



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

Contemplation: To Hear and to Answer the Call

To be a member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul is not merely to volunteer, because to volunteer is to *do* something. Vincentians are not called simply to *do* something, but rather to *be* something. That is the nature of a calling, or vocation. The largest and most fundamental calling of all Christians is the universal call to holiness. [\[LG, Ch. 5\]](#) We are called to be holy. Yet we know that each of us takes a specific and individual pathway towards that goal, and that the universal calling must by necessity include smaller, more specific, and more individual calls to each of us.

Most of us were first called to this vocation by another member, either by way of a pulpit talk, or a personal invitation. When we consider that this vocation is a call from God, we should often reflect that it was the Holy Spirit who inspired and sent that person to deliver His invitation to us. We should allow this thought to lead us toward seeking His inspiration in all people, for we cannot know in advance who will be inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Consider in particular the neighbors seeking assistance who literally call us personally to them. They may dial the conference help line, in other words, but the call comes to you. From the beginning the Society has regarded our service to the neighbors to be *“the means and not the end of our association.”* [\[182, to Lallier, 1838\]](#) Viewed in this way, then, how would it change us, how would it guide our encounter with the neighbors, if we go to them already disposed not only to finding Christ in them, but with the understanding that theirs is a very specific call meant to guide us personally closer to holiness?

The way to holiness seems long – at least as long as a human lifetime. That we all are called to the same holiness makes its attainment no less daunting a goal. After all, how many of us even work in the same occupation at age fifty that we had envisioned for ourselves in our youth? We walk a winding path through life, rarely able to see far ahead with any accuracy or certainty. To trust in providence is to trust that God will continue to guide us on this winding road, picking us up when we stumble, leading us to Him, calling us again and again through the people and experiences of our lives - if we keep our hearts open to hear Him.

As Blessed Frédéric once asked, *“so long as the traveler sees ten steps ahead of him, will he not arrive just as well as if he had the architect’s plan before his very eyes?”* [\[70, to Falconnet, 1834\]](#) God’s call to all of us is great, and thundering, and universal. His call to each of us is a whisper in the storm, a tap on the shoulder, the smile of a stranger, a feeling of contentment, a sigh, a vision, or a fleeting thought. In the person of the neighbor, He calls us. In faith and in love, we answer, and each time that we do, we draw closer to the loving God who wants nothing more than for us to be one with Him in love.

Contemplate

Do I listen carefully for God’s call in the people and events of my life – especially in the neighbor?

Recommended Reading

[Letters of Frédéric Ozanam](#)