Vincentian Family Office ● Bureau de la Famillie Vincentienne ● Oficina de la Familia Vicenciana
500 East Chelten Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19144, USA +1 (215) 715-3984 VFO@famvin.org WWW: famvin.org

Rome, Advent 2025

AN ADVENT WITH "OPEN EYES"
TO LIVE THE MYSTICISM OF CHARITY

Dear members of the Vincentian Family,

May the Lord Jesus, source of true Hope, who gives light to minds and instills peace in hearts, be with us always!

At the beginning of Advent, a time of waiting and hope, I would like to share with you an idea that comes from the heart of our charism and our spirituality: to live our waiting for the Lord in the concreteness of charity.

Advent is not only a time of liturgical preparation for Christmas, but also a journey of conversion of our vision, to learn to recognize Jesus who continually comes to meet us in the faces and persons of the poor, the little ones, and the marginalized. It is a time when the Word of God invites us to watch, but also to act, to allow ourselves to be touched by the wounds of the world, and to become credible signs of Jesus's love.

During this Advent, I invite you to reawaken the *mysticism of charity*: that which is born of the silence of prayer, grows in daily service, and becomes reality in fraternal communion. This is not the first time I have invited you to reflect on the mysticism of charity, because I believe that its "practice" allows us to act according to the very heart of Christian life. It is in charity that faith becomes visible, that hope is translated into action, and that waiting for Jesus becomes a daily encounter with his presence in the poor.

The Vincentian Family is invited today, as always, to love the poor according to the heart of Jesus, without seeking personal gain. Our hearts must burn with charity according to the spirit of the Gospel, as Saint Vincent de Paul writes: "… a heart truly filled with charity, which understands what it is to love God, wouldn't want to go to God unless God anticipated him and attracted him by His grace. That's a far cry from wanting to carry God away and draw Him to himself by hook or by crook. No, no; in those cases, nothing is gained by force. When God wants to communicate himself, He does it effortlessly, in a perceptible, very pleasant, gentle, loving way..." (*CCD* XI, 207-208).

On 19 September 2016, writing for the first time to the Vincentian Family as Superior General, I invited you to reflect on the figure and work of Saint Vincent de Paul, mystic of charity; later, I called you to deepen, in the light of our Constitutions and Common Rules, **the pillars of Saint**

Vincent's spirituality that made him a mystic of charity: the Incarnation (Advent 2016), the Holy Trinity (Lent 2017), and the Eucharist (Advent 2017).

Vincent's innovative approach is clear to all of us simply because it follows the mysticism of love that Jesus lived in the dynamic of the Incarnation and made visible in history. In the words and actions of the Incarnate Word of God, Love takes flesh in Jesus, consisting of listening to the needs of the people, proclamation of the liberating Word, and effective works aimed at promoting every human person, elevated to the dignity of a child of God. Every teaching of Saint Vincent aspires to reaffirm the mystical dimension of the gift that came to human beings without any merit on their part in the Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Vincentian Family, mission finds meaning and nourishment in the mystery of charity, where Jesus is mystically seen in the poor. Just as the Son of God became flesh in a child, humbly laid in the humility of a manger, so he is present *in the poor*. For all of us, this is the source of the spirituality of love for our neighbor, which passes through Jesus and reaches the poor. The Word of God invites us to live concretely the service of our brothers and sisters in their material and spiritual needs.

In this Advent 2025, I invite you to rediscover the truth of vision, which not only makes us dream of the coming of God in the concreteness of humanity, but also allows us to nurture and nourish what theologian Johann Baptist Metz has called the ***mysticism of open eyes***. The Vincentian Family is called today to renew every dimension in the fervor of Love: prayer, the mission of charity, fraternal life, the proclamation of the Gospel to the poor, and Christian witness in society. Jesus calls us in this time of waiting to practice once again the hard work of the fruits of love, according to the teaching that Saint Paul gave us in the Hymn to Charity!

Keeping our eyes open means committing ourselves to a spirituality of concreteness, responsibly exercising our mandate as a Family of Charity in the name of Love incarnate. In fact, to paraphrase Metz, it is charity that makes us vigilant, keeps us awake, and opens our eyes to reality, but only if it is rooted in the Love that is Jesus. This Love is the cornerstone that nourishes the life of Saint Vincent and that of the entire Family he desired. "Charity," said Saint Vincent, "is above all Rules, and everything comes down to that. If it's a woman of rank, you have to do what she tells you" (*CCD* X, 478).

If we want to live the *mysticism of charity with our eyes open*, we must strive to make the waiting of Advent an exercise of zeal for the salvation of souls.

The mysticism of charity with open eyes shows us, during this Advent season, the concreteness of the vision of each one of us. **We are sent to convert our material and spiritual eyes**. Sometimes our eyes are dulled by despair and could fall into indifference. There may be those who, while declaring themselves Samaritans (cf. Luke 10:25-37), may avoid the road from Jerusalem to Jericho ... perhaps so as not to meet the eyes of the poor with the eyes of their own opulence. We must return to that road for a concrete and responsible journey in the logic of evangelical industriousness; that is, in the silence of works to bear witness to Charity made flesh.

Revitalizing the zeal of our mission, according to the intention of Saint Vincent, also means restoring dignity to *the dreams of the poor* with tangible responses, following the example of the Samaritan in the Gospel, who was willing to support and accompany the desperate wait of the unfortunate man, confident that he would receive an act of love, precisely **because the poor, whatever their condition, "dream, but need someone to interpret their dreams," as writes a venerable member of the Church, Bishop Tonino Bello.**

Jesus asks us to convert our hearts so that we can combine Charity and Justice. Hoping in charity means living the mysticism of charity with our eyes open, with the zeal prescribed by Saint Vincent, which has its source in Jesus. In fact, "If love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame; if love is a sun, zeal is its ray. Zeal is unconditional in the love of God" (*CCD* XII, 250).

A mysticism of charity with open eyes truly knows how to be the expectation and fulfillment of Jesus's promises when all persons are recognized for their dignity and not evaluated according to the logic of profit or on the basis of social conditions and economic possibilities. In fact, **writes theologian Metz, "the Christian faith is, in any case, a faith that seeks justice. Certainly, Christians are always mystics, but they are not exclusively mystics in the sense of a spiritual experience of themselves, but in the sense of a spiritual experience of solidarity. They are first and foremost 'mystics with open eyes.' Their mysticism is not a natural, faceless mysticism. Rather, it is a mysticism that seeks the face, which leads first and foremost to an encounter with others who suffer, to an encounter with the faces of the unfortunate and the victims."**

It is now time to live the *mystical dimension* of the Vincentian Family that is part of the Church's mission. In this Advent season that we are about to experience, not only must we meditate on this challenge, but also we must commit ourselves to making our mission more evangelical**. More than 50 years have passed since Karl Rahner, the great theologian of the 20th century, wrote one of the most prophetic and well-known phrases about faith during the Council debates. The phrase we have heard and repeated many times is this: "The Christian of the 21st century will either be a 'mystic'—that is, a person who has 'experienced' something—or will not even be a Christian."** Now is the favorable time to make this prophecy a reality by working concretely in charity to live mysticism with open eyes; that is, recognizing Jesus, who comes to us, in the poor.

May this time of grace of the Lord's coming among us find us vigilant in love, capable of making the Father's tenderness visible and of proclaiming the Good News to the poor with words and deeds, giving life to their dreams with concreteness, responsibility, and trust in the Jesus of hope who comes to us in the poverty of the manger.

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

Tomaž Mavrič, CM

P.S. I would like to inform you, as announced in my letter for the Solemnity of Saint Vincent on 27 September 2025, that educational and pastoral resources on the film *Monsieur Vincent* and the multimedia work *Fino alla fine. Vincenzo de' Paoli, messaggero e servo* (*Until the End: Vincent de Paul, Messenger and Servant*) are available on the website: https://congregatiomissionis.org/en/pastoral-resources/.

I encourage everyone to disseminate and promote these productions in communities, parishes, schools, missions, and works of the Vincentian Family as an opportunity for knowledge, formation, and prayer; to use them as missionary tools to reach young people, families, and those distant from the faith, showing them the beauty of a life given to God and to others; to experience the viewing of these productions as a community event that strengthens our sense of belonging and rekindles in us the flame of the spirituality and charism.