



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

Contemplation: One in Love

We often repeat St. Vincent's words, that we should *"love God...with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows"* [CCD XI:32], understanding this (correctly) to mean that all of our works of charity are expressions of love for the Creator. Our rule affirms this, explaining that we work not for any reward or advantage for ourselves, but *"for love alone"*. [Rule, Part I, 2.2] Over and over, Vincent and Frédéric remind us that the proof of our love for God is in the sweat and toil of our works. This definition of love seems very different than the warmth and affection that the word naturally conjures in our minds.

When we love a friend, a child, a spouse, a mentor, we feel a natural affection; we like to be with them. We naturally smile in their presence, and seek out their company. We can hardly help ourselves but to pick up our children and hug them. Surely, this is love, too!

We just as naturally feel affection and warmth towards our loving God. As St. Vincent put it, we are *"filled with warmth and affection... continually aware of the presence of God, [find] satisfaction in thinking about Him"* and spend our lives *"imperceptibly in such contemplation."* [CCD IX:973] This love, which St. Vincent, following the teaching of St. Francis de Sales, called affective love, becomes our motivation to do things, even difficult things, in order to please God – for His sake, not our own.

In a similar way, the natural affective love we have for our spouses and children inspires us to try to please them, and more importantly, to work for their good. How would it be, after all, if our love for our families consisted only of hugs and affection, without doing the work needed to feed, shelter, protect, and teach them? When we do this work, even, and perhaps especially, when it is unappreciated, this is what Vincent termed effective love. We act for the good of the one we love.

As St Thomas Aquinas wrote, to love is to will the good of another. [Summa, III, Q27, A2] How, then, do we will the good of God? The good of God, St. Vincent said, is for *"His name to be made known and revealed to everyone, that He may reign over the earth, and that His Will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* [CCD XI:35] To love God, then, to will His good, is to do His will; to make His will our own.

And it is God's will that we see and serve Him in the poor, in the despairing, in the hungry, the prisoner, the stranger, and the sick. We offer them not only our affection, but our time, talents, possessions, and ourselves. After all, as St. James teaches, *"If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?"* To love God is to love what He loves, both affectively and effectively. Faith and works, then, become one in love.

Contemplate

Is my love for the neighbor, and for God, truly more than words?

Recommended Reading

[Turn Everything to Love](#)