

Reflection for Thursday 13th August 2020

Many people will be familiar with the St Vincent de Paul Society, a small group of dedicated men and women who try to raise funds to provide for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged within the parish and beyond. They do a tremendous amount of good work and are always looking for new members, please speak to one of the clergy if you would like to become involved.

However, not many people know about the life of St Vincent de Paul or how this great apostolic work started and spread throughout the Church. He was born in the southwest of France in 1580 to a family of peasants and was ordained a priest in 1600. Five years later he was travelling by sea when he was taken prisoner by Turkish pirates and sold as a slave in Tunis (yes there were white slaves, funny how you don't hear much about them). After two years he managed to escape and returned to France where he began his mission to the poor peasants founding a religious institute of priests for the evangelisation of country people.

He also became director of eleven seminaries and started retreats for clergy and laity, over twenty thousand in all. He set up a large number of soup kitchens all over France, provided shelter to hundreds of homeless and medical care for the sick. It's amazing how much can be done by the inspiration of one person totally dedicated to the gospel. Statues and pictures of St Vincent show him wearing the cassock and nearly always carrying a poor child with other poor children by his side demonstrating his tireless devotion to the poor and orphans.

Having been a galley slave himself, he devoted much of his life to the Barbary slaves, 30,000 in all and mostly Catholic. They were made to perform back breaking work, kept in chains, crowded onto ships with only bread and water to keep them alive. They lived in complete misery covered in vermin, sores and ulcers. Their morals were even more pitiful than their physical misery and St Vincent resolved to

improve both, treating them with great kindness doing whatever he had to do no matter how repulsive.

St Vincent was a firm defender of the faith against the many heresies raging through France at the time, particularly the Jansenists who denied the important role of free will in accepting the grace of God as a free gift. It also held that God gives His grace to some but not to everyone who asks for it. They are therefore unable to resist evil and keep the commandments thus damning them to eternal punishment without the grace of the sacraments. However, he always treated the heretics with charity hoping for their eventual conversion back to the true faith. There are still plenty of heresies doing the rounds both inside and outside the Church in the current time but we seem to show no real interest in them and tolerate them with little fuss.

St Vincent de Paul passed to his eternal reward on 27th September 1660 in Paris. He was canonised on 16th June 1737 and his feastday is traditionally kept on 19th July and in the new calendar on 27th September. He is the patron saint of charities, volunteers, prisoners and leprosy patients. His life is a shining example of what we can do if put all our trust in God's providence loving Him completely and practising abandonment to the will of God in our lives. Easy to say but very difficult to carry out.

May the Lord bless us and Our Lady protect us.

Deacon Kevin