanded its name to the Conference of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.

The young students, with Ozanam as the guiding spirit and coached by Sr. Rosalie, began their service of the poor by visiting them in their slums and hovels carrying firewood and food, helping them solve their problems, and acquiring their affection and their confidence.

In spite of failing health, Frederic continued his writing and university lectures and traveled in order to complete his research. While in Italy, he became ill. When it became evident that his end was not far off, he left for France, intending to die at home in Paris, but death overtook him in Marseilles, where he died on September 8, 1853 at the age of forty.

Prayer:

Lord, you made Blessed Frédéric Ozanam a witness of the Gospel, full of wonder at the mystery of the Church.

You inspired him to alleviate poverty and injustice and endowed him with untiring generosity in the service of all those suffering.

In family life, he revealed a most genuine love as a son, brother, husband and father. In secular life, his ardent passion for the truth enlightened his thought, writing and teaching.

His vision for our society was a network of charity encircling the world inspired by St. Vincent de Paul's love, boldness and humility.

His prophetic social vision appears in every aspect of his life, together with the radiance of his virtues. We thank you Lord, for these many gifts. May the Church proclaim his holiness, as a saint, a providential light for today's world!

We ask this prayer through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

September 27: Feast of St. Vincent de Paul

St. Vincent de Paul was born on April 24, 1581 in the Kingdom of France. At the young age of 15, his father sent him to the seminary, where St. Vincent hoped to establish a successful career as a priest, so that he could retire early and comfortably. However, God had other plans in mind for St. Vincent. Although the seminary he attended was not very pious or spiritually contemplative, he continued his studies and was ordained a priest on September 23, 1600, at the age of 19. After his ordination, he continued to study, as he had a natural gift for reading and writing, but he felt little connection to his faith; rather, he desired a life full of wealth and fame.

In 1605, while returning home from a journey, St. Vincent was taken captive by Barbary pirates, who took him to Tunis, Africa, and auctioned him off as a slave. He was a slave for two years, and had many different owners, but he eventually gained his freedom by converting his last slave master to Christianity. He and his owner escaped to France together in 1607. During St. Vincent's time in slavery he strengthened his own faith significantly and prayed that if he were to be freed, he would dedicate his life to the poor. When he returned to Europe, he devoted his time and energy to serving as a priest and spiritual advisor. St. Vincent also made many very wealthy friends, who he then persuaded to donate funds for food and hospitals for the poor community. He also used their money and connections to liberate 1200 slaves from North Africa.

Through his charity work, St. Vincent became acquainted with St. Louise de Marillac, and together they founded the Daughters of Charity, a society of apostolic life for women within the Catholic Church.

St. Vincent de Paul died in Paris on September 27, 1660. St. Vincent de Paul was canonized on June 16, 1737 by Pope Clement XII.

Prayer:

Tender God, refuge of the poor, You filled Vincent de Paul with the strength of the apostles to work for the salvation of the poor and the instruction of the clergy. May we who follow the example of his life be driven by unceasing charity to continue the mission of Your Son in the world. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.