



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

Contemplation: Our Vincentian Hearts

In his encyclical, [*Dilexit Nos*](#), Pope Francis focuses on the importance of the heart to the practice of our faith; not merely the physical, biological heart, but the heart which is the core of our being, the union of body and spirit. Not surprisingly, he cites St. Vincent de Paul, who often taught that all God asks of us is our hearts. He also said that “as soon as a heart is empty of self, God fills it.” [\[CCD XI:281\]](#) His biographer Joseph Guichard even noted that St. Vincent began each day by crossing himself and saying, “My God, I give You my heart.”

St. Vincent’s actual heart is in the Chapel of the Miraculous Medal in Paris, but in Frédéric’s time, it was in a cathedral in Lyon, Frédéric’s childhood home, where it was an inspiration to him. Like Vincent, Frédéric recognized the centrality of the heart to our vocation, saying of our patron that he “is a life to be carried on, a heart in which one’s own heart is enkindled...” [\[175, to Lallier, 1838\]](#) Adding then, to Vincent’s teaching, Frédéric’s thoughts begin to define for us a Vincentian heart.

Our works, he believed, should be guided not by cold reason, nor bureaucratic rules, nor even solely by the model of other Conferences. Instead, as he advised one new Conference, “It is better for you to raise your work by your own strength, under the inspirations of your heart, under the influence of local circumstances...” [\[90, to Curnier, 1835\]](#)

For Frédéric, the heart was the center of both faith and charity, for “the human heart easily allows itself to be captured by love and there is always much love there where there is much faith.” [\[145, to Velay, 1837\]](#) This love of God, charity, arises in our hearts through “God’s design... to implant religion in the mind through reason, and in the heart through grace.” [\[Baunard, 213\]](#)

Yet there is another vital aspect of the Vincentian heart: its union with other Vincentian hearts. Frédéric went so far as to say that “The principal goal of our association was to do everything with one heart and one soul...” [\[1457, Report on the Works, 1834\]](#) You can’t be a Vincentian without other Vincentians; our friendship is first “a union of hearts in Jesus Christ, our Lord.” [\[Bailly, Circ. Ltr. 14 Jul 1841\]](#) That friendship we share with one another, we extend also to the neighbor, serving [for love alone](#); a love that arises from the light of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and that seeks to unite us in communion with one another and with Jesus Christ.

This flame in our hearts inspires us to love God, as St. Vincent taught, “with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows.” [\[CCD XI:32\]](#) In our works, in our faith, and in our friendship, Vincentian hearts are united, and as Frédéric said, “When the heart and the hand are at work, how can we stop them?” [\[40, to his father, 1831\]](#)

Contemplate

How can I better allow myself to be led by the inspirations of my heart, in union with fellow Vincentians?

Recommended Reading

[*Dilexit Nos*](#)

National Council of the United States Society of St. Vincent de Paul

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