

Vinfam India

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Message

THE JOY OF LOVE

As we all know, today the world is desperately craving for joy and peace. The awful developments being witnessed these days like war, terroristic attacks, religious fanaticism, homicides, child abuses, women trafficking etc., are really threats to humanity. The root cause of the present crises in the world is due to lack of true love. As a prophetic voice, time and again Pope Francis speaks of the importance and relevance the law of love. In order to build up a better society it is indispensable to nurture true and genuine love in family which is the basic unit of the society. Conscious of this fact, Pope Francis directs his special attention on family. This is what he had articulated in his recent post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love). This document was signed on March 19, 2016 which is the outcome of the two Synods on the family convoked in 2014 and 2015. It contains 9 chapters with 326 paragraphs. At first he invites to open the Scriptures to find out the success stories of family relationship. He then cautions the various issues and imminent dangers especially 'me first' culture that will adversely affect the healthy family relationship. Pope Francis then recalls the teachings of the Church on family. In order to build up ideal families, Pontiff reiterates to maintain genuine love between couples and with their children. The parents are duly reminded of their natural obligation of procreation and education of the children. Pope Francis then accentuates the Church's obligation to

provide proper pastoral care for all families. The document concludes with a brief discussion of family spirituality.

Through this lengthy document Pope Francis wants to see joy in the eyes of all especially among all the members of the family. Pope Francis definitely understands the spiritual and corporal struggles in the family. In any case joy can be restored if there is genuine love. Citing the letter of St. Paul to the first Corinthians 13, he confirms that LOVE CONQUERS ALL and it lasts forever. If there is love there is joy. Hence Pope Francis says about 'Joy of Love'.

The Holy Family of Nazareth continue to show a beautiful example to all those who are called to family life. The Gospels of Mathew and Luke enumerate the struggles and agonies of Mary and Joseph from the moment of their betrothal till their death. In midst of all their hardships and anguishes they learned to extend genuine love for each other. They embraced their daily cross with profound love. There were no rooms for complaining to God or against each other. There were no moments where they felt discouragements to carry out their vision and mission. Since they did everything with love they found joy even amidst terrible sorrows. Certainly this document refers to the biological families. Through this document, Pope Francis directly intends and teaches to the catholic families. Can the members of Vincentian Family learn anything from this document of '*Amorislaetitia*'? Of course, the members of Vincentian Family are related to each other not due to

consanguinity. But they are united together as one spiritual family due to the possession of a common charism. The message elucidated in the document can be applied analogically. The members of the Vincentian Family, in their endeavour to build the family of God by means of the evangelization of the poor, confront many challenges and struggles, which may emerge either from *ad intra* (with-in) or from *ad extra* (with-out). If the members are animated by the genuine love whatever be the hindrances they will continue to be faithful to their charism. They will always find joy in being and becoming a member of the Vincentian Family.

Christmas once again reminds the great love of God. God is love (1 Jn 4: 8). He loved the world so much so that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3: 16). In order to redeem the mankind Jesus emptied himself and took the human nature (Phil 2: 7). He preferred to be born in a manger (Lk 2: 7). The love moved him to offer even the last drop of his blood for mankind (Jn 15:13). Jesus gives a beautiful example to find 'joy of love'. Let this Christmas help us as Vincentians to imitate Christ's 'Kenosis' and thereby to experience 'joy of love'. I take this opportunity to wish you a Merry Christmas and praying for you to have that joy and peace especially all through the ensuing year and in all your spiritual efforts.



“Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (Jn 16: 22)

Fr. Francis Puthenthayil CM
Coordinator of Vincentian Family in India

NEWS – NATION

1. 400th Anniversary of Vincentian Charism

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” A global initiative of the Vincentian Family to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Vincentian Charism in 2017. The year of welcoming the stranger will run from January 1st to December 31st 2017.

It was in 1617 while preaching in the parish church of Chatillon, that Vincent exhorted his parishioners to take responsibility for a poor family from the parish that had taken seriously ill and were in need of food and comfort. The family was saved by the overwhelming response to this call to action and Vincent, as a result, had his great realization that for charity to be effective it must be properly organized – an event which has changed the world for the last 400 years.

This story also brings to life a gospel text at the heart of our shared Vincentian calling – Matthew 25:35 “I was a stranger and you welcomed me”. By reaching out and helping the strangers in our midst we are showing solidarity with that event at Chatillon and we are as one with our Vincentian calling – we model the example of the Good Samaritan in our community.

Who are the strangers in our midst today? There are so many to choose from – the refugees fleeing from oppression and poverty, those internally displaced within their country due to civil war, the migrants seeking a new life, the homeless, those coping alone with physical or mental illness, those suffering discrimination perhaps because of their faith or race or color, the lonely and vulnerable both young and old.

Many of these people and issues are already familiar areas of work to members of the Vincentian Family globally. However, can we do more? Are there new poverties emerging that we are being called to respond to?

To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Vincentian charism the leaders of the international Vincentian Family would like to invite all members of the Vincentian Family AROUND THE WORLD to consider how we might better welcome the strangers in our communities by making it the focus of the 400th Anniversary of the Vincentian Charism.

We invite them to focus on the following questions:

- Who are the strangers in our midst?
- How are we currently supporting them?
- What new needs are emerging?
- How might we respond to these needs?
- Might we be the strangers in need of welcoming?

Welcoming the strangers in our midst should also be seen as an invitation to everyone who shares (or might be interested in) our Vincentian values, mission or spirituality. The people we currently serve are as capable of welcoming strangers as we are – if we invite them to do so. It is not dependent on power or wealth or hierarchy. This is an opportunity for everyone to be part of our family and to share in our celebrations over the course of the year.

2. Workshop on Systemic Change



The International Commission for Systemic Change organised a meeting of the Systemic Change for the Asia-Pacific region for 2 days, on 11th and 12th of November 2016 at the Provincial House of the Daughters of Charity in Lam Lukka, Bangkok. Bro. Jim Claffey SSVP from USA, Sr. Teresa Muede DC from Philippines and Sr. Teresa Kotturan SCN from India were the resource persons. The meeting was attended by 20 members from 6 various branches hailing from 4 different countries in Asia. Bro. Jim talked at length about the concept of Systemic Change and about the functions of Systemic Change Commission. Sr. Teresa presented the tool kit for systemic change which consisted of different topics related to the theme. Sr. Kotturan explained elaborately the presence and

activities of the Vincentian Family in the UNO. The Sessions were followed by Group Discussions.

It was also decided in the meeting that there be two separate representations for the International Systemic Change Commissions from Asia – one from Asia-South Asia and East Asia. Sr. Teresa Muede DC will be the contact person of Eastern Asia and Sr. Teresa Kotturan for South Asia.

1. Commission for Women Empowerment:

RESTORING THE DIGNITY OF WOMEN: VINCENTIAN FAMILY COMMITMENT

A meeting of women commission of VFI was held at St. Vincent Provincialate, Banaswadi, Bangalore 56000 on 15-11-2016 at 4 pm. The coordinator Sr. Roselyn Karakattu presided over the meeting and welcomed the members.

In their deliberations the members highlighted that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. We share a conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family, and the equality and dignity of all human beings. We affirm the sacredness of the individual person and the importance of his or her freedom of conscience. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.

After the report and its evaluation the meeting discussed our mission and objectives. Each one shared the experiences in the respective mission field where we are involved for restoring the dignity of women. Women empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. It also helps to increase and improve the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights. Women have the rights to get their voices heard, build self-esteem and confidence, create public

leaders and boost decision-making power. To this we need to know and collect the information from different sources.

Education and advocacy are very much needed to defend the dignity and rights of women. Religious communities possess spiritual, moral and social human beings. Violence against women threatens the lives and assets that can be utilized.

Workshops are suggested on the following Topics:

- **Violence against women and girls**
- **Human rights, Gender sensitivity**
- **General policy and privilege on women**
- **How to empower women in our society?**
- **Atrocities against women**
- **Role of women in today's society**

Encourage women's participation in decision making processes in families and in church and civil bodies: Supporting, motivating and encouraging each woman to involve in active participation in all the possible ways. To some extent they are coming up through their-own group gathering (Self Help Group) Gramasabha and Panchayat meeting, school,) A study of women's success stories to be collected and shared with others which may boost and encourage the women who are not able to come forward. Allow women to talk freely about their rage, fears, assumptions, and experiences related to violence against women; in many contexts, religious leaders serve as one of the only safe listeners for survivors, and their voices must be heard to get appropriate support.

We Pledge for the well-being of women, children, adolescent Gender equality and women's empowerment.

2. NEWS FROM VARIOUS BRANCHES

Congregation of the Mission

The New Visitor for the South Indian Province

The members of the Southern Indian Province elected Rev. Fr. Tomichan Mattathiveiyil CM and the same was confirmed by the General Curia.



He was born on 10th of August 1967 as the 5th child of Joseph and Catherine in St George's church, Muhamma, of the Archdiocese of Changanassery in Kerala. Fr. Tom joined the Congregation of the Mission in 1986 and was

ordained a priest on 04th January 1993 by His Grace Mar Joseph Powathil, the Archbishop of Changanassery. As a young priest he worked in different parishes and seminaries. From the year 1999 for the last 17 years he was working in Germany. Rev. Fr. Tomichan Mattathiveiyil CM was installed Visitor on the 24th of October 2016.

Thanks to Rev. Fr. Mathew Onatt, the outgoing Visitor for the South Indian Province

Fr. Mathew Onatt CM who was leading the South Indian Province in the capacity as Visitor completed his term. It was he who took initiative to allot a plot of land in Belwadi for establishing secretariat of Vincentian Family India. He did his level best to promote collaboration among the various branches of Vincentian Family. Hence he deserves special appreciation and thanks. Vincentian Family India is immensely indebted to him and wishes him long life and assures all the best for his new ministry.

SAINTS AND BLESSEDS OF VINCENTIAN FAMILY.

THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL: MARY'S GIFT TO HUMANITY

Sr. Grace Moolan DC



From the marriage at Cana in Galilee (Jn 2) Mary intervenes in human history. She accompanies us all along and gives her message to lead us to her Divine Son. Today too there are many experiences, apparitions and interventions of Mary in different

parts of the world, giving us messages from heaven because she loves us all very dearly.

In the 19th century, Mary appeared twice in France: 140 rue du bac, Paris in 1830 and at Lourdes in 1858 as the country was torn apart by various difficulties:

- Political upheavals demanding democracy, based on equality, fraternity and liberty
- Economic and social life affected by poverty, epidemics of cholera and plague
- The youth with questions before the Church demanding more commitment to the poor

It is in this context that God chose Sr. Catherine Laboure, a humble novice of the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul to be instrument, so that as she said, “so that no one may doubt the message”. We know these facts through the three accounts she wrote and the message she passed on to Fr. Jeanne Marie Aladel who was to carry out Mary’s instructions.



In **the first apparition** during the night of July 18-19, 1830, Sr. Catherine was led by her guardian angel to the brightly lighted and decorated Chapel at 11.30 p.m. Mary sitting on the Director’s Chair and she kneeling by her side with hands resting on Mary’s knees, spoke with her for two hours on the following:

- God wanted to entrust her with a mission and she would have a lot of suffering. Then “come to the foot of the altar to open her heart”.
- She had to share everything with Fr. Aladel who would carry out Mary’s instructions.
- Revolutions and sufferings in France – July Revolution of 1830, of 1848 and of 1871
- Renewal required in the Congregation and the amalgamation of a Congregation with the Daughters of Charity which happened in 1850.
- Her own personal growth in holiness
- The great devotion in the months of the Sacred Heart and of Mary. The devotion of the month of Mary was begun in 1834 and that of the Sacred Heart in 1835.



The **second apparition** took place on 27 Nov 1830. It was at 5.30 p.m. when the whole community and the novices were in the chapel doing their meditation. She heard the rustling sound of silk and saw the Blessed Virgin standing with a globe in her hands. She was standing on another globe. She heard the voice, “This globe represents the world, France and each one in particular.” Today Mary would have spoken of Syria and others. With love she holds each one of us close to her heart and offers us to her Divine Son. She pleads for all our needs and hopes, also of the whole world.

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal:

The globe disappeared, and there was a lot of glitter, brightness and indescribable beauty. Mary extended her arms and from her shed bright rays of light which overflowed on the globe below. She heard, “These rays of light are a symbol of the graces that Mary obtains for people.” Surrounding the picture, she read the invocation, **O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.** She also heard, “I pour out graces on those who ask them of me.”

A few moments later this picture turned round and on the reverse side, she saw the letter ‘M’ surmounted with a little cross and at the foot of it, a heart surrounded by thorns and another pierced with a lance. She heard the voice again, “A medal must be struck on this model, and those who carry one and make this prayer will enjoy the special protection of God.” **Once again in Dec**, Catherine had this same vision at 5.30 p.m.

The brightness, glitter and her beauty gives us a glimpse of the glory of ‘sinlessness’, ‘the fullness of grace’. Today more than ever we need her in the midst of darkness of injustice, corruption, oppression and self-seeking tendencies. The reverse of the medal is the answer –turn to the redeeming love given us through the Cross. We should

continually remember the path of the Cross we must follow to experience true freedom to love.

Fr. Aladel in great hesitation turned to Msgr, de Quelen, the Archbishop of Paris for light. He was deeply inspired by the narration – the apparition of Mary in her Original grace as depicted in Rev. 12. He agreed to make the medal with the words, “The tree will be judged by its fruits.”

In 1832 the first medals were made and the Sisters at first distributed them to all the school students in the Paris region at the second outbreak of cholera. In one School, little Caroline the only one who did not wear the medal caught cholera. The Sisters gave her one and she was healed. Name of the medal spread far and wide, and people began to use it. There were many inner healings at deathbeds and conversions. The people called it, “The Miraculous Medal”. By 1835 one million medals were already in circulation. On Jan 20 1842, Alphonse Ratisbonne, a staunch Jewish youth entered the Church Sant’ Andrella de la Fratte, Rome together with his Catholic friend, and was struck by the apparition of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. He knelt down and was converted. He received Baptism and later became a Jesuit missionary in Africa.

The Apparition is a prelude to the declaration of Mary’s Immaculate Conception as a dogma of faith in 1854 and setting of the feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8th Dec. In 1858 Mary appeared again to St. Bernadette Soubirous to confirm it, naming herself as “I am the Immaculate Conception”.

Sr. Catherine Laboure kept the secret of the apparition all through 46 years of life. Living as a devoted servant of the poor she died on 31st Dec 1876. Her incorrupt body rests in the Apparition Chapel. This Chapel is a pilgrim centre, where morning till evening people of all colours and languages come and pray at the foot of the altar. More information can be obtained on its website:

“The Chapel of the Miraculous Medal”. The feast of the Miraculous Medal is celebrated on 27th Nov.

I conclude with the prayer of St. John Paul II on the occasion of his visit on 31 May 1980: “To you Mother of all people and nations we confide in faith the entire human family with its fears and its hopes... Guide it in the search for freedom and justice for all. Direct its footsteps on the paths of peace. May all encounter Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

ANNUAL GATHERING & SEMINAR ON SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The Annual Gathering of the Major superiors/heads of the Vincentian Family in India will be held from 11 to 12 March 2017 at ‘NIVETHITHA’, Chunangenvely, Alwaye, Kerala. Bro. James Claffey, Secretary of the International Commission for Systemic Change has consented to be the resource person on 11th March. Rt. Rev. Simon Kaipuram CM, Bishop of Balasore has consented to give the Key Note Address on that day.

The International President of Systemic Change Commission, Rev. Fr. Giuseppe Turati CM will conduct **two-day seminar** for our members who are actively involved in social work. It will be held at ‘NIVETHITHA’, Chunangenvely, Alwaye, Kerala from 13 to 14 March 2017. Food and lodging will be free but anyone feels free to donate, it is most welcome. It will go to the fund of the Vincentian Family India. Only 50 seats are available. So kindly register your members for this seminar latest by 26th of January 2017. Bro. Tomy Varghese SSVP, National Secretary is in charge of the registration. The phone number and e-mail Id is as follows: 09447475163 :tomyvarghese@gmail.com. If anyone of the major superiors/heads feel to attend the seminar after the AGM they are most welcome.

"Noise makes no good, good makes no noise"

St. Vincent de Paul