



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE US SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

Contemplation: Alongside the Road

The parable of the good Samaritan is a favorite among Vincentians, depicting, as it does, the personal encounter between the wounded victim lying by the side of the road and the traveler who stops to personally help. The Samaritan is exactly the model we seek to follow in our vocation, obedient to the words of our Savior, who calls us to [*“go and do likewise.”*](#)

Blessed Frédéric himself analogized our calling to the calling of the Samaritan, likening the victim to *“the humanity of our days...attacked by the kidnappers and robbers of thought, by wicked men who have robbed it of what it possessed: the treasure of faith and love.”* [90, to Curnier, 1835] The neighbor, he saw, would not always exhibit such obvious needs as the bloodied victim lying in a ditch. How does one look, after all, when robbed of the treasure of faith?

More importantly, how do we approach this victim? For Frédéric, our approach to healing the wounds had to be accompanied by *“words of consolation and peace”*. [Ibid] Only our gentleness and love can help him move past the fear that separates him from his neighbors and from hope. Sometimes, those gentle words are all that is really needed.

Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris regularly participate in what they call *“maraudes”*, which are visits to the homeless, whose tents and blankets line the banks of the Seine, and seem to occupy every other doorway once the businesses close for the night. Although the Vincentians bring with them soup, blankets and other comforts to offer, the people often decline. What they do not decline, though, is the opportunity to talk to somebody.

In his exegesis of the parable of the good Samaritan in the encyclical [*Fratelli Tutti*](#), Pope Francis suggests that *“only two kinds of people: those who care for someone who is hurting and those who pass by; those who bend down to help and those who look the other way and hurry off.”* [FT, 70] For the homeless in Paris, or any large city, there is no shortage of those who look the other way, or don't take our eyes off of our phones as we hurry past. But in the evening hours, dedicated Vincentians walk the streets, finding the most marginalized not by accident, but instead by striving to *“seek out and find those in need and the forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity.”* [Rule, Part I, 1.5]

On the wall of the crypt in which Frédéric Ozanam is entombed is a mural of the parable of the good Samaritan. In it, the Samaritan is Ozanam. While the poor may always be with us, the face and the circumstances of poverty are constantly changing. The robbers' victim in Christ's parable lay along the side of the road to Jericho. May the depiction of Frédéric as the Samaritan remind us that the road beside which the poor lie is the one we walk together; it is our [*Vincentian Pathway*](#).

Contemplate

Do I look to the margins, or do I hurry past?

Recommended Reading

[*Faces of Holiness*](#)