



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

Contemplation: With Simple Assurance

Our virtue of [simplicity](#) is not really about living a more ascetic lifestyle, although that is also a virtuous pursuit. Simplicity, as we seek to practice it, is about a dedication to the truth, or as our Rule puts it, to “*frankness, integrity, genuineness.*” [[Rule, Part I, 2.5.1](#)] It is through our simplicity that we earn the trust of the neighbor, our benefactors, our communities, and each other.

St. Vincent said that simplicity was his favorite virtue; that it has to do first with God, for it is about truth, and God is the ultimate truth. He even went so far as to say that “*God is very simple, or, rather. He's Simplicity personified; consequently, where there's simplicity, there God is also found.*” [[CCD XI:40](#)] So, being called to imitate Christ, to be His face in our encounters with the neighbor, we must be committed to truth. Vincent taught that to speak with simplicity is to speak the words as they are in our hearts, just as we think them, and to do otherwise is dishonest.

Often, we avoid simplicity not to be dishonest, but because we are afraid of how others may respond. Certainly, simplicity should not be confused with bluntness, or lead us to voice all of our thoughts. Instead, with simplicity tempered by prudence, we say what needs to be said, as gently as possible. Sparing somebody's feelings is kind. Hiding the truth from them is not. Seeking the balance between those two things is simplicity. Vincent explained that we should not be afraid to say what is good, we should be certain we are correct before saying what is bad, and as for the indifferent, we needn't say anything at all. “*We must always consider God,*” he said, “*and never ourselves.*” [[CCD XIIIb:280](#)]

Blessed Frédéric also expressed a fear of simplicity, writing his friend “*I regret very much having sometimes hidden what I thought in order to seem to agree with you.*” Having concerned himself first with how he might be viewed, he did his friend no favors, and so, he concluded “*Let us not be afraid to tell each other the whole truth.*” [[13, to Materne, 1830](#)] In this way, theirs would become a stronger friendship. In a similar way, our simplicity with the neighbor is essential to forming relationships based on trust and friendship. We don't make promises we cannot keep, and if we believe the best way to help may not include material assistance, we explain why we feel that way, without, for example, hiding behind guidelines that we pretend have tied our hands.

When we try to protect ourselves by not speaking plainly, we will often find ourselves replaying the conversation in our minds, feeling as if it never really ended, and wondering what would happen if our true thoughts were discovered. This is why, Vincent taught, “*the person who walks simply, walks with assurance; whereas, on the contrary, those who are wily and practice duplicity are in constant fear that their craftiness will be discovered, and that, if people catch them in their deception, they'll no longer be willing to trust them.*” [[CCD XI:40](#)]

Contemplate

When I am less than truthful, is it truly to protect others, or is it sometimes to protect myself?

Recommended Reading

['Tis a Gift to Be Simple](#)