



Rome, 18 November 2022

**ADVENT CIRCULAR  
THE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS:  
THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS**

To all the members of the Vincentian Family

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the grace and peace of Jesus be always with us!

This Advent letter is an invitation to pray, meditate, and interiorize the “Evangelical Counsels” as a means to pursue our journey with Saint Vincent de Paul, a “Mystic of Charity.” Jesus is the center of our being, our action, our aspirations. For us Christians, He is the focus, model, and the One to put in first place in our own lives, regardless of whether our vocation is to married life, single life, or some form of Consecrated life. Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience are indisputable and vivid signs in Jesus’s life, for He was poor, chaste, and obedient.

Usually when we speak of the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, we link them to persons in Consecrated life. They follow a specific path, confirmed by the vows they make. However, the Evangelical Counsels are part of the response to the universal call to holiness for every Christian, but always according to her or his specific vocation, given by Jesus Himself.

Jesus remains the prototype of the three Evangelical Counsels. Although He had it all, He lived poorly. He was chaste, allowing Him great freedom in His relationships. He was obedient, expressing with great clarity that His mission on earth would develop according to the Father’s plan and surrendering totally to His Father’s will to the last second of His earthly life, to the cross where He exclaimed before returning to His Father’s house: “It is finished” (John 19:30).

The foundation for the Evangelical Counsel of Poverty is the life of the Son of God:

*Jesus Christ, who having all things, had nothing. He was the Master and Lord of the whole world. He made the goods that are in it; yet, He willed, for love of us, to deprive himself of their use; even though He was Lord of the whole world, He made himself the poorest of all men and even had less than the smallest animals.*<sup>1</sup>

Our common call as Vincentians to serve the poor urges us to witness to the world our configuration to Christ that began with our baptism and deepens until our return to the Father's house. As Vincentians, our priority is not the accumulation of material goods and financial resources for our own selfish reasons, for we always bear in our minds and hearts that the poor are "Our Lords and Masters" who have a claim to our resources. Considering how we can assist them helps us to live the Evangelical Counsel of Poverty through a sober and simple way of life. The Vincentian mission places us in the world of the poor. Vincentian poverty fosters a community of service and solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

It also presupposes patterning our life on the example of the poor Jesus, who evangelized the most abandoned. Saint Vincent, following a long Church tradition, distinguishes between interior and exterior poverty, both of which are necessary. Without an external manifestation, "spiritual poverty" is not credible. Without spiritual motivation, "material poverty" may often be evil.

The Evangelical Counsel of Chastity likewise concerns all Christians, obviously those who vow it but also persons who are married and those who are single. As Vincentians, who are regularly in touch with the poor, we must not help them only materially, but also spiritually, approaching the person in a holistic way, sharing the value of chastity with them as we evangelize. The poor will come to understand Christian relationships by how we live in accordance with the Gospel values, serving as light and salt for humanity.

Chastity involves interior and exterior continence, according to one's state in life, so that a person's affectivity and sexuality are lived out with deep respect for others and for oneself. Celibacy presupposes the renunciation of marriage and the sexual expressions proper to it.

For Vincentians in Consecrated life, these two elements of the vow—chastity and celibacy—are external manifestations of a total dedication of one's life. They should be perceived as an undertaking of a "particular responsibility: the service of the poor" and not as

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<sup>1</sup> *Vincent de Paul, Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, translated and edited by Jacqueline Kilar, DC; and Marie Poole, DC; et al; annotated by John W. Carven, CM; New City Press, Brooklyn and Hyde Park, 1985-2014; volume XI, p. 210; conference 130, "Poverty," 6 August 1655. Future references to this work will be indicated using the initials *CCD*, followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, *CCD XI, 210*.

a rejection of familial responsibility. The demands of a radical following of Jesus lead Vincentians in Consecrated life to offer themselves completely for the cause of the Kingdom.

For Vincentians in general, the Evangelical Counsel of Chastity helps us to grow in an intimate relationship with Jesus. As generous self-giving to others, chastity promotes our evangelizing and charitable mission to the poor, an expression of generativity and creativity. Like poverty, chastity encourages a community of service that can be effective only through friendship and fraternal relationships.

We are called to develop freedom and mutual support through healthy friendships and prudence, leading to apostolic zeal. We need to recognize our own weaknesses, our need for humility, and our reliance on Jesus's indispensable support. Saint Vincent affirms, "Humility is a very excellent means for acquiring and preserving chastity."<sup>2</sup> There are moments when fidelity to Jesus entails sacrifice. Saint Vincent recommends serious sacrifice (mortification) of the interior and exterior senses, and knowing how to avoid ways of expressing affectivity and sexuality that are not in keeping with the celibate life. Because our humanity has its strengths and weaknesses, we must speak about difficulties sincerely with Jesus and with other people who can support us, like our confessor and spiritual director.

The third Evangelical Counsel is Obedience. It speaks to persons who are open to Jesus's message. Despite doubts and uncertainty, they surrender to Jesus and trust Him, persuaded that, in the end, the path He is suggesting we follow is the best. As Saint Vincent reminds us, "You will have God's blessing in actions performed through obedience."<sup>3</sup>

Obedience involves Gospel values and attitudes including humility, simplicity, meekness, dialog, the gift of listening in married life, in single life, or in Consecrated life. Even when speaking to consecrated persons, Saint Vincent often evokes the example of lay people's obedience and deference:

*I knew a Councillor of the court... Although he was a Councillor and up in years, he never did anything without seeking advice. If no one else was about, he would send for his valet, 'Come here, young Pierre. I have to attend to a certain business matter; what do you think I should do about it?' His valet would answer, 'I think you'd do well to act this way.' 'Fine, Pierre; right you are. I'll follow your advice.' And he told me that he felt God blessed matters in such a way that any business he carried on in that fashion was successful.<sup>4</sup>*

When two or more persons cannot agree among themselves, especially in serious issues, it is the Evangelical Counsel of Obedience that brings them to a state of inner peace and reconciliation that they could not imagine. As Christians and Vincentians, we strive not to have

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<sup>2</sup> CCD XI, 162; conference 111, "Chastity," 13 November 1654.

<sup>3</sup> CCD VI, 574; letter 2431 to François Villain in Troyes, 25 October 1657.

<sup>4</sup> CCD XIIIb, 282; document 160, Council of 20 June 1647.

the last word, or be right, but to place ourselves in the role of a servant, the one who serves and not the one who is served.

May our meditation and interiorization of the Evangelical Counsels help each of us to respond to the universal call to holiness and thus experience great blessings.

*How blessed are those who give themselves to God in this way to do what Jesus Christ did, and to practice, after His example, the virtues He practiced: poverty, obedience, humility, patience, zeal, and the other virtues! For in this way they are the true disciples of such a Master. They live solely of His Spirit and spread, together with the fragrance of His life, the merit of His actions, for the sanctification of souls for whom He died and rose again.<sup>5</sup>*

My Advent prayer for all the members of the Vincentian Family is that you “continue to fear and love Him [Our Lord] well; offer Him your difficulties and your little services, and do only what pleases Him. In this way you will continue to grow in grace and virtue.”<sup>6</sup>

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM

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<sup>5</sup> CCD V, 554; letter 2013a to Joseph Beaulac, [1656].

<sup>6</sup> CCD IV, 402; letter 1512 to the Sisters of Valpuiseaux, 23 June 1652.