



JOURNEYING WITH ST. VINCENT PALLOTTI
THE PROPHET OF COMMUNION

FIND THE GOD WHO SEEKS YOU

*Journeying with St. Vincent Pallotti
The Prophet of Communion*

VENSUS GEORGE, S.A.C.

U.S. Edition, 2015

edited by

Bro. James W. Beamesderfer, S.A.C.
Mrs. Georgette Gray

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Editor's Note:

The only changes to this edition were grammar and English in the vernacular of the United States of America.

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ABBREVIATION

Italian Works

Lett.	Lettere e Brani di Lettere del Ven. Vincenzo Pallotti
OCC	Opere Complete
OCL	Opere Complete: Lettere

English Translations

GIL	God: The Infinite Love
SD	Spiritual Diary
STA	Spiritual Thoughts and Aspirations of St. Vincent Pallotti
PSCA	Pious Society of the Catholic Apostolate

FORWORD

We are grateful to Father Vensus George, S.A.C. for giving us permission to edit his work for use in the United States of America. The purpose of our edition is to retain the integrity and the beauty of the work, but to bring it into conformity with the English usage of the United States of America.

We are deeply grateful to the Very Rev. Peter T. Sticco, S.A.C., Provincial Rector of the Immaculate Conception Province, for granting permission and providing funds to print this edition.

Edited 2015:

Brother James W. Beamesderfer, S.A.C.

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Printed and bound in the United States of America

PREFACE

St. Vincent Pallotti, the Founder of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, was born on 21 April 1795 in Rome as the third of ten children of Peter Paul Pallotti (1755 - 1837) and Mary Magdelene de Rossi (1765 - 1827). He spent his entire life in the city of Rome. He lived in an age of democratic revolutions. Italy, at this time, was plagued by wars, invasions, and occupation of inimical powers. After the French Revolution, the French army occupied the city of Rome in 1798 and 1800. The French abducted Pope Pius VI in 1789 and imprisoned Pius VII in 1809. A number of secret societies were formed to spearhead revolutionary struggle for Italian unification, and they were anti-establishment in the social, political and religious levels.

St. Vincent lived through this turbulent time of Italian history. After his initial studies, he was a student at Sapienza University from 1814 to 1818, and graduated with Doctorates in Philosophy and Theology. He was ordained in 1818. He served as a tutor at Sapienza University from 1819 to 1831. As a priest, Vincent was involved in a number of apostolic activities. In 1819 he started night schools for tradesmen. In 1820 he conducted retreats for youth, public servants and soldiers. He was an active member of twenty-six confraternities. He was busy as a confessor for convents and monasteries. In 1827 he was appointed as the Spiritual Director at the Roman College. In 1835, he took up the same office at the Propaganda Fide College. In addition, he was the confessor at the Irish, English, Scottish and Greek Colleges.

In 1835, he founded the Union of Catholic Apostolate, a pious society which attempted to bring together laypeople, priests and Religious to collaborate in the revival of faith and charity aimed at apostolic action. Significant among the apostolic activities of this Society was social service for the poor and the needy in the city of Rome and in the missions abroad.

This society played a great role in the cholera epidemic that ravaged the city of Rome in 1837. The Society of St. Vincent also attempted to counter the political manipulations of the secret societies which attempted to persuade the youth to take the path of rebellion. To animate the Union of Catholic Apostolate and its activities, he founded the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, a community of priests and brothers, and the Congregation of the Sisters of the Catholic Apostolate. St. Vincent Pallotti died on 22 January 1850. He was beatified after a century in 1950, and was canonized a saint in 1963, during the Second Vatican Council, by Blessed Pope John XXIII.

This book of reflections entitled *Find the God Who Seeks You - Journeying with St. Vincent Pallotti: The Prophet of Communion* is the result of my initial reading of the writings of St. Vincent Pallotti in preparation for my research on his Anthropology. The life of St. Vincent is rich in its spiritual and apostolic contents. In order to become his true followers, we must capture the spirit that guided him in his life. To imbibe his spirit and make it our own, we need to walk daily with him, learning from his spirit and living it in the context of our life in a manner unique to ourselves. This book of reflections aims at facilitating our everyday journey with St. Vincent Pallotti towards the goal which he achieved in his life, both in the spiritual and the apostolic realms. The structure of the daily reflection consists of a quotation from the writings of St. Vincent Pallotti which introduces the theme. An elaboration of the theme follows. Then, a few questions aimed at applying the theme in the context of the life of the reader are presented. Finally, the daily reflection ends with a quotation from the Bible. It is my hope that this book of reflections helps every reader to know, understand and live the spirit of St. Vincent Pallotti, thereby moving them towards spiritual wholeness and apostolic dynamism in his/her life.

Rev. Vensus George SAC

January 1

Mary: The Mother of Jesus

Faith teaches me that our Lord Jesus Christ is my first-born brother, and since the most Blessed Mary is the real mother of Jesus Christ, she is also my mother. Oh, how blessed I am. (OOCC, XIII, PP. 152 - 153; GIL, XXV, p. 95)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the annunciation scene brings the motherhood of Mary to light. Mary, in accepting the words of the angel Gabriel, gives herself to the task of being the mother of Jesus. Being the mother of Jesus, who is divine, confirms the fact of her special position above all creatures. Though it is a privilege specially given to Mary, it also implies many responsibilities. Mary has to accept a way of life which involves great sacrifices. She helps Jesus grow up into a mature man, giving him all the care and love a mother needs to give. She is at his side all the years of his private life at home. When it is time for him to accomplish God's plan through his public ministry, she has to let her son go and watch from the background all that is happening to him, giving him a helping hand whenever it is needed. At the end of his public ministry, she accepts God's plan for her son to die on the cross, and witnesses the event of his crucifixion at Mount Calvary. She generously offers to suffer with her son. Simeon's prophecy, at the presentation of Jesus in the temple, that a sword will pierce her soul, does come true. Thus, Mary, in accepting the position of the mother of Jesus, not only accepts the privileges associated with it, but also its hardships and difficulties.

Do I acknowledge Mary as the mother of Jesus? Do I have the readiness of Mary to accept God's will in my life? Do I accept the responsibilities of my vocation? Am I, like Mary, ready to accept the privileges as well as the hardships of my vocation in life?

The angel said to her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." (Lk. 1: 30 - 31)

January 2

Time: The Price of Eternity

Time is precious, short and irreparable. I would like ... to make as good use of it as would a dead person if he were to rise to a new life; I would like [to use my time] to remedy the past ... [For it is] "the price of eternity." (OCCC, X, pp. 553 - 554; STA, 143)

St. Vincent Pallotti acknowledges the importance of time in the life of the human person. Time is the gift of the eternal God to man. In creating the human person and placing him in the world to rule and guide his creation, God presents him with the gift of time. Though it is a God-given gift, it is the price with which the human person purchases his eternity. For his eternal life depends on the manner in which he utilizes this God-given gift of time. Time is precious because nothing happens without it, as every event in this world is temporal. Time is short because the time allotted for each is limited, and a person is not capable of adding a bit more time to his life than what is given to him. Time is irreplaceable because one can never get back the time he has lost. Only in relation to time can one remedy his past and make up for the failures of his past. In this way, time is a God-given opportunity to renew a person's life, to rectify things that have gone wrong, and to give his life a fresh start. St. Vincent Pallotti speaks of the urgency to use the gift of time profitably. For him, a person must do whatever he is called to do, as if a dead person has come back to a new life.

Do I understand the importance of time in my life? Do I realize that it is precious, short and irreplaceable? Do I feel the urgency not to lose the opportunity that time gives to me? Would it not be good for me to capture the true spirit of St. Vincent Pallotti in this New Year?

Lord, help me to realize how brief my time on earth will be! Help me to know that I am here for but a moment more. My life is no longer than my hand! My whole lifetime is but a moment to you.
(Ps. 39: 4-6)

Perfect Use of Time

I intend to use every moment of time, the past, the present and the future, in the most perfect manner. And I intend to do what would be done if this were really to happen. (OCCC, X, pp. 75 - 76; STA, 70)

Time, though a free gift of God to the human person, is not to be squandered and wasted. It must be put to use in the most perfect way. The proper use of time calls for planning and organizing the time that is at one's disposal. The right time management implies that one prioritizes the various tasks one is expected to accomplish. The setting of priorities is an important element of time management. The priorities must be listed in relation to the importance of a particular task and its relevance to the life of a person. After the priority list is made, a person allots the available time in relation to the significance of the work in question. The allotment of the right proportion of time, relative to the importance of the priority, can only be achieved when one evaluates one's past and learns from it, organizes one's present, and meaningfully plans for the future in light of past and present experiences. When one's life is focused in this manner, he would be the perfect user of the gift of time. Each day of St. Vincent Pallotti's life was organized very systematically. He had a list of priorities in his life, both in the dimension of his personal spiritual life and in his life of the apostolate. He allocated sufficient time for the inner and outer aspects of his life systematically, thereby making fruitful use of his time.

How do I use my time? Do I set priorities in my life so as to utilize the time at my disposal in the best way? Do I allot the right proportion of the available time relative to the importance of the priority? Do I learn from my past, live the present, and plan for the future meaningfully?

Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should. (Ps. 90: 20)

January 4

Time: The Setting to Perform Acts of Virtue

I will take with me a little book ... so that I will not waste time when I have to wait somewhere. From the first to the last, I will use the time to perform internal acts of virtue. (OOCC, X, pp. 541 - 542; STA, 105)

Time, the gift of God, is given to the human person to be used in a perfect manner. It is meant to be the place in which a person can perform good acts. Time is the context in which a person encounters events and situations that bring him pains or gains. Time is the background in which a person meets the people who love or hate him. Time is the milieu in which one experiences the ups and downs of living. Time is the framework in which one can come to know those opportunities which a person has missed in his life and make amends for them. Time is the scene in which one can explore and create new possibilities. Time embraces every situation of a person's existence. In one's gains and pains, in being loved or hated, in experiencing lows and highs, in making up the losses or creating possibilities, a person is called to sow the seeds of goodness in and around his environment. Hence, time provides the only place where one can perform inner and outer acts of virtue. St. Vincent never wasted his time. He utilized every bit of time he had at his disposal to accomplish what God wanted of him. Even if he had to wait somewhere, instead of wasting time, he would read a book and gain some insight for his life. In this manner, St. Vincent used time to help him constantly open himself to God and his grace.

Do I use the God-given gift of time to do good or to do evil? Is time a setting to love or to hate, to build or to destroy? Does time provide me with an opportunity to perform inner and outer acts of virtue? Is time a means to constant openness to God and his grace?

So be careful how you act; these are difficult days. Don't be fools; be wise: make the most of every opportunity you have for doing good. (Eph. 5: 15-16)

January 5

Compassion for the Poor

On seeing or thinking about the poor, I will try to help them in whatever way I can ... I would try to feel such a compassion for their miserable state, that all parts of my body and my very soul, breathe pity and mercy. (OOCC, X, p. 15; STA, 31)

Compassion for the poor is the true mark of a Christian. A true follower of the compassionate Jesus is one who is able to recognize the poor and their need, and manifest a great sense of concern for them. The basis of compassion is the realization that the other in need is, indeed, a part of the human family and that the other has the right to have the basic needs of life. Compassion implies that one acknowledges that what one possesses is not merely for oneself, but also for the good of others. Such an understanding helps one to feel empathy towards the poor. An empathetic person is moved by true love for the other, because his actions emerge from a heart that is tender and a mind that is humble. In short, a compassionate person does not seek himself, but rather he seeks the good of the other, with the pure motive of true charity. St. Vincent Pallotti lived the value of compassion to the fullest, and felt deeply for the other from the depth of his heart. Whenever he saw a person who was poor and in need, he immediately attempted to do anything within his power to help him in his need. St. Vincent felt within himself a deep compassion for the poor. He used his body, mind and spirit to communicate the compassion he felt within himself for the poor.

Am I compassionate towards others? Do I realize that everyone belongs to the human family? Do I recognize that every good thing in this world is meant for all? Do I seek my good only or that of others as well? Am I an empathetic person? Do I communicate concern for others using my body, mind, and spirit?

You should be a big happy family, full of sympathy [empathy] towards each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. (I Pet. 3:8)

January 6

Jesus: The Revelation of God

I firmly believe that you will communicate to me all the merits, virtues and works of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ ... by transforming me entirely in yourself and in my first-born brother Jesus Christ. (OOCC, X, p. 366; STA, 391)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that Jesus was the greatest communication of the heavenly Father to the human person. Of all the blessings God had bestowed on humanity, the most significant was the Father's gift of his Son for the salvation of humankind. For this reason he celebrated the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord in an elaborate manner. Hence, it was St. Vincent's firm hope that in giving his Son, the Father would also communicate to the human person all the merits and virtues of the life of Jesus. By doing so, God would entirely transform every person who was open to the love of the Father into the image of God and that of the first-born brother Jesus Christ. Since the Father had gifted Jesus, his Son, and the totality of his life to those who were open to his love, every human person had the opportunity to experience God and his love in and through Jesus, the Son of God. Thus, Jesus had become for every human person the revelation of God. He not only revealed to man the incomprehensible essence and nature of God in a human and tangible way, but also helped every person to know and love God in and through his person, in a real way. Thus, in Jesus God became a human person, so that the human person might be able to become like God, in and through Jesus. In this manner, Jesus besides revealing who the Father was, provided himself as the way to the Father.

Do I acknowledge Jesus as the revelation of God? Am I able to know who God is in and through the life of Jesus? Do I believe that Jesus is the way to the Father? Do I use the life of Jesus as a means to reach the Father?

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (Jn. 1:18)

January 7

The Right Attitude in Performing Duties of Life

When engaged in prayer, teaching, studying and custodianship I will try to think how Jesus, Mary, the Angels and Saints would have conducted themselves during such activities. By thus trying always to act with greater perfection, I intend always to act with that same perfection with which they themselves would have acted.
(OCC, X, pp. 5 - 6; STA, 1)

One catchy phrase St. Vincent constantly used while performing any activity, especially in accomplishing the various duties of his life, was “always more” (*Sempre Più*). The use of this phrase, in the context of doing the duties of his life, expressed his desire and intention to do whatever he did with the greatest perfection. He was neither satisfied with doing the minimum, nor happy doing them half-heartedly. Before he carried out any activity, he reflected on the activity, explored the various ways in which that activity could be completed, chose the best manner in which it could be executed, and then got that activity done. He often invoked the spirit of great saints in fulfilling the task, and performed the act in the way it would have been done by those saints themselves. Thus, whether St. Vincent was engaged in praying, teaching, studying, or caring for people who were under his guidance academically or spiritually, he did his best to do those activities in the most perfect manner. The ideal St. Vincent followed in his life was the perfection of God. He wanted to be as perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. In this manner, the attitude of doing “always more”, both in the sense of quantity and quality, marked the spirit of St. Vincent Pallotti.

Does the attitude of doing “always more” guide me in accomplishing the duties that are entrusted to me? Am I satisfied with doing the minimum? Do I perform activities of my daily life in a half-hearted manner? What do I need to do to capture the spirit of doing everything in the most perfect manner? Is the perfection of God the ideal of my life?

But you are to be perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.
(Mt. 5: 48)

Not a Blind Hope

God is always with us. If we have confidence in our Lord Jesus Christ, everything will go well with us ... First let us stand firm in our confidence in God and open ourselves to the providence of God, ... without which it is not possible for us to withstand either a small or a great difficulty. (Lett., 1129, p. 245)

Though St. Vincent Pallotti firmly hoped in God's merciful design for his life, his hope in God was not a blind hope. In other words, he did not hope in God and remain idle, doing nothing about the problem at hand. On the other hand, while hoping and trusting that God would provide according to his plan for him, St. Vincent did whatever humanly possible and at the earliest to remedy the troubled situation. St. Vincent firmly believed that the founding of the Union of Catholic Apostolate was the greatest example of his hope in God. For him, in the context of his time, bringing together laypersons, secular and religious societies, bishops and cardinals to form an Institute aimed Universal Apostolate was definitely a wonderful manifestation of God's plan given to him in God's loving providence. Yet, when the Society was criticized and the order of its suppression was promulgated, St. Vincent did not remain idle, blindly hoping that God would do everything for him. Instead he acted immediately and did whatever was possible within his power to avert the danger that was about to fall on the Society, believing that he was concerned with the affairs of God and that he would provide. Thus, St. Vincent, while trusting in God did not hesitate to trust in his own God-given powers to remedy the problem in question.

Is my hope in God a mere blind hope? Do I expect God to do everything for me without humanly cooperating with his designs? While believing in God's providence for me, do I do the needful to remedy the difficult situation? While trusting in God's providence, do I hesitate to trust in my God-given powers to better a situation?

So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." (Gen. 22:14)

January 9

Union of Catholic Apostolate: Reflection of God's Infinite Love

My God ... in your infinite mercy allow me ... to promote, establish, propagate, perfect and perpetuate the pious institution of a universal apostolate ... so that you may be known in the world by a reflection of your infinite charity. (OCCC, X, pp. 198 - 199; STA, 281)

The spirituality and the apostolate of St. Vincent Pallotti began with his personal experience of God as the Infinite Love. God, who loved him infinitely, reached out to him unconditionally and generously. Overwhelmed by and caught up in this love of God, especially on 9 January 1835, St. Vincent was inspired to respond to God by manifesting him as the Infinite Love. In order to do this task effectively he promoted, established, propagated, perfected and perpetuated a pious institution of universal apostolate, called the Union of Catholic Apostolate. Hence, the Union of Catholic Apostolate, as visualized by St. Vincent Pallotti, was meant to be a reflection of God's infinite love in the world. The members of this institution involved in a universal apostolate of charity, manifest God, who is charity-in-essence, in the diverse and concrete situations of human living. Thus, the Union of Catholic Apostolate in proclaiming God as infinite charity to everyone in the world, brings eternal and infinite glory to God.

Do I, as a member of Union of Catholic Apostolate, recognize God as the infinite love? Do I respond to God, the infinite love, by participating in the universal mission of charity? Do I manifest God as infinite-love-in-essence through my mission of charity, thereby bringing infinite glory to God?

Above all let your love for one another be intense ... As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another ... Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (I Pet. 5: 8, 10-11)

January 10

God: The Beginning and End of All Actions

In all my actions ... I intend that there be no other beginning or end than God alone, even in those actions that are called indifferent.
(OCCC, X, p. 27; STA, 40)

St. Vincent Pallotti recognized God as the beginning and end of all his actions. In other words, for him, God is the origin and culmination of everything he did. He always attempted to perform his actions motivated by this truth. As a result, before he thought of performing any action, he looked towards God as the starting point of his actions. Similarly, while the action was executed and reached its termination, he fell back on God, in whom this act gets its completion. The attitude of looking up to God before, during and after an action is performed, made St. Vincent do every action with the mind of God. His thoughts became similar to that of God; his will always chose those actions that were corresponding to the will of God; his sentiments were like that of God; and his mode of action resembled that of God. As a result, there was hardly any selfishness in the actions St. Vincent performed. He never performed any action for his own satisfaction or pleasure. But his actions were done with the purest motivation. His actions were always aimed at bringing greater good to the other and greater honor to God. Spending his whole life for the twin purposes of the glory of God and the good of all God's creatures helped St. Vincent to accept God as the beginning and end in his everyday living.

Do I recognize God as the beginning and end of my life? Do I perform my actions looking up to God as their origin and culmination? Do I accomplish everything having God's thoughts, his sentiments and his mode of action? Do I perform actions for my personal satisfaction or pleasure? Do I perform every action with the purest intention?

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending of all things", says God, who is the Lord, the All-powerful One, who is, and was, and is coming again. (Rev. 1:8)

January 11

Glorifying God in Everything

My God, in one word, no matter what I see, read, know, feel ... I intend to ... quickly lift my mind up to you, praying that from all this there may come the true and greater glory of God. (OOCC, X, p. 24; STA, 37)

Since God is the beginning and end of all things, according to St. Vincent, whatever happens in this world happens because of his design and power. Therefore, St. Vincent had a faith-vision of God as directing and guiding everything, including his life in the world. Hence, God is the foundation of every event that occurs in the world. Since God is the foundation of everything that takes place in the world, a person must raise his heart and mind to God in gratitude, for every event that happens in his life. These events reveal to the human person, the nature of God, what God's plans are, and what God wants of him to accomplish with his life in the world. Therefore, every event that happens in a person's everyday living, i.e., what one sees, reads, knows and feels deep within himself are occasions in which the plan of God for man is revealed. Hence, all these events are occasions for which we need to give honor and glory to God. The realization of this truth caused St. Vincent Pallotti to lift his mind up to God in gratitude for everything that happened in his life. He expressed his gratitude by making use of each of these events as opportunities to give infinite glory to God.

Do I have a faith-vision to see the hand of God in everything that happens in my life? Do the everyday events that happen in my life reveal God's plan for me? Do I make use of these daily and ordinary events to proclaim the glory and honor of God?

Declare each day that he [God] is the one who saves! Show his glory to the nations! Tell everyone about his miracles. For the Lord is great, and should be highly praised. (I Chro. 16: 23-25)

January 12

Manner of Treating Others

Treat everyone in kindness and in the name of Jesus Christ.
(OCC, X, p. 31; STA, 43)

St. Vincent Pallotti thought that others were superior to him in every way. Hence he believed that in comparison with others, he deserved much less. This humble perception of himself made St. Vincent cultivate in himself a deep appreciation of other persons and their God-given gifts and talents. St. Vincent did not measure a human person in terms of what he has done, but rather viewed him in his relationship to Christ. If St. Vincent were to measure the other in terms of his achievements, he might have found many faults in him. But since he measured the other in his relationship with Christ, he was able to see the goodness and dignity of the other, despite his human limitations. As a result, he perceived true richness in the other, which comes from a person's relationship to God who has showered on him many gifts and his relationship to Christ, who is his model in everyday living. He treated every human person with genuine kindness and respect, and he treated the other in the name of Jesus. He considered the other as one redeemed by Christ; therefore, whatever he did to the other had a bearing on his own relationship with Christ. For this reason, St. Vincent treated others with understanding in order to maintain and grow his own relationship with Jesus. Such an attitude towards his neighbors helped St. Vincent Pallotti to understand other persons in their limitations and yet to love and honor them.

How do I perceive other people? Am I able to see their many God-given gifts and abilities? Do I treat others with kindness and respect? Do I deal with others in the name of Jesus? Am I able to understand, love and honor other people despite their limitations?

Don't just pretend that you love others: really love them ... Love each other with brotherly affection and take delight in honoring each other. (Rom. 12: 9-10)

January 13

Man's Perfect Actions Bring Greater Glory to God

I will try to remember often at the beginning and during the course of my actions that greater the perfection with which I perform them, so much the greater is the glory God receives. (OCC, X, p. 32; STA, 47)

One of the predominant goals of the life of St. Vincent Pallotti was bringing infinite glory to God. His wish was that God be glorified at all times and in every circumstance and he longed for glorifying God infinitely. In his lifetime on earth, he constantly looked for ways and means to praise and honor God. One important way in which he attempted to bring glory to God was his own actions. He believed that good and perfect actions resulted in earning more glory to God. The greater the perfection a person achieves in the actions he performs, the greater the glory he brings to God. A person's good and perfect actions serve as the means in and through which the goodness of God is manifested to others. When they see the good works a person manifests in the name of God, they would glorify God in the midst of others. Thus, the good works a person performs truly can become a means to glorify God. Hence, St. Vincent Pallotti was concerned about doing every action of his life with the greatest perfection, so as to bring the greatest glory to God. Therefore, before he performed any action, and while performing it he allowed himself to be guided by the thought of glorifying God. When such a pure motive guides the action, the net result is the glorification of God, through his actions.

Is the glorification of God an important goal of my everyday living? Do I make an attempt to use the actions that I perform daily to bring glory to God? Do I seek God or myself in the many good actions I carry out every day?

Be careful how you behave among your unsaved neighbors; for then, even if they are suspicious of you and talk against you, they will end up praising God for your good works. (I Pet. 2:12)

Doing Good Always

Since good is all that I plan to do, at different hours of the day, and at different times and circumstances ... I intend to do good always ... I will try to excite in myself, through some act, the intention to do it all. (OCC, X, pp. 32 - 33; STA, 48)

God is goodness by his nature. Every good thing that one finds in this world is an expression of the goodness of God. After creating the world in all its richness, God has found it to be very good. The human person, the crown of God's creation by his vocation, is called to be a co-creator. He is called to work with God, and make this world a better place in which to live. In God's plan, the human person's aim in life is to add beauty and prosperity to the world, the creation of God. St. Vincent Pallotti, being fully aware of his vocation to cooperate in God's creative plan for the world, always attempted to do what was good. Therefore, in every circumstances of his daily living, he constantly looked for opportunities to do actions that would add goodness to the situation in which he found himself. He never sought his own advantage, his name or fame, while doing a good act. He often excited in himself a genuine desire to do what he believed to be done through some act. He also encouraged his followers to do the same. In all his effort to do good, St. Vincent always wanted to maintain the objective goodness of the situation in which he found himself, and the benefit of the people involved in the situation.

Do I, like St. Vincent Pallotti, recognize man's vocation to do what is good in this world? Do I recognize my role as the co-creator? Do I add goodness to the situation in which I find myself? Do I take the trouble to do what I believe to be done? Do I seek my advantage or the good of the people in doing the good I do?

Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think of things that are pure and lovely ... Keep putting into practice all you have learned from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4: 8-9)

January 15

Performing an Action only with the Right Motive

Although I might be able to decide and do things which others could not decide or do, I will neither decide nor do them, if the glory of God and the advantage of souls do not require it. (OCC, X, p. 35; STA, 55)

A person may possess capabilities and talents, either by way of natural gifts from God or acquired by his own efforts. Such an adept person is able to decide and do things, which an inept person cannot decide or do. It is praiseworthy that a person has skills and proficiency in accomplishing different tasks. But, it is not always advisable to use such gifts, if their use is not going to bring good effects for the person and for others. If a person's talents and abilities are to bear good fruit, he must be guided by the right motive. If the motive of the person in utilizing his God-given gifts is proper, all such abilities of a person can bring much good. But, if the motive is bad, one can harvest only evil effects out of the great potentials of the person. St. Vincent Pallotti, being aware of this great truth, believed that a person should decide and do even those things which others are not capable of doing like him, only if there is a right motive for its performance. The fact that there is no other person capable of doing what one can do does not justify the use of that person's talent arbitrarily and purposelessly. According to St. Vincent, the right motives are glory of God and the advantage of others. Hence, there should be no selfish interest in using a person's talents. But, one must use his talents only when he is able to glorify God and bring happiness to others through them.

Do I recognize the many talents and abilities I have? Am I selfish in using my God-given gifts? Do I realize the importance of the right motive for the fruitful use of my talents? Am I selfish in using my talents? Do I use my abilities for the glory of God and the happiness of my neighbor?

Most of all, let love guide your life, for then the whole church will stay together in perfect harmony ... And whatsoever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus. (Col. 3: 14, 17)

Not Paying Back in the Same Coin

I will try to hold everyone in great esteem. And if they do evil to me, I will suppose that they believe they are doing me a great good, and ... I will try to commend them to God. (OCCC, X, p. 36; STA, 57)

St. Vincent Pallotti held every human person with great respect. For he believed that the human person is the image of God. As the image of God, the human person is capable of representing the nature, the being, and the perfection of God. Thus, every human person has a dignity that God gives him, by creating him in His image. Therefore, St. Vincent wished to do nothing that would, in any way, bring disrespect to the human person. Hence, even when someone ill-treated him or did him an evil, he always resisted the temptation to retaliate the evil action done to him. For, in retaliating to the other who has hurt him, he offends God, in whose image the other is created. Thus, for St. Vincent Pallotti, 'paying back in the same coin' is not a response of a true Christian to an evildoer. Instead he attempted to see the hand of God in the evil act done to him, believing that God would bring some great good through the evil he has experienced. This mind-set of seeing the hand of God in the evil done to him by the other helped St. Vincent to understand the person who has done him harm. It gave him an enlightened mind that would not pass a judgement on the act of the evildoer. It assisted him to treat kindly the one who has hurt him. Finally, it helped him to commend the evildoer to God's protection. All these attitudes helped St. Vincent to treat his neighbor with respect.

Am I able to respect and treat kindly the person who has done me harm? Do I retaliate the one who has treated me badly? Do I have the mind-set to see the hand of God in the evils I experience in my daily life through the unjust actions of others? Do I commend the evildoer to God's protection by praying for him?

Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In this way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven. For he gives sunlight to both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust too. (Mt. 5: 44-45)

For God's Eyes Only

I desire to love God ... without my love being known to anyone but God; to suffer [for God] ... but have my suffering known only to him; ... [so that] when I am called by God to dwell with him in heaven, I would be recognized only by him. (OCC, X, p. 71; STA, 63)

One significant dimension of the spiritual life of St. Vincent Pallotti was his hidden spirituality. He was very particular about doing whatever he did only to be seen by God. He desired to love God. But, he did not want his act of loving God to be known to anyone except God. He desired to suffer for God, but he wanted this suffering to be known only to God. All through his life he performed manifold acts of kindness to other human person, but he wanted them to be seen only by God. He received many honors and distinctions during his lifetime, but he never declared them in public. He was involved in diverse apostolic endeavors, but he never proclaimed his success from the mountaintops. Thus, St. Vincent wanted to live in such a way that only God sees all that he did. Hence, like Jesus, he always wished to keep every good deed he performed a secret. He never attempted to parade his good actions in a grand manner. He carried out all his actions only to be seen by God. For St. Vincent Pallotti, the recognition by another human person is insignificant, but that which matters truly is the acknowledgement by God. He wanted to go unnoticed in this lifetime, for the importance he gains in the world is not a lasting one. He wanted to be noticed by God when he encountered him face-to-face in the life to come. This inspired St. Vincent to live here on earth for God's eyes only.

How do I live the hidden spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti in my life? Do I parade my good actions in a grand manner? Do I prefer man's recognition or God's acknowledgement? Am I able to live for God's eyes only in my everyday living?

Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, for then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven ... But when you do a kindness to someone, do it secretly – don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. And your Father who knows all secrets will reward you. (Mt. 6: 1, 3-4)

Grace Makes One's Works Nobler

What would my works be, if they were not raised and ennobled by the grace of God ... Nothing, nothing at all! ... Having thrown myself entirely on Divine Providence, I am certain [that] my works and smallest thoughts ... shall receive ... great nobility and excellence. (OCCC, X, p. 80; STA, 76)

God is constantly concerned about the human person and his genuine progress. Therefore, God is ever-present in the historical context of every human person. Being present in the everyday situation of a person, God, by his grace, consistently assists him to bear fruit abundantly in his name. Thus, God raises and ennobles every human activity with the help of his grace. Therefore, before a person attempts to perform any action, he needs to throw himself entirely on the Providence of God, believing that with God at his side he is able to achieve great things. The “throwing of oneself at the Providence of God” does not mean that a person does not have to plan and prepare for the task ahead. It only means that having done his best by way of preparation, he reaches out to God to be touched by his grace. Assisted by Divine Grace, even the ordinary actions which a person performs on a daily basis achieves great nobility and merit. Convinced of this truth, St. Vincent Pallotti believed that by themselves, his works of mercy were nothing at all. But supported by the grace of God, even a little act of kindness done by him becomes richly fruit bearing and meritorious. Thus, St. Vincent did his best by way of preparation for the act ahead, and then surrendered it to God, leaving God to bless his efforts with success. It is in this spirit that St. Vincent performed each and every action of his life.

Do I believe that God is ever-present in my life and assists me in bearing fruit on his behalf? Do I prepare for every action I plan to undertake? Do I place each action of mine before God and allow him to bless my efforts with success? Do I allow my everyday actions to be ennobled by Divine Grace?

God has given each of you some special abilities [graces]; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God's many kinds of blessings. (I Pet. 4:10)

Love of Poverty

I would like to remain poor, without even a place to rest my body, air to breathe, water to slake my thirst, food to sustain me, or a rag to cover me – indeed, with nothing at all. (OCCC, X, pp. 82 - 83; STA, 79)

St. Vincent Pallotti, in his lifetime, made an option to live a life that was poor. He made this decision to love poverty for two reasons. The first reason for his choice of poverty as a way of life was that he had made an option to spend his life serving the poor. The Universal Mission of Charity, he embarked upon by establishing the Union of Catholic Apostolate, was basically aimed at alleviating the various forms of poverty that plagued the poor of the city of Rome, both in the spiritual and the material plane. The Saint was involved in diverse ways to help the poor and to make their life better. The poor were the goal towards which every charitable act he performed was focused. Having made this option for the poor, St. Vincent felt that he needed to identify in a real way with the poor he served. The best way to identify with the poor is to live a life characterized by poverty. The second reason for St. Vincent opting to live a life of poverty was to imitate Jesus. He wanted to have in his life the same spirit of poverty that marked the life of Jesus Christ. The imitation of the poverty of Jesus made St. Vincent deny for himself a place to live, air to breathe, water to quench his thirst, food to sustain himself, a piece of cloth to cover his body, and to go about in life without anything. Imitating Jesus, the poor, and serving the poor in Jesus' name made St. Vincent make an option to be poor in his life.

Have I made an option to be poor in my life? Have I made an option to serve the poor? How do I serve the poor in my everyday life? How do I imitate Jesus, the poor, in my life? Have I cultivated a love for a life of simplicity and poverty?

Remember, I don't even own a place to lay my head. Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but I, the Messiah, have no earthly home at all. (Lk. 9:58)

Self-denial

I intend ... always to offer the Lord the negation of my will, united and offered together with that of all the just, the saints, Mary and Jesus. (OCC, X, p. 84; STA, 80)

The term “self-denial” does not mean rejection of one’s self, which is in fact created in the image of God. If self-denial is understood in this sense, it is not a spiritual value at all, because rejection of one’s self that is made in the image of God would amount to rejecting the very self of God himself. For St. Vincent Pallotti, self-denial does not involve a person’s rejection of his self, but rather it is only a negation of a person’s will, especially when his will leads him to ways which are contrary to the will of God. Thus, self-denial consists in putting aside one’s desires, conveniences and blessings, even the legitimate ones, joyfully and voluntarily, for the sake of choosing Jesus as one’s first priority in life. In other words, in self-denial, a person chooses to give Jesus the first place in his life, while giving everyone else, and everything else a place after him. Understood in the latter sense “self-denial” is a necessity for any follower of Jesus. St. Vincent Pallotti, in imitation of Jesus, Mary and the saints, all through his life attempted to offer to the Lord the denial of his will in order to be available totally for Jesus and his Mission of Universal Love.

Do I have the right understanding of “self-denial”? Do I joyfully and voluntarily set aside my conveniences and desires to choose Jesus as the first priority in my life? Am I ready to deny my will if it goes against the will of God? Is my self-denial aimed at being available for Jesus and his Mission?

Anyone who wants to follow me must put aside his own desires and conveniences and carry his cross with him every day and keep close to me! Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it, but whoever insists on keeping his life will lose it. (Lk. 9: 23-24)

The Uniqueness of Each Action

[I would like to] ... perform each and every action as though it were the principal and the most important of all. (OOC, X, p. 534; STA, 86)

St. Vincent Pallotti valued the importance of each action he performed, however ordinary it might be. He wanted to perform each and every action as if it were the most important of all the actions he was expected to do in a given situation. He believed that though an action was ordinary, if performed with deep interest and the right motivation, it would produce results that would enrich the one who does the action and bring glory to God. For him, each action is unique and must be done with total attention on the part of the person who does the act. No action should be done with indifference. A lukewarm and half-hearted attitude in performing an action only destroys the total purpose of that action. Nor must one consider an action as ordinary and useless. Strictly speaking, no action is ordinary and useless because every action if done well would produce good fruit. Hence, if a person plans the performance of an action with reflection and thoughtfulness, and gives his total attention in actually doing the action, though the action is ordinary, it would be meritorious and produce much benefit. It is St. Vincent's perception of each action as unique and important, and as deserving of one's total attention at its performance, that has made him a great achiever for God and his people.

Do I believe that each action is important and unique in the sight of God? Do I believe that every action is capable of bringing great good, if done well? Do I perform my everyday actions with genuine interest and the right motivation? Am I lukewarm and casual in executing an action?

I know you well – you are neither hot nor cold; I wish you were one or the other! But since you are merely lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth. (Rev. 3: 15-16)

Life of St. Vincent Pallotti: A True Life in the Spirit

[I would like to] ... practice modesty in conversation, honesty in actions, peacefulness in relationships, constancy after a good beginning, complete obedience, readiness and humility in serving, prudence in work, the presence of God, [and] mortification of the spirit ... [and] of the senses. (OOCC, X, p. 535; STA, 87)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a true life of the spirit is manifested in a number of ways. First, it involves the practice of modesty, especially the area of conversation. A spirit-filled person often talks less and does more. Second, he is sincere in everything he does. Genuine honesty is the hallmark of a man of the spirit. Third, a spirit-filled person establishes true and peaceful relationships with himself, others and God. Fourth, a man of the spirit perseveres in the good he has begun. Constancy in virtue is the characteristic mark of life in the spirit. Fifth, life of the spirit calls for complete and total obedience to all whom God has placed over a person. Sixth, a person of the spirit is ready for humble service. Seventh, a spirit-filled person exhibits a sense of prudence in whatever he does. Eighth, life of the spirit opens a person to the experience of the presence of God. Finally, a life of the spirit implies living a life of mortification of senses and of the spirit. For St. Vincent, when a person lives these qualities, he truly progresses towards the true life of the spirit. In his life he attempted to live these qualities in an extraordinary manner.

Do I possess the qualities of life in the spirit? Do I live the characteristics of the life in the Spirit in the context of my everyday life? What concrete steps do I need take in order to cultivate the qualities of life in the spirit?

You are living a brand new kind of life that is continuously learning more and more of what is right, and trying constantly to be more and more like Christ, who created this new life within you. (Col. 3: 10)

Identification with the Poor

I would like to become food to satisfy the hungry, clothes to cover the naked, drink to refresh the thirsty, tonic to strengthen the stomach of the weak, ... medicine and health to cure the infirmities of the crippled, the mutilated, the deaf and the dumb. (OCCC, X, p. 115; STA, 176)

St. Vincent Pallotti felt within himself “the sense of being without” or “the sense of not having anything” which the poor and the downtrodden experienced in their daily life. He felt within himself their hunger, their thirst, their nakedness, their being crippled, mutilated, deaf and dumb. Even as a youth, St. Vincent developed a compassionate heart for the poor. He saw in them the image of God that is distorted by poverty, pain and anguish. He wished to restore the pristine beauty of the image of God in them, not only in the spiritual sphere, but also in the material realm. He wished that every human person lived a life worthy of his status as the image of God, both in the spiritual and material aspects of his life. As a result, he not only wanted to give them something to satisfy their needs, but rather he himself wanted to become their food, drink, clothing and medicine. St. Vincent completely identified himself with the less privileged people of his time. This identification with the poor made him visualize and execute the mission of universal charity, calling people of every status within the Church to cooperate in this mission. He believed that each one could be a partner in this project of helping the poor, in his/her own little way. He reminded all who cooperated with him in this project that what they do for these little ones, they do for Jesus.

Do I feel within myself the pain and anguish of the poor and the needy? Do I see poverty, hunger and all other social evils as distortions of the image of God in the human person? What can I do in the concrete situation of my life to implement the mission of universal charity? Do I realize that what I do for these little ones, I do for Jesus?

Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do it unto me.
(Mt. 25:40)

Danger of Vanity

In order to avoid vanity, I will not do outside what I could do in a room. (OCC, X, p. 540; STA, 100)

Vanity consists of a person giving himself an honor which he does not deserve. It implies that a person pretends to have a quality which he does not have. Hence a person, infected with the vice of vanity, attempts to show off his personality as something very great when it is not. Vanity is a very dangerous vice, because it kills a person spiritually and prevents a genuine growth in him. When a person attempts to show himself off as someone great when he is not, he denies the actual nature of his personality. When a person attempts to hide what he really is and puts on the mask of being someone else, he cannot make any progress in his life. Hence, the vice of vanity completely blocks every forward movement in one's spiritual life. Thus, the person who suffers from vanity is practically a spiritually dead person. It is for this reason Jesus called people with the hypocritical attitude as 'whitewashed tombs'. St. Vincent Pallotti realized the danger of vanity in his spiritual life, and to avoid this vice he lived the practical principle: "I will not do outside what I can do in a room."

Do I suffer from vanity? Do I realize that vanity prevents me from knowing the true nature of myself? Do I realize that I deny myself a genuine growth in my spiritual life because of vanity? What concrete measures do I need to take to free myself from this dangerous vice?

Woe to you, Pharisees, and you religious leaders – hypocrites! You are like beautiful mausoleums – full of dead men's bones and of foulness and corruption. You try to look like saintly men, but underneath those pious robes are hearts besmirched with every sort of hypocrisy and sin. (Mt. 23: 27-28)

January 25

Cultivating Genuine Sorrow for One's Sins

My Jesus ... through your infinite mercy ... grant me further participation in ... [your] suffering ... in the Garden of Gethsemane, so that this suffering may make me weep over my sins.
(OCC, X, pp. 367 - 368; STA, 394)

St. Vincent Pallotti often called himself “nothingness and sin.” He believed that he was not worthy of God’s love because he had by his many faults failed to bring the glory God deserves. Having acknowledged his ungratefulness to God, he cultivated genuine sorrow for his sins. He wanted to participate in the sufferings of Jesus, especially in his agony and passion, in order to make reparation for his many failures. Following the directive of Jesus in the beatitude that those who mourn would be comforted, St. Vincent constantly mourned his failures and shortcomings by performing acts of penance in the spirit of living out in his life the passion and suffering of Jesus. Thus, the cultivation of genuine sorrow by way of performing various acts of penance, in view of mourning over his sins of commission and omission against God, made St. Vincent live his everyday life as a penitent. Living the life of a penitent on an everyday basis, he made immense progress in his spiritual journey towards God

Do I acknowledge that I am sinful and unworthy of God’s love? Do I recognize that by my shortcomings, I fail to give the glory God deserves? Do I live the life of a true penitent? Do I participate in the sufferings of Christ as a means to mourn over my sins? Does the penitential life I undertake help me to make progress in my spiritual life?

Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted. (Mt. 5: 4).

Suffer, Love and Be Silent

In suffering conform yourself to ... the sacred humanity of the Redeemer. Love with the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Imitate the silence Jesus observed in his Passion. (OCL, I, 253, p. 364)

St. Vincent Pallotti propagated a simple formula of “suffer, love and be silent” as a means to true and joyful Christian living. He derived this formula from the life of Christ himself. First, St. Vincent wanted his followers to conform to the sufferings of Jesus in his sacred humanity. When sufferings come in the life of a person, he should not get caught up in them. Instead, he should bring before his mind the manifold sufferings of Jesus, which he accepted freely though he was innocent for the sins of the world. St. Vincent often found much consolation from the meditation on the passion of Jesus. The more a person becomes aware of the intensity of the sufferings of Jesus, the more he is able to identify his suffering with that of Jesus. In this way, he learns to suffer like Jesus, voluntarily and joyfully. Second, St. Vincent wanted his followers to love with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The “Sacred Heart of Jesus” symbolizes the sacrificial love of Jesus for every human person. This love is unconditional, expects nothing, is always ready to give, does not distinguish between a foe or a friend, and other-centered. When a situation of daily living calls a person to love and to give, the love that was in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, must be his guide for action. Third, St. Vincent wanted his followers to imitate the silence which Jesus practiced during his passion in coping with a person who is troublesome, or a situation that is painful. Living this simple formula makes a person truly joyful, peaceful and tranquil in living his daily life.

Do I understand the meaning of the simple formula of St. Vincent “suffer, love and keep silent”? Do I accept sufferings in a Christ-like manner? Do I love everyone in my life with the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus? Am I ready to accept the daily situations in which God places me with the spirit of silence that Jesus followed in his life?

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.
(Is. 53: 7)*

Dangers of a Thoughtless Word

Before I speak I shall think carefully so that I say nothing which may displease God. I will try not to say a word that is unnecessary, useless, or not directed to this honest end. (OCCC, X, p. 541; STA, 104)

True speech comes out of a reflective mind. Sensible speech calls for sound thinking. An unreflective mind produces only useless rambling and gossip. In reflection, a person truly listens and comes in contact with his depth dimension. Such a listening is very essential to utter a meaningful word. A thoughtless person is unable to enter within his inner self and incapable of listening to his true self. Hence, he fails to communicate a speech that comes out of true reflection. A thoughtless word can hurt people, bring discord within the community, lead to unnecessary quarrels and bring about the breakdown of relationship among people, thereby leading one to displease God and the human person. Also, a thoughtless person often has to regret his thoughtless speech. St. Vincent Pallotti realized the dangers of a thoughtless word. He was a man of reflection. He always took time to reflect before he spoke anything. He knew what he should say, and said only what he thought he should say. His speech and actions emerged from his reflection. St. Vincent never said anything that displeased God. Similarly, he avoided all unnecessary and useless speech because often they brought disunity and disruption within the community and destroyed personal relationships. His speech was always directed to the honest end.

Am I a reflective person? Does my speech come out of a genuine reflection? Do I destroy relationships by a careless word? Do I bring disorder within the community by my thoughtless word? Do I displease God with my speech? Is my speech always directed towards an honest end?

A sensible man watches for problems ahead and prepares to meet them. The simpleton never looks, and suffers the consequences. (Prov. 27: 12)

True Purposes of Study

[A person must] ... study for the glory of God and the advantage of souls, and to correspond to grace. (OCCC, X, p. 535; STA, 91)

Among the things that enrich a person, the most significant is the study. It implies not only the formal learning, but also learning from various life-experiences and acquiring the practical wisdom that guides one to live a good, honorable and other-centred life. One begins such an endeavor from his cradle and continues until he goes to the grave. St. Vincent Pallotti considered study as something very important in the life of a person. He himself had always been a learner. He lived to learn, in the process learning to live every situation God has placed him in. Besides being a learner in the general sense, he was also a great academician. He had obtained his Doctorates in both Philosophy and Theology. He served as a professor at the Sapienza University. That which motivated him constantly to be a learner and an academician were the goals of the glory of God, the advantage of the people whom he served, and correspondence to the grace of God. St. Vincent never looked upon study as something that brought him personal prestige and honor. He wanted to enrich himself with what he studied and learned and then use his learning to serve others, thereby glorifying God, the author of his life. Similarly, learning helped St. Vincent to know God and love God more, in the process helping him to correspond to the grace of God in the best way possible.

Do I recognize the importance and value of study in my life? Do I take the trouble to enrich myself by my learning? Do I consider my academic achievements as a matter of personal prestige? Do I study to bring glory to God, and happiness to others? Does my learning help me to know and love God and correspond to his Grace?

I want those already wise to become the wiser and become leaders by exploring the depths of meaning in these nuggets of truth. How does a man become wise? The first step is to trust and reverence the Lord! (Prov.1: 5-9)

January 29

Seeking God's Most Holy Will

I, acting in secret and without reward, ask only that His [God's] most holy will be done. I intend to perform the same act in all the things I would like to do, but cannot. (OCCC, X, p. 93; STA, 114)

St. Vincent Pallotti, like Christ, always sought to accomplish the will of God. Living a life whose main aim was to do the most holy will of God, meant for him that in everything he did, he constantly preferred what God wanted of him rather than what he wished to do. In other words, seeking God's will implied, on the part of St. Vincent, a perpetual self-denial. Thus, in all circumstances of his life, he had to say 'no' to the diverse tendencies of himself, whenever they stood up against God's plan for him. Besides, seeking the will of God meant that he always acted without anyone noticing what he was doing. Thus, St. Vincent Pallotti sought to do the will of God in secret and without expecting any reward. Hence, he accomplished the will of God with the purest motive. Even when, for some unavoidable reason, he was not able to do an act which he believed was God's will for him, at least he intended and desired to do that particular act because of the love of God. In this way, St. Vincent's food, indeed, was to do the will of God.

Do I, like St. Vincent Pallotti, always seek to do the will of God? Am I ready to say 'no' to my will in order to do the will of God? Do I have the pure motive of doing the will of God in secret and without expecting any reward? Do I have the intention and desire to do God's will, though I am not able to do it in a particular situation for some reason?

Don't work hard only when your master is watching and then shirk when he isn't looking; work hard and with gladness all the time, as though working for Christ, doing the will of God with all your hearts. (Eph. 6: 6-7)

Be Doers of the Word

Few words and many deeds, and let them be done well (Lett., 1554, p. 339).

St. Vincent Pallotti was neither a mere man of words, nor a mere hearer of the word, but also a man of action. He often said that one must speak less and do more. Though speaking and hearing the word of God was significant to him, he never stopped merely at speaking and hearing. As a Christian he did hear the word of God and spend time reflecting on the word of God. As a priest he spoke the word of God and communicated the contents of the scriptures to others. While doing these two in the right measure, he was more interested in putting into action what he heard and what he spoke. In his spiritual life, he was constantly concerned about doing various virtuous actions that would make him live the life of the image of God, besides bringing the glory of God. In his apostolic life, he had set up a well-organized pastoral plan that would help him to serve the poor and the needy while working for their sanctification. Besides whatever he did, whether it was in his spiritual life or in his apostolic life, he did them in the best possible way. Doing everything he did with the right effort and pure intention, he made sure that they became the best offerings he could offer to God.

Am I a mere man of words? Am I a mere hearer of the word? Am I a doer of the word? Do I perform actions to live as God's image and bring God the glory? Are my apostolic endeavors aimed at the service of the poor and the needy, while working for their sanctification? Do I perform my actions in the best way possible?

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like (Jas. 1:22 – 24)

Perfection through Humility

Our acts will be all the more perfect the more they are made with humility. (OCCC, X, p. 99; STA, 119)

A humble person grows in perfection. Humility, as a virtue, is the stepping-stone to perfection. Humility helps a person to assess himself honestly. A proud person does not want to look into himself for he is afraid of acknowledging his shortcomings and limitations. But a humble person is not at all anxious about self-assessment, for he is ready to accept his limitations, and learn from them. When a person evaluates himself in all honesty, he becomes aware of his own positive and negative qualities, and thereby obtains true self-knowledge. True knowledge of himself helps the person to acknowledge his unworthiness before God. He, like the publican in the Gospel, knowing his limitation, begins to trust in God, who is the strength of his humble servants. The person's trust and dependence on God help him to move towards God in a progressive manner. On the other hand, the haughty and the proud block true self-knowledge by their self-righteous attitude. Hence, no spiritual growth is possible in the life of the proud. But a humble person, knowing who he is, can change and transform his life, in the process achieving greater levels of perfection. Knowing the value of humility for Christian perfection, St. Vincent Pallotti practiced it constantly in his life. As a result, he achieved higher levels of perfection.

Am I a humble person? Does the virtue of humility open me to genuine self-knowledge? Does humility open me to true self-knowledge? Does humility help me to depend on God? Does the practice of humility help me to grow in perfection?

Humility ... will make you both wise and honored. (Prov. 15: 33)

Necessity of Prayer

The practice of holy prayer is most necessary for an ecclesiastic. ... "A Christian without prayer is a man without reason." ... "A missionary without prayer is a soldier without a sword." (OCC, X, pp. 577 - 578; STA, 150)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, prayer is very important in the life of a Christian, especially for a priest or a religious, who has completely dedicated his life to the service of God and the people. The richness of the life of a Christian depends on the quality of prayer he lives. A person without prayer is like the salt that has lost its taste, and the lamp that has failed to give light. St. Vincent Pallotti compared a Christian without prayer to a person without reason. Similarly, a priest or a religious, whose vocation in life is to serve God and his people, without prayer is compared to a soldier without a sword. We can never think of a person without reason, for it is reason that makes a human person. Likewise, a soldier cannot be thought of without a weapon of war, for it is the possession and the ability to use the weapon of war that makes a soldier. In the same way, it is the quality of a person's prayer life that makes him a Christian, a priest or a religious. Without the former, the latter cannot be. Understanding the significance and value of prayer, St. Vincent Pallotti made the task of growing in prayer life his life's endeavor.

Do I recognize the significance of prayer in my Christian and consecrated life? Do I take time to pray amidst the various activities I am called to accomplish in my life? Do I consider prayer as 'the weapon of war' with which I can conquer the world for Christ? Do I understand the danger of giving up prayer in my Christian life?

Seek the Lord while you can find him. Call upon him now while he is near. (Is. 55:6)

Mary's Protection

Place yourself in the hand of the Madonna ... and do not let any thing worry you. (OCL, III, 592, p. 112)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed firmly in Mary's protection. He often recommended to those who sought his advice in moments of troubles and difficulties, to count on Mary as their security. Whatever problems people have, whether they are physical or mental, they can definitely approach Mary for help. All that one needs to do is to place his trouble in the hands of Mary and carry on with his life, doing the best he can in that situation, without being worried or anxious about the outcome. Mary is capable of helping people in their predicaments. The gospel gives a wonderful example of Mary's intervention in the life of the couple at the wedding at Cana. Mary understood their need, even without their asking. She felt for them in their trouble and she offered to help, on her own. She knew that she could do great things with Jesus at her side. At her plea, Jesus, though feeling that his time had not yet come, worked the first miracle of his public ministry and granted the request of his mother on behalf of the couple. St. Vincent never doubted Mary's powerful assistance. He wished that everyone did the same.

Do I believe in Mary's protection? Do I readily approach her in all my needs? What inspiration do I receive from Mary's presence and action at the wedding at Cana? Do I realize that she is a powerful advocate before Jesus on my behalf?

When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." (Jn. 2: 3)

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus: Means to Perfection

The first step to perfection is not to dominate others; the second one is to be subject to others [and] the third is to suffer patiently the injuries in this submission. (OCCC, X, p. 544; STA, 153)

St. Vincent Pallotti visualized a means to perfection that is based on the humble path of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. Jesus, in living the Paschal Mystery, permitted himself to go through a number of self-emptying acts. He left the glory of his nature as God, took the form of a human person, became a slave of all and finally, died on the cross. The self-emptying of Jesus brought him the glory as the Lord and a name, which is above every other name. In imitation of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, St. Vincent Pallotti proposed a threefold step to perfection: not dominating others, being subject to others, and suffering patiently all the pains associated with this submission. Not dominating others is the first step. Non-domination destroys one's self-righteous perception of oneself. Secondly, non-domination must be followed by subjection to others. In subjecting myself to others, I accept my limitation and superiority of others. Thirdly, joyfully and patiently accepting the pains and disappointments involved in the subjection of myself to others. These three-fold self-emptying steps, in imitation of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, will pave the way for true perfection in the life of a person.

Do I believe in the truth of the Paschal Mystery, which says: "the cross is the way to the crown"? Am I ready to stop dominating others, subject myself to others and suffer joyfully the pain involved in the first two submissions? Am I ready to walk the path St. Vincent Pallotti walked in imitation of Jesus?

Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ, who, though he was God, did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like men. And he humbled himself even further, going so far as to actually die a criminal's death on a cross. (Phil. 2: 5-8)

True Perfection

I know that perfection consists in carrying out exactly and with right intention whatever is suitable to my state of life. (OCCC, X, p. 111; STA, 170)

A person may think that he must do extraordinary things, and perform out-of-the-way activities in order to achieve holiness of life. For St. Vincent Pallotti, perfection does not consist of doing exceptional and remarkable things. But rather, it consists of a person carrying out the ordinary duties of his everyday life in an extraordinary manner. By the “extraordinary manner” we mean that a person does his duties of daily life exactly and with the right intention. Doing the tasks “exactly” implies that he does the various tasks he is called to do in the way he is expected to do. It involves doing the tasks entrusted to one in a meticulous manner and in the way God wants it to be done. Doing the demands of life “with right intention” means that the motivation of action must be pure. The intention must be God-centered and other-centered, rather than merely self-centered. The intention of a person has to be similar to that of God, as he performs his activities of daily life. Hence true perfection consists of a person performing the daily duties that are suitable to his state of life in a manner he is expected to do them, and with the motivation of love of God and neighbor. The life of St. Vincent Pallotti is an external proclamation of this simple way of achieving sanctity.

Do I recognize the fact that true perfection consists of doing the ordinary tasks of life in an extraordinary manner? Do I perform the duties of my life “exactly” and “with right intention”? Which are some attitudinal changes that I need in order to learn to be perfect through the everyday events of my life? Do I imitate St. Vincent’s simple way of achieving sanctity?

I command you before God ... and before Christ Jesus ... that you fulfill all he [Christ] has told you to do, so that no one can find fault with you from now until our Lord Jesus Christ returns. (2 Tim. 13-14)

Holy Impatience

[Besides doing] whatever is suitable to my state of life ... it seems that God, as an example of his infinite mercy towards me, ... has additionally given me a holy impatience to do even greater things ... although I know myself most inadequate to do them. (OCC, X, p. 111; STA, 170)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed and lived his life based on the conviction that true Christian perfection consists in performing ordinary acts of everyday life in an extraordinary manner. But, he also recognized the fact that God, in his mercy, can call a person to do outstanding and wonderful works on his behalf and for the good of the Church. Among the many gifts God bestowed upon St. Vincent Pallotti, there was the special gift of the holy impatience to do greater things for God. Holy impatience consists of having within oneself an earnest desire, a resolute determination, and a greater urgency to accomplish great things for the glory of God and the good of others. St. Vincent Pallotti was an enthusiastic person and he communicated this enthusiasm to others as well. With this holy impatience, St. Vincent proceeded to remove all forms of poverty from the human person, and made him re-experience his true nature in the image of God. He wanted to make every person in this world a part of one fold, under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Impelled by this holy impatience, and motivated by the desire to accomplish these goals in the shortest time possible, St. Vincent founded the Union of Catholic Apostolate. In this manner, St. Vincent Pallotti was filled with zeal for God, the establishment of his kingdom, and the happiness of the human persons.

Am I satisfied with doing merely what I am expected to do in life? Do I have the earnest desire, resolute determination and greater urgency to accomplish great things for the glory of God and good of others? How can I express my zeal for God by doing great things for him in the context of my life today?

My zeal for God and his work burns hot within me. And because I advocate your cause, your enemies insult me even as they insult you. (Ps. 69: 9)

February 6

Prayer of Confidence

When I ask for some spiritual grace, I shall imagine with solicitude, confidence, humility and gratitude that I have immediately obtained it. I will perform internal acts as if I had really obtained such a grace. And I do not doubt I will obtain it. (OOCC, X, pp. 112 - 113; STA, 172)

An effective prayer is a prayer of confidence. Often one does not trust in the Lord totally and fully when he places his prayers before him. When a person prays, he does not often hand over to the Lord the problem he is struggling with, the demanding situation he is facing, or the troubles that are difficult to overcome, with the confidence of a child. Often, even in his prayer, a person struggles alone with the problem he faces. He fails to take the problem out of himself and place it at the feet of the Lord. While asking for a favor from God, deep within the person there is the question, would God grant it. Therefore, his prayers often do not produce the desired effect. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, when a person asks for some special grace from God, he should never doubt God's bountiful providence to grant the requested favor. In avoiding doubts about God's bounty, he must imagine with confidence that he has already obtained the requested grace and express sentiments of gratitude for having received the favor. The attitude of thanking God for the grace requested, with the thought that one has already received it, implies deep confidence in God's power to make things happen in our lives. Living this attitude, St. Vincent approached God in total trust, and placed his needs before God in complete surrender while praying. Such a prayer of surrender definitely bore abundant fruit in his life, and the lives of many he encountered daily.

How do I pray? Do I pray with confidence? Do I hand over to God the problem I am struggling with while I pray? Do I doubt the bountiful providence of God during prayer? Do I imagine to have received the favor I have placed before God in prayer and express sentiments of gratitude?

Lord you know the hopes of the humble people. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort their hearts by helping them. (Ps. 10: 17)

Respect for Other's Feelings and Words

I intend to have respect ... for the words and feelings of others, however opposed they are to mine. (OCCC, X, p. 132; STA, 189)

The human person is a social being. He is called to live in an interactive relationship with others. The interactive relationship may take place either in an I-you interaction on a personal level, or in an inter-personal interaction in a community. Whether a person lives in a community or interacts with others on a personal level, it is important that there exists a genuine respect for each other among the persons who wish to live in a relationship. True respect for each other is possible only if one learns to be considerate towards the other's feelings and words. A genuine relationship cannot be built among persons who cannot respect each other's feelings and words. When a person is able to understand what the other thinks, feels and speaks, and accepts the perspective of the other though it is different from that of his, there is a genuine respect for the other. When this takes place, a true relationship can happen between persons. St. Vincent Pallotti, realizing the importance of respecting people's feelings and words for building up authentic human relationships, gave this task a significant place in his spiritual and human living. He constantly made every effort to cultivate in himself the attitude of respecting the words and feelings of others. He made special effort to reach out in acceptance to the one with whom he experienced differences in the level of his thinking, feeling and speaking.

Do I attempt to have genuine interactive relationships with others? Do I show genuine respect for other's feelings and words in my interactions with persons, especially those with whom I do not agree? Am I thoughtful of others in my dealings with them?

Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Try always to be led along together by the Holy Spirit, and so be at peace with one another. (Eph. 4: 2-3)

February 8

Jesus: The Model of Suffering

Whatever the tribulation, always remember that Jesus most patiently suffered more bitter and harder ones than any we could suffer. (OCCC, X, p. 124; STA, 180)

The main purpose of Jesus' coming into the world was to win humankind for his Father through his suffering and death on the cross. Jesus accepted the will of his Father and became one among us in every way except sin. During his lifetime on earth, he was tempted, suffered, was accused, was blamed and underwent every form of physical and mental pain. Though Jesus had to walk by the narrow way and struggle like any other human being, he always accepted the plan of God and did all that he could to accomplish it in the best way. Jesus was never a quitter and he never ran away from accepting and living the cross his Father had placed in his life. St. Vincent Pallotti was fascinated by the perseverance Jesus manifested, in spite of the suffering he had to undergo in accomplishing God's plan of salvation of the world. He often meditated on the passion of Jesus. Whenever tribulations and troubles came his way, he always looked at Jesus who struggled but never gave up and always triumphed victoriously. Thus, for St. Vincent, Jesus was the model of suffering, who suffered more than any other human being. From Jesus, St. Vincent learned to cope with the trials and hardships that came in his life.

How do I cope with sufferings that come in my life? Do I accept sufferings or run away from them? Am I able to look at Jesus who suffered greatly in moments of my troubles? Am I able to learn from the example of Jesus to cope with my daily troubles? Do I see the sufferings as a way to accomplish God's will?

Then he [Jesus] told them, "My soul is crushed with horror and sadness to point of death ... stay here ... stay awake with me." (Mt. 26: 38)

February 9

Life in the World: The Greatest Penance

My greatest penance is life in the world, and all that has to be done in it, so that I may not become peculiar. (OCC, X, p. 126; STA, 184)

While life in the world provides a person with the opportunity to perform good actions, living in the world is very demanding. Everyday life involves a lot of struggle and pain. There are demands of all sorts from every side: the demands from the laws of God, the demands from laws of society, the demands from other human persons, and demands from within oneself. A person can either cope with them in all earnestness, or run away from them. A person coping with these demands is called to respond to all of them. In doing so, he is expected to make decisions and be responsible for them. Making decisions and being responsible for them often produces tension in a person. The tensions, if not handled properly, can make a person peculiar and his behavior strange. Because one experiences these tensions in his life, his everyday living is not that easy. St. Vincent Pallotti considered life in the world as the greatest penance which purifies a person here on earth and trains for the life to come. Therefore, a person must not allow himself to get lost in these tensions of life. He must view all these stresses and tensions of everyday life as that which helps him to prepare himself for the life to come. With this attitude a person can happily cope with tensions of daily life.

Do I consider the struggles of life as something that purifies me? Am I ready to cope with the daily demands of my life and tensions that result from it? Do I, like St. Vincent Pallotti, consider life in the world as the greatest penance? Do I use the tensions and stresses of everyday life as a preparation for my life with God in eternity?

My life passes swiftly away, filled with tragedy. My years disappear like swift ships, like the eagle that swoops upon its prey. (Job. 9:25)

February 10

Possessing the Spirit of Jesus Crucified

Since the perfect spirit is found in the crucified Jesus, I will try through grace to obtain it from Jesus, in whom is found love, charity, humility, poverty, solitude, and everything else. (OCCC, X, pp. 126 - 127; STA, 185)

Jesus allowed himself to be crucified because he loved his Father and loved humankind. In accomplishing the plan of the Father for humankind, Jesus counted his advantage as nothing, and instead placed the advantage of others before that of his. The true spirit of Jesus consists in that he did not think of himself, but spent his life for others. His concern was not what was going to happen to him, but to accomplish the will of the Father for the redemption of every human person. Thus, the true spirit of Jesus consists in his self-emptying, which culminates in his crucifixion. According to St. Vincent, the spirit of Jesus is manifested in his crucifixion, i.e., his total self-emptying for the sake of others. In the crucified Jesus all perfection of his spirit, that is, love, charity, humility, poverty and solicitude are manifested. He is the true possessor of these virtues, and the instructor of all these virtues. The crucified Jesus invites a person to possess the same spirit that sustained him, and work towards achieving the virtues that constitute his spirit. St. Vincent Pallotti, in his lifetime on earth, attempted to imitate the very life of the crucified Jesus. He lived to take in Jesus' true spirit in his life, in order to manifest the very same spirit of Jesus in his own life.

Do I possess the true spirit of Jesus crucified? Do I possess the qualities that constitute the spirit of Jesus? Do I attempt to imitate the very life of the crucified Jesus? Am I ready to manifest the spirit of Jesus in and through my private life and public ministry?

Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards; and now he sits in the place of honor by the throne of God. (Heb. 12: 2)

Each New Day: An Occasion to Live for God

O how happy and blessed are you, who still live on the earth because of the many blessings you can merit. If only a person knew how much he could merit everyday, his heart would fill with great happiness ... each morning as he rose, because of the new day in which he could live for God. (OCC, X, pp. 122 - 123; STA, 179)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that life here on earth is a blessing God bestows on every human person. All those who are living on the earth are blessed. For the world and its situations provide each person with many opportunities to do good actions and obtain great merit. Therefore, he asks everyone who lives in this world to accept his everyday living with a sense of gratitude to God, just as our Blessed Mother Mary lived. Each day of a person's life here on earth is an occasion to live for God. This thought filled St. Vincent's heart with great happiness. He woke up each morning with great gladness in his heart because he knew that the new day presented him with countless opportunities to reach out to others in God's name, to speak to others on behalf of God, to proclaim the word of God, to assist those in need, and to bring peace and joy to the sorrowful. If a person approaches his life on earth with this attitude, his life's goal becomes serving God by serving all those in need. With this goal to guide him each day of his life, his life here on earth becomes more fruitful and meaningful, because he becomes the means through whom others experience the loving presence and touch of God.

Do I consider my life on earth as a blessing or a burden? Am I happy that God has placed me in this world? Am I grateful to God for my life here on earth? Do I believe that each new day is an opportunity to live for God? Do I plan to spend each day fruitfully and meaningfully? Does "serving God by serving those in need" become the goal of my life each day?

For to me, living means opportunities for Christ, and dying – well, that is better yet. But if living will give me more opportunities to win people to Christ, then I really don't know which is better, to live or to die! ... But the fact is that I can be of more help to you by staying! (Phil. 2: 21-22, 24)

February 12

Be Quiet and Timorous

The life of a Christian must be quiet because it rests in God, and timorous, because it fears to lose the abundance of our Lord, Jesus Christ through sins. (OOCC, X, pp. 133 - 134; STA, 190)

In the vision of St. Vincent Pallotti, Christian life must have the quality of quietness, because it rests in God. A Christian must never be agitated or restless, but instead he must be calm and quiet. The reason for this mind-set of the Christian is not that his life is free from troubles and hardships. Though he faces countless challenges in his everyday living, a Christian is calm and composed because his life does not rest on himself, but on God, who is his fortress. Since Christian life is founded on God, a Christian can throw all anxieties on God and live his life with calmness of mind and peacefulness of heart. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, Christian life must also be timorous, because it fears the loss of God's abundant graces through human weaknesses and failures. A Christian, though dependent on God, always must recognize the fact the he is weak and diffident. While cultivating the attitude of total dependence on God, he must also cultivate a certain amount of distrust in his ability to accomplish the will of God all by himself. The latter quality will help a Christian to be realistic about himself, count more on God, and avoid the pitfalls of self-righteous attitude to spiritual living. Hence, while trusting less on himself and absolutely on God, a Christian can live a peaceful and happy life.

Am I less agitated and calm in my spiritual and human living? Do I believe God is the fortress of my life, who keeps me secure? Am I realistic in my perception of myself? Do I recognize my weakness and diffidence?

You must be ... obeying God with deep reverence, shrinking back from all that might displease him. For God is working within you, helping you ... do what he wants. (Phil. 2: 12-13)

A Good Instruction

Three things are to be observed when ... [giving an instruction], ... you must be slow in talking, ... cautious ... and brief ... In speaking, I will take care not to offend God, and I pray ... that he [God] may deign to grant me grace in order to fruitfully instruct the faithful. (OCCC, X, p. 609; STA, 210)

St. Vincent Pallotti recognized the value and importance of Christian instruction. He observed the following guidelines in instructing the faithful and encouraged others to do the same. While giving an instruction, the preacher must be slow in talking in order that the listeners clearly understand what is said. He must be cautious and avoid all ambiguities in his speech so as not to confuse the congregation. The instruction must be brief so that the listeners can be attentive to instruction and gain maximum benefit from it. The preacher must never preach anything that might offend God. He must pray, especially before he begins his instruction, asking God for the grace to instruct the faithful competently. By taking note of all these guidelines, the preacher must effectively preach the word of God to the faithful and instruct them in the ways of God.

Do I recognize the importance of Christian instruction? Do I take care to be slow, cautious and brief while instructing the faithful? Do I preach/teach anything that might offend God? Do I pray for the fruitfulness of my preaching/teaching?

Teach these things and make sure that everyone learns them well ... Read and explain the Scriptures to the Church; preach God's word. Be sure to use the abilities God has given you ... Put these abilities to work; throw yourself into your tasks. (I Tim. 4: 11, 13-15)

Not Despising the Devout Acts of the Simple

When I know that some simple person ... has performed an act of affection or devotion ... I will not only try not to disparage it, but also do what ... [he] did, no matter how lowly ... [he is]. (OCCC, X, p. 140; STA, 192)

In human society often the distinction between the simple people and the great persons is made. The simple people are the poor, the uneducated and the socially low persons, while the great are the wealthy, the educated and the socially high persons. An ordinary act done by a so-called great person is looked upon as something great, while an extraordinary act done by a simple person is considered as something very ordinary. Human society uses a double standard in measuring the activities of the simple and the great. As a result, there is a tendency among society to belittle the simple people and their acts. St. Vincent Pallotti, while living on earth, took scrupulous care not to fall into this improper and unjust estimation of people. When he noticed a simple person performing a good act, he never attempted to belittle that person and put him down. Instead, he appreciated the effort that person has put in, and praised him for the successful performance of that act. Besides giving him the due acknowledgment for the good he had done, St. Vincent also did the very good act in imitation of that person, however lowly and ordinary he was. Therefore, St. Vincent looked at humankind not according to human standards, but in the way God looked at them.

Do I use a double standard in judging the acts of society? Is my dealing with the other biased? Do I belittle persons of lowly backgrounds? Do I acknowledge the good a person of simple background does? Am I ready to imitate the good action of a lowly person?

You are living a brand new kind of life ... In this new life one's nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant; such things mean nothing. Whether a person has Christ is what matters, and he is equally available to all. (Col. 3: 10-11)

Right Attitude of Obedience

In matter, which do not alter the course of actions approved for me by my confessor, I will try, with a spirit of true, prompt and joyful acceptance, to obey all those who will ask something from me.
(OCCC, X, p. 141; STA, 193)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered obedience as a very significant virtue for a Christian. According to him, a Christian must obey with a spirit of true, prompt and joyful acceptance of what he is expected to do. First, obedience must be true. The motive of the one who obeys must be honest and genuine. There is no pretension and hypocrisy behind the act of obeying. Second, obedience must be prompt. It means that the person obeys a particular order immediately. There is no procrastination and postponement of the act of obedience. Third, obedience must be a joyful acceptance of a given order. It implies that the command given is received joyfully and willingly executed. There is no dislike of the command and hesitation in the execution on the part of the person who receives the order and executes it. Finally, one must obey a given order with these threefold attitudes only when the command given in no way goes against the plan God has marked out for the genuine growth of the person. A person comes to know God's plan for him in a concrete manner, through the directives of God's representatives here on earth, i.e., through those persons God has placed over a person as his leaders. St. Vincent Pallotti meticulously lived out these attitudes in the practice of the virtue of obedience in his life.

Do I have the right attitudes in my practice of obedience? Am I true, prompt and joyful when I obey? Do I examine if the act of obedience I am called to live is in line with God's plan for me? Do I accept the directives of God's representatives, and accept them as the will of God for me in my daily life?

Obey me and I will be your God and you shall be my people; only do as I say and all shall be well. (Jer. 7: 23)

True Spirit of Obedience

I ... from a spirit of true obedience, will obey readily, exactly, happily and simply anyone who requests, or even commands something from me, whether he is great, small, noble, ... superior, inferior, or even [the one] under my care. (OCC, X, p. 149; STA, 216)

Besides cultivating the right attitude in obeying, St. Vincent Pallotti lived out the true spirit of obedience. For him, true spirit of obedience has two aspects. First, a person obeys an order readily, exactly, happily and simply. Readiness in obeying involves the preparedness and the disposition to accept and fulfil the command given. The person does not show any sign of reluctance in obeying. Exactness in obeying means that a person does not change the given order to suit his convenience, but performs it in the same way it is given. Happiness in obeying implies that a person feels within himself a great satisfaction in having obeyed the given command. There is no sign of sadness in the person as he set out to execute the order. Simplicity in obeying requires that the person places no conditions when he obeys. The person shows total generosity in executing the given order as he places no conditions for obeying the order. Second, living the spirit of obedience calls for a person's readiness to obey any person, whether he is small or great, noble or plebeian, inferior or superior. St. Vincent Pallotti was ever ready to obey any person, even a person who is under his care. In this manner, he lived the true spirit of obedience in its twofold aspects.

Do I have the true spirit of obedience? Do I obey readily, exactly, happily and simply? Am I ready to obey any person through whom God demands of me obedience in a given situation?

Now if you will obey me and keep your part of the contract with you, you shall be my own little flock from among all the nations of the earth; for all the earth is mine. (Ex. 19: 5)

Overcoming Spiritual Poverty

In order to overcome my spiritual poverty in every possible way, I intend always to ask with outstretched hand, in the name of the most perfect charity, for spiritual alms from all past, present and future creatures, each one infinitely multiplied at every infinitesimal moment. (OOCC, X, pp. 144 - 145; STA, 196)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered himself as a person who was spiritually poor. In comparison to the great spiritual richness of God, he believed that he was utterly poor spiritually. All through his life he attempted to overcome the spiritual poverty from which he believed that he was suffering. He believed that he needed the assistance of every person in overcoming it. He imagined himself as a person who was in need of spiritual alms. For his spiritual alms, he approached not only God and the saints of all ages, but also all past, present and future creatures of this world. He was ever ready to be a beggar of spiritual support from one and all in his effort to overcome his spiritual poverty. Such was the spirit of humility with which St. Vincent visualized himself. But he was a very holy and God-fearing person. There was a lot of spiritual richness in the life of St. Vincent, with which he constantly enriched many persons. Yet, when he viewed himself in relation to the great richness of God, he saw himself as “nothing and sin.” It is his desire to be more like God which made St. Vincent acknowledge his sinfulness. The acknowledgement of his sinfulness made him seek God with the support of every creature.

Do I have the honesty to see my spiritual blindness? Does the acknowledgment of my spiritual poverty help me to move towards the richness of God? Am I ready to seek the help of God and others to overcome my spiritual poverty? Do I make honest efforts to become spiritually richer?

Live no longer as the unsaved do, for they are blinded and confused. Their closed hearts are full of darkness ... If you have really heard his [Christ's] voice ... throw off your old nature ... Clothe yourself with this new nature. (Eph. 4: 18, 21, 24)

Urgency to Sanctify Oneself

I will strive immediately for sanctification, without waiting for ... later years ... I will correspond with readiness, humility and gratitude to the gifts of the Lord ... I will remove those obstacles that can impede my own sanctification; the greatest in me is pride.
(OCC, X, pp. 580 - 581; STA, 197)

In the spiritual agenda of St. Vincent Pallotti, the aspect he strived to achieve with greater urgency is his personal sanctification. He said that he would strive for sanctification immediately without waiting until he got older. For him, living a holy life is an everyday task, which begins early in life and continues until one's death. In order to achieve his sanctification, he proposed two means. First, he decided to remove every obstacle that was capable of preventing him from attaining holiness and any obstacle that would slow down his ascent to God. He considered pride as one of the greatest obstacles that blocked his spiritual growth and attempted to overcome this vice every way possible. Second, having removed everything that obstructed and slowed down his spiritual journey, St. Vincent Pallotti decided to correspond to the gifts and blessings the Lord has showered on him with readiness, humility and gratitude. He accepted God's graces with readiness and humility, thanked him for his condescension and utilized them fully for his spiritual advancement. Thus, St. Vincent used the simple formula of removal of obstacles and corresponding to God's graces as the means to his personal sanctification.

Do I strive for my personal sanctification on a daily basis or postpone it for a later period? Do I attempt to remove the obstacles that prevent my spiritual growth? Which is my greatest vice? Do I correspond to the grace of God with readiness, humility and gratitude?

Be holy now in everything you do, just as the Lord is holy, who invited you to be his child. He himself has said, "You must be holy, for I am holy." (I Pet. 1: 15-16)

Good Intention: The Life of One's Actions

What the body is without life, the same is the action without good intention ... What St. Peter left in order to follow Christ, and what the widow offered in the Gospel, is most estimable because of the good intention with which it was done. (OCCC, X, pp. 601 - 602; STA, 202)

The goodness or the evilness of an action depends on the good or evil intention with which a person performs it. The merit one can gain from an action is in proportion to the quality of the good intention involved in the performance of the action in question. Realizing this truth, St. Vincent Pallotti considered good intention as the life of one's actions. He compared good intention to life saying that just as a body cannot be alive without life, so also an action would be dead without the good intention. He illustrated this truth with two examples from the Gospel: St. Peter's response to the call of Jesus and the offering of the widow at the temple. When Jesus called St. Peter to be his disciple, he immediately left everything and followed him. Similarly, the widow in the temple offered the little she had to the Lord. In both of these cases, the generosity St. Peter showed in offering himself to the Lord, and the generosity the widow showed in offering all she had to the Lord were meritorious because of the good intentions of the two people involved in performing these actions. St. Vincent Pallotti translated this belief in his everyday life. He took great care to have the purest of intentions in everything he did in his life. Whether it was prayer, apostolic activities or interactive relationship with others, St. Vincent was motivated by the purest intention of glorifying God.

Am I conscious of the intentions with which I perform the various actions of each day? Do I recognize the value of good intention in making my acts more meritorious? Do I take care to form good and pure intentions before I begin performing an action?

Create in me a new, clean heart, O God, filled with clean thoughts and right desires. (Ps. 51: 10)

February 20

Selflessness of True Charity

In order to practice even the smallest act of charity towards my neighbor for the love of God, I would willingly throw myself into the flames of hell ... but only with the grace and love of God.
(OOCC, X, p. 146; STA, 205)

True love is selfless. It never thinks of itself. A person who has true charity does not seek his own advantage in anything he does. The one consideration that overwhelms the mind of the man of true charity is that good must be done everywhere and every time. His concern is to bring happiness to the lives of others by performing works of charity. He is ready to take any trouble on himself in order to do what is good and bring joy to others. St. Vincent Pallotti lived out this selfless charity in his life. He said that in order to do even the smallest act of charity towards his neighbor, he would be ready to throw himself into the flames of hell, provided it was what God wanted of him. He was ready to go to hell and undergo all pains associated with it because God wants him to love his neighbor. Such was his selflessness in accomplishing genuine acts of charity.

Do I perform works of true charity? Am I selfless in the works of charity I perform? Do I take trouble on myself in order to perform works of charity and bring happiness in the lives of the people with whom I live?

Love is patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges ... It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. (I Cor. 13: 1-7)

All Creatures Participate in the Divinity

I will imagine that all creatures, as participants in divinity, are transformed in every way possible into the divine and the holy. Moreover, I will imagine I see the living image of our Crucified Lord Jesus Christ in each creature. (OCCC, X, p. 147; STA, 207)

The world is the creation of God. Every creature in the world is his handiwork. As the handiwork of God, every creature participates in the nature and being of God. As a participant in God's nature, all created things are transformed into his likeness. Therefore, we find in every creature a certain vestige of God. God, in creating the creatures of the world, placed in them divergent aspects of his perfection. By their very being in the world, every creature manifests the glory, greatness and divinity of God. Similarly, Christ's redemptive act of dying on the cross has recreated and sanctified the whole of creation. To the extent every creature is sanctified by the redemptive death of Jesus on the cross, every creature reflects the Crucified Jesus in its nature. Hence, creatures in the world contain in themselves vestiges of Christ Crucified. St. Vincent Pallotti experienced in the creatures of the world both the images of the Creator and the Redeemer of the world. Therefore, for St. Vincent, the world and all its creatures manifest the glory of the Creator and the Redeemer, by their very being in the world.

Do I consider the world as the creation of God? Do I believe that every creature is the reflection of God? Do I have the faith-vision to see every creature as the manifestation of the creative love of God? Do I believe that every creature manifests the redemptive love of the Christ Crucified?

The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of his craftsmanship. Day and night they keep telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world. (Ps. 19: 1-4)

Good Example: The Means to Sanctify Others

No one can be excused from giving good example ... [as it is efficacious and suitable for the sanctification of one's neighbor]. It is efficacious because it penetrates the hearts of the faithful; ... it is suitable because there is no natural defect that prevents [one from] setting a good example, as there might be in preaching or other duties. (OCC, X, pp. 606 - 607; STA, 209)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed in the value of giving good example, as a great means to sanctify one's neighbor. He said that no person could be excused from giving good example to his neighbor, as it is an efficacious and suitable means for the sanctification of others. Good example is an efficacious means because it touches the heart and mind of the one who experiences an exemplary act. Since people see the act directly, good example is self-evident and does not need any further explanations. Good example is a suitable means of sanctification, because no natural defect in the person giving the example can prevent them from performing the exemplary act. Natural defects such as defects in speaking or in walking may prevent one from becoming a preacher or an active missionary respectively. But despite all such natural defects one can become an exemplary person. Hence, St. Vincent insisted upon giving good example as a means to edify and sanctify one's neighbor.

Do I recognize the value of good example as a means to sanctify my neighbor? Do I use every opportunity I get in my life to give good example to others? Am I willing to learn from the good examples of others?

Since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow: do as I have done to you. (Jn. 13: 14-15)

Perfect Life of Jesus: A Life of Perpetual Crucifixion

May you fulfill in me and in everyone ... the perfect life of Jesus Christ, so that we may lead a life of perfect and perpetual sacrifice, perfect and perpetual crucifixion. (OCC, X, p. 135; STA, 191)

St. Vincent Pallotti often prayed to God to fulfill in himself and in everyone the perfect life of Jesus Christ. For him, the perfect life of Jesus Christ is nothing but a life of perpetual sacrifice and crucifixion. The life of Jesus was a life of the cross. From his cradle to his grave, Jesus lived a life of suffering, deprivation and agony. The crucifixion was only the final act that completed his way of the cross here on earth. Though Jesus struggled to accept sufferings which came as the will of God at different times during his life, he did not flee from them. Jesus joyfully offered every one of his sufferings to God as the perfect sacrifice. Therefore, St. Vincent Pallotti while praying to possess the perfect life of Jesus in himself, in fact desired to possess a life of continuous sacrifice and crucifixion. By such a life he was able to identify with the sufferings of Jesus, which he lived through during his life on earth. Thus, St. Vincent desired that the life of Jesus' way of the cross be accomplished in him. The desire to live a life of perpetual sacrifice and crucifixion in imitation of Jesus helped St. Vincent to accept the various sufferings of his life joyfully. Besides accepting the sufferings of his daily life joyfully in imitation of Jesus, St. Vincent also attempted to make the troubles of his daily life redemptive, by using each of them for the glory of God and the salvation of the humankind.

Do I desire to live the perfect life of Jesus here on earth? Am I content with living a life of perpetual sacrifice and crucifixion? Am I able to make my sufferings redemptive like Jesus?

Then Jesus shouted, "Father, I commit my spirit to you" and with those words he died. (Lk. 23: 46)

Dealing with One's Neighbor

[In dealing with one's neighbor one must] be kind to all, flattering to none, familiar with a few, [and] just to all ... I pray [to] God that He makes me very similar to our Lord Jesus Christ in all my works and dealing with others (OCC, X, p. 611; STA, 212).

St. Vincent Pallotti took great care that his dealings with his neighbors were cordial and genuine, yet balanced. He practiced a few simple rules in order to make such a relationship possible. He was kind to everyone who came into his life. He never deliberately hurt or wronged any person. He was always concerned about the wellbeing of his neighbor. While he was kind to every person he encountered, he flattered no one. He never attempted to please anyone in order to derive something for his own advantage. Similarly, St. Vincent maintained a relationship of familiarity with only a few. For he knew that such deeper and closer relationships of confidentiality and cordiality cannot be sustained with many. He was just in his dealings with all. He gave everyone his due and never claimed for himself more than what he deserved. As St. Vincent related to his neighbor in this manner, he constantly prayed that he might be similar to Jesus Christ in his dealings with his neighbor.

How do I relate to my neighbor? While relating to others in genuineness and cordiality, do I maintain a sense of balance? Am I, like St. Vincent, kind to all, flattering none, familiar with a few and just to all? Am I like Christ in my dealings with others?

If you love your neighbor as much as you love yourself you will not want to harm him or cheat him ... Love does no wrong to anyone. That's why it fully satisfies all of God's requirements. It is the only law you need. (Rom. 13: 9-10)

Gratitude to God for the Good Others Do

When I hear that others are doing very great things for the glory of God, I will arm myself with a holy envy, and thank God.

(OCCC, X, p. 47; STA, 217)

Prayer of gratitude comes from the heart of a person, who has recognized and acknowledged the abundant blessings of God in his life and that of others. There are many things that happen in our life, for which one needs to be grateful to God. A person needs to thank the Lord for the many blessings he brings in the life of others in and through his efforts and activities. Similarly, he must thank the Lord for the great things his brethren do for the glory of God. Often, due to jealousy, a person fails to recognize and acknowledge the good done by his neighbor. Sometimes, he speaks ill of such good activities of others and attributes wrong motives for their actions. At times even he carries tales about the motivation of his neighbor in doing such good activities. For St. Vincent Pallotti, such behavior is unchristian and malicious. It is unbecoming of a Christian to behave in like manner. In his lifetime, he took special care to recognize and acknowledge the good works of his neighbor. He often had a word of appreciation and encouragement for the person who had done a good action. He never failed to thank the Lord for the good action done by his neighbor and to pray for him that he would continue to glorify the Lord in and through his good actions.

What is my attitude towards the good actions done by my neighbor? Am I jealous of the good actions of others? Do I recognize and acknowledge the good works of my neighbor and thank the Lord for them? Do I pray that my neighbor may continue to glorify the Lord through his good actions?

Is there any such thing as Christians cheering each other up? ... Does it mean anything to you that we are brothers in the Lord and share the same spirit? ... [If so] don't just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and in what they are doing.

(Phil. 2: 1, 4)

Right Attitude in the Presence of God

When I enter the holy temple of the Lord, I will imagine [that] I am the publican mentioned in the Gospel. Imitating him I will ask pardon for my sins. (OCCC, X, p. 48; STA, 219)

God is the ultimate source of our existence. He is the beginning and end of our life. It is on him that we depend for everything in our life. Hence, Jesus said: “Apart from me you can’t do a thing” (Jn. 15:5). Since God is the foundation of our life, it is important that we acquire the proper attitude with which we can approach his presence. The type of attitude we need to unlearn is the attitude of the Pharisees. The pharisaic attitude, in fact, does not acknowledge the greatness of God, but rather proclaims one’s own greatness and achievement. In the gospel story of the Pharisee and the Publican, the prayer of the Pharisee is not a praise of God, but a self-praise. In his prayer, the Pharisee condemns the life and personality of the publican, declares the various evil actions he avoids and the good activities he performs. But he does not say a word in God’s praise. Even the gratitude expressed in his prayer is pointing to him rather than to God. But the publican, in all humility and simplicity, does not consider himself worthy to stand in the presence of God. He acknowledges his sinfulness and announces his need for God. In doing so, he stands justified before God. St. Vincent Pallotti lived the attitude of the Publican whenever he encountered the presence of God.

What is my attitude as I stand before the presence of God? Am I like the Pharisee and stand in self-praise in the presence of God? Am I like the Publican and stand in praise of God in his presence? How do I pray? Do I announce my achievements or proclaim the greatness of God in my prayer?

But the corrupt tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed, but beat his chest in sorrow, exclaiming: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” (Lk. 18:13)

A Good Teacher of Christian Faith

If I instruct others I must strive to pray and reap for myself that fruit which I desire to see in ... [the ones I instruct]. (OOCC, X, pp. 48 - 49; STA, 220)

A good teacher of Christian faith is one who has in-depth knowledge of the faith taught by Jesus Christ. He is one who has encountered the Lord Jesus and experienced his teachings. Such a teacher of Christian faith has the facility and capability to instruct others about the faith. Besides having the knowledge of matters of faith and the facility to instruct, he must also be a person who practices the instruction he gives to others. In other words, a good teacher of Christian faith must live what he preaches to others in his own life. He must strive to achieve at least that much perfection in the living of his faith, which he desires to see in those whom he is instructing. Otherwise, his preaching is in vain as far as his own life with God is concerned, for while saving others he is not able to save himself. St. Vincent Pallotti was conscious of this truth. All through his life, he always attempted to live what he preached to others. As a matter of fact, before he instructed others on any aspect of Christian faith, he always put them into practice so that he could speak to them more experientially. He always strived to attain perfection in the persons whom he was instructing.

Is there a correspondence between my words and actions? As a teacher do I practice what I teach others? Do I wish to achieve in me that perfection which I desire to have in the persons I am instructing?

All who listen to my instructions and follow them are wise, like a man who builds his house on solid rock ... But those who hear my instructions and ignore them are foolish, like a man who builds his house on sand. (Mt. 8: 24, 26)

Power of Grace

Brethren of Jesus Christ ... remember that now that you are alive, you can do with God's grace more than the saints have done. Imagine, therefore, that the Lord has given you ... all those graces necessary to arrive at a very high degree of perfection. (OCC, X, p. 49; STA, 221)

Grace is a special blessing the Lord bestows on his chosen ones, in order that they would be able to do marvelous things in his name. The effectiveness of a person's efficient planning and hard work in executing his plan gets increased many times when assisted by the grace of God. A person, open to God's grace, can accomplish much more than his abilities and talents can achieve. Such is the power of God's grace. St. Vincent Pallotti was certain that he could attain a great deal when the grace of God and his hard work combined together in an effective manner. He said that as long as we are living in this world, we would be able to do more than all the saints have done together when we cooperate with the grace of God. Hence, he believed that God gives all the necessary graces to do great things for God and his people, and to arrive at a high degree of perfection, as and when one is in need of them. It is up to each person to open himself to the power of God's grace and cooperate with it to accomplish the will of God for him in his life here on earth.

Do I believe that God's grace is freely available to me to assist me in doing what he wants of me in my life? Do I believe that I can accomplish God's plan for me most perfectly when assisted by God's grace? Am I willing to cooperate with the grace of God in my daily life?

But whatever I am now it is because God poured out such kindness and grace upon me – and not without results: for I have worked harder than all the apostles, yet I wasn't doing it, but God working in me, to bless me. (I Cor. 15: 10)

February 29

Everyday Living: A Memory of the Beginning
and an Anticipation of the End

In the course of your [everyday] life, as often as you can, make believe that every moment of your life is the beginning of your conversion and the last moment of your life. And therefore try to act as you would in such a state. (OOC, X, p. 50; STA, 222)

We often consider our life here on earth as permanent and ongoing. But our life in this world is impermanent and short lived. We are pilgrims journeying towards our final destiny. The fact that we are going to arrive at our destiny is certain, though the when and the how of our encounter with our destiny are uncertain. Hence, living our life with the sense of uncertainty calls for right attitudes to accept and face the everyday events of life. St. Vincent Pallotti attempted to live his everyday life as a memory of the beginning and an anticipation of the end. In other words, he lived each moment of his life as the beginning of his conversion and the last moment of his life. Facing his everyday life and its events with this attitude, St. Vincent was able to do each activity in the best way possible. In doing any act of his daily living, he would consider it as the first act that he performed after his conversion. The memory of the beginning would make him do the act in a most fervent manner. Similarly he would think of the same act as the last act he would be performing in his life. The anticipation of the end while performing the act would make him perform that act with greatest devotion. In this way, each action would be done in the most perfect manner. This attitude helped St. Vincent to live his life in the most perfect way.

Do I consider my life as permanent and ongoing? Do I recognize the shortness of my life? Do I perform each of my actions with the memory of the beginning and anticipation of the end? Am I performing every act in my daily life in the most perfect manner?

We glide along the tides of time as swiftly as a racing river, and vanish as quickly as a dream. We are like grass that is green in the morning ... and withered before the evening shadows fall. (Ps. 90: 5-6)

March 1

Guidance to the Young for Action

You, who are young, intend to do in your actions what in your old age you would like to have done for the glory of God and the advantage of souls. (OCCC, X, pp. 52 - 53; STA, 229)

St. Vincent Pallotti had great concern for the youth. He believed that they have a big role to play in the Church and in society. He called them the "Pillars of the Church." He spent a lot of time guiding and caring for them. He often told them that they should not presume that because they are young, they have still a lot of time. Such an attitude would make them lazy and mediocre. With an average spirit, a person would do the minimum in his life, often postponing what was expected of him while idling away all his time. The constant living of the mediocre attitude can lead young people to moral degradation. They can get into different forms of vicious living. In the historical situation of St. Vincent, he saw the youth being led astray in a number of ways. Hence, he wanted the youth to cultivate a more authentic and committed attitude towards their life. He wanted them to do those very actions which they would like to do in their old age for the glory of God and benefit of their neighbor. Having the attitude of the older person regarding life, its expectations and its demands, the youth can attain genuine maturity of action in their life. In doing so, they will bear true fruits for the glory of God and happiness of the other.

How do I spend my life? Am I a minimalist, doing the minimum? Do I think that I have a lot of time to do the good I am called to do? Do I manifest the urgency in accomplishing the duties of my life? Do I have an authentic and committed attitude towards life? Do I bear fruit for the glory of God and the happiness of others?

Say not, "I am too young." To whomever I send you, you shall go. Whatever I command you, you shall speak. (Jer. 1: 7)

March 2

Glorification of God through Daily Tasks

In your every action remember that you can give great glory to the Creator by carrying out the obligations of your state with holy and right precision. (OCC, X, p. 50; STA, 224)

God is the source of everything a person has in his life and the good he accomplishes in his everyday living. A person makes efforts in achieving the good deeds he plans to do. But it is God who blesses his efforts, and generates fruits of his good deeds in his life and that of others. Therefore, God deserves to be glorified in and through every action a person performs each day. St. Vincent Pallotti believed that the glory of the Creator could be best brought about by carrying out the duties of a person's state of life. Thus, whether a person is a priest, religious or layperson, he can glorify God by performing the obligations of his state of life "with holy and right precision." The phrase "holy and right precision" refers to an inner attitude of the person, which earnestly wishes and intends that the good act be done with the purest intention and in the best way possible. When an action is done in this manner, it perfects the situation in which it is done, the person to whom it is done, the person who performs the action, and brings God the greatest glory. All through his life, St. Vincent performed each of his actions as a priest with holy and right precision. In doing so, he allowed each of his acts to bring the greatest glory to God, while facilitating at the same time the sanctification of his neighbor.

Do I believe that I can bring glory to God through the performance of the duties of my state of life? Do I seek my own advantage or the glory of God in and through the good deeds that I perform? Do I carry out the duties of my state of life "with holy and right precision"?

My mouth shall be filled with your praise, with your glory day by day. (Ps. 71: 8)

March 3

Walking on the Path to Perfection

You who long to walk along the road to perfection ... [must] act at every moment of your life as you would ... if you were to rise from death to a new life. (OCCC, X, p. 51; STA, 226)

Every Christian is called to walk along the road to perfection. This is the whole purpose of Christian life. Therefore, in every Christian there must be an inner longing to embrace the path to perfection and to walk the way despite the many hurdles that may come along the way. To continue walking in the way of perfection, a Christian must realize that he, by his insertion into Christ, has been dead to the life dominated by the sinful self and is risen to a new life in Christ. Since he has put off the old sinful self that is dead and has been reborn into a new life, he must live every moment of his life as a person who has risen with Christ. He must give up his old ways of living. He must constantly make efforts to live the very life of Jesus. St. Vincent Pallotti lived his Christian life with the constant awareness that the life he is called to live is the life of Christ. This way of living has made him rise above his old sinful self and the behavior that emerged from it. In living this life at every moment, St. Vincent wished to have the attitude of the person who has died and risen back to life. It meant that he wasted no opportunity to grow into the life of Christ, and that he made use of every possibility to achieve the very life of Christ in his own person. Therefore, he pursued the path of perfection with genuine eagerness and constant effort and in the process living the very life of the risen Christ.

Do I believe that I, as a Christian, am called to walk along the road to perfection? Do I realize that by my insertion into Christ I am dead to sinful ways and have risen to a new life in Christ? Am I ready to give up everything that displeases Christ and walk on the path of perfection with genuine eagerness and constant effort?

It is he [Christ] whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. For this I labor and struggle. (Col. 1: 28-29)

Triumph of God's Mercy over Man's Misery

I intend at all times that you deign to work everything in me in order that I may be everything in you ... and may be transformed in all that you are, your infinite mercy triumphing perpetually over my inconceivable misery. (OOCC, X, p. 202; STA, 316)

As a person journeys through life, he realizes that there are two laws that are operative in him, the law of sin and the law of grace. The former is rooted within a person and pulls him towards what is evil. The latter is founded on God and calls every person to choose what is good and honorable. Thus, in his daily living, a person is tossed between these two laws. St. Vincent Pallotti, attempting to live his spiritual life seriously, realized the way these two laws were operative in his daily living. He acknowledged that if he attempted to live his life by himself, he would end up in inconceivable misery, because by placing his total trust on his own abilities, he would succumb to the law of sin. Hence, he made every effort to open himself to the law of grace that has its foundation in God. St. Vincent wished that God would work everything in him in order that he could be everything for God. He did everything within his power that he might be transformed into God by opening himself to the law of grace, thereby allowing the mercy and the grace of God to triumph over his own misery and sinfulness. In this way, St. Vincent was able to bring the law of sin totally under the rule of the law of grace.

Do I recognize the operation of the law of sin and the law of grace in my spiritual life? Do I succumb to the insinuations of the law of sin? Do I place the law of sin under the rule of the law of grace so that God's mercy can triumph over my limitations?

The law entered in so that transgression might increase but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5: 20-21).

Needs of Life: A Path to God

Let not the needs of your life and those of others ever remove you from union with God; for after all, in those acts you are doing the will of God, and thus you will not forsake loving him. (OCCC, X, p. 52; STA, 228)

The needs and troubles of our life must neither be considered as burdensome nor be rejected as unwanted. In fact, they are paths that lead us to genuine union with God, because the situations of our needs and troubles provide us with concrete opportunities to recognize the will of God and do them. If we seek the will of God in the events of our needs and attempt to accomplish them wholeheartedly, each of our needs would take us to a fuller knowledge of God, deeper love of God, and a complete union with God. Such an attitude would never make us forsake God's love for us that often comes to us in and through the events of our troubles and needs. On the contrary, if we shun the events of our troubles and run away from them, we miss the God-given opportunity to know God, to love him, and to be united with him. St. Vincent Pallotti acknowledged that the needs of his life were paths to God. Accepting this truth, he never faced the troubles of his life all by himself. He always reached out to God in every moment of his needs. He did not pray to be freed from the trouble, but instead he asked God to be with him in his difficulties. In this manner, St. Vincent Pallotti made use of each of his troubles and needs to come in touch with God. He used his hardships to recognize the love of God that was manifested through them. Finally he used them to be united with God.

Do I acknowledge that the needs and troubles of my life are paths to God? Do I recognize the love of God that is manifested through them? Do I seek God's will through them? Do the needs of my life bring to me a fuller knowledge of God, a deeper love of God and a complete union with God?

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. (Rom. 8: 35, 37)

March 6

Placing Oneself in the Hands of God

Conduct yourself in such a way that nothing ... distracts you from God. Thus, if you are in distress, misery, [and] tribulation ... put everything in the hands of God, ... animated by a heroic faith, ... hope, charity, and sorrow for ... [your] faults. (OCCC, X, p. 54; STA, 232)

In every aspect of his life, St. Vincent Pallotti conducted himself in such a way that he was totally focused on God and his mind was never distracted from God. He was always at peace, even in moments which were very difficult. For instance, when he received the Papal order containing the suppression of the Society he founded, he knelt down along with his collaborators and prayed the “*Te Deum*” in thanksgiving. He was able to maintain such a mind-set and remain calm even in the most adverse situation because he was able to place every happening of his life in the hands of God. In doing so, he was animated by an ardent faith, a devoted love, an unquestioning hope and a genuine sorrow for his failures. When any form of distress, misery, or tribulation came into his life, he knew very well that he did not have to face it alone, as God was there to assist him and help him to overcome the difficulty. All he needed to do was to approach the bounty of the merciful God with faith, love, hope and genuine sorrow for his limitations. Living his life with this attitude, St. Vincent Pallotti was always focused on God.

Am I able to maintain the tranquillity of mind that helps me to focus on God even in moments that are difficult? Do I place everything that happens in my life in the hands of God with faith, love, hope and genuine sorrow for my failures? Do I face the troubles of my life all by myself? Do I hand over my problems to God?

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God. (Rom. 8: 38-39)

Seeking God Alone

I want nothing displeasing to God, but everything pleasing to him. I seek God alone, I desire to suffer and be despised for him ... Oh love of God, enkindle enflame and burn ... [my] heart, destroy vice and infuse virtue. (OOCC, X, p. 56; STA, 237)

St. Vincent Pallotti always wanted to do only those things that were pleasing to God and brought glory to him. He never deliberately attempted to do anything that would displease God. The yearning of his heart was to seek God alone. He was ready to suffer and to be despised, if that would bring glory and honor to God. He wished that his heart was enkindled with the fire of the love of God, and was enflamed and burned with the same love always. He desired that the love of God would burn his heart, thereby destroying all forms of vice in him, and infuse in him every virtue which would make him live his life in the way that pleased God. He took great care to do whatever he did in the most perfect manner so that his actions would be pleasing to God. Similarly, he took upon himself the practice of penitential acts when he realized that he had inadvertently performed actions that would displease God. Thus, seeking God alone and doing those things that pleased God were the sole concerns of St. Vincent's daily life.

Do I seek God in whatever I do or say? Do my actions reflect the motivation of pleasing God in all things? Am I ready to accept hardships and tribulations in order to bring honor and glory to God? Am I penitent when I realize that I have performed actions that have displeased God?

But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things [food, drink and clothing] will be given you besides. (Mt. 6: 33)

March 8

No Complacency in One's Spiritual Progress

[You must] examine your actions, and if you find them scandalous, correct yourself, and if you know them to be good remember that ... [one] who is holy must be holier, ... [and one] who is just must be more 'just'. (OOCC, X, p. 504; STA, 239)

St. Vincent Pallotti took his spiritual life and its progress seriously. He was neither complacent about nor compromised by his spiritual progress. He constantly examined his actions in the sight of God. He was very strict with himself in evaluating the progress he made in his spiritual life. He was totally transparent to his spiritual director with regard to every aspect of his spiritual life. St. Vincent took his word as God's word, and followed it in letter and in spirit. If he found any of his actions to be scandalous he accepted his mistake without any hesitation, and was ready to correct his faults. He was never hesitant to perform the remedial methods his spiritual director suggested to make him grow in his spiritual life. He did not place an upper limit on his spiritual progress. He knew that the perfection he needed to achieve in his spiritual life was similar to the perfection of the heavenly Father. Therefore, his ideal was: 'the one who was holy must become holier', and 'the one who was just must become more just'. Living this ideal was the aim of St. Vincent's spiritual life.

Do I take my spiritual life and its progress seriously? Am I complacent about my spiritual life? Do I compromise my spiritual progress? Am I strict in evaluating the progress I make in my spiritual life? Am I open to my spiritual director in all matters of my spiritual life? Do I take his suggestions seriously? Do I place an upper limit on my spiritual progress?

No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God. (Lk. 9: 62).

March 9

Following the Obedient Jesus

I intend that every thought, word, and deed of mine ... be transformed into the obedience of Jesus Christ ... I intend to regard every creature as my superior. And therefore I intend to execute all orders for the love of God. (OOCC, X, pp. 157, 158; STA, 267)

Jesus was obedient to the will of the Father all through his life here on earth. He never attempted to do his own will, even in situations that were demanding. He always chose to do what God, his Father, wanted of him even if it meant that he had to undergo hardships and pains. Jesus' obedience to the Father was unconditional. He placed no "ifs" and "buts" when he had to obey the Father. He accepted the Father's will, though it was not easy for him to say "yes". Yet he said "yes" to the Father's plans for him, because he was convinced that the Father's will was his way of life. St. Vincent Pallotti lived his life in imitation of the obedient Jesus in his thought, word and deed. His imitation of Jesus' obedience made him consider every creature as his superior. He had cultivated an attitude of readiness to do whatever others demanded of him. He had pledged to execute all orders given by anyone for the love of the obedient Jesus. In this manner, St. Vincent Pallotti obeyed everyone with deep inner joy, for in obeying someone in a given situation, he lived the life of the obedient Jesus.

What is my attitude in living the virtue of obedience? Is my living of obedience a joyful self-giving in imitation of Jesus' self-giving? Am I ready to accept the hardships involved in obeying joyfully?

After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he [Jesus] prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." (Lk. 22: 41-42)

March 10

Doing Everything at the Proper Time

What I can do now, I will not put off until another time. (OOCC, X, 540; STA, 101)

The world in which we live is a properly ordered system. There is a proper time for everything in the world. The night comes after the day. There are the seasons that come one after another in a continuous sequence. Similarly, the time to plant, the time to weed, and the time to harvest are well marked in this beautifully ordered universe. The human person is fully part of this well organized world. As the most significant part of the world, the human person also must do everything at the proper time. What he is expected to do now must be done now, and must not be put off for another time. The postponement of a task that has to be performed at a particular time, brings disorder in the life of the human person and discord in the society. The procrastination makes a person lazy and slows down the growth of the community. St. Vincent Pallotti, being aware of this truth, was very prompt in doing what was expected of him. Whether it was prayer, the apostolic endeavors or the works of charity, he did them all as per his plan and at the right time. He constantly lived his dictum: "What I can do now, I will not put off until another time."

How prompt am I in performing the duties of my state of life? Do I have the tendency to procrastinate? By my tendency to postpone the performance of my duties do I make myself lazy? Does the attitude of postponing bring discord in the community? What concrete steps must I take to overcome my tendency to put off performing an action at the proper time?

There is a right time for everything ... Everything is appropriate in its own time. (Eccl. 3: 1, 11)

Accepting a Life of Suffering

My Jesus ... give me ... your thirst for sufferings, opprobrium, persecutions, calumnies, imprisonment ... [and] condemnation to a humiliating death ... for the greater glory of the heavenly Father, and the eternal salvation of ... all in all the world. (OCCC, X, pp. 370 - 371; STA, 397)

A life of suffering is part and parcel of the life of a Christian. Jesus has affirmed this truth in his teachings, especially in his instruction to his apostles. The cross, the symbol which a Christian holds dear to him, vouches for the significance of suffering in the life of a Christian. Though suffering is a distinguishing mark of a Christian life, what is more important is the attitude a person takes toward the sufferings that he faces in his life. In the early Christian community, while the apostles were flogged and ill treated because they spoke in the name of Jesus, they considered it to be an honor to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus and rejoiced over it. Similarly, St. Vincent Pallotti always believed that the greatest honor he could offer to God was to suffer for him joyfully. He often prayed to give him the thirst for sufferings, persecutions, calumnies, imprisonment and condemnation to a humiliating death in imitation of the passion of Jesus. The motives with which St. Vincent undertook the acceptance and practice of suffering were the greater glory of the heavenly Father and the eternal salvation of all in the world. With these motives to guide him, he accepted his sufferings joyfully, in the process living the true spirit of the beatitudes.

Do I accept suffering as the distinguishing mark of Christian life? Am I like the apostles, ready to suffer dishonor for the honor of the name of Jesus? Do I, like St. Vincent, live the spirit of the beatitudes by accepting and living suffering for the glory of God and salvation of all?

Blessed are you when men reproach you, persecute you, and speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, because of me.
(Mt. 5:11)

March 12

Jesus Forgives

I intend ... to forgive every offense against me ... [and] pray now and forever, for my offenders, embracing them in God as my dearest benefactors. (OCCC, X, pp. 408 - 409; STA, 468).

Forgiveness was one of the themes Jesus constantly preached during his public ministry. But from the cross before his death, he practiced forgiveness by declaring his love for the very people who condemned and killed him. The first words Jesus spoke from the cross pointed to Jesus' loving heart, a heart that did not nurse any ill feeling. Jesus though hurt and in pain, had no bitterness against his killers in his heart. He found their ignorance of what they were doing as reason to justify their behavior. Jesus, true to his teaching on love of enemies, did not accuse or condemn his killers, nor did he proclaim his innocence. Instead he interceded with his father to forgive them, telling him that had they known the gravity of the matter, they would have never done what they did to him. St. Vincent Pallotti was fascinated by the example of Jesus' forgiveness of his detractors and killers. Inspired by the example of Jesus, he vowed to forgive every offense against him. He constantly prayed for his offenders, embracing them in spirit before God's presence, considering them as his dearest benefactors.

What is my attitude towards those persons who offend me seriously? Do I have a loving heart that forgives and finds some reason to justify the behavior of my detractors? Do I pray for those who offend me? Do I see them as benefactors of my spiritual life?

Father, forgive them; they know not what they do. (Lk. 23: 34)

March 13

Jesus Makes Man Worthy of His Kingdom

[Lord Jesus] stimulate me to reflect that I, more than anyone else, am unworthy of Paradise. (OCCC, X, p. 411; STA, 469)

In the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, Jesus taught that there would be great joy in heaven over a sinner who repented, in comparison with the ninety-nine that did not stray. From the cross just before his death, he practiced what he had been preaching in his public ministry. Even in his dying moments, the heart of Jesus could not help but be open to reach out to the repentant thief. The thief acknowledged his unworthiness to belong to the Kingdom of God, while asking Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into his Kingdom. St. Vincent Pallotti was convinced that he was unworthy of the Kingdom of God as he was the most miserable of all creatures. He often identified himself with biblical persons such as Peter, Paul, Mary Magdalene, the good thief and the like, who had failed Jesus through their sinful deeds, but who were made worthy of the Kingdom of God by the merciful love of Jesus. He constantly instilled in himself his unworthiness for attaining paradise, for then the mercy of God could be operative in him and make him worthy of the Kingdom of God.

Do I recognize my unworthiness to belong to the Kingdom of God? Do I believe in the mercy of God that can destroy my unworthiness and make me belong to God's Kingdom? Do I make an appeal of my desire to be with Jesus in paradise, like the good thief?

Then he [the good thief] said, "Jesus remember me when you come into your Kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk. 23: 42-43)

March 14

Jesus Gifts His Mother

[Lord Jesus] help me reflect fruitfully that I have been infinitely ungrateful for the infinite love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who deigned to give me his own most holy Mother as a mother. (OCC, X, P. 413; STA, 470)

Through the third words Jesus spoke from the cross, he manifested his generous heart. The generosity of Jesus caused him to make a total gift of himself and all he had to humankind. At the last moment of his life on earth, as he hung on the cross, he realized that he still had his mother who was most dear to him. He felt that he should hold nothing for himself and let go of everything before he offered himself to the Father through his death. Jesus also felt that he should not leave his disciples as orphans and his mother would be the best person to be the mother of his disciples. Therefore, he offers his mother as the most generous gift to John and through John to every true disciple of Jesus. For St. Vincent Pallotti, Jesus' generous gift of his mother to humankind as its mother manifested the infinite love of Jesus for the human race. He felt that he had been so ungrateful for this infinite love of Jesus. The recognition of his own ingratitude helped St. Vincent Pallotti to accept Mary, the mother of Jesus, as his own mother in his spiritual life and learn from her the true missionary spirit, which was a great impetus for his own apostolic endeavors.

Do I acknowledge the generosity of Jesus in offering his mother to me as my mother in my spiritual life? Do I accept Mary as a significant person in my spiritual journey? Have I fruitfully made use of the protection and assistance of Mary in my apostolic endeavors?

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there who he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother." (Jn. 19: 26)

March 15

Jesus Thirsts

[Lord Jesus] help me consider that I have never profited from the mysterious thirst of our Lord Jesus Christ, expressed by him on the Cross ... May he help me in making ... the most perfect correspondence with his thirst. (OCC, X, pp. 414, 415; STA, 471)

With the offering of his mother to John to be his mother, Jesus had given up everything in his life. There was nothing which he could call his own in this world. Jesus felt within himself a sense of having lost everything. His life along with its mission given by the Father seemed to be a failure. Even his disciples on whom he counted, were not with him in his last moment except John, the disciple Jesus loved. One of them betrayed him and another denied him, while the others left him disappointed and discouraged at what had happened to him. This was a moment in which Jesus experienced a sense of loneliness and being left alone. A desperate feeling overwhelmed him. His heart was yearning for all that he missed at this moment. This, indeed, was the thirst Jesus expressed in the fourth words from the cross. St. Vincent Pallotti referred to this state of Jesus as the “mysterious thirst.” He often prayed that Jesus would help him to make a perfect correspondence with the “thirst of Jesus.” Being in touch with the state of mind of Jesus in his “mysterious thirst” was a great consolation to St. Vincent as he was able to cope with similar experiences in his own life with courage and determination.

Do I understand the true meaning of Jesus’ thirst which he expressed from the cross? Have I come across such meaningless and lonely moments in my life? How have I coped with such moments? Have I, like St. Vincent Pallotti, drawn inspiration to cope with my lonely moments from the “mysterious thirst of Jesus”?

After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I thirst.” (Jn. 19: 28)

March 16

Jesus Experiences Abandonment

[Lord Jesus] help me consider that I deserve to be forsaken infinitely by God, ... [because] I have never disposed myself to profit from the merit of that abandonment. (OCCC, X, PP. 417 - 418; STA, 473)

As Jesus hung on the cross, waiting for the moment of his death, the sense of loneliness he felt became more acute. The desperation he felt about the fact that his apostles had not stood by him at his last hour and that his mission had failed, though painful was manageable silently. But the desperation he felt – about the fact that his heavenly Father, at whose bidding he had begun his redemptive enterprise, had given up on him – was something that Jesus could not bear in silence. Jesus experienced intense pain deep within his heart when the thought that his heavenly Father had abandoned him overwhelmed him. He cried out loudly in desperation and made a frantic appeal, asking the Father the reason for his abandonment. St. Vincent Pallotti, contemplating on this experience of Jesus' abandonment by the Father, felt within himself that he deserved to be forsaken infinitely by the Father for his repeated unfaithfulness. He accused himself that he never profited spiritually from the merits of Jesus' abandonment. He wished that he had learned from this desperate and painful experience of Jesus to accept courageously any similar experiences God sent in his life.

Do I understand the full implication of Jesus' abandonment by his heavenly Father? What do I learn for my life from this experience of Jesus? Do I live my life in such a way that I deserve to be abandoned by God? Do I have the inner courage to cope with similar situations of abandonment?

And about three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27: 46)

March 17

Jesus Accomplishes His Father's Will

[Lord Jesus] help me consider that I have never profited from the infinite love with which our Lord Jesus Christ ... fulfilled all that was prophesied concerning his humble, poor, suffering, and despised life and death. (OCC, X, p. 416; STA, 472)

As Jesus was human like us in every way except sin, it was natural that he did experience a sense of desperation like any one of us when he perceived that his apostles and his heavenly Father abandoned him. Though the experience of abandonment was intensely painful and temporarily created in Jesus a deep sense of desperation, it was not a permanent state of mind in Jesus. In the sixth words Jesus spoke from the cross, we do not see a desperate Jesus, but a resigned, grateful and peaceful Jesus. Jesus was able to make the transition from desperation to peacefulness very quickly. In saying, "It is finished," Jesus showed his resignation to the will of the Father; he was grateful to the Father for helping him to drink the cup of his passion, suffering and death; and he experienced a sense of peacefulness for having accomplished the design of the Father for him. Contemplating on the sixth words of Jesus from the cross, St. Vincent Pallotti felt that he never profited from Jesus' example of accomplishing his Father's holy will, though it implied humble, poor, suffering or despised life and death. He realized that he needed to learn Jesus' resignation, gratitude for the Father's constant assistance and peacefulness for having accomplished God's will.

Am I, like Jesus, able to make the transition from desperation to peaceful acceptance of God's will quickly? Do I accept the cross which comes into my life with resignation, gratitude and peacefulness? What do I learn from Jesus' complete acceptance of God's will in his life?

When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." (Jn. 19: 30)

Jesus Surrenders His Life to the Father

[Lord Jesus] help me consider that I have never disposed myself fruitfully to say those same holy words ... [May he give me] the gift of speaking those words to him in the most fruitful way at every moment – especially at the terrible point of death – and with the disposition of the heart of Jesus. (OCCC, X, p. 419; STA, 474)

Having accomplished the plan of salvation the Father had given to him, Jesus finally surrenders his life to the Father. The seventh words from the cross declare the surrendering heart of Jesus. The life of Jesus, from the beginning to the end, was a total surrender to the Father. At the moment of his death, Jesus made a final and joyful gift of himself to the Father with the deep satisfaction of accomplishing his will. Thus, the death of Jesus was his final surrender of himself to his loving Father. With deep inner joy, Jesus gave up his spirit into the hands of the Father. Therefore, a true Christian should not mourn over Jesus' death, but rather he should live the death of Jesus every day of his life by meditating on the words of Jesus. Contemplating the seventh words of Jesus from the cross, St. Vincent Pallotti felt that he never had the right disposition to say the last words Jesus spoke from the cross. He prayed that Jesus would give him the grace to speak those words, especially at the time of his death, as meaningfully and fruitfully as Jesus had spoken, and with the very disposition which Jesus had in his heart as he said those words before he died.

What is my perception of death? Do I see it as a final and joyful surrender of my life to the Father? What is the impact of Jesus' death on my life? Do I live Jesus' death every day of my life meditating the words of Jesus from the cross?

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last. (Lk. 23: 46)

March 19

Example of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for One's Perfection

If you wish to walk along the road of perfection swiftly, follow Jesus, Mary, and Joseph continually, and try to imitate those heroic virtues they practiced so admirably in all circumstance of time and place. Intend to serve them in their house, and in their perilous journeys, but with love. (OCCC, X, pp. 51 - 52; STA, 227)

St. Vincent Pallotti constantly kept his eye on the progress he made in the path of perfection. He believed that to move fast on the road to perfection, a person must follow the example of biblical figures like Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The aspirant of perfection must become aware of the diverse life situations of these personalities, and the manner in which they responded to God's invitations in their life. He must have the right knowledge of their heroic virtues and practice them in the context of his life. He must contemplate the lives of these saints and the various happenings in their lives, such as their life at home, their relationship with each other, their heroic deeds for God, the dangers they encountered in accomplishing the mission with which God had entrusted them, etc. Having meditated on these events, the seeker of perfection must emulate the spirit which moved them to do all such great deeds and make that spirit his own. He must avoid duplicating their action, but instead imitate the spirit that guided them and apply it to his own life. In this manner, St. Vincent constantly sustained his spiritual life and made it grow by the example and grace of the great biblical personalities.

Do I believe that the example of the great biblical personalities can sustain my spiritual life? Do I take the trouble to meditate on the lives of these saints in order to capture the spirit that directed them in their life? Do I imitate their spirit in the context of my life? Do I duplicate their actions without any reference to my historical context?

We earnestly desire each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises. (Heb. 6:11-12)

March 20

Called to be the Living and Perfect Image of Christ Crucified

My God, I am unworthy to be a living and perfect image of your divine crucified Son, but grant it to me through your mercy and merits of Jesus and Mary. (OOCC, X, p. 205; STA, 318)

From his birth to his death, the life of Jesus involved varying trials, temptations and tribulations, which he joyfully endured in order to accomplish his Father's plan of salvation for humankind. Living a life of the cross in imitation of Jesus is, in fact, the vocation of every Christian. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, every Christian is called to be the "living" and "perfect" image of the crucified Lord Jesus. The call to be a Christian, therefore, first implies that a person is expected to be "the living image of the crucified Jesus." The phrase "living image of the crucified Jesus," when applied to a Christian means that he, in the context of his own life, is obliged to live out Jesus' life of the cross. In other words, it implies that a Christian must continue to spend himself generously for others, just as Jesus gave himself up on the cross for the world's salvation. Second, a Christian is called to be "the perfect image of the crucified Jesus." It means that a person is expected to live the cross in perfect imitation of Jesus' life of the cross. In other words, the manner of living out one's cross is as perfect as the manner in which Jesus lived out his cross. Spending his life as the "living" and "perfect" image of the crucified Jesus, St. Vincent sanctified his life and that of others.

Do I recognize that living the life of the cross in imitation of Christ crucified is my vocation as a Christian? Do I live as the living and perfect image of the crucified Jesus? Does the living of this image help me to sanctify my life and that of others?

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world ... for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body. (Gal. 6: 14, 17)

March 21

Jesus Lives and Acts in Me

In all my works may it always be Jesus Christ who lives and acts in me. United with him, I offer you the correspondence of his most holy humanity. (OCCC, X, p. 270; STA, 324)

St. Vincent Pallotti wished to offer to the heavenly Father a life of total correspondence to the humanity of Jesus. Jesus lived in the most perfect way a human person was expected to live in the world. Thus, the best way of being a human person would be to imitate Jesus in his humanity. St. Vincent attempted to live his human life in the manner in which Jesus lived his humanity while he was living on the earth. In order to make the correspondence to the humanity of Jesus possible, he wished that Jesus lived and acted in each of his works. If Jesus were to live and act in him and in each of the acts he performed, his works would be like that of the works of Jesus and he would be similar to Jesus in all his actions. He constantly opened himself to Jesus and allowed Jesus to dwell in him and act in him. He attempted to act as if Christ himself was acting through him. In this way, he was able to live the humanity of Jesus in his own humanity. It was such thoughts and actions derived from them that directed the spiritual life of St. Vincent Pallotti, especially in the manner in which he imitated Jesus in his humanity.

Do I recognize the need to imitate the humanity of Jesus in order that I can live my life as a human person? Do I open myself to Jesus and allow him to dwell in me and act in me? Do I live my life as a human person similar to the manner in which Jesus lived his life as a human person? What do I need to do to correspond in a perfect manner to the humanity of Jesus?

It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2: 20)

March 22

Suffering: An Expression of the Love of God

My God ... I pray you to grant me the gift of suffering for your love as much as I would like to, and as much as you merit. Let me suffer thus only in order to love you, who are worthy of infinite love, and to love you without reward ... of any kind. (OCC, X, pp. 273-274; STA, 325)

A Christian is not only a person who believes in Christ, but also one who is ready to suffer for Christ. For a Christian, there is meaning in suffering because Jesus, whom he believes in, has won the crown of glory by means of the crown of thorns. Therefore, in Christian life suffering becomes an expression of the love of God. St. Vincent Pallotti often prayed to God to grant him the gift of suffering because he believed that through accepting the suffering in his life and living it joyfully, he could love God as much as he deserved. According to him, suffering, when accepted and lived without the expectation of any reward, would become worthy of God's infinite love. Inspired by this truth, St. Vincent Pallotti embraced all forms of suffering and lived them as occasions through which he expressed his love for God. In this manner, St. Vincent was able to turn the many suffering moments of his life into moments of love and grace, thereby making even the most painful events of his life as occasions to experience God's love for him and bring God the glory he deserved.

Do I constantly remind myself of the fact that Jesus won the crown of glory by the crown of thorns? Do I accept my sufferings and express my love of God through them? Am I able to turn my moments of pain into moments of love and grace? Do I glorify God through my suffering?

To you it has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him. (Phil. 1: 29)

Submission to the Holy Mother Church

I subject everything to the judgment of the Holy Mother Church. I believe everything the same Holy Church believes and teaches, and I reprove all that which Holy Mother Church reproves ... I believe, think, say, and intend to say everything in the same sense as Holy Mother Church. (OCCC, X, p. 290: STA, 327)

St. Vincent Pallotti was an ardent believer in the supreme authority of the Church. In his writings, he often fondly referred to the Church as the “Mother.” His attitude towards the Church was very similar to that which he had towards his mother. He loved the Church and dedicated his whole life for the service of the Church. In his lifetime, he did whatever possible to spread the faith deposited in the Church by Christ. He conceded in every matter to the judgment of the teaching authority of the Church. He believed and taught what the Church believed and taught. Similarly he did not accept and shunned what was not in agreement with the teaching of the Church. In interpreting the scriptures and the teachings of the Church, St. Vincent was particularly careful that his explanations and interpretations in no way went against the sense in which the teaching authority of the Church understood them. St. Vincent Pallotti remained firm in his faithfulness to the Church, even in moments when his own plans for the society he founded were looked upon with suspicion by the Church authority.

What is my attitude towards the Church? Do I consider the Church as my Mother? Do I love the Church and dedicate my life to the service of the Church? Do I firmly hold on to the faith taught by the Church? Do I explain and interpret the scriptures and the teachings of the Church in the sense in which the Church teaches them?

And I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mt. 16: 18-19)

March 24

Living the Spirit of Christ's Obedience

I intend, my God, to live, suffer and die with the same obedience Jesus Christ showed for me until his death on the cross. (OOC, X, pp. 292 - 293; STA, 331)

Jesus, at every stage of his life here on earth, manifested a genuine spirit of obedience. He was obedient to the will and plan of his Father in his life, in his suffering and in his death. First, the life of Jesus on earth from its beginning to its end was due to the filial obedience of Jesus towards his Father. It is in obedience to the will of the Father that Jesus left his Godhead and became man born of a woman. His growing up in the home of Nazareth, his private life, his public ministry, his preaching and working of miracles were all done because his Father wanted those of him. Second, Jesus was obedient in his suffering. As a man, Jesus suffered at different levels. Jesus suffered from the hostility of the scribes and the Pharisees who were opposed to his mission. He also suffered from name calling, because for some Jesus was considered a glutton, a drunkard and a friend of sinners. These and many other sufferings he accepted in his life because his Father wanted them. Finally, Jesus was obedient to the Father in his death. In his agony, he struggled to accept his Father's will that he had to die by way of crucifixion, but in obedience he accepted even his death and went through it courageously and joyfully. St. Vincent Pallotti was fascinated by the spirit of obedience lived out by Jesus. Like Jesus, he also wished to live, suffer and die in obedience to the plan of God in his personal life.

Am I like Jesus in my obedience? Do I have the spirit of obedience that Jesus manifested in his life? Am I ready to live, suffer and die in obedience to the Father?

I have food to eat of which you do not know ... My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work. (Jn. 4: 32, 34)

March 25

Mary: The Object of Our Imitation

Because of the fullness of her merits ... holy Church salutes Mary with the profound title of Queen of Apostles. Thus, all priests and laypersons of every sex, state, rank and condition will be inspired to imitate her. (OOCC, III, p. 6)

Because of the person Mary is, because of the way she reaches out to everyone in need, and because of the marvelous way she has cooperated with God in accomplishing his plan for humankind, St. Vincent Pallotti believed that every Christian must accept Mary as the object of his imitation. For St. Vincent, whether one is a priest, Religious or a layperson of every sex, state, rank and condition, he must be inspired by Mary's life and must accept her as a model for his life. There are many things one can learn from Mary and she can be of great inspiration in one's life. Mary's greatness does not consist of the fact that God has made her great. But her greatness consists of her accepting her God-given greatness despite uncertainties, doubt and suffering, and cooperating with God in accomplishing God's plan for her. First, Mary believed in God's promises unconditionally. She knew very well that the one who called her would not let her down. She, as the handmaid, walked the path which God had laid out for her. Second, Mary was totally focused on others. Her heart went out to the ones in need. Third, Mary is a great example of apostolic zeal. Fourth, Mary is an inspiration for those who live a family life, a religious life or a priestly life. Fifth, Mary is a true disciple of Jesus, who followed his teaching in its entirety. In this way, every Christian, despite what he is, can learn something from Mary. Therefore, St. Vincent called his followers to imitate her.

Do I accept Mary as an object of my imitation? Do I acknowledge that Mary's greatness consists of her unconditional cooperation with God's plan? Which aspect of Mary's life do I need to learn from? Which aspect of her life attracts me?

Blessed is she, who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. (Lk. 1:45)

Human Person: A Prodigy of God's Mercy

O my God ... [You] have deigned to destroy me, to form and create in me a new prodigy of mercy, and to constitute me in Your Church as a new prodigy of mercy. (OOCC, X, p. 211; STA, 398)

St. Vincent Pallotti experienced a dichotomy within himself. On one hand, he considered himself the most unworthy instrument God could use for any mission as he was “nothingness and sin.” On the other hand, he found himself crowned by God with glory and honor as he had the dignity of being the image of God. Thus, St. Vincent was torn between experiencing himself as the most unworthy and as the most dignified. Reflecting on his life, he realized that while he was indeed most unworthy, he also had been made the most dignified because of the infinite mercy of God. Thus, he believed that God in his infinite mercy had destroyed his most unworthy self and created in him a self that was crowned with glory, honor and dignity. It is this dignified self that was capable of accomplishing great things for God within the Church. Thus, for St. Vincent Pallotti, his human personality was nothing but a prodigy of God's infinite mercy, for it was God who made his most unworthy self into the most worthy self, capable of accomplishing the plan to which God had entrusted him. Acknowledging himself as the prodigy of God's infinite mercy, St. Vincent spent his life in gratitude, completing the mission God had handed over to him to accomplish.

Do I recognize my God-given dignity, in spite of my limitations? Do I, like St. Vincent, acknowledge myself as the prodigy of God's infinite mercy? Do I spend my life generously accomplishing the work God has entrusted to me as the prodigy of his infinite mercy?

What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him? [Yet] You have made him little less than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor. (Ps. 8: 5-6)

March 27

Mission to the Poor: Means to Make God Known, Loved and Served

I would like to be forever in hospitals ... [and] jails ... in order to help the miseries of the poor and the infirmities of the sick ... [thereby] make all princes, sovereigns, kings, nobles, common men, and all creatures know, love and serve God, my Father ... and my All. (OCC, X, p. 114; STA, 176)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that the greatest way to make God known, loved and served in the world is to serve the poor. The apostolate to the poor and the marginalized reveals to everyone the unconditional generosity of God. Serving the poor who cannot pay for any good done for them, implies that a person acts like God who expects nothing in return for the manifold blessings he showers on humankind. So in serving the poor, the motive of a person becomes like that of God. Thus, in one's service to the poor, he proclaims a God who is an unconditional lover. In doing so, he makes others know, love and serve God. St. Vincent Pallotti visualized an apostolic life which would make him spend his life in the hospitals, jails and in places where the unwanted and the outcasts of society lived. He wanted to help the miseries of the poor, the illnesses of the sick, and to teach the spiritually poor the true knowledge of God. St. Vincent attempted to do all these for the purpose of announcing to the people of every walk of life, that is, the princes, sovereigns, kings, nobles, common men, and all creatures, that God is a God who loves and cares. In this manner, for St. Vincent, the apostolate to the poor and the needy becomes a special means through which God is made known, loved and served.

Do I make an option for the poor in my apostolate? Do I have the right mind-set to accept the difficulties involved in choosing the apostolate for the poor? Do I see my apostolate to the poor as a means to make known to everyone how good our God is and make him loved and served?

Do not hide your light! Let it shine for all; let your good deeds [for the poor] glow for all to see, so that they will praise your heavenly Father. (Mt. 5: 15-16)

March 28

Success in Ministry: A Product of God's Mercy

My God, the progress of the evangelical undertakings, orders, industries, and establishments, ... will be the products and manifestation of your mercy. (OCCC, X, p. 309; STA, 346)

St. Vincent Pallotti, as a minister of evangelization, was convinced that the evangelizing ministry he was involved in was not his own personal undertaking. Though there was a personal choice on his part to be engaged wholeheartedly in the ministry, the mandate for the mission and graces needed for its success came from God. Thus, for St. Vincent, both the ministry he was involved in and the success of that ministry were nothing else but products of God's mercy. Therefore, he attributed all the progress in his evangelical undertakings and all other activities associated with the success to God's merciful dealings with him. For he knew that unless God manifested his mercy towards him and blessed what he had begun, there would be no progress and success. Such a perception about his ministry made St. Vincent humble and dependent on God. For he knew that with God's mercy to guide him in his ministry, nothing would go wrong. Even if something went wrong, he was certain that God's mercy would not let him down. With this trust-filled attitude, he joyfully carried on the ministry with which God had entrusted him.

Do I consider my apostolate a product of God's mercy? Do I attribute the success in my ministry to the mercy of God or to my own efforts? Am I humble and dependent on God in accomplishing my ministry? Am I discouraged if and when something goes wrong with my ministry?

Yet I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of God's grace. (Acts. 20: 24)

March 29

Contemplation of God's Mercy: Remedy for Vanity and Pride

My God, ... my life, thoughts, words and deeds will be works of your mercy ... You will deign to work everything in me in an entirely spiritual and invisible way, so that I will not find myself exposed to the perils of vanity and pride. (OCCC, X, p. 309; STA, 347)

St. Vincent Pallotti always wanted to be a humble person. He wished to depend on God for everything in his life, rather than on himself. Yet he often wrote in his diary that pride was his greatest vice. He constantly made efforts to overcome his pride. One of the methods St. Vincent Pallotti used to rid himself of pride and vanity was the contemplation of the mercy of God. He often reminded himself that he was nothing but a prodigy of God's mercy, as outside the realm of God's mercy he was "nothingness and sin." The Catholic Apostolate he was engaged in also was a trophy of God's mercy. He also knew very well his ministry of evangelization and the success he experienced in it were simply products of God's mercy. The more he meditated on the manner in which God had shown him mercy in the various situations of everyday life, the more he realized how foolish he was in becoming prey to his own pride and vanity. The constant contemplation of God's merciful dealings with him made him believe that his life, thoughts, words and deeds were works of God's mercy and made St. Vincent shun pride and vanity.

Do I recognize God's merciful dealings in my life? Do I accept the fact that without being open to God's mercy, my life would be meaningless? Does the contemplation of God's mercy help me to overcome my pride and vanity?

Masters, act in the same way towards them [slaves], and stop bullying, knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven and that with him there is no partiality. (Eph. 6: 9)

March 30

Human Person is Deified in God's Humanity

God became man, so that man might become God, for God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son. Did he not give us everything with him? (OCCC, X, p. 357; STA, 386)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that God created the world and placed the human person as the crown of creation because he loved him. Though he fell through his sin, God continued to love him so much that he sent his only-begotten Son to bring him back to his original state of godliness. Thus, God became a human being in Jesus Christ. According to St. Vincent, the purpose of Jesus accepting human nature and being born in this world was to help every person to become God-like. A human person could have never learned to be God-like unless God himself descended on the earth and taught him to be so. Jesus, in his life on earth, had shown the best way a human person should live and achieve divine glory through his humanity. Hence, it is proper to say that the human person is deified in God's humanity. The fallen humanity could never have ascended to its original state of godliness unless God had descended to the human level and raised him to the state of divinity. Thus, for St. Vincent, Jesus descended to the world to teach every person to be divine by his own example of being human and to raise the human person to the level of godliness by the power of his grace. St. Vincent attempted to live the humanity of Jesus in totality so that he could become divine like him.

Do I acknowledge that Jesus, by his humanity, teaches me to be divine? Do I believe that Jesus descended into the world as a human being to raise me to the level of Godhead? Do I attempt to live the humanity of Jesus so that I can be divine like him?

Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself. (Phil. 3: 20-21)

March 31

Jesus: The Model of Meekness and Humility

My Jesus ... you, who mercifully became our divine model of meekness and humility, so that we could imitate you efficaciously ... Let myself be entirely destroyed, let there be in me nothing but your meekness and humility. (OCCC, X, pp. 262 - 263; STA, 390)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, anger and pride are two vices that could totally destroy the spiritual growth of a person. They both are against the true Christian spirit. An angry person is violent, wild and impatient in his dealings with others. A proud person is arrogant. He thinks that he is capable of doing everything better than anyone else. Thus, a person with anger and pride is self-centered and ignores any right dealings with others. Thus, a person dominated by these two vices is incapable of true communication with God and others. St. Vincent wished to destroy these two vices from his life by practicing the contrary virtues, that is meekness and humility. A meek person is mild, patient and non-violent in his dealings with others. A humble person, while recognizing his God-given talents and abilities, acknowledges the abilities of others and works with them. In living out these two virtues, St. Vincent imitated Jesus, the true model of meekness and humility. He wished that his self dominated by anger and pride be destroyed, with a meek and humble self after the model of Jesus taking its place. Living the spirit of meekness and humility in imitation of Jesus, St. Vincent was able to be Christ-like in his life.

Do I recognize the danger of anger and pride in my spiritual life? Do these vices dominate my life and make me incapable of genuine communication with God and others? Do I practice the virtues of meekness and humility in imitation of Jesus?

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. (Mt. 11: 28-29)

April 1

Greater Man's Emptiness, Greater God's Reaching Out

My God ... infinitely communicable mercy! Because you are infinite goodness, you love to communicate yourself infinitely. The greater the misery the more you communicate yourself ... I firmly believe that you will communicate to me all the merits, virtues and works of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. (OCCC, X, pp. 363, 366; STA, 391)

St. Vincent experienced God as the infinite goodness. Goodness cannot contain itself and by its very nature, it is overflowing. Therefore, God, as infinite goodness, communicates himself infinitely. St. Vincent often refers to God as 'infinitely communicable mercy' because the greater the emptiness of the person, the greater is God's reaching out to him. The greater the misery in which one finds oneself, the greater are the communications from God. Just as the wind blows towards a place without air, similarly, the goodness of God communicates itself in a marvelous way to a person who is spiritually weak and needs the assurances of God. St. Vincent Pallotti believed that God the Father would communicate to him all the merits, virtues and works of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, as he was 'nothing and sin.' Because of such communications from God, St. Vincent could respond to him with genuine love.

Do I believe that God is "the incommunicable mercy?" Do I believe that God communicates adequately to the spiritually weak? Is it true that the 'greater the emptiness of a person, the greater the communications of God?'

The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groaning. (Rom. 8: 26)

April 2

Poverty of Spirit

My Jesus ... You see that my heart is completely attached to the earth ... Through your infinite mercy ... destroy entirely ... my poor heart, and give me your entirely spiritual, heavenly, and divine heart. (OCCC, X, pp. 366 - 367; STA, 393)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the spiritual attitude of the “poverty of spirit” touches the very foundations of our spiritual life. It consists of our always being conscious of who we are before God. It involves our child-like dependence on God and the recognition that God is the person essential to our spiritual life. In short, a person who is spiritually poor should give prime importance to God in his life. Giving God the first place automatically calls the person to be detached from other things and persons. St. Vincent Pallotti said that both the rich and the materially poor are called to practice the attitude of spiritual poverty. The rich are spiritually poor when they practice detachment from material goods and give their superfluous possessions to those who do not have them. The materially poor can practice the spirit of poverty by accepting God’s plan in their life and by not lamenting against the directives of divine providence. On his part, St. Vincent lived the attitude of the spirit of poverty wholeheartedly.

How do I live the attitude of the spirit of poverty in my personal life? Am I child-like and dependent in my attitude towards God? Do I give God the prime place in my life? Do I practice the spirit of detachment? If I am materially blessed with riches, am I generous towards those who have less in life? Am I content with what divine providence has decreed for me?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
(Mt. 5: 3)

April 3

Hunger and Thirst for Sanctity

Through your infinite mercy ... destroy in me the desire for earthly things, and give me instead your hunger and thirst ... for sanctity and perfection. (OCC, X, pp. 368 - 369; STA, 395)

A human person who is caught up in the attractions of this world forgets the real goal of his life. He fails to remember that he is only a pilgrim making his journey towards his final destiny. His earthly attachments make this world so real and permanent that he begins to think and act as if this is the place where he is called to live eternally. Overlooking the passing nature of earthly things, he stops thinking about everything that is heavenly. He disregards the call of Jesus in the beatitude to hunger and thirst for justice and holiness. St. Vincent Pallotti, fully aware of the fact that he could get lost in the interests of the world, attempted to concentrate on living the true spirit of the beatitudes. He constantly reminded himself that the world and all its attractions are impermanent. He knew that he was a pilgrim called for a higher destiny, a life with God for all eternity. Therefore, he sought justice of God and holiness of life. He did what was in his power, always trusting in God, to attach himself to God and to detach himself from the earthly satisfactions, for he desired to be satisfied by God at his coming. A life of perfection and sanctity took St. Vincent to a deeper experience of God and his love.

Am I caught up in this world, forgetting its passing nature? Do I recognize that I am a pilgrim in this world? Do I live the spirit of the beatitude calling me to seek justice and holiness? Do I seek the satisfactions of this world or desire to be satisfied by God at his coming in my life?

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied. (Mt. 5: 6)

April 4

Catholic Apostolate: A Trophy of God's Mercy

If you choose me for all the works of your glory ... through the institution of that holy Society which respects, venerates, favors and assists the Catholic Apostolate ... [it is not due to] any merit of mine ... [but because] you choose me as the most resplendent trophy of your mercy. (OCCC, X, p. 308; STA, 345)

St. Vincent Pallotti, a prodigy of God's infinite mercy, was chosen by God to begin the Catholic Apostolate for the greater glory of God and the salvation of God's people. In order to actualize the Catholic Apostolate in the context of the everyday life of the people, St. Vincent founded the Union of Catholic Apostolate on April 4, 1835. This Society respected, venerated, favored and assisted the Catholic Apostolate in every possible way. St. Vincent Pallotti was convinced that he did not found the Society to promote and propagate the Catholic Apostolate due to his own merits and abilities, but because God, in his infinite mercy had chosen him to do this task. Hence, his task of establishing the Catholic Apostolate through the Union of Catholic Apostolate was the most resplendent trophy of God's mercy. Therefore, the Catholic Apostolate and all the attempts to promote it were part and parcel of God's merciful design, which was executed as per the plan of God by St. Vincent. The attitude of looking at his life's work, to which he had spent all his energies as the trophy of God's mercy, made St. Vincent work for God's glory and others' happiness unselfishly and generously.

Do I promote and propagate the Catholic Apostolate? Do I, like St. Vincent, believe that the Catholic Apostolate is a trophy of God's mercy? Am I able to spend my energies for God's glory and others' happiness generously?

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy ... [be] of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart. (Phil. 2: 1-2)

April 5

Blessedness of the Merciful

Through your infinite mercy ... destroy in me all my cruelty; give me your mercy, transform me in your mercy, and let my life be a life only of works of corporal and spiritual mercy for the benefit of all. (OCCC, X, p. 369; STA, 396)

St. Vincent Pallotti recognized the blessedness of the merciful, for he knew that God, who had been ever merciful to him despite his repeated unfaithfulness, was blessed. He was personally conscious of his own misery and his own need for the mercy of God, which God never denied him. The experience of being the object of God's mercy made St. Vincent live a life of mercifulness towards others. He realized that he needed to be merciful for two reasons. First, he wished to show mercy towards others because God had shown him mercy. In other words, St. Vincent desired to return his gratitude to God by being merciful to others. Second, by being merciful to others, he wanted to be counted among the blessed ones who were qualified to obtain mercy from God. He often expressed his mercy towards others by his sympathetic acts to alleviate the material and spiritual needs of anyone who came to him with such needs. Besides, he also got involved in performing corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Living a life of mercifulness was indeed the reason for the blessedness of St. Vincent Pallotti.

Am I merciful to others even though they fail me many times? Am I conscious of my shortcomings and my need for the mercy of God? How do I express my mercifulness towards others in my daily life? Does my mercifulness lead me to my blessedness?

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain Mercy. (Mt. 5: 7).

April 6

Presence of Christ in All My Works

Jesus Christ may do everything in me, ... [and] I will often repeat, especially at the beginning of these works: "Lord Jesus, expel me and put yourself in me, destroy my life and may your life be my life." (OCC, X, pp. 157 - 158; STA, 268)

Jesus, living out his incarnated existence in this world, was constantly aware of his communion with the heavenly Father. Everything he did always emerged out of this deep communication with the Father. In his teachings, Jesus often taught that his disciples should be united to each other just as he and the Father were united. Even the teachings and works of Jesus were not strictly his, but rather they were the actions of the Father manifested through Jesus. Just as Jesus' every action was an expression of the presence of his Father in him, similarly St. Vincent Pallotti felt that Christ, in fact, did everything in him. He constantly prayed to Jesus to destroy his selfish self, and place the very self of Jesus in him. Thus, St. Vincent Pallotti cherished the desire to be another Christ. He wanted to manifest the presence of Christ in and through his works. As a result, his actions were not merely his, but also that of Christ. By being another Christ in the world, St. Vincent wanted to manifest the greater glory of God to every person he encountered in his life.

Do I realize that I am called to be in communion with Jesus? Do I believe that my actions are expected to manifest the presence of Christ? Do I, in my prayer, ask Jesus to make my actions become similar to that of his? Do I desire the destruction of my selfishness and my emergence as another Christ to manifest his glory?

If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize [and understand] the Father is in me and I am in the Father. (Jn. 10: 37-38)

April 7

Respecting God's Likeness in the Human Person

My God, I respect your image and likeness in all redeemed souls ... [I do not] intend at any time to outrage anyone ... and what I do upon him I intend to do only in order to help him imitate Jesus Christ, for all the good possible ends that are pleasing to you.
(OCCC, X, p. 773; STA, 418)

Every human person is made in the image of God. The likeness of God in the human person consists of possessing the breath of life which belongs to God. The Book of Genesis says that as he receives the breath of life from God, he becomes a human being. Since he possesses the breath of life which is a gift from God, his dignity as the human person basically comes from God. Hence, every person must be treated with respect. St. Vincent Pallotti, being conscious of this truth, attempted to respect the image and likeness of God in every person. He pledged that he would never insult, outrage or show indignation towards any human person, for it would amount to offending God himself. Whenever he planned to do something to a human person, it was only for the purpose of helping that person to imitate Jesus Christ or for bringing the person to some good end which was pleasing to God. This dignified perception of the human person helped St. Vincent Pallotti deal with every person he encountered with respect, thoughtfulness and love.

Do I respect a human person because he is the image of God? What is my attitude towards other human persons? Do I insult, outrage or show indignation towards any human person? Do I treat every human person I encounter everyday with respect, thoughtfulness and love?

The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.
(Gen. 2: 7)

April 8

Doing God's Will

I confess and affirm now and always, that your most holy will contains all good and all the most sublime perfection ... [Hence] may your most holy and most plain will especially in the unfavorable things, be my paradise. (OCC, X, pp. 377, 379; STA, 437)

St. Vincent Pallotti always wanted to accomplish in his life the most holy will of God. For the holy will of God contained all good and the most sublime perfection. But finding the will of God was not an easy job. It always involved the difficult tasks of seeking, discerning, choosing and doing what God wants of us in a given situation. Jesus had to make such a choice when he was twelve years old. He had gone along with his parents to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. But without the knowledge and permission of his parents, he decided to stay at the temple, probably along with some of his friends who were already studying the Jewish law in Jerusalem. He might have nurtured a desire to stay and study in Jerusalem. His parents came searching for him. When they found him, they expressed their desire that he go home with them to Nazareth. Jesus said 'yes' to them, knowing that this was what his Father had wanted of him then. Doing God's will that came through his parents made Jesus advance in wisdom, which made him acceptable before God and the people. Like Jesus, St. Vincent Pallotti constantly sought and did the will of God, even in the most unfavorable situations. He felt that doing the will of the Father was his paradise.

Do I seek, discern, choose and do what God wants of me? Am I ready to do the will of God both in favorable and unfavorable situations? Do I imitate the spirit that guided Jesus and St. Vincent Pallotti in accomplishing the plan of the Father?

He [Jesus] went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them ... And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man. (Lk. 2: 51-52)

April 9

Christ-centered Activity: The Heart of Christian Life

Let my whole life be destroyed. May the life of Jesus Christ be my life. (OCCC, X, p. 618; STA, 270)

Every activity of a Christian must be centered on Christ. If Christ-centeredness is missing in Christian life, it becomes empty and meaningless. Hence, Christ-centered activity is the heart of Christian life. St. Vincent Pallotti, realizing this truth, attempted to perform every activity of his life centered on Christ. He took the life of Jesus as his model in everything he did. The life of Jesus provided for him the topics of his meditations. Every study project he undertook, whether it was secular or religious in nature, was aimed at bringing glory to God through Christ. Any apostolic task he embarked upon for the enrichment and growth of the Church was meant to beget the glory and honor of Jesus, the Lord. The prayer of St. Vincent was always centered on the prayer of Jesus, as he always prayed through and in the name of Jesus. His conversations with others always manifested the sympathy and concern of Christ for the poor and the needy. The various works of mercy he was engaged in also manifested the very charity Jesus showed towards the poor in his merciful acts. In this way, Christ-centeredness was the marked quality that we find in the personal, relational and apostolic life of St. Vincent Pallotti.

Is my Christian life Christ-centered? Are the various activities that I perform each day in the personal, relational and apostolic aspects of my life done with the motive of bringing glory and honor to God through Christ? Do I realize that my activities are fruitless unless they are Christ-centered?

As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col. 2: 6-7)

Renewal of Life in Christ

My God, how much evil have I done in all my works, and how much good have I impeded, especially ... in my public and private instructions! ... Yet my ... pride and vanity made me believe [that] I was doing ... better than others ... Ah my God, destroy my past, present and future life, and give me ... the life of your only Begotten Son; this I offer you in place of mine. (OCCC, X, pp. 190 - 191; STA, 272)

The constant renewal of one's life in Christ is an essential element of Christian life. The life of a Christian without true renewal is similar to an undusted and dirty room. The three important aspects of Christian renewal consist of one looking back at his life, discovering areas where he needs to grow, and taking the necessary steps to effect the required changes in his life. St. Vincent Pallotti, following a path of perfection in which the ideal was the perfection of the heavenly Father, made a consistent effort to renew his spiritual life. In his reflections, he examined himself so as to become aware of not only the evil he had done, but also the good he had failed to do in his public and private actions. Besides acknowledging his failures of commission and omission, he also identified the many times he believed with pride and vanity that he was doing better than others. Having accepted his limitations and shortcomings, he attempted to destroy them from his life and have within himself the life of Jesus, thereby offering the pure life of Jesus to the Father in place of his tainted and sinful life. Such renewal of life on a regular interval marked the spiritual life of St. Vincent Pallotti.

Is my Christian life characterized by genuine renewal undertaken on a regular basis? Do I periodically review my life? Do I discover the areas in my life in which I need to grow? Do I take the necessary steps to change my life? What are some of the concrete steps I need to take in order to bring about genuine change in my life?

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly ... Put on the new self, which is being renewed ... Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to the Father through him. (Col. 3: 5, 8,17)

April 11

Call of the Human Person to Perfection as the Image of God

I remember, O my God, that you lovingly created us in your image and likeness, and that you have given us the gift of free will to perfect ourselves meritoriously, insofar as we are living images of you. (OCCC, X, p. 298; STA, 338)

The human person is created in the image and likeness of God. His creation as the image of God is an act of love on the part of God. By this act of love, God shares with a person the essence of his nature, that is knowledge and freedom. By placing these godly qualities in a person, God calls him to move towards the attainment of perfection in the image of God. Thus, as the creature that can know, understand and choose freely, the human person has the obligation to perfect himself in the ideal perfection of God in whose image he is made. Hence, he must use his knowledge and freedom wisely so as to live his life in as perfect an image of God as possible. By his right perception of reality and proper choice of his love, a person is called to transform his life and that of others into the likeness of God and to build up a community modelled after the communion of persons within the Trinity. St. Vincent Pallotti was conscious of the fact that he was created in the image of God and that he was called to perfect this image of God within himself and in others. He accomplished this task by the right use of his faculties of knowledge and freedom which helped him to bring about genuine changes in his life and that of others. Therefore, he became more and more like God, the source of his being as the image of God.

Am I conscious of my being the image of God? Do I recognize my obligation to perfect myself as the image of God? Do I make proper use of the faculties of knowledge and freedom in order to perfect myself as an image of God?

I urge you ... brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God ... [and] be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. (Rom. 12: 1)

April 12

Being a Good Samaritan

On thinking about, hearing or seeing afflicted, distressed, tormented persons, worn out and weighed down with work or heavy loads ... I will try to excite in myself a vivid compassion for them ... I will try to console them in their afflictions, to exhort them to patience and resignation, and to make them see that suffering is brief, enjoyment is eternal. (OOCC, X., pp. 19 - 20; STA, 34)

The everyday life of a person has its own demands and challenges. A person is often caught up in them and as a result, he tends to ignore the needs and troubles of the other afflicted and distressed persons. He passes through life without ever being aware of what is happening to them. A Good Samaritan, despite his own problems, is able to recognize the predicament of the other person. He feels for the other in his need and does what is within his power to alleviate the grief of the other. Thus, recognition of the need of the other, feeling sympathetic towards the one who is in trouble, and giving the needed relief are the significant characteristics of a Good Samaritan. St. Vincent Pallotti was, indeed, a true Good Samaritan in his lifetime. He never missed a person in trouble. Whether he was on a journey, at the university teaching, at the confessional hearing confession, guiding the person who has come to him for help, or ministering in the Church as a priest, he always identified the poor and the one in need. St. Vincent had a tender heart that always felt for the one in need. He had a ready mind that would plan and execute a course of action to give immediate, as well as remote relief to the one who was distressed and troubled. In this manner, St. Vincent always attempted to be a Good Samaritan in his life.

Am I caught up with my own daily troubles? Am I able to move beyond my problems and see the need of the other? Do I have the sensitivity of the heart to feel with the other? Do I concretely do something to bring relief to the poor I encounter?

A despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw him [the man attacked by the bandits], he felt pity. Kneeling beside him the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine and bandaged them. (Lk. 10: 33-34)

April 13

All Things are Possible with God

Ah, my God, by myself I can do nothing; with you I can do anything. I wish to do everything for you. (OCCC, X, p. 642; STA, 301)

God is the foundation of every form of existence, for everything comes from him and goes back to him. Since all things are dependent on God and their existence comes from him, everything is possible for him. Hence, God not only has the power to do anything with his creation, but he also can give his creation the power to accomplish everything for him. The human person, the crown of God's creation, shares in a special way in God's creative power, for he is the image of God. Thus, everything is possible for a person if he totally surrenders himself to God's will. St. Vincent Pallotti was convinced of his own ability to do anything if he was open to the grace of God. This conviction made St. Vincent say constantly that he was able to do nothing by himself, but with God he could do anything, especially in all situations where he wished to do everything for God. Thus, he saw God as his strength. Having God at his side, he felt strong enough to take up and complete any task God wanted him to accomplish in this world.

Do I consider God as my strength? Do I believe that everything is possible for me with God at my side? Am I able to surrender every situation of my life to God with total confidence and trust? Do I desire to do everything for God?

Remain in me, as I remain in you ... Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15: 4-5)

April 14

Salt and Light of the World

O my God ... give me the gift to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, through your mercy and merits of Jesus and Mary.
(OCC, X, p. 652; STA, 313)

Salt and light are two essential items human beings need for their sustenance in the world. Salt adds taste to the food people eat, while light helps people to see things in the world. The most interesting quality of salt and light are that they are noticed only when they are absent. One comes to know what salt is and what it does only when it is missing in the cooked food. Similarly, one comes to realize the nature of light and its function only when the light is absent in a given situation. Thus, salt and light serve people by providing taste to the food and making people see the nature of things respectively, without they themselves being noticed. St. Vincent Pallotti, in his attempt to live the evangelical challenge of being the salt of the earth and light of the world, wanted exactly to be like the salt and the light. He wished to spend his life for others as the salt that brought true happiness in their life and as the light that enlightened them in all their moments of darkness, without anyone knowing anything about it. This was the spirit that directed the life of St. Vincent in whatever he did. By living this gospel spirit, he was able to give joy and enlightenment to many he encountered in his life.

How do I live the evangelical challenge of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world? Do I, like the salt and light, give taste and enlightenment in the life of others? Do I prefer to remain unnoticed, like the salt and light, when I help others?

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? ... You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. (Mt. 5: 13-14)

April 15

Human Person: The Image of God

I intend now and at all times to venerate in everyone the image of God, in whose likeness they were created. (OOC, X, p. 202; STA, 315)

St. Vincent Pallotti never disrespected any human person, but rather he treated every person with genuine respect and honor. He believed in the inner dignity of every person. For him, human dignity does come not from the human person himself, but the basis of the dignity of the human person is his innate divinity. Thus, human dignity is founded on the fact that he is made in God's image. As the image of God, the human person has the godly qualities of knowledge and free choice which help him to know God and others and enter into an intimate relationship with them. Since he is made in God's image and possesses the divinity of God within him, St. Vincent Pallotti often said that he, at all times, would never hesitate to venerate in every human person the image and likeness of God. Therefore, the human person as the image of God, is the temple of the Divine. Hence, he must not be treated thoughtlessly but with all seriousness, esteem and admiration. This realization made St. Vincent sensitive and gentle in dealing with others.

Do I believe that every person is an image of God? Do I acknowledge that human dignity is founded on his innate divinity? Do I treat others with respect, esteem and admiration as the image of God? Am I sensitive and gentle in my dealings with others?

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" ... God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him. (Gen. 1: 26, 27)

April 16

Readiness to Listen and Respond to the Voice of God

My God, I intend ... to be ever ready to listen to your voice and your inspiration, calling me to whatever state of life you desire, to whatever renewal of spirit, detachment, suffering, humiliation and shame. (OCCC, X, p. 202; STA, 316)

God's call comes in a person's life in a number of ways. One important attitude he needs to have in order to recognize God calling him through the diverse situations of his existence, is the readiness to listen and respond to the voice of God. First, the person must listen to God speaking to him through the given situation. Unless he listens and discovers the will of God, he cannot respond to God's plan. Thus, listening and responding to God goes together in the spiritual journey of a Christian. St. Vincent Pallotti, recognizing the value of this attitude of listening and responding to God, made a conscious effort to be alert and sensitive to the inspirations that came from God in his daily life. His intention and alertness to seek God's will and to discover God's plan for him, helped him to not only find the will and plan of God in every situation, but also to respond to the changes that needed to be made for his spiritual progress as per the inspiration of God. Allowing this attitude to guide him, St. Vincent not only made considerable progress in his journey towards God, but he also accomplished God's will in the area of the apostolate.

Do I recognize that God's call comes to me through the various events and situations that happen in my life? Have I cultivated the attitude of listening and responding to the inspirations of God? What impact has this attitude made in both my spiritual journey and the apostolate?

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. (I Sam. 3: 9).

April 17

A Faithful God

My God, my sins have deserved death and hell, but you allow me to live ... [and] to employ all the moments of my life for your greater glory and the greater sanctification of all souls. (OCC, X, pp. 450 - 451; STA, 491)

St. Vincent Pallotti based his Christian life and apostolic ministry not on his faithfulness to God, but rather on God's faithfulness to him. He was convinced that he was the most miserable among all creatures and he deserved death and hell for all his unfaithfulness. Therefore, he knew that he could not base his life on his faithfulness to God, for often time, there was more unfaithfulness than faithfulness in his life. Though he was disloyal in his dealings with God, he constantly experienced God's loyalty to him. St. Vincent Pallotti felt that God's fidelity to him was manifested in a special way by allowing him to live in this world as a person, as a Christian and as a priest. God had entrusted to St. Vincent an apostolic ministry aimed at the greater glory of God and the greater sanctification of human persons, which for St. Vincent, was the greatest sign of God's steadfast love towards him. Though deeply sorry for his unfaithfulness to God, he was neither disappointed with himself nor discouraged in his apostolic ministry because of his failures. He believed that when the loyal and faithful God wanted an unfaithful Vincent to live for him and accomplish great things for him, his unfaithfulness should not be in the way to frustrate God's plan for him. While constantly making efforts to remain loyal to God, St. Vincent Pallotti, like a dedicated warrior, fought the good fight for God despite his own periodic disloyalty to him.

Have I founded my Christian life and apostolic ministry on God's faithfulness to me or on my faithfulness to God? Am I disappointed with myself or discouraged in my ministry because of my unfaithfulness? How do I respond to God for his loyalty to me?

Understand, then, that the Lord, your God, is God indeed, the faithful God who keeps his merciful covenant down to the thousandth generation. (Deut. 7: 10)

April 18

The Mercy of God

Yes, my God, I believe your mercy is unlimited; I believe with certainty that it is now being given to me. (OCC, X, p. 197; STA, 279)

Holy Scripture presents mercy as one of the attributes of God. God's mercy is not limited and conditional, but it is as infinite as God himself. The God of mercy, besides forgiving the failures of the one who turns away from the wrong path, manifests his compassion by offering encouragement by his personal presence in the life of the one who turns to him. As a result, not only does the person feel encouraged to carry on his life according to the plan of God, but he is also able to encourage others to follow the demands of a life lived according to God's will. Thus, the power of God's merciful presence in the life of the person not only makes him a person of inner strength, but also fills him with the power to be a source of God's merciful presence in the life of the other. St. Vincent Pallotti believed in the infinite and unlimited mercy of God that had been showered upon him. He knew that it was the mercy of God that sustained him at every moment in his life and gave him the inner energy to cope with the troubles of his life. He was able to be a source of encouragement for others only because of the existence of the mercy of God in his life. Living under the protection of God's mercy, St. Vincent Pallotti experienced a sense of security to live his life joyfully and to spend his life generously for others.

Do I believe in God's merciful presence in my life? Do I place myself under the protection of God's mercy? Does the mercy of God make me a courageous person? Am I able to be source of encouragement for others in their trouble?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. (2 Cor. 1: 3-4)

April 19

God Sustains His Love in the Human Person

With the love with which he [God] eternally and infinitely loves himself, he mercifully deigns to nourish me. With such ... nourishment, ... he destroys in me every vestige of earthly and profane love, and lets his love live in me, be in me, operate in me.
(OCCC, X, p. 453; STA, 494)

God is Love Eternal. Godhead is a communion of persons who are eternally in love with each other. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the three persons involved in the Godhead. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father and the love of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. Hence, God is a community of love. In this community, there is mutual appreciation of each other and reciprocal support to each other in order to accomplish their respective functions within and outside the Trinity. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, God communicates and nourishes the human person with the same divine love. When a person is nourished by God's love, he is totally overwhelmed by the love of God. The love of God takes hold of him and every form of earthly and profane love is totally destroyed. With the destruction of earthly and profane forms of love in the life of a person, the love of God lives in him, remains in him, and operates in him. With the presence of God's love within a person, he remains in God and God remains in him. Thus, for St. Vincent, with God and his love residing in a person, he is able to love others with the very same love with which God loves him.

Is my love for others truly Trinitarian? Is there mutual appreciation and reciprocal support in my love for others? Am I nourished by the love of God? Is the presence of God and his love in me an antidote to earthly and profane love in my life? Does God's love in me help me to love others with the very same love with which God loves us?

Whoever is without love does not know God for God is love ... We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.
(I Jn. 4: 8, 16)

April 20

God Sustains His Power in the Human Person

God is eternal, infinite ... power. Although I am weakness itself, ... still he mercifully ... nourishes me with his eternal and infinite power. With such nourishment he completely destroys my weakness, so that it may not be ... an impediment to those works for his glory. (OCC, X, pp. 453 - 454; STA, 495)

St. Vincent Pallotti visualized God as Eternal and Infinite Power. The power to do any actions basically comes from God. By himself a person is limited and weak. But God, the infinite power, in his mercy nourishes man with his eternal infinite power. Nourishing with his power, God completely destroys the weakness of a person. Being strengthened by God's power and the destruction of weakness, a person is freed from all impediments. When the clutches of impediments are freed, the person is able to engage himself in various apostolic endeavors, always keeping in mind that all apostolic engagements must, in the final analysis, be centered on bringing glory to God. The Bible is full of examples of weak persons called by God who are granted great power and strength that came from God. For instance, when Jeremiah was called, he felt unworthy of the call because he was only a youth. Similarly, when God called Isaiah, he felt unworthy of the call because he was a man of unclean lips. In both of these cases, God strengthened them with his infinite power and chose them both as his prophets. Thus, for St. Vincent Pallotti, the power of God strengthens everyone in his weakness and enables him to accomplish the mission to which he is sent.

Do I recognize God as the infinite power? Do I believe that God can destroy my weakness and help me accomplish the mission to which I am sent?

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth! You have exalted your majesty above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes ... you have fashioned praise because of your foes, to silence the hostile and the vengeful. (Ps. 8: 2-3)

April 21

God Sustains His Wisdom in the Human Person

God is eternal, infinite ... wisdom. Although I am ... unworthy of his illumination ... still he mercifully nourishes with his eternal and infinite wisdom. With such nourishment he ... completely destroys the darkness of my ignorance (OCC, X, p. 454; STA, 496).

St. Vincent Pallotti experienced God as the Eternal and Infinite Wisdom. The wisdom of God is beyond measure. No one can totally understand God's wisdom, but everyone's understanding depends on the wisdom of God. Unless God lends wisdom to a person, he would not have the right knowledge and proper understanding. In his wisdom, God created everything in the universe, both the rational and irrational creatures. Each creature in its own way manifests the marvelous wisdom of God. The human person, the crown of creation, enjoys a higher level of wisdom than other creatures of the universe, because he is made in the image of God. The wisdom given to him is not what he has actually merited, but a free gift from God. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, though a person is not worthy of God's illumination, still he nourishes him with eternal and infinite divine wisdom. God's nourishment of a person with his wisdom completely destroys the darkness of ignorance in the human person and fills him with true knowledge and correct understanding. As a result, he is able to have the right perspective of his life with regard to God's plan for him and is capable of accomplishing God's will in whatever he does, especially in his mission.

Do I recognize that my human wisdom is founded on the wisdom of God? Do I acknowledge that true wisdom is God's gift? Am I able to cultivate a right perspective of both my life and ministry?

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, established the heavens by understanding; by his knowledge the depths break open, and clouds drop down dew. (Prov. 3: 19-20)

April 22

God Sustains His Justice in the Human Person

God is justice itself. Although I have been unjust toward God, my neighbor and myself, still ... He nourishes me mercifully with his justice, and completely destroys my injustices, together with their most horrendous consequences. (OCCC, X, pp. 455 - 456; STA, 498)

St. Vincent Pallotti acknowledged that God is Eternal and Infinite Justice, for he is never unjust to any of his creatures. His justice goes beyond any human considerations. Though we are unjust to him, he is never unjust to us. He gives us what is our due. The mercy of God does not go against his Infinite Justice. While his mercy makes him let the sun shine over the good and the evil, his Justice makes him give everyone what he deserves. The justice which a person possesses and practices, is a manifestation of the Infinite Justice of God. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the human person is a free creature and can act unjustly towards God, towards his neighbor, and at times even towards himself by choosing actions that go against God's plan for him. But despite human failure to be just, God mercifully nourishes a person with his Justice, and completely destroys all forms of injustice from him. As a result, if person is truly open to God of justice and allows him to wipe away his injustices, he can truly be just in all dealings with God, with his neighbor and with himself. When such a just way of behavior takes hold of a person, he will be able to establish a just society, where the Infinite Justice of God would reign supreme as the standard by which everyone lives.

Is the justice I practice based on the Infinite Justice of God? Am I just in my dealings with God, with my neighbor and with myself? By opening myself to the Infinite Justice of God, am I able to establish justice for all in the community I live?

Come here and declare in counsel together: Who announced this from the beginning and foretold it from of old? Was it not I, the Lord, besides whom there is no other God? There is no just and saving God but me. (Is. 45: 21)

April 23

God Sustains His Mercy in the Human Person

God is infinite, eternal mercy itself; I am cruelty and barbarism itself. It is he who ... mercifully nourishes me with his infinite mercy and completely destroys my cruelty and ... remains in me. (OCC, X, pp. 456 - 457; STA, 500)

God revealed himself to St. Vincent Pallotti as the Eternal and Infinite Mercy. He felt that though his actions were not according to God's plan, yet God not only forgave his shortcomings and limitations, but also chose him to be his instrument to propagate the idea of the universal mission of charity and to carry it out in the city of Rome. Although he did not deserve it, God had showered him with many other blessings both in his spiritual journey and apostolic ministry. Hence, for St. Vincent, God is "Infinite, Eternal Mercy Itself" and in comparison with God, he is, as he calls himself, "cruelty and barbarism itself." St. Vincent Pallotti believed that he was able to act kindly and mercifully towards others despite his cruel nature only because God nourished him with his infinite mercy and destroyed all traces of cruelty from him. God remained within St. Vincent with his merciful love and sustained the transformation he had effected, that is, the transformation from cruelty to mercy in the heart and life of St. Vincent. In this manner, St. Vincent became a manifestation of the infinite mercy of God, and his actions became as if they were the actions of God, the Infinite Mercy.

Do I believe in God's merciful love in my life? Do I acknowledge that my mercifulness depends on God's infinite mercy? Do I allow God to effect and sustain the transformation from cruelty to mercy in me? Are my merciful actions like that of God?

The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity, continuing his kindness for a thousand generations. (Ex. 34: 6-7)

April 24

God Sustains His Purity in the Human Person

God is infinite purity itself; I am impurity itself. It is he who ... nourishes me with his ... merciful purity, and completely destroys my impurity and its horrible consequences. (OOC, X, p. 456; STA, 499)

The ability to live a life of purity and perfection before God was one of the ideals St. Vincent Pallotti wanted to live in imitation of God, who is Eternal and Infinite Purity. God, who is spiritual in nature, does not have the bodily nature. Hence, every form of impurity associated with material nature is absent in God. Therefore, God is infinitely pure, free from every impurity, the most perfect being. Viewing himself in the light of God, whom St. Vincent called “Infinite Purity Itself”, he was, in his words, “impurity itself.” Though impure by his very nature and being, and not deserving the mercy and grace of God, the Most Pure Being, St. Vincent was able to have some traces of purity in his life and actions because God nourished him with his merciful purity. The touch of God’s purity on him completely destroyed his impurity and its terrible consequences on his life and that of others. The presence of God’s purity in him and destruction of impurity from his life helped St. Vincent to behave with genuine purity in his intentions, thoughts, words and deeds. As a result, through his actions he could manifest the genuine purity of God himself.

Is God’s purity the foundation of the purity of my intentions, thoughts, words and deeds? Do I believe that with God’s help I can remove all forms of impurities from my life? What changes do I need to bring about in myself in order to manifest through my actions the genuine purity of God himself?

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense ... Cleanse me of sin with hyssop, that I may be purified; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow ... A clean heart create for me, O God. (Ps. 51: 2, 9,12)

April 25

God Sustains His Eternity in the Human Person

God is eternal. He nourishes me with his eternity ... and completely destroys my waste of time ... [Thus] Jesus gives me all the works of his most holy life, and his love, from all eternity. (OCCC, X, pp. 457 - 458; STA, 501)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered time as a gift from God, whom he experienced as eternal and timeless. Hence, God, the author of time, is eternal and he allots time to everyone as per his design and plan. God's allotment of time to every human person is not based on the merit of the person concerned, but rather it depends on the bounty of God's mercy towards him. For this reason, no one has a claim on his time and everyone is accountable to the time God has allotted to him. Therefore, time, though a free gift from God, must not be squandered away but must be used for the honor and glory of God, who is the totality of time. Viewing himself from the perspective of the eternal and timeless God, St. Vincent felt that he did not profitably make use of the God-given time. He wished that the eternal God nourished him with his eternity and completely destroyed his tendency to waste time. He also prayed that Jesus would bless him with all the works of his most holy life and his love, so that he may be able to use the time God had allotted for him to accomplish the very works of Jesus in the context of his own life and manifest his love to all, in the process bringing honor and glory to the eternal and timeless God.

Do I recognize the eternal God as the author of time and realize that it is a gift from him? Do I acknowledge that I am accountable for the time God has allotted to me? Do I use the God-given time to manifest the works and love of Jesus through my life? Do I use time to give honor and glory to God, who is eternal and timeless?

Before the mountains were begotten and the earth and the world were brought forth, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Ps. 90: 2)

April 26

God Sustains His Immensity in the Human Person

God is immensity. He nourishes me with his ... immensity, and completely destroys my smallness and limitations. Myself entirely destroyed, his immensity works in me as though I had acted everywhere for his greater glory and the greater sanctification of souls. (OOCC, X, p. 458; STA, 502)

St. Vincent Pallotti experienced God as Immensity and Omnipresence. God's immensity makes him capable of being present everywhere. There is nowhere the immense God is not present. According to the words of the Psalmist, no one can flee from God's presence, as he is present in the heavens, in the netherworld and in the farthest limits of the ocean. Because of God's immensity, besides being present everywhere, he is also able to perform different actions in different places at the same time. Viewing from the perspective of God's immensity, St. Vincent Pallotti saw himself as limited and small, for he is conditioned by time and space. Limitations of time and space brought along with it a number of restrictions on him and as a result, he was not able to do the many things he wished to do for God. Hence, St. Vincent prayed that the immense God would nourish him with his immensity and destroy all types of restrictions that came from time-space conditioning. Having done away with all such restrictions, he wished that the immensity of God would work through him so that he could act everywhere at the same time for the glory of God and sanctification of persons. Because of this yearning in his heart to work zealously for God's glory through God's immensity and omnipresence, many times God had granted the gift of bi-location to St. Vincent Pallotti.

Do I have the zeal to work for God, bringing glory to him and sanctifying human persons? Do I have a longing to work for God, through God's immensity?

From your presence where can I flee? If I go to the heavens you are there; if I sink to the netherworld, you are present there ... If I settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall guide me, and your right hand hold me fast. (Ps. 139: 7-10)

April 27

God Sustains His Holiness in the Human Person

God is ... holiness itself ... He mercifully nourishes me with his infinite sanctity, and completely destroys my wickedness ... Therefore, it is not I who am holy; but God who is holiness itself, who is in me, absorbs me, destroys me, and lives in me (OOC, X, pp. 458 - 459; STA, 503).

St. Vincent Pallotti experienced God as Holiness Itself. In the bible we find God himself declaring that he is holy. When God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, he told him to remove his sandals, for the ground on which he was standing was holy because the holy God has visited the place. Evaluating himself in the light of God's holiness, St. Vincent felt that he was full of wickedness and misery. Hence, he wished that God would nourish him with his infinite sanctity, thereby completely destroying his wickedness. Freed from all that is wicked in him by the presence of God's holiness, he became aware that holiness, in fact, does not belong to him but rather to God. The Holiness Itself lives in him and makes him holy by destroying every evil within him. The same holy God lived in him and absorbed St. Vincent into himself. In this manner, God not only sanctified St. Vincent, but also sustained holiness in him. Thus, living in the God of holiness, he was able to manifest the very holiness of God in and through his actions.

Do I recognize God as the author of my holiness of life? Do I allow God to nourish me with his infinite sanctity, thereby destroying my wickedness and misery? Am I able to manifest the holiness of God in and through my actions?

Extol the Lord, our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for holy is the Lord our God. (Ps. 99: 9)

April 28

God Sustains His Image in the Human Person

Although I am ... unworthy and incapable of being like God, still God mercifully nourishes me with the living image of his divine substance ... [and] destroys in me my unworthiness ... God is in me, lives in me and operates in me. (OCC, X, pp. 452 - 453; STA, 493)

St. Vincent Pallotti firmly believed that God created the human person in his own image and likeness. For him, a person did not merit becoming the image of God, but rather it was a privilege God bestowed on him out of God's love for him. A person, due to his inclination towards evil, lost his focus on God and became unworthy and incapable of being God-like. God did not abandon him. But, by the redemptive merits of the Son, Jesus, God mercifully nourished him with the living image of his Godhead, in the process destroying human unworthiness and misery. According to St. Vincent, with the destruction of all that was evil in a person, God entered a person's life and lived and acted in him. Thus, it was God who continuously sustained the image of God in each human person, in spite of the fact that he periodically lost it due to his sinfulness. But in this task of maintaining the image of God within a person, he must cooperate with God, thereby facilitating the continued presence of the image of God in him. Human cooperation with God would imply that he attempted to live his life as the image of God in his daily life.

Do I recognize God as the foundation and sustainer of the image of God in me? Do I cooperate with God in maintaining the image of God in me? What are some of the efforts I need to make in order to live as the image of God in my daily life?

My heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body too abides in confidence; because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful to undergo corruption. (Ps. 16: 9-10)

April 29

God's Love: The Source of Human Action

My God, by myself I can do nothing; with you I can do all. For your love I wish to do all. To you honor; to me contempt. (OCCC, X, p. 657; STA, 510)

God is the source of everything in the world. Everything depends on God for its origin and sustenance. The human person with his rational capacity is capable of higher types of action. Since a person can know and love, he is able to perform actions that are morally good or evil. As a being that is capable of knowing and loving, he is called not only to live in relationships with his fellow men, but also with his God. Though a person is a higher type of being that is capable of higher types of actions, he depends, like any other creature, on God for his origin and continued existence. Hence, if he is in a good relationship with God, man can do all things. But cut off from God, he would not be able to accomplish anything purposeful. St. Vincent Pallotti was convinced of this truth. In his life he always depended on God, for he knew that without God, he could not succeed in any of his undertaking. It is the love of God that moved St. Vincent to perform the various activities he was involved in, such as following the Lord faithfully, keeping his commandments, remaining loyal to him and serving him with his whole heart and mind by serving one's neighbor. He did whatever he did because he loved God. For the honor and glory of God, he was ready to accept any contempt on himself. Thus, God's love is the source of St. Vincent's every activity.

Is God's love the motivating factor of the activities I perform in my life? Do I recognize that a good relationship with God is essential in order to achieve the facility to do all things? What do I need to do so that the love of God motivates me in my actions?

Love the Lord your God; follow him faithfully; keep his commandments; remain loyal to him; and serve him with your whole heart and soul. (Josh. 22: 5)

April 30

Jesus: The Termination of Every Evil and Sin

My Jesus, you have come so that iniquity may be destroyed, perversion may be brought to an end, sin may finish and eternal justice may be brought about ... Let there be no sin; let there be ... the communication of your most holy life, with all your virtues and merits. (OOCC, X, pp. 663 - 664; STA, 512)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, Jesus the redeemer was the termination of every evil and sin. By Jesus' coming into the world taking the form of the human person, every iniquity and perversion in human persons were destroyed. Jesus had brought about the redemption of humankind by the shedding of his blood. Thus, in Jesus, every Christian obtains redemption by the forgiveness of his sins. As a result, sin in the world is brought to an end and the eternal justice is established in the world. The world would be free from all forms of sin. There would be genuine communication between God and the human person at all levels. For instance, Christians would be able to receive the communication of the most holy life of Jesus, with all its virtues and merits. Thus, for St. Vincent Pallotti, Jesus came to undo what Adam did by his sin of disobedience. The obedience of Jesus was the most perfect act that could truly bring about a sense of balance between the fall of creation by Adam's sin and the recreation of the world by Jesus.

Do I acknowledge that Jesus is the termination of every sin and evil? Do I cooperate with Jesus in removing sin and evil, especially from my personal life? What program of action should I plan in order to terminate sin and evil from my life?

In him (Jesus) we have redemption by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. (Eph. 1: 7-8)

May 1

Human Person: Called to Live the Law of Work

As in the Holy Family of Nazareth ... [in our communities] there should be manual work, and work for other necessities of life ... There should be hardly any idleness, and they must shine in the most perfect actuality of every action. (OOCC, II, p. 148)

Everyday life of a human person, for St. Vincent Pallotti, calls for effectively living the law of work. It was the will of God that a person must submit himself to the law of work. Hence, God created the human being, made him the crown of creation, and commanded him to till the earth and to make it fruitful. Jesus became a human being, submitted to the law of work, and blessed the work of human hands. Acknowledging the importance of work in the life of the human person and its value for the human society, St. Vincent called his followers to live the law of work generously. He reminded his followers of the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth, where Joseph, Mary and Jesus lived the law of work in the perfect manner. He also invited them to do away with all forms of laziness in the various communities of the Society he founded. Idleness is the root cause of many evils. Hence, a person must shun it at all cost. Instead of wasting his time in idle and unwanted talk, the consecrated person must perform his God-given responsibilities everyday with joyfulness in his heart. In this manner, besides spending his life more fruitfully, he is also able to help the Society and its apostolate in caring for the poor and the needy.

Do I believe that it was God's plan that humankind must submit himself to the law of work? Do I recognize the value of work in my consecrated living? Is there any form of idleness in my consecrated living? Do I waste my time in idle chatter? Do I understand what I can do for the Society and its apostolate by cultivating the attitude of hard work?

We exhort you, brethren ... to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands. (I Thes. 4: 10 - 11)

May 2

Faith: Means to Become God's Children

[As Savior Jesus] rekindled in us the faith in that intimate, real and close supernatural kinship by which we obtain the right to become children of God, heirs of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ. (OCCC, XIII, p. 148; GIL, XXIV, p. 91)

God the Father manifested his love for humankind in sending Jesus as the Savior of the world. Jesus, in order to accomplish the plan of the Father, became a human being, thereby making a person to open himself to the life of God. His opening of himself to a life of relationship with God is brought about by faith which Jesus enkindles in the heart of every person. Because a person is blessed with faith, there comes about an intimate, real and close supernatural relationship between him and God. As the result of this deep relationship, he obtains the right to become a child of God. As God's child, a person becomes an heir of God and co-heir with Jesus. As the encounter between the human person and God takes place in faith, he moves beyond his natural realm of existence and is raised to the supernatural level. At this higher plane of existence, he is able to participate in the very life of the Holy Trinity. The realization of this truth made St. Vincent Pallotti pray often asking God to destroy his life of sin and ingratitude, and bless him with the very life of Jesus and that of the most Holy Trinity.

Do I acknowledge faith as the gift of Jesus to me? How strong is my faith in God? Do I nurture and deepen the gift of faith so that I may be able to participate in the very life of the most Holy Trinity? Am I grateful to God for the honor of calling me to be a child of God, an heir of God and a co-heir with Jesus?

But without faith it is impossible to please him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb. 11: 6)

May 3

Living the Pascal Mystery of Christ

Lord Jesus, banish me and replace me by yourself ... may your life be my life ... your agony be my agony, your death my death, your resurrection my resurrection, your ascension my ascension, all that is yours, mine. (OCCC, X, pp. 488 - 489; STA, 573)

The Pascal Mystery of Christ in a general sense, means the totality of the self-surrendering life of Jesus which makes him shed his greatness as God and become a human being. But in a narrow sense, it refers to the Pascal event of Jesus' agony, death and resurrection. Every Christian is called to live the Pascal Mystery of Jesus in these twofold senses. First, like Jesus, a Christian is expected to live a life of self-surrender every moment of the time God has allotted for him. Second, he is expected live the Pascal event of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus on a daily basis in every situation he faces in his life. St. Vincent was very conscious of this duty as a Christian and wanted to live it very radically. He did not want to live his life anymore. Instead, he wanted to live the very life of Jesus. He often prayed asking God to banish his life and replace his life with the life of Jesus. He wished that the life of Jesus, his agony, his death, his resurrection, his ascension and all that Jesus had be transformed into himself, so that he might cease to exist and only Christ would live in and through him. As a result, he would be able to live the Pascal Mystery of Jesus in its totality in the same manner in which Jesus had lived.

Do I accept my duty as a Christian to live the Pascal Mystery of Jesus in my daily life? Do I live the Pascal Mystery in a radical manner? Do I allow Christ to live in me and work through me? Do I take the trouble to remove from me everything which does not make me Christ-like?

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Is. 53:7)

May 4

Submission to Jesus: The Essence of Christian Life

Almighty and merciful Jesus, completely destroy my life ... I commend my life, and my last day and moment to your hands. The true nourishment of my life is to do the will of my Lord at all times. (OCCC, X, p. 510; STA, 508)

A person who is proud does not recognize God as the author of his life, for he does not feel the need of anybody other than himself. He thinks that his life is his own and he can easily manage the diverse happenings of his life. Therefore, there is an element of arrogance in the heart of the proud person. He lacks the attitude of humility which is necessary to acknowledge and accept the significance of other persons in his life. Such a person does not submit himself before anyone, even if it is God. St. Vincent Pallotti was constantly at war with himself in uprooting pride, which he acknowledged as one of his shortcomings. In order to remove this vice from his life, he submitted himself to Jesus, whom he acknowledged as his author of life. He wished that Jesus would destroy his life of arrogance and pride. He commended his life and especially his last moment into the hands of Jesus. He proclaimed that the true nourishment of his life was to do the will of Jesus at all times, in total submission and surrender to him. Living this attitude of submission to Jesus on a regular basis, St. Vincent Pallotti grew in closer relationship with Jesus and led many others to him.

Do I acknowledge God as the author of my life? Do I recognize the significance of God and other persons in my life? Am I ready to submit my will to Jesus, especially in those areas where I wish to have my own way? Do I commend the totality of my life into the hands of Jesus?

“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (Jas. 4: 6-7)

May 5

A Pure Heart: The Greatest Human Offering to God

O my God ... You do not eat the flesh of bulls nor drink the blood of goats; you want the heart. Destroy my wicked heart; give me the heart of Jesus Christ, our Lord. In and through this heart ... [I may] preserve your honor in everything. (OOCC, X, p. 690; STA, 522)

Our God is the living God. He is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. Therefore, the worship of the Old Testament times, that is the offering of the flesh of bulls and blood of goats, are not truly acceptable to God. What can a person offer to the King of kings? What is a person's acceptable offering to God? It is nothing else but a pure heart: a heart that honors God; a heart that longs for God; a heart that is free from faults and failures; a heart that is ready to do his will; and a heart that tries to be as perfect as the heavenly Father. For God is the King of our hearts. St. Vincent Pallotti always desired to have such a heart and wished to offer it to God, for he believed that the greatest gift that a person could offer to God was his own heart. Since the heart was the greatest gift that he could offer to God, St. Vincent wanted to destroy his wicked heart and wished to possess the heart of Jesus Christ. Having possessed the purest heart of Jesus, St. Vincent could preserve God's honor in everything, in and through his own Christ-like heart.

What is it that I offer to God? Am I ready to offer God a heart that is pure? What can I do to preserve the purity of my heart? Do I destroy the wickedness of my heart and attempt to possess a Christ-like heart? Do I preserve God's honor by offering him my heart in its purest state?

As for you ... my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing soul ... If you seek him, he will let himself be found by you; but if you abandon him, he will cast you off forever. (I Chro. 28: 9)

May 6

Doing God's Will in Moments of Pain

Perfect conformity with the divine will during the time of tribulation will store up great capital for eternity. (Lett., 1192, p. 258)

Doing the will of God, for St. Vincent Pallotti, is a very significant aspect of the life of a Christian. Jesus himself very clearly shows the importance of doing God's will when he says to his disciples that his food is to do the will of his Father. According to St. Vincent, it is often easy and not demanding to do the will of God when everything goes well in a person's life. In other words, if doing the will of God does not involve taking upon himself any form of difficulties, then one may find it easy to say 'yes' to the Lord. But reaching out in perfect conformity to what God wants of a person in times of tribulations is often very difficult. St. Vincent says that doing God's will in moments of pain often brings to a person many favors and blessings from God because it involves unconditional faith and surrendering love. First, when a person accepts a great tribulation in his life as God's will, his faith in God is tested. Despite the difficulty he faces, he believes that God knows what is good for him and that in his own way God will help him to find a way. He is ready to surrender himself and his situation to God because of his unconditional faith in God. Second, readiness to accept a painful event as God's will involves surrendering oneself in love to God. His love for God is great since he is ready to love God despite his trouble. Since doing God's will in times of trouble calls for unconditional faith and surrendering love, a person who does the will of God despite his troubles, will be great in the eyes of God.

Do I acknowledge the value of doing God's will in my life? Am I open to accept the will of God and carry it out in my life in times of tribulations? Do I understand the value of accepting God's will when it involves pain? Do I have an unconditional faith and surrendering love to say 'yes' to God when he sends me troubles in my life?

I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.
(Ps. 40: 8)

May 7

Honoring Jesus in the Eucharist

My God ... You will inspire in me the keenest presence of mind before the most holy Eucharist ... and that you will make mine a life of perpetual preparation, participation, and thanksgiving in the infinite fruits of the most holy Eucharist. (OCCC, X, p. 722; STA, 528)

St. Vincent Pallotti had a deep devotion to the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist. For him, the Eucharist consisted of the total and actual presence of the Lord Jesus. He encountered the Eucharistic Lord, not only at the time of the celebration of the Eucharist, but also many times during the day through spiritual communion with him. He often attempted to have a keen presence of mind before the Eucharistic Lord. St. Vincent Pallotti spent his daily life in perpetual preparation for the participation in and thanksgiving for the infinite blessings he received from the Lord. Whatever he performed in a day was viewed as a constant preparation for his reception of the Eucharist. He performed every action in such a way that it became worthy of Jesus in the Eucharist. Second, all his actions were done as a perpetual participation in the Eucharist. In other words, every act he performed was done so as to facilitate him in his communion with the Eucharistic Lord. Third, every action of St. Vincent was done as an act of thanksgiving for the blessings the Lord showered on him. Thus, the totality of the everyday life of St. Vincent was totally centered on the Eucharist. Centering his life on the Eucharist not only made St. Vincent's life meaningful, but also fruitful.

Do I honor Jesus in the Eucharist with deep devotion and love? Do I maintain a relationship of communion with Jesus in the Eucharist? Do I spend my life in perpetual preparation for, participation in and thanksgiving for the Eucharistic Lord? Do I center every activity of my daily life in the Eucharist?

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise; give thanks to him; bless his name. (Ps. 100: 4)

May 8

Allowing God to Act

My God, act in me as you wish ... and give me the grace to act as you wish. (OCC, X, p. 727; STA, 531)

St. Vincent Pallotti was always ready to hand himself and his every action over to the hands of God. He believed that such a handing over would make him the most powerful instrument in the hands of God. He always prayed to God to act in him as God wished. He wished to be the most pliable instrument in the hands of God so that God could use him in whichever way he liked. St. Vincent thought that just as the clay got the right shape and proper utility in the hands of the potter, in the same way he would be in his best form and purpose if he offered himself to the Lord in total surrender. When he was in the hands of God, he not only allowed God to act in him as God wished, but also he would be able to act as God wished since it was not he who acted, but rather it was God who acted in him. This readiness to hand himself and all that he ever did over to the Lord made St. Vincent a powerful instrument of God. He was blessed with miraculous powers, successful in his apostolic ministry, communicated powerfully the reconciling love of Jesus for sinners, and on a personal level experienced great depths of mystical encounter with God. Thus, the attitude of allowing God to act in him made St. Vincent a great mystic and an ardent apostle.

Do I hand my life and my actions over to God? Do I believe that allowing God to act in me would make me a powerful instrument of God's grace in the life of others? Do I believe that surrendering my life to God would make me a great mystic and an ardent apostle?

Can I not do to you ... as this potter has done? says the Lord. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so you are in my hand.
(Jer. 18: 6)

May 9

Jesus: The Foundation of Our Perseverance

My God ... I was unfaithful in resolutions, and did not profit from the means you gave me to persevere ... When I make you a promise, I do just the opposite ... But your mercy ... assures me that you will destroy me completely ... [and] you yourself ... will be my perseverance. (OCC, X, pp. 734 - 735; STA, 533)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered perseverance a significant virtue in the life of a consecrated person. By means of this virtue he manifested his continuous faithfulness to the commitment he had made by living out its demands in the context of his everyday life. For this reason he instituted perseverance as one of the promises which the members of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate were expected to take as they entered the Society. But living out this virtue was not an easy task. St. Vincent often found himself falling back on his resolutions because he did not fully take advantage of the means God had given him to persevere in his vocation. He did make promises, but often tended to do the opposite when he faced the situation. In order to persevere in his vocation and all its demands, both personally and apostolically, St. Vincent founded himself on the perseverance of Jesus, which made him accept the plan of the Father to die on the cross and accomplished it joyfully and courageously. He prayed that Jesus would destroy his unfaithfulness and fill him with the perseverance of Jesus in order that he also, like Jesus, accepted the will of Jesus for him. Founding himself on the perseverance of Jesus, St. Vincent lived his commitment courageously, glorifying God through all he did.

How do I live the promise of perseverance on a daily basis in my life? Do I persevere in my commitment, both personally and apostolically? Is my perseverance founded on Jesus' perseverance in his vocation?

Christ was faithful as a son placed over his house. We are his house, if [only] we hold fast to our confidence and pride in our hope. (Heb. 3: 6)

May 10

Basking in the Flame of God's Infinite Love

[Jesus] I know not how to love you as much as I ought. My Jesus, he who does not love cannot live ... May I be entirely lost in love ... and may I be nothing more than flames of love. May your passion ... be my guide for all eternity, all fire and flames. (OCCC, X, pp. 226 - 227; STA, 541)

As the children of the heavenly Father we are called to love him and relish his love deep in our being. For God has loved us with an everlasting love and has called us as his own. Responding to the fire and flames of God's love has been always difficult for a human person. He always finds himself in diverse situations where he has to make the choice between love of God and love of the world. St. Vincent Pallotti, being caught up in this tug-of-war, often found fault with himself, saying that he did not know how to love God as much as he wanted. At the same time, he was conscious of the truth that he who did not love could not live a genuine and Christian life. St. Vincent wished to be lost entirely in the love of God. He desired to become nothing more than a flame of God's love. The contemplation and imitation of the passion of Jesus did help him to make a joyful response of love to God. Living with an ardent desire to love God, to live with him, and to enjoy his presence, St. Vincent Pallotti made attempts to surrender himself to God, thereby basking in the genuine Love of God.

Do I recognize that I am called to love God and enjoy his love? Do I believe that he who does not love cannot live? Do I make a joyful response to the love of God by my contemplation on the passion of Jesus? Do I bask in God's love every day of my life?

With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy towards you. Again I shall restore you, and you shall be rebuilt. (Jer. 31: 3 - 4)

May 11

Encountering Human Nothingness: Means to Become God's Own

My Jesus, my firm hope, let me always be most keenly aware of my nothingness, in order that I become all yours, lost and transformed in you ... I become all your attributes, wishes, and love. (OOCC, X, p. 227; STA, 542)

There is an interactive relationship between a person's perception of himself and the fact that he becomes God's own. A person's true insight into himself, his abilities and shortcomings is very vital for the manner in which he relates himself to God. If a person counts too much on himself, he will not have the right mind-set to be open to God and his grace. Unless a person is open to God, he cannot become God's own. Such a person would not recognize the need for God in his life. Therefore, a person's encountering his limitation and acknowledging his need for God are very essential for his belonging to God. St. Vincent Pallotti accepted this truth as a guiding principle in his life. He was keenly aware of his limitations and shortcomings. He often called himself "nothingness and sin." The purpose of acknowledging his nothingness was not to think low of himself or to consider himself a useless person, but rather such knowledge of himself would make him recognize his need for God and to be dependent on him. These attitudes, in turn, made St. Vincent cultivate genuine love of God, in the process making him God's own.

Do I have a right insight into myself? Do I, while acknowledging my good qualities, also recognize my limitations? Do I admit that I need God and his grace in my life? Do I accept the fact that all my capabilities are, in fact, gifts from God? Do I work towards making myself God's own?

With all my heart I seek you; let me not stray from your commands. Within my heart I treasure your promise that I may not sin against you. (Ps. 119: 10 – 11)

May 12

Humility: Distrust in Oneself and Trust in God

To be humble it is necessary to live distrusting of oneself, but trusting in God. (OCCC, X, p. 543; STA, 152)

If a person totally denies all his talents and abilities, and considers himself as someone worthless, he is not a humble person. Humility does not consist of denying the God-given talents and abilities a person possesses. On the contrary, if a person believes that he is capable of doing everything and trusts in himself alone, he also lacks the virtue of humility. Humility consists of neither an absolute distrust in a person's abilities, nor in an absolute trust in oneself. A humble person, in fact, distrusts himself in the sense that he knows his weaknesses as a human person, and that he is prone to fail. But he trusts his ability to accomplish what God wants of him because he trusts in the Lord and his power to make everything happen in his life. Hence, a humble person is one who understands himself and his achievements in relationship to God. Though he faces challenging situations in his life with a certain amount of uncertainty of his success, he moves with the hope of doing all that life demands of him because he knows the Lord is his strength. St. Vincent Pallotti approached every arduous task he had undertaken, every taxing situation he faced, and every testing difficulty of his life, with the above-mentioned attitude and achieved great things for God while remaining humble as a person.

What is my understanding of being humble? In order to be humble, do I deny my God-given talents and abilities? Do I place absolute trust in myself without taking any recourse to God as I face challenging situations? Am I dependent on God while acknowledging my talents and abilities?

Lord I am not proud and haughty. I don't think myself better than others ... I am quiet now before the Lord, just as a child who is weaned from the breast ... O Israel you too should quietly trust in the Lord – now and always. (Ps. 131: 1-3)

May 13

God's Loving Condescension on the Human Person

My God ... at every moment you think of me, and pour upon me ... favors, gifts and mercies ... You work these proofs of your love and mercy day and night, whether I am awake, asleep, thinking of you, or not thinking of you ... On the holy altars ... You wait for me and burn with the infinite fire of love to give me yourself completely. (OCC, X, pp. 235 - 236; STA, 544)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that his life as a Christian was a miracle of God's mercy. The greatest miracle is that which God worked through Mary for the salvation of humankind. The more he reflected on his life and that of the saints, the more he was fascinated by the manner in which God worked in, through, with, and for the human person. Everything God did with him manifested God's loving condescension on him. St. Vincent deeply felt that God constantly thought of him and poured on him favors, gifts and mercies. Whether it was night or day, whether he was asleep or awake, whether he was thinking of God or not thinking of God – God worked on St. Vincent the proofs of his mercy and love. St. Vincent was particularly touched by the presence and love of the Eucharistic Lord on the holy altars where Jesus waited for him, burned with infinite love for him and gave himself completely as nourishment for his spiritual life. Acknowledging the marvelous ways in which God dealt with him in so many ways, St. Vincent Pallotti lived his life in gratitude to God, attempting to give himself to God and others in the very manner in which God gave himself to him.

Do I acknowledge the marvelous ways in which God is dealing with me in my everyday life? Do I recognize God's dealings with me as his condescension on me? Am I grateful to God for the manifold expressions of his love in my life? How do I express my gratitude to him?

*The Lord is waiting to show you favor, and he rises to pity you;
For the Lord is a God of justice: blessed are all who wait for him!*
(Is. 30:18)

May 14

God Preserves Every Good in the Human Person

My God ... you still sustain me with your infinite mercy. Indeed you communicate your graces to me, give me your lights, enrich me with your gifts ... you seek me at all times ... you wish to transform me completely in you, because you wish to make me as blessed as you. (OCCC, X, p. 252; STA, 548).

God created the human person as the crown of creation. He was made a little less than the angels; crowned with honor and glory. After the creation of the human being, God found him to be good. Thus, he was created with every form of good in him. Though he deviated from the goodness God had placed on him by his disobedience, God did not let him down. He restored his goodness by the redemptive act of Jesus and continues to preserve this goodness in the human person. St. Vincent Pallotti believed that it was God who sustained the goodness in him. God, with his infinite mercy, preserved the goodness in him by the communication of various graces and blessings. God filled him with right insights and enriched him with his gifts. St. Vincent's experience was that God went after him and sought him whenever he tended to go astray. For God desired to transform him completely in order that he would possess the goodness of God himself. Acceptance of this truth and living by it helped St. Vincent to take care to live a good life, for he knew that he was never alone in his endeavor to make himself a good person and this world a better place.

Do I believe that God in creating me placed his goodness in me? Do I recognize the role of God in preserving goodness in me? Do I make constant effort to preserve the goodness God has placed in me? Do I cooperate with God in making myself a good person and this world a better place?

Withhold not, O Lord, your compassion from me; may your kindness and truth ever preserve me. (Ps. 40: 12)

May 15

God Fills Human Emptiness

My God, by myself I can do no good. ... But I abandon myself entirely in the most loving bosom of your infinite mercy. ... I firmly trust that you will destroy my ... unworthiness, and transform me completely in you. (OCC, X, p. 253; STA, 548)

St. Vincent Pallotti was convinced that by himself he could not achieve any good. By making this statement, he did not say that he was good for nothing, nor did he claim that he had no goodness in him. For if St. Vincent had any goodness in him, he could never claim it as his own but must ultimately attribute his goodness to God, because in the last analysis every good he possessed came from God. Whenever he attempted to do any good by himself without any reference to God, often he failed to achieve the good he intended to do. St. Vincent believed that it was God who filled his emptiness and made him great. Every good he achieved in this world was always with reference to God. Therefore, whenever he attempted to do any good, he abandoned himself entirely into the infinite mercy of God. He firmly trusted that God would transform him completely into God's own self, destroying all forms of unworthiness from him. With the assurance that God would provide whatever was lacking in him made St. Vincent march ahead in everything he undertook and achieve success with the power of God and his own hard work.

Do I recognize that God is the author of everything that is good in me? Do I believe that God fills my emptiness and makes me great? Do I take God as my partner in every good I attempt to do in my life?

Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Rom. 5: 5)

May 16

Who is God? Who am I before Him?

Ah My God, for me to know who am I before you, it would be necessary for me to know and comprehend your infinite perfection itself and ... at the same time the malice of sin, because it offends you who are infinitely perfect. (OCC, X, p. 469; STA, 556).

The fundamental question St. Vincent asked himself at the outset of his spiritual journey was: “Who is God? Who am I before him?” It was clear to the mind of St. Vincent that before he could ever describe who he was, he needed to know who God was. For he could understand his true nature only in relation to the nature of God. For St. Vincent God, though infinite in his perfection, was infinite love and mercy. He was always there with open arms to receive him. Placing himself before God, St. Vincent experienced himself as a sinful and limited person, so distant from God’s infinite perfection. But though distant from God because of his sinful nature, he was very close to God because God’s infinitely merciful love was ready to accept him in his sinfulness and unworthiness and raise him to the nature of God himself. Thus, it was the nature of God to which he was so closely related that gave him dignity and worth as a human person. St. Vincent realized that despite malice of sin which was part of his nature as a human person, fundamentally he was an image of God who was infinitely perfect. This realization made St. Vincent a constant warrior who fought against sin and all forms of evil in order to maintain the image of God within him in its pristine purity.

Who is God for me? Who am I before him? Do I see my human nature intertwined with God’s being? Do I recognize my dignity as God’s image despite my sinfulness? Am I a warrior, who fights against sin and evil to maintain the image of God in me?

For who is God except the Lord? Who is a rock save our God? The God who girded me with strength and kept my way unerring ... Who trains my hand for war till my arms could bend a bow of brass. (2 Sam. 22: 32-35)

May 17

God: The Source of Human Greatness

Who am I, since you ... with infinite love think always of me? ... You are turned towards me and pour upon me ... [your] mercies in order to destroy my unworthiness ... You speak to me in the intimate recesses of my most ungrateful heart: "I will not change into you, but you will change into me." (OCCC, X, pp. 472 - 473; STA, 557).

God is the source of a person's greatness. Though a person devises plans to be prosperous in his life, explores various possibilities to execute them and works hard in actualizing these plans, it is ultimately God who brings success to all human endeavors. Even though a person has many proposals for his happiness in life, it is God who disposes each of them according to his plan for the human person. Hence, God is the author of human greatness. St. Vincent Pallotti accepted this truth as a guiding principle for his personal life. St. Vincent experienced God as the one who constantly thought of him and whose eyes were always turned toward him. God consistently poured on him his infinite mercies for the purpose of destroying everything that was unworthy in him. God spoke to St. Vincent in the intimate recesses of his heart, promising to change him into God, thereby making him great and godly. Since God had so much interest in St. Vincent and his life, he was certain that he definitely would achieve whatever greatness God wanted him to have in his life, provided he cooperated with God.

Do I acknowledge God as the source of my greatness? In working out my plans and purposes, do I accept God as the one who disposes my proposals? Do I believe in God's plan for me? Do I cooperate with God to achieve in my life the greatness God wants for me?

Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings ... For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors. (Deut. 30:9)

May 18

Human Unworthiness before God Vs. Human Need of God

Ah my God, because of what I am and because of what you are, I am compelled to say, "Draw back from me, for I am a sinful man." At the same time I must beg you, "Come, O Lord, do not delay, run like a doe," because I cannot stay a moment without you. (OCCC, X, p. 277; STA, 565)

Reflecting on who he was, St. Vincent Pallotti felt his utter unworthiness before the presence of God, who was infinitely perfect. The more he contemplated his limitations and the greatness of God, the more he felt that he did not deserve to be related to God at all. He felt like asking the Lord to depart from him for he was a sinful man. While he was overwhelmed by these sentiments, he felt within himself a deep yearning for God for he could never think of living without God. Thus, St. Vincent felt within himself his need as a human being to belong to God on the one hand and his unworthiness to belong to God because of his sinfulness on the other. Hence, a tension between his unworthiness before God and his need for God marked the spiritual life of St. Vincent Pallotti. Because of this tension, he constantly worked to make himself a worthy person before God. In his efforts to grow in the grace and love of God he was never alone, for he knew that God was constantly with him. Thus, the tension between his unworthiness before God and his need for God helped him to make steady progress in his spiritual journey, combining the grace of God and his efforts beautifully together.

Do I recognize God's greatness and perfection? Do I acknowledge my unworthiness before God? Do I make constant efforts to make myself worthy of God? Do I depend on God in order to grow in my spiritual life?

To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, do not refuse to hear me, for if you are silent to me, I shall be like those who go down to the Pit. (Ps. 28:1)

May 19

God's Love for the Human Person

[My God] the infinite love with which you freely and mercifully love me from all eternity compels you . . . to come to me, to be with me, and to make me one with yourself. My God, love compels you to excesses [of love]. (OCCC, X, pp. 277 - 278; STA, 565)

Though a person does not deserve to be loved by God, he has loved the human person from all eternity. God manifests his love by bringing various blessings on the human person. While writing to the Church community at Ephesus, St. Paul narrates a number of spiritual blessings the God of mercies has brought on humankind through his Son Jesus. Though he is unworthy and sinful, God has called him to a life of intimate relationship with him so that he can be holy and blameless like God himself. God has bestowed on a person many blessings through Christ's redemptive action in the world. St. Vincent Pallotti was overwhelmed by the generous love of God. He always felt that the love God had for the human person compelled him to excesses of love. God, because of his love for the humans, had gone out of his way to do great things for them. St. Vincent found the proofs of God's excess love for his people in God choosing him, coming to him, being with him and establishing an intimate relationship on a personal level with him, even though he deserved none of these. Recognition of God's excess love for him made St. Vincent grateful to God by living a life which manifested the greatness and holiness of God.

Do I believe in God's great love for me? Am I able to find proof of God's love in my life? Do I acknowledge my unworthiness to be the object of God's love? How do I respond to God's excess love for me?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. (Eph. 1:3 - 4)

May 20

Human Response to God's Excess of Love

[My God] grant me the gifts of work and suffer without it ever being known ... in order to cooperate fully, efficaciously, and eternally with every work for your greater glory and the salvation of souls. (OCCC, X, p. 280; STA, 566)

St. Vincent Pallotti wanted to respond to the gracious love of God in a corresponding manner. He believed that his gratitude must be manifested through his life rather than through mere words. Hence, he was looking for ways and means to respond to the excess love God had manifested in his life so graciously. He thought that he could offer his gratitude to God by working for his glory and suffer for it without it ever being known to others. First, St. Vincent wanted to work for God's glory and the sanctification of human persons. He wanted to cooperate fully and efficaciously in the work of salvation of humankind, so as to make God known, loved and glorified. This desire of St. Vincent took concrete expression in the foundation of the Union of Catholic Apostolate and the various apostolic activities he had undertaken in the city of Rome to bring God's love to the poor and the needy. Second, St. Vincent wanted to accept every hardship and trouble that came his way in accomplishing God's plan of salvation and suffer it without it ever being noticed by others. He often prayed for these two gifts of working for the salvation of humankind, and suffering for it without this suffering being known to others. In this manner, St. Vincent responded to the excess love God manifested towards him.

Am I able to perceive the many ways in which the love of God reaches out in my life? Am I ready to give a corresponding response to the God, who loves me excessively? How does this response find concrete expression in my everyday life?

Keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire. (Jude 1: 21 –23)

May 21

God's Marvelous Plan for the Human Person

My God, through your infinite love you have deigned to create me in your image and likeness. You have granted me the gift of free will so that I might perfect myself insofar as I am a living image of you ... because you wish to make me similar to you in your glory and essence (OCC, X, p. 749; STA, 570).

St. Vincent Pallotti was always conscious of the marvelous plan of God for him. He was fully aware that the totality of his life and all that he undertook to accomplish were part and parcel of God's plan. Hence, he never sought himself and his own petty interests. Therefore, in attempting to do anything, he always discerned if what he planned fitted into the plan of God for him. For he knew that God created him in his own image and likeness, gave him the gift of free will and made him similar to God in glory and essence. God bestowed all these gifts on him not because he wanted these gifts to be used to accomplish his own selfish plans, but the plan of the one whose image he bore. In order to achieve the goal of actualizing God's plan, St. Vincent made sincere efforts to perfect himself so as to remain as perfect an image of God as humanly possible. By doing this he wanted to become a living image of God both in his being and in his actions, thereby manifesting the glory of God in and through his life while accomplishing the plan God had set for him.

Do I believe in the fact that God has a personal plan for me? Do I seek my selfish interests in my apostolic endeavors? Do I discern if the activity I am embarking upon fits into the plan of God before I actually execute it? Do I take the trouble to make myself a living image of God?

I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Tim 1:16)

May 22

Mary: Queen of the Apostles

The Virgin Mary, without preaching the Gospel, became the Queen of the Apostles through the efficacy of her prayers by which she sustained the courage of the apostles and caused them to prosper in their work. (OOCC, IV, p. 378)

The Cenacle scene is uppermost in the mind of St. Vincent Pallotti as he addresses Mary as the Queen of the Apostles. Mary holds apostles together at the upper room. She prays with them and encourages them as they are disappointed at the loss of Jesus, their Master. It is under her protection that the Spirit of God descends on them and they are made to face the world as preachers of the message of Jesus. She gives birth to the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, at the Cenacle. Thus, Mary plays a very significant role in accomplishing the plan of God for the redemption of humankind along with Jesus. Though not given the dignity of an apostle, Mary commits herself to the mission of universal charity because she works with great zeal for the salvation of God's people and for the glory of God. Mary did not preach the gospel like the apostles, but through her prayers and personal presence amidst the apostles, she helped to sustain the courage of the apostles, allowing them to be true apostles of Jesus, and made them prosper in their work for him. In doing so, she surpassed all the apostles in merit. Hence, she is given the title "Queen of the Apostles." In this way, Mary has shown how a person without the office of priesthood in the Church, can participate in the mission of the Church totally and fully. Hence, Mary becomes an example of the mission of every layperson within the Church.

Do I acknowledge the significant role of Mary in God's plan of salvation? Am I ready to serve in simplicity, like Mary, without holding any office of dignity? Do I sustain the courage of others engaged in ministry by my prayers and personal presence?

And Mary Said: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word." (Lk. 1: 38)

May 23

The Motive Behind Doing Every Good

All good that has been done, is being done and will be done by all creatures, and all that I have done, am doing, and will do for the greatest glory of God ... our most loving and infinitely perfect Father. (OCCC, X, p. 57; STA, 16)

St. Vincent Pallotti, at the beginning of his spiritual life made a general declaration, known as “General Protestation.” It involved a treaty or a contract between the aspirant of God’s experience and the Divine Majesty. For St. Vincent, the General Protestation meant a holistic understanding of the future of his spiritual life and the road map of all his striving for perfection. In it he assertively stated his intention to bring the greatest glory to God. It did not merely imply his desire to do everything for the greater glory of God, but rather it was a proclamation of his love for God and fidelity to this love. St. Vincent ardently loved God and wanted to manifest his faithfulness to that love by doing every good he did with the motive of bringing the greatest glory to God. Thus, by bringing glory to God, he declared his love for God and his faithfulness to him. St. Vincent’s whole spiritual life was centered on the ‘fixed thought’ of glorifying God. It was the dynamic force that moved the totality of his spiritual life. Hence, the infinite glory of God became the motive of whatever good he achieved in his life.

Do I have a holistic understanding of my spiritual life? Do I have a road map of my striving for perfection? Do I have a ‘fixed thought’ that serves as the dynamic force behind my spiritual life? Is my spiritual life centered on the motive of bringing the greatest glory to God?

Arm yourselves also with the same intention ... so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. (I Pet 4:1 – 2)

Infinite Desire for God

Knowing that it is absolutely impossible that I, a poor creature could do all this ... But I will not give up supposing that each creature infinitely multiplied and at every infinitesimal moment of all eternities ... with infinite perfection infinitely multiplied ... will do all these actions. (OOCC, X, p. 60; STA, 18)

St. Vincent Pallotti, while recognizing the depth of his sinfulness, also realized that he was made by God, who was infinite. Hence, he infinitely desired to bring glory to God. He wanted every creature who lived at every moment throughout eternity to be multiplied infinitely and join him in bringing glory to God. The ‘infinite desire,’ the ‘multiplication of every creature infinitely’ and the ‘infinite multiplication of every moment of all eternities’ which St. Vincent was speaking about was often referred to as “infinetism” in his spirituality. According to him, there was a paradox involved in the concepts of ‘the infinite desire’ and ‘the multiplication of the infinite’ because a person, as a finite being, can never have an infinite desire and the infinite can never be multiplied. Yet for St. Vincent it was a ‘beautiful thought’ which pointed to his heart that was passionately in love with God, the Infinite Love. It also indicated the holy impatience, the agony and the yearning that lay deep in the heart of St. Vincent to rest secure in God’s love. It also helped St. Vincent to learn humility because he discovered his true state of unworthiness only in relation to God, the Infinite Love.

Are there elements of St. Vincent’s infinetism in my spiritual life? Do I recognize my unworthiness? Do I acknowledge that I am made for God, the Infinite Love? Do I long to rest secure in God?

They took an oath to the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with horns. All Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around. (II Chro. 15:14 – 15)

May 25

Response to the God of Love

I desire greatly to love God ... in such a manner that I would be in heaven and on earth at the same time – in heaven to love God supremely; on the earth to love and suffer supremely for the love of God. (OCCC, X, p. 69; STA, 62)

Having experienced the touch of the infinite love of God in the depth of his being, St. Vincent Pallotti wanted to respond to God of love in every way possible. He wished that infinite glory would be given to God by infinite creatures by doing infinite good in the world. This thought formed the basis of St. Vincent's spiritual and apostolic aims. He desired to love God so much that he wanted to be in heaven and on earth at the same time to love him supremely and to suffer for him greatly. His yearning to reciprocate God's love for him took many directions. He wanted to possess 'infinite wills and lives' so that he could sacrifice all of them to God. He wished to possess infinite wealth so that he could renounce all for God. He desired to remain poor and to have nothing at all so that he could live in imitation of Jesus, the poor. He longed to be in hospitals, jails and in all such places to help those who were suffering in different ways. He hoped to teach the ignorant and to help people from all walks of life to know, love and serve God. He was even ready to throw himself into the flames of hell to bring solace and happiness to his neighbor. In this manner, St. Vincent attempted to respond to God, the Infinite love, both by making efforts to grow in his spiritual life and by engaging in diverse apostolic endeavors.

How do I respond to the love of God in my personal life? Do I make an effort to grow in my spiritual life in imitation of the all holy God? Do I manifest God's love for me by getting involved in various apostolic endeavors?

Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. (Ps. 116:7 – 8)

May 26

Actions and Desires

When the effectiveness of the action does not attain its goal I must strive that the wings of desire to reach it. (OCCC, X, p. 49; STA, 220)

St. Vincent was a man of desire. His desire to respond to the God of love made St. Vincent Pallotti a dynamic and active apostle. He wished to be engaged in diverse ministries for the good of the Church and the human race. He often prayed to God to give him great desires to do great things for God and his glory. He desired to journey throughout the world and minister to all people in their spiritual and temporal needs, even though in actual fact he never left the city of Rome for engaging in the apostolate. St. Vincent's love for God was so great that he desired to do many things for God. But he knew he was limited in his capacities to accomplish everything he planned to do. He often begged for God's power, wisdom and goodness in helping him to accomplish great things for him. He often said that when he was not able to actualize his apostolic plans due to his limitations as a human person, he should not be discouraged or give up the project. But instead, he should continue to desire the very things he failed to accomplish and should put in as much effort as possible to accomplish it, for he knew that effort was his gift to God, while success was God's gift to him.

Am I, like St. Vincent, a man/woman of desire? Do I desire to do many things for God and his people? Am I discouraged and give up when some of my plans are not actualized? Do I continue my efforts to accomplish my plans despite the failures? Do I believe that God does not measure the results, but the efforts?

I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. (Phil. 1: 5 – 6)

May 27

Being Hopeful About Success

Since it is impossible for me in my misery, poverty and impiety to carry out everything I want to do for the glory of God, I will do it by performing acts of love and humiliation, [and] offering the merits of Jesus Christ. (OOCC, X, pp. 71 - 72; STA, 63)

St. Vincent Pallotti was not merely a man of desires, but also a practical person. He not only desired to do great things in order to bring the greatest glory to God, but also practically set up a number of plans to actualize his mission. He was also practical in recognizing his own limitations and that of the external environment that sometimes prevented him from accomplishing his pastoral and apostolic plans. Since it was not always possible for him to do everything he wanted to do for the glory of God because of his misery, poverty and impiety to carry them out, he planned a twofold strategy in accomplishing what he wanted to do for God. First, he would arm himself spiritually by performing acts of love, humiliation and offering the merits of Jesus Christ to the eternal Father. Second, he would continue to carry out his pastoral and apostolic plans with the needed modifications and changes, despite the fact that he had experienced failure. This twofold strategy of seeking the grace of God to assist him in executing his pastoral plan helped St. Vincent Pallotti to carry on his mission with courage and determination. He did his best in planning for his mission and executing it, while leaving the dimension of success to God. In this manner, St. Vincent Pallotti lived and worked for God with a deep sense of hope in God, for he knew that with God everything was possible.

Do I accept the fact that my limitations and external circumstances sometimes prevent success in the apostolate? Do I make use of the double-fold strategy of seeking the grace of God while executing my pastoral plans for the success of my mission? Do I do my best and leave the rest to God, when I embark upon my apostolic endeavor?

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. (Ps. 42:11)

The Path to Perfection

The acquisition of true perfection consists not only in ideas and holy desires, but it is also necessary that we practice constantly a holy life ... in a more perfect and actual imitation of the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. (OCCC, II, pp. 4-5)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that the true path of perfection did not consist of a person having wonderful ideas about holiness of life nor in having the holy desire to become perfect, even though they are non-essential elements for his ascent towards God. Though ideas about holy life and desire to become holy would definitely help a person to move towards perfection, by themselves they would not make a person holy. According to St. Vincent, a person would ascend in the life of perfection only if he used his knowledge about holiness and desire for holiness in the context of his everyday life. This would mean that he should live a holy life in imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. The thoughts, words and deeds of Jesus should become his own thoughts, words and deeds. When a person attempted to live the very life of Jesus, he would be like a person who built his spiritual life on the rock of listening to the word of God and living it. The house built on the rock was able to withstand the downpour of the rain and the flood. Similarly, the person who built his spiritual life on the rock of the practical living of a holy life would be able to endure the hardships involved in his journey towards holiness. Though St. Vincent did give importance to the knowledge about holiness and desire for holiness, he was a practical man who proposed the practical path of living a holy life as a means to perfection.

Do I spend my energy on the practical living of a holy life? Does my path to holiness consist of living a holy life in imitation of Jesus Christ? Do I use ideas about holiness and desire for holiness to facilitate my practical living of a holy life?

Jesus said to his disciples: "It is not those who say to me, 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Mt. 7:21)

May 29

Human Person: Nothingness and Sin

I was conceived and born in sin. Even after the great benefit of holy baptism, how many times I have sinned, and how much I have horribly sinned! ... Ah my God, who am I before you, guilty as I am of innumerable sins, ingratitude, and resistance to your merciful calls? (OCCC, X, pp. 469 - 470; STA, 556)

St. Vincent Pallotti characterized every human person, including himself, as nothingness and sin. This characterization comes from St. Vincent's own existential experience of his own personal history, especially viewed from the perspective of God and his infinite holiness. He believed that he was conceived and born in original sin. Though having opened to the grace of the Lord in Baptism, sin was still part and parcel of his life ever since. In many of his writings, St. Vincent often narrated about his innumerable sins, ingratitude and resistance to merciful calls of God. Hence, there was nothing worthwhile in him that he could give to God. As he went to encounter God, there was nothing of value that he could offer to God. Hence, the term "nothingness" refers to the 'negation of everything.' Because of his sinfulness, he was nothing before God as he had nothing with him except sin as he stood face to face with God. St. Vincent did not understand how God could bear him. The realization that he was "nothingness and sin" did not make St. Vincent despair, but rather it made him surrender unconditionally to God's merciful love. It made him realize how he needed God in his life, and made him take all the troubles so that he could belong to God and could find his meaning in him.

How do I perceive myself? Do I have a sense of my sinfulness? Does the awareness of my sinfulness make me feel despair or surrender to God unconditionally? Do I realize that I need God in my life? Do I take trouble to belong to God and find the meaningfulness of my life in him?

Happy are those, whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. (Ps. 32:1 - 2)

Human Person: A Receptacle of God's Communications

[Though] I have merited ... the eternal loss of your gifts ... [your divine mercy] through the merits of Jesus Christ ... assures me the continued communication of your gifts, graces and mercies. (OCCC, X, pp. 732 - 733; STA, 532)

St. Vincent Pallotti acknowledged himself as “nothingness and sin” as he had nothing of his own to offer to God except his sinfulness as he stood face to face with him. St. Vincent wondered how God could bear him because he had merited the eternal loss of the gifts of God by his sin. But he was amazed at the fact that God, out of love for him, visited him and communicated himself to him. Hence, he was certain of God’s gifts, graces and mercies, which God the Father offered him through the merits of Jesus Christ. The communication of God’s divinity and all the graces associated with it were not merely one-time gifts, but rather St. Vincent had God’s assurance that he would communicate them on a continuous basis. As a result, the one who was “nothingness and sin” became a “receptacle of God’s communications.” Hence, the unworthiness associated with “nothingness and sin” had vanished and St. Vincent had become a genuine dwelling place of God, a receptacle of his graces and a medium that manifested the glory of God.

Despite my sinfulness, do I acknowledge that I am the receptacle of God’s communications? Do I acknowledge that God deals with me in a wonderful manner though I am unworthy? Am I open to God’s gifts, graces and mercies which God showers on me? Have I realized that I am a dwelling place of God, a receptacle of his graces and a medium for manifesting God’s glory?

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief. (I Tim 1:12 – 13)

May 31

Mary: Mother of Divine Love

My divine Son, Jesus ... loved and blessed them [all God's people] with the infinite love by leaving me as their mother ... Acknowledge me and experience me as a Mother of Mercy (OOCC, XIII, P. 550).

The visitation scene inspired St. Vincent Pallotti to visualize Mary as the Mother of Divine Love. Mary's compassion for her aged cousin in her need, points to Mary's heart that is full of love and mercy. She reaches out to help others in their need. St. Vincent perceived Mary, Mother of Divine Love, as one who has genuine interest in the spiritual wellbeing of every Christian saved by Christ. He advised everyone to approach Mary in moments of tribulation, difficulty, and temptation, for she had genuine compassion towards those who suffer from all form of evil, especially from sin. St. Vincent used a new image of Mary to represent her in the title of the Mother of Divine Love. This image consisted of a representation of Mary holding Jesus, portrayed as a child with his heart in his left hand, while Mary holds her heart in her left hand. These two hearts communicate the love of God and that of Mary for everyone. It is this image St. Vincent carried underneath his sleeve and gave people to kiss, instead of his hand. Mary, as the Mother of Divine Love, was very dear to St. Vincent, for he believed that through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Divine Love, the Holy Spirit would cause our hearts to vibrate with love.

Do I acknowledge Mary as the Mother of Divine Love? Do I believe in her powerful intercession? Do I approach Mary's intercession in moments of tribulations and difficulties? Do I open my heart to her in order to be filled with the spirit of love?

Mary remained with her [Elizabeth] about three months, and returned to her home. (Lk. 1: 56)

June 1

Creation: The Revelation of God's Love

God, blessed in himself, moved with infinite love and mercy, created the world in order to give himself wholly to creatures. (OCCC, XIII, p. 29; GIL, I, p. 1)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that it was the infinite love and mercy of God that moved him to create the world. He created the world out of nothingness and brought into being every type of creature that inhabited the earth. From formless chaos, God brought order and beauty in the universe. If a person contemplates the manner in which the creation of every being in the world was so meticulously planned and artfully executed, one could not but wonder at the wisdom and love of God. The creation of the human person as the pinnacle of everything that existed further added to the wonder of God's plan for creation. Though the human person had received a sublime nature from God with manifold gifts, St. Vincent was shocked at the fact that very few people knew their own value and appreciated their own gifts and God-given vocation. He wished to let everyone know God was the basis of the natural and spiritual fabric of human living. Hence, for St. Vincent, the order and beauty found in every creature was the means through which God communicated his love. Therefore, creation was the revelation of God's infinite love and mercy.

Do I recognize the love and mercy of God with which every creature in the world is created? Do I acknowledge the love with which God created me? Do I accept my value and worth as the pinnacle of God's creation? Do I believe that God is the foundation of the natural and spiritual fabric of human life? Is creation a revelation of God's love for me?

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. (Gen. 1: 1 – 2)

June 2

Creation: The Revelation of God's Goodness

Oh my God ... you are infinite goodness, and as such you are infinitely diffusive. From all eternity with infinite goodness and mercy, you have decreed the ineffable work of the world's creation.

(OCC, XIII, p. 30; GIL, I, p. 2)

St. Vincent Pallotti saw the created world as the revelation of God's goodness. For him, God was infinite goodness. The good, by its very nature, was diffusive and God as infinite goodness was infinitely diffusive. He gave himself out in creation. Hence, the infinite goodness of God was operative in the process of the creation of the world. Since the goodness of God was the essential element in the work of the world's creation, by his very creative act God had left a mark of his goodness in every creature. Therefore, every creature bore within itself an aspect of God's goodness. For this reason, after the creation of the world God saw everything that he had made was, indeed, very good. According to St. Vincent, because every created reality contained an element of God's goodness within it in an essential way, it became a medium through which the goodness of God was manifested. Thus, every created being, by being what God wanted it to be, turned out to be a revelation of God's infinite goodness. This conviction made St. Vincent Pallotti to have right reverence for every created being and find God's infinite presence in and through every creature. It also helped him to live out God's goodness in his life, thereby becoming a revelation of God's goodness in the world.

Do I acknowledge that God, in his infinite goodness, decreed the work of world's creation? Do I believe that every created reality participates in the goodness of God, its creator? Do I cultivate right reverence for every created being, as it contains God's goodness? Am I able to find the presence of God in and through every created being? In my own way, do I try to be a revelation of God's goodness?

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Gen. 1: 31)

Human Person: The Revelation of God's Essence

[The human person] is the likeness and image of God ... [This image] was not painted on canvas, it was not made of wood, stone or metal but of a living, rational and spiritual substance which has its own characteristic and substantial make-up ... representing ... all of you in your essence. (OCCC, XIII, P. 60; GIL, VIII, p. 27)

Creation is the revelation of God's infinite love towards humankind, as it is the love of God that moved him to create every creature in the world. At the same time, creation is also the revelation of God's infinite goodness because creation is due to the diffusion of the infinite goodness of God, and every created being has participated in the goodness of God. Hence, every creature in the world demonstrates that they are the infinite love, goodness and mercy of God. But the human person is unique among the created beings, for he is created in the image and likeness of God. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, this image is not a mere painting on canvas, wood, stone or metal. But, being the image of God means for a human person that he is a living, rational and spiritual being, which has the very characteristics and substantial make-up that represents in a real way the essence of God. Thus, the human person is similar to God more than any other creature. He can have a degree of relationship with God which no other creature can have. He has God-given powers over creation which no other created beings have. In short, a human person is the only co-creator among the creatures God created who has dominion over the creation, and who makes the creation of God develop and grow, thereby manifesting the glory and honor of God, the creator.

Do I acknowledge my significant place in God's creation? Am I constantly aware of my dignity as the image of God? By my life, do I reveal the nature and essence of God? Do I make the world a better place by using my God-given powers and abilities?

God blessed them [man and woman], saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the flesh of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth." (Gen. 1: 28)

June 4

Practice of Love: A Difficult Task

As the children of Adam, we all have our weaknesses. ... [Though] animated by the desire to do good ... it cannot be expected that ... [we] will never cause one another displeasure. All, therefore, should be ready for such circumstances and be patient. (OCC, I, pp. 108-109)

St. Vincent Pallotti was realistic in considering the practice of the commandment of love as a difficult task for many people. He also admitted that some would fail to observe this law of love in their everyday living because every human person is basically weak. As the children of Adam, every human person has a nature that is weakened. As a result, he is tempted and bound to fall prey to his own sinful inclinations and tendencies. Although a person is inspired by the desire to do good, he is not in heaven but rather on earth. Hence, due to the limitations of his own nature and personality, he may cause displeasure to his neighbor. Therefore, St. Vincent asks all his followers not to be anxious about all such circumstances, but rather be ready for experiences in which one may fail the other. The significant attitude a person must develop in all these circumstances is patience and kindness, because love is patient and kind. Thus, according to St. Vincent, despite one's failure in genuine practice of love towards one's neighbor, one must put on love and be reconciled with one another, once again beginning their life of relationship.

Is the living of the commandment of love a difficult task in my life? Do I acknowledge my weakness that makes me fail in living the commandment of love? Am I ready to reach out to my neighbor in reconciliation when I fail? Am I patient and kind towards my neighbor when he fails?

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy one of Israel: By waiting and by calm you shall be saved; in quiet and in trust your strength lies. (Is. 30: 15)

Jesus: Father's Gift to Humankind

As if enamored of the human person ... God promises him a Savior ... [and] offers his own divine Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ ... Oh ineffable gift of infinite love and mercy! ... Yes, Jesus is mine! ... God ... cannot take him away from me unless I give him up by committing a mortal sin (OOCC, XIII, pp. 121 - 124; GIL, XXII, pp. 83, 84).

In his spiritual life, St. Vincent Pallotti experienced Jesus as a gift from the heavenly Father given to every human person. The motive behind such a gift was God's love for humankind. St. Vincent, using the image of falling in love, said that God appeared enamored of the human person and he promised him a Savior to be sent in the fullness of time. He found no other reason than that of God's love for God giving humankind such a wonderful gift. Neither was there anything in a human person that could merit the Father's gift of his Son, nor was there any external obligation on the part of God that would cause him to go out of his way to bless humankind with this act of kindness. For St. Vincent, the Father's gift of Jesus was the gift of God's infinite love and mercy. Since the Father has given his Son, St. Vincent felt that Jesus was his own. God would never take Jesus away from him because he had given Jesus as a free and eternal gift to him. Hence, Jesus was his own forever. He did not want to lose Jesus from his life, but he could lose Jesus by his act of sinfulness. Only a life contrary to the teachings of Jesus had the power to separate St. Vincent from Jesus. His desire not to lose Jesus from his life and to possess him forever caused St. Vincent to live his life according to the Father's plan for him.

Do I acknowledge Jesus as the Father's gift given to me out of his infinite love for me? Am I grateful to God for the gift of his Son? Do I believe that by a life of sin I can lose Jesus from my life? Do I live a life according to God's plan in order to have the continued presence of Jesus in my life?

Can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'? (Jn. 10:36)

Correspondence: The Human Response to God's Gift of Jesus

[Always] try, assisted by divine grace, to correspond exactly to such graces with all the powers of your soul and the senses of your body. (OCCC, X, p. 49; STA, 221)

St. Vincent Pallotti, having received Jesus, the gift of the Father, wanted to respond to God in gratitude. For St. Vincent, the best way to be grateful to God was to accept the very life of Jesus as his own and live it in the best way possible. In other words, there must be a correspondence between the life of Jesus and that of St. Vincent. Such a correspondence would not be possible if it was not done in and through Jesus, because only through the mediation of Jesus, could he live a life of correspondence to that of Jesus. According to St. Vincent, the acceptance of the mediation of Jesus consisted of opening himself to God's grace, which was the gift of Jesus to him. When St. Vincent opened himself to the grace of God with all the powers of his soul, mind and body, Jesus would destroy in him everything that would prevent the proper correspondence and make him act as Jesus acted. Thus, all the energies of St. Vincent were focused on imitating Jesus, thereby offering to the Father the perfect correspondence to the life of Jesus in gratitude for the Father's gift of Jesus to him.

How do I respond to the Father for the gift of Jesus, his Son, to me? Is my response one of correspondence to the life of Jesus? Do I accept the mediation of Jesus in my reaching out to the Father in gratitude? Am I open to the grace of God in my imitation of Jesus?

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self ... and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4: 22 – 24)

June 7

Christian Perfection: The Work of God and the Human Person

My God ... I have said I will perform this or that act of virtue or good work, and then done nothing. Now, however, I place myself in your hands, my God. By myself I can do nothing; with you I can do anything. (OCC, X, p. 122; STA, 178)

A Christian's spiritual journey towards perfection is a long and arduous one. If a person attempts the journey by himself, he may find it hard-going and demanding. This was also the experience of St. Vincent Pallotti. Whenever he evaluated his spiritual life, he found that he failed to perform the good works he had planned to do. He often greatly desired to do many good deeds and meticulously prepared plans to accomplish them. But often he was not able to turn his desires into commitments and plans into activities. Hence, St. Vincent knew that left to himself he would not be able to succeed in any of his spiritual endeavors. Therefore, he realized that it is significant to take God into his confidence if he wanted to succeed in all his efforts. He often used to say that by himself he could do nothing, but with God he could do anything. With this confidence, St. Vincent did what was within his power to plan and accomplish what he wished to do in his spiritual life. Once he had done what was expected of him, he handed it over to God allowing him to do what was best for him. Hence, St. Vincent's journey of Christian perfection was the combined work of God and that of himself, a mutual interplay of divine-human encounter, based on a mutual bond of love between God and himself.

Do I make my spiritual journey all alone? Do I take God into confidence in living the demands of my spiritual life? Do I do my part before I seek the help of God in my spiritual journey? Do I accept the fact that Christian perfection is a combined work of God and the human person based on a bond of mutual love between them?

We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine ... But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. (Eph. 4:14 – 15)

Christian Perfection: A Personal Choice

[One must] strive always to go forward and constantly mature in holiness and in evangelical perfection according to the rules and the spirit of the institutes of the congregation. (OCCC, II, p. 57)

St. Vincent Pallotti was convinced that Christian perfection was a personal choice on the part of a Christian, for no one could make a person holy unless the person in question chose to become holy. When a person accepted God's invitation to be holy as God himself was holy, and strove consistently on a daily basis to progress in perfection, he would become mature in holiness. According to St. Vincent, following are some of the elements involved in the personal choice of holiness. First, one would achieve the degree of holiness he desired. Second, a person should plan out a roadmap for his spiritual journey and execute it within the context of his life situations. Third, a person must learn to strive for holiness very early in life. He should not postpone the task of becoming holy until later in life. Fourth, a person must live every moment of his life in the memory of his conversion and in anticipation of his death. This would make his personal choice to be holy more effective. Thus, for St. Vincent, when a person made a personal choice involving all the above-mentioned elements, without any doubt he would make progress in his spiritual life.

Do I believe that in order to live my life of perfection, I must make a personal choice to follow Jesus? Do I desire holiness? Do I work toward achieving holiness in the context of my daily life? Do I postpone the task of becoming holy? Do I live every moment of my life in memory of my conversion and anticipation of my death?

Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you. (II Pet.1: 10 - 11)

June 9

Christian Perfection: Doing God's Will Daily

Sanctify yourself: but sanctify yourself in the manner in which God wills your sanctification. . . . God wants you to be holy in the midst of the world, in community living . . . even in making a holiday and travelling. For sanctity consists in doing the will of God (OCL, II, 308, p. 24.).

St. Vincent Pallotti taught that Christian perfection consisted of doing God's will daily. Hence, in order to attain perfection it was not necessary for a person to flee from the world, but it could be achieved by his being in the world. St. Vincent was insistent that perfection must be pursued within a person's life situation and in the performance of his duties of life. According to him, a person must sanctify himself in the manner in which God desired his sanctification. It was St. Vincent's belief that God wanted a person to achieve holiness by being in the world and doing the many things he was expected to do in the world. In other words, a person should make use of every event of his life such as community-living, going on a holiday, traveling, leisure, taking rest when he was unwell and any other activity which God wanted him to do in his life to make him holy. For St. Vincent, a person could become a saint in and through all these activities, provided these actions implied doing the will of God.

Do I believe that Christian perfection consists of doing God's will daily? Do I acknowledge that I can achieve perfection by being in the world? Do I try to achieve holiness in and through the daily events of my life? Do I seek the will of God in my life finding God's will and doing it, thereby becoming holy?

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2)

The Most Blessed Sacrament

Jesus makes us an infinite gift in the most Blessed Sacrament. ... There are three principal things in Holy Communion: the memory of the passion of Jesus Christ, an abundance of grace, and the pledge of eternal life. (OCC; X, pp. 574 -575; STA, 148)

The most Blessed Sacrament is the mystery of God's love for us. In this mystery, Jesus, the Eucharistic Lord, gives a gift of himself to us. Hence, in the most Blessed Sacrament Jesus' continuous and real presence is made available to every believer. In this mystery of God's love in Jesus for us, the memory of the passion of Jesus Christ is recalled. Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist or express our adoration to the Eucharistic Lord, we recall and commemorate the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord. The Eucharistic mystery is the font of grace, as all the merits of the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord are communicated through the Eucharist. Therefore, when we participate in the Eucharistic celebration, we open our lives to the abundance of graces which are manifested to us through the resurrection of Jesus. Finally, Eucharist is the final pledge of Jesus in which we are guaranteed eternal life in the world to come. The life of St. Vincent Pallotti was centered on the Eucharist. For him, in the celebration of the mystery of the Eucharist, one encounters the total Christ, his passion is meditated upon, abundance of grace is granted to each participant and the pledge of future glory is also given.

Do I have the faith-filled understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist? While participating in the Eucharist do I experience the total Christ? Does the Eucharistic celebration help me to recollect the passion of Jesus, open me to experience abundance of his graces, and assure me of future glory?

Unless you eat the flesh of the Messiah and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him at the Last Day. (Jn. 6: 53)

Essentials of Christian Perfection

Through the supreme goodness of God, I know that perfection consists in carrying out [one's duties of daily life] exactly and with the right intention. (OCC, X, p. 111; STA, 170)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, Christian perfection consists of carrying out the duties of a person's daily life exactly and with the right intention. First, Christian perfection is to be lived not outside the context of a person's life, but rather it must be lived within the daily events of his life. Hence, a person whether he is a priest, a religious or a layperson, becomes holy in relation to the duties he is called to perform in the context of his state of life. Second, in order to become holy, he must do his duties exactly. The term "exactly" refers to the manner in which the duties must be performed. It implies that a person performs the action in the most proper way, as per the directives of scripture, teachings of the Church and the Law of the religious institute to which a person belongs. It also means that a person makes the right effort to accomplish the action. Third, a person must perform the duties of his life with the right intention. It means that the motive that moves the person to perform the action must be good and pure. Thus, the intention should not be evil, half-hearted, indifferent, or selfish, but rather it should be God-centered and other-centered. For St. Vincent, a person should fulfill these essential conditions in order to achieve Christian perfection.

Do I believe that Christian perfection is achieved in the context of the duties of my state of life? Do I perform the duties of my life with right and proper effort? Do I have the right intention in doing the duties of my life? Am I God-centered and other-centered in my actions?

Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention ... so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God. (1 Pet. 4:1 – 2)

June 12

Life of Perfection: A Universal Call

All are obliged to work towards the attainment of more sublime perfection. (OOCC, II, p. 4)

St. Vincent Pallotti did not expect every person to have the gift of transforming union in God, which involved God and the soul completely giving themselves to each other so that the soul was made divine and participated in God as much as possible in this life. For St. Vincent, such deepest level of union was not needed for Christian perfection. But he did expect that every person was able to seek the obligation to live the commandment of love. Hence, according to St. Vincent Pallotti, every person was called to be perfect. Jesus announced this universal call to holiness when he proclaimed the perfection of the heavenly Father as the ideal of Christian perfection. Therefore the universal call to perfection had its basis in the Lord's words. Besides, this obligation stems from human nature as image and likeness of God. As the image of God, a person was also an image of God's holiness and perfection. If a person does not become holy, then that person is constantly in opposition with his very self as the image of the perfection of God, because lack of holiness and being the image of God's perfection are contrary to each other. Hence, for St. Vincent, the call to perfection was universal, i.e., a call addressed to every Christian.

Do I accept that the call to holiness is a universal call and is addressed to all? Do I attempt to live the ideal of the holiness of God in my life? Do I live my vocation to be the image of the perfection of God here on earth?

Since we have these [God's] promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God. (II Cor. 7: 1)

June 13

Life of Imperfection: An Opposition to God's Designs

He who does not purposely devote himself to the attainment of sublime perfection is guilty of breaking a sacred obligation, which is inherent to his very nature, that aspect of which is the living image of God [who is Perfection]. (OCCC, II, p. 3)

The call to holiness is universal and is a call addressed to every person because by a person's nature he is called to be the image of God's perfection. Hence, giving oneself to a life of imperfection amounted to an opposition to the holy designs of God. For St. Vincent Pallotti, any person who purposely did not devote himself to the attainment of sublime perfection was guilty of breaking a sacred obligation inherent in human nature, that is, being the living image of God's perfection. If a person did live a life of imperfection, he automatically went against the plan of God for the human person to be God's image and the living image of God's perfection. Hence, St. Vincent constantly attempted to perfect himself in every possible way, because he did not want to live a life of contradiction with himself and at the same time go against the plan of God.

Do I live a life of imperfection and thereby fail to be the living image of God's perfection? Do I contradict my own nature by failing to be what God wants me to be? Do I make an honest effort to perfect myself so that I may not contradict my own nature and oppose the designs of God for me?

Whoever says, "I have come to know him" but does not obey his commandments is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. ((I Jn. 2: 4 –5).

Sin: The Roadblock to Perfection

Sin is a rebellion against God and a choice of the creature over the creator. ... Sin causes the sinner to become more worthless than nothingness ... Sin impedes a person from attaining his final end [the union with God]. (OCCC, XII, pp. 469, 438)

St. Vincent Pallotti visualized sin as a rebellion against God. It implied that a person chose a created thing instead of the creator. For him, the consequences of sin on the sinner were manifold. First, sin made the sinner act against his own nature as the image and likeness of God. Hence, sin distorted the image of God in the human person, thereby making the sinner worthless. Thus, because of his sinfulness a person lost his dignity as God's image. Second, sin besides destroying a person's own true nature, also became an aberration within the community. Every sinner affected the healthy life of the community and brought into it an element of darkness by his sin. The good spiritual health of a community depended a lot on the spiritual health of each of its members. Third, sin cut a person off from his relationship with God, and thereby prevented him from attaining the goal of union with God. By sinning, a person had decided to say 'no' to the invitation from God to participate in his life. Thus, sin affected the personal, horizontal and vertical dimensions of a person's life, and in the process alienated him from himself, others and God. When a person was not opened to himself, others and to God, there could be little progress in his spiritual life. Hence, St. Vincent viewed sin as a roadblock to the life of Christian perfection.

Do I consider sin as a roadblock to the life of perfection? Do I acknowledge the manifold consequences of sin in my life? Am I aware of the effects of sin in my relationship with myself, others and God? Do I recognize the danger of the threefold alienations sin brings in my life and its consequences on my spiritual life?

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins ... (I Jn.3: 4 - 6)

June 15

Destruction of Sin: The Beginning of Perfection

Let us strive to wage an incessant and bloody war against that accursed evil, sin. (OCL, I, 9, p. 25).

Because sin had such drastic consequences on the life of the sinner, as long as he remained in the state of sin, there could not be any spiritual progress in his life. Hence, St. Vincent Pallotti considered the destruction of sin as the beginning of perfection. The destruction of sin became the means to the attainment of perfection, because becoming perfect automatically implied sin permanently losing its power over a person's action. Thus, in St. Vincent's worldview, the destruction of sin was the key to giving a start to a person's spiritual life. For this reason, St. Vincent added the destruction of sin, along with the glory of God and salvation of souls, as the third important goal of his spiritual life. In his own life, he conquered sin with the power of God's grace and with the help of ascetical and religious practices. Even as a young priest, he strove constantly to wage war against sin and encouraged others to do the same, as he saw it as one of the major roadblocks to a life of perfection. As the minister of reconciliation he encountered the sinfulness of many. He was very compassionate to each of his penitents, always giving a sense of hope and letting them out of despairing situations.

Do I acknowledge that the destruction of sin will lead to the beginning of the life of perfection? Do I attempt to destroy sin from my life, thereby opening myself to a life of union with God? Though I dislike sin, am I compassionate towards those who sin due to their weaknesses?

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1: 8 – 9)

Personal Effort: Means to Perfection

Seek God and you will find him. Seek him in everything and you will find him in everything. Seek him always and you will find him always. (OCL, II, 382, p. 126).

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that unless he took his life of perfection seriously and put in a lot of effort to grow in sanctity, he would never be able to achieve holiness. Hence, he acknowledged the importance of personal effort as a means to perfection. He believed that if he sought God he would find him, if he sought God in everything he did he would find him in everything, and if he sought God always he would find him always, for Jesus said: "Seek and you will find." Therefore, seeking God in order to find him and become perfect like God were the main concerns of St. Vincent's life. For this reason he resolved to act always with greater perfection; he felt the urgency to seek perfection immediately, for he did not know if he would live tomorrow. He wished to do great things for God while he was still alive; he desired to act as if he were raised to a new life; and he was never distracted from God, constantly doing the will of God, which alone he sought in his life. In this manner, St. Vincent put in a lot of hard work to execute the spiritual roadmap he had made for his personal spiritual growth. He always had the satisfaction of God blessing his efforts to become holy like God himself.

Do I recognize that personal effort is an important element in my spiritual growth? Do I make honest efforts to grow in my spiritual life? Do I believe that if I seek God I will find him? Do I have a plan for my growth in spiritual life and am I earnest in executing it? Do I believe that God will reward me for my hard work?

See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. (Rev 22:12)

Grace of God: Means to Perfection

I believe that God in his goodness ... can infuse in me such an abundance of sanctifying grace that I will be able to [attain] ... highest degrees of sanctity and perfection. ... Jesus always knows how to make great saints out of men who, like myself, are great sinners. (OCCC, X, pp. 84, 86; STA, 81)

St. Vincent Pallotti, though he recognized the importance of personal effort in the attainment of perfection, also acknowledged the value of the grace of God. He knew that despite the great efforts he put in building up his spiritual life, he often found himself standing before the presence of God empty-handed with broken promises, failed good intentions and the like. Hence, he realized the value of the grace of God to fill in what was lacking in the personal effort he had expended. He believed that God in his goodness could infuse in him an abundance of grace, which in turn would help him to attain the highest degree of perfection which his human effort alone was never able to achieve. Similarly, he was convinced that God was so great that he could make a great saint out of him, though he was a sinner of the first rank. Thus, St. Vincent had unshakable confidence in God who by his grace was capable of raising him to the highest degree of perfection. This unconditional faith and trust in God's providence, coupled with the personal efforts he put in to make himself rich before God, helped St. Vincent Pallotti to become a great saint as we know him.

Do I recognize the value of the grace of God in my spiritual life? Do I believe in God's power to make great thing happen in my life? Do I have unshakable confidence and unconditional faith and trust in God's providence?

To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you. (II Thes. 1:11 –12)

Christ: The Teacher of True Love

We must love as Jesus Christ has loved us. But since Jesus Christ has loved us so much, that with infinite love he accepted death by being nailed to a cross. So, we ... must enter [this holy institute] to participate more perfectly in the practice of love towards our neighbor. (OOCC, II, p. 6)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, Jesus Christ is the true teacher of the way of love. The Sacred Heart of Jesus symbolizes the love Jesus has for humankind. Hence, according to St. Vincent, we must love as Christ has loved. The love of Christ must impel us to love God and our neighbor. Christ's love for us implied that he laid down his life for us by following the way of the cross. Hence, true love calls for laying down one's life for others, accepting sufferings on oneself for the sake of others and letting oneself go in order to let others in. Thus, true love of God and neighbor, as Jesus teaches us, involves a radical self-surrender. St. Vincent Pallotti visualized the religious institute one joins to serve God as a significant means to live a life of love towards God and neighbor. Hence, he advised anyone who wished to join the community he founded to enter it only if he planned to practice the love of God and neighbor in a perfect manner. Just as in the life of Jesus, in our life too, love must be the key motivating force that underlies every action we do in our life, however small it may be.

Do I acknowledge Jesus as the true teacher of love? Do I take the trouble to understand and experience Jesus in the aspect of love? Am I ready to lay down my life for the good and joy of others? Do I consider my particular way of life a means to love God and others in a perfect manner?

For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; ... He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (II Cor. 5: 14-15)

Love: A Surrender to God

My Jesus, I do not wish to leave you any more. ... Your infinite love and pity have chained you to me. Therefore, because you are faithful in your agreements, you must stay with me. You are all mine.
(OCC, X, p. 254; STA, 549)

St. Vincent considered God as the beginning and end of his life. Therefore, he earnestly wished that he performed every action in total agreement with the will of God. He often said in his writing that the holy will of God must be done despite the many difficulties that might come in its accomplishment. St. Vincent found a wonderful example of such a surrender of love in the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Hence, imitating her example of loving surrender, he joyfully embraced the will of God and readily fulfilled it. Thus, St. Vincent's life became a loving surrender of his will to that of God. As a result, he loved and desired only what God loved and desired. In everything he wanted to please God and to seek him alone. He never wanted to say 'no' to God, for he wished nothing but God. This surrender of love to God made St. Vincent Pallotti forget all his attachments to the world. His focus on God was such that nothing in the world could ever distract him. Living this attitude of loving surrender led St. Vincent to not only fulfill God's commandments and to accept any form of suffering in his life, but also to give himself to God completely without any reserve. His life consisted of saying a joyful 'yes' to God in total surrender and love.

Does my love for God make me surrender my life to God in everything? Do I consider God as the beginning and end of my life? Does my love for God make me more detached and give me the freedom to live for God alone? Am I able to say 'yes' to God in all circumstances and unconditionally?

I love you, O Lord, my strength. (Ps. 18: 2)

June 20

Value of the Present in Achieving Perfection

I think that I am deficient in the practice of the Holy Virtues. I would like to practice them more perfectly, because I tell myself: become a saint [today], for tomorrow you will die. (OCC, X, p. 522; STA, 130)

The time God has allotted to a human person consists of the past, the present and the future. Of these three, the present is the most significant, because the past and the future are understood only in relation to the present. The past can be viewed as the memory of the present, while the future can be considered as the hope of the present. Strictly speaking, memory and hope are not real because the former refers to the events that have already taken place while the latter points to the events that are yet to take place. What has already taken place and what is yet to take place are not as real as what is taking place, namely, the present. Hence, the present is the most significant time and a person must focus on it rather than wasting his energy on the past or the future. St. Vincent Pallotti realized the importance of the present, especially in a person's pursuit of perfection. He said that he intended to perform all acts of virtue in such a way that they would have the required perfection in the here and now. In other words, he directed all his energies in achieving perfection at the present moment rather than diverting his energies to feeling guilty for his past failure or anxious about his future action. While leaving the past and the future to God and focusing on the present state of his perfection, St. Vincent was able to reach higher stages of perfection.

Do I understand the value and importance of the present? Is my spiritual life focused on the present? Do I use my energies to build my spiritual life in the here and now? Do I waste my energies worrying about the past and the future?

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Mt. 6:34)

June 21

Freedom of Action: Essential to Perfection

I intend that all my acts ... shall come under a vow of the most sublime perfection. [But] I will perform my actions not just by reason of the vow, but because once performed in the proper degree of perfection, they will receive the merits of a vow. (OCCC, X, p. 263; STA, 246, 5)

St. Vincent Pallotti formulated his unrelenting quest for perfection into a vow and later extended this vow of perfection to the practice of all virtues. The purpose of formulating the vow was to gain the merits of performing a virtuous action through a vow. The vow was not an obligatory one, but it was a conditional vow which gained him the merit only after the action had been successfully performed. Though St. Vincent wished to gain the merit of performing an action through a vow, he did not want to perform it under an obligation which would take away his freedom of action. In other words, though he performed the act through a vow, he did not want to perform it by reason of the vow. Instead, he would perform the act freely with the proper degree of perfection, which would bring him the merits of performing an action through a vow. Thus, St. Vincent was very particular about every good act he did, with genuine freedom of action. There was no trace of compulsive attitude in the choices he made and the actions he performed, especially in his spiritual life. He never did actions because he had to do them but always did whatever he did because he chose to do it. Thus, it was choice and not compulsion that characterized the spiritual living of St. Vincent Pallotti.

Do I recognize the significance of freedom of action in my spiritual life? Am I compulsive about my spiritual progress? Do I perform actions because I have to or because I choose to? Is it compulsion or choice that is characteristic of my behavioral pattern?

As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. (I Pet. 2:16)

Faith: A Complete Abandonment to God

I wish nothing save God, God entire, [and] God alone. I wish, if possible, to suffer infinitely and to be despised for God. ... Oh, if I were granted to love [God] infinitely and suffer for [Him] ... infinitely. (OCCC, X, pp. 68 - 69; STA, 61)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the theological virtue of faith was that which sowed the seed of eternal life in a Christian, because by faith an intimate and personal relationship between God and a person was established. Besides, it was faith that directed one to a greater commitment to God and his word. Thus, faith instilled in a person genuine knowledge of God. As a person had the right knowledge of God, he was able to love God and hope in God. As a result, he was able to surrender and abandon his life to God. The faith St. Vincent Pallotti lived consisted not merely in practicing the presence of God and listening to him, but also living a life of total correspondence to the life of Jesus. This involved seeking God alone, suffering and being despised for God and loving him infinitely in imitation of Jesus. It also implied the perception of everything from God's perspective: trusting God like that of a child; being absorbed in God; resisting the insinuations of the devil; and engaging in works of charity. For St. Vincent, living a life of faith also entailed spending his whole life in diverse ways to propagate the faith on which his life was founded. In this manner, St. Vincent's faith in God amounted to a total abandonment of his life to God.

What is the nature of my faith-life? Does it consist merely of believing in some doctrines and dogmas? Is my faith a total abandonment of my life to God? How does my faith help me to live my Christian life? What do I do to propagate the faith which is the foundation of my life?

For his [Christ's] sake I have suffered the loss of all things, ... in order that I may gain Christ ... not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. (Phil 3: 8 - 9)

Created Things: Stepping Stones to God

Oh my God ... you have created all visible things. You have given me their use so that I may profit by knowing you, the omnipotent Creator of all things, and I may come to possess you ... in all your Being and Nature. (OCC, XIII, p. 53; GIL, VI, p. 20)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, all created things are stepping stones to God. They point to the nature and being of their creator. God created all visible things in the world. As creatures, they bear within themselves the characteristic elements of God. They in some measure bear the goodness and beauty of God. After creating them, God has given them to the human person for his use so that he may profit by knowing God, his creator, and come to possess him in his being and nature. Though God's divine and eternal nature is invisible in itself, it is revealed through diverse finite things he created and placed in the world. For this reason, every finite being in the world, by being what it is, manifests the infinite nature of the creator. This truth fascinated St. Vincent Pallotti and he attempted to reach out to God in and through every creature he encountered in the universe.

Do I consider created things as stepping stones to God? Do I have the faith to see the infinite being manifested in the finite and the tangible? Am I able to move from the known and the experienced to the unknown and the inexperienced?

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he [God] has made. (Rom. 1:20)

June 24

Practice of Presence of God: Means to Genuine Faith

In order to maintain the spirit of fervent and humble faith ... we must often recall the presence of God. (OCCC, II, p. 62)

The life of St. Vincent Pallotti was animated and directed by the spirit of faith. Revival of faith within himself and others was his main apostolic goal. A statement he often addressed to himself and others was “Let us revive our faith.” His lively faith helped St. Vincent to see God and his presence in every created being. As a result, he had cultivated a right and proper relationship with the things of this world. He saw them as a means to reach God. Hence, his faith made him unattached to the things of the world using everything he possessed for the glory of God. He constantly maintained a spirit of fervent and humble faith in his life. Besides living such a faith, he also taught the same spirit of faith to others. According to St. Vincent, the best way to maintain a genuine spirit of faith was the practice of the presence of God. Continual recalling of the presence of God would make a person totally open to God at every situation of his life. Regular practice of the presence of God would make the person see God in everything. This attitude of seeing God in everything would, in turn, make him totally dependent on God, finding in God his ultimate rest. In this manner, St. Vincent on one hand used his faith to experience God’s presence, and on the other hand used the practice of the presence of God to enliven and deepen his faith in God.

Do I maintain a spirit of humble and fervent faith in my life? Does my faith help me to have the right and proper relationship with the things of the world? How do I maintain genuine spirit of faith in my life? Do I use my faith to experience God’s presence and use the practice of God’s presence to deepen and enliven my faith?

My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. (Ex. 33:14).

A Life of Union with God

We must live our life with our mind and heart united and directed towards God ... [This is achieved] through external modesty ... and with the spirit of faith, by which we see God in everything, because in everything he is found in immensity. (OCCC, II, p. 21)

St. Vincent Pallotti lived his life with his mind and heart united and directed towards God. This union with God and the orientation towards God remained in him as a permanent state-of-being. He achieved this state of union with God, as he himself testified, by the practice of external modesty coupled with the cultivation of the spirit of genuine faith. The practice of external modesty consisted of the right use of all his senses. Moderation in the use of his senses helped St. Vincent to maintain a proper relationship with the things of this world. He never allowed the things of the world to control him or to affect the deeper concerns of his life. While giving the things of this world the attention they deserved, he was able to move beyond them to their creator. The practice of the spirit of faith helped St. Vincent to see the hand of God in everything that happened in his life. He knew that God had a personal plan for him in his general plan for the whole of creation. His endeavor in life was to discern this personal plan of God for him, accomplish it in the best way possible, and in the process complete his role in the realization of God's general plan for the whole of creation. In this manner, by the practice of external modesty and the cultivation of the spirit of faith, St. Vincent lived a life of perpetual union with God.

Do I attempt to live a life of union with God as a permanent state-of-being? Do I practice external modesty as a means to regulate my relationship with the things of the world? Do I cultivate a genuine spirit of faith in my life? Do I recognize and accomplish God's plan in my life?

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:28)

June 26

Faith Conquers a Person Totally for God

Faith conquers because it makes us accept what is in the creed. It conquers because it makes us ... observe the law of God ... It conquers because it makes us receive the sacraments. It conquers because of the comforts in the tribulations of life ... It conquers because of the eternal possession of heaven. (OCC, XII, p. 152)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed in the conquering power of faith. Faith makes us surrender ourselves totally to God and to place all our burdens of life in his hands. As a result, we are filled with the strength of the power of God, as we are not facing the struggles of our lives all alone but with him. With him at our side and never walking alone in coping with the troubles of life, we can become true conquerors of every difficult situation. According to St. Vincent, faith is capable of conquering any form of difficulties for the following reasons. First, faith conquers because it makes us accept those truths which are contained in our profession of faith. Second, it conquers because it makes us live the commandments of God and thereby attain eternal life. Third, faith conquers because it opens us to the life of grace through the sacraments of the Church. Fourth, faith conquers because it comforts us in our tribulations and especially at the moment of our death. Finally, faith conquers because it leads us to the eternal possession of heaven. Thus, for St. Vincent, faith gives life to our thoughts, words and deeds and strengthens our sense of purpose in doing whatever we are called to do, thereby allowing us to conquer every eventuality we face in our life.

Do I believe that I am able to cope with every situation in my life with the help of faith? Do I allow faith to conquer by opening myself to the strength God gives? Am I able to surrender the totality of my life into the hands of God?

For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. (Mt. 17:20)

Hope Overcomes Self-limitation

I know myself [to be] most inadequate to do [the duties of my state in life] ... because of my wretchedness. However, trusting [hoping] in divine goodness and helped by it, I feel certain that I shall able to do them. (OOCC, X, p. 111; STA, 170)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, hope depends on faith, because unless we know a person, we cannot hope in him. It is faith that brings us true knowledge of God, in whom we hope. The virtue of hope involves the expectation of reaching God and the prospect of receiving the necessary means to attain him. Thus, for St. Vincent, hope implied cultivating a profound trust in God's mercy, power and fidelity. St. Vincent believed that even if he were unfaithful to God, God would be faithful to him. As a result, he was never discouraged with his own limitations. Often he acknowledged his inadequacy to do the duties of his life in a proper manner because of his sinfulness. But this knowledge did not lead to him to despair or to give up and run away from life, because he hoped in the goodness of God to help him. Because of his hope in God's goodness and his assurance of help from God, he felt confident about accomplishing what was expected of him, despite his limitation. Hoping in God's goodness which was always available to him, and acknowledging God's fidelity to him despite his failures, St. Vincent placed himself on the solid rock of the God of hope to overcome his self-limitation and to become God-like in his actions despite his profound sinfulness.

Do I genuinely hope in God while facing difficult situations in my life? Do I acknowledge God's fidelity to me despite my infidelity? Do I believe in God's goodness and its availability to me? Am I able to overcome my self-limitation by hope?

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. (Heb. 10:23)

June 28

Possibilities of Hope

Everything is irreparable without confidence in God and everything is reparable with confidence in God. (Lett., 1099, p. 237)

St. Vincent Pallotti often used to say that everything was possible with confidence in God. Without confidence in God nothing was reparable, while with confidence in God everything was reparable. Thus for him the virtue of hope opened up diverse possibilities for his life. Animated by the virtue of hope, St. Vincent not only overcame his self-limitation with tranquility of mind, but he was also able to maintain a remarkable calmness of mind in every event that took place in his life. His expression was serene, his words were peaceful, and his dealings with others were courteous. Not only did he maintain a sense of confidence within his person, but he also radiated confidence in his dealings with others, thereby creating a sense of confidence in the persons whom he encountered in his daily life. In the oppressed, the discouraged and the disheartened, St. Vincent brought a ray of hope and helped them to cope with their difficult life situations courageously. Living his life with firm hope in God, St. Vincent, like St. Paul, carried on his life and every difficulty that came into his life with the thought that he could do all things in and through Christ who constantly strengthened him in whatever he undertook.

Am I able to maintain a calmness of mind in coping with difficult situations? Am I able to radiate confidence in my dealing with others? Am I capable of creating confidence in others? Do I trust that I can do all things with the help of God?

I can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens me.
(Phil. 4:13)

Guilt and Sorrow

I will ... [acknowledge] my faults, imagining myself to be on the cross with the good thief, prostrate on the ground with David, fallen on the road to Damascus with Paul, asking for pardon, and grieving with Peter, with Magdalene, and with all the other sinners.
(OCC, X, p. 14; STA, 26)

A human person has the tendency to fail, but failure is not the end of his Christian living. The most significant dimension of Christian life consists of not being caught up in the failure, but rather in re-initiating a person's life with God once again with the help of genuine sorrow. Sorrow is different from guilt. Guilt is a psychological state of mind which makes a person experience a sense of remorse for the act done, accompanied by a state of helplessness to get out of the situation. It is a childish reaction to the fact of a situation of failure. The guilt makes the sinner feel hopeless and makes his life meaningless. Judas Iscariot, the traitor of Jesus, experienced a sense of guilt for his failure which made him take his life. But sorrow is an adult reaction to the fact of failure. It involves three elements: the acknowledgement of one's failure; the belief in the power of God and oneself to get out of the situation of the failure; and the action of taking the necessary steps to re-establish one's relationship with God. St. Vincent Pallotti, like many other scripture persons such as Peter, Paul, David, the good thief and Mary Magdalene, understood the value of genuine sorrow which made them saints in spite of their limitations. He cultivated the penitential attitudes of these great scripture persons in his personal life, always acknowledging his failure before God.

Is it sorrow or guilt that dominates my Christian life? Do I learn from my failures? Do I practice a genuine spirit of penance? Do I cultivate the qualities of genuine sorrow? Do my failures help me to grow in the love of God?

You do not want penance ... You aren't interested in burned offerings before you on the altar. It is the broken spirit that you want ... A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not ignore.
(Ps. 51: 16-17)

June 30

Christian Life: Founded on Hope

I trust in you, O Lord! My hopes will not be in vain. (OOCC, X, p. 54; STA, 232)

The life St. Vincent Pallotti lived as a Christian and as a priest was totally steeped in hope, assisted by faith and charity. He was a man of hope and his life was founded on hope. In everything, he always conducted himself in such a way that nothing distracted him from God. Whether it was distress, misery or tribulation, he did not lose hope but rather stood firm on the foundation that is God, the rock of his life. If something went wrong in his spiritual endeavors, he corrected the state of affairs counting on God's power to make things different for him. If any of his apostolic endeavors did not go the way it should have gone, he placed it in the hands of God with the hope that God would provide, while meticulous in making the needed changes or modifications to his plans in order to make the task successful. When he found himself in his brokenness having lived a life of infidelity to God, without losing hope he would attempt to overcome his self-limitation with the mercy and compassion of God which was always available to him. In all situations, he would cry out to God saying that he hoped in him and prayed that his hopes would not be without meaning. Thus, the totality of St. Vincent's life was founded on hope in God.

Is my life as a Christian and as a religious founded on hope? Am I a person of hope? In any situations of my life, if events get out of hand do I lose hope in God?

Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. (I Pet. 1:21)

July 1

Interior Detachment

You must rejoice! ... You are called to a state ... [in which] you can cultivate ... the detachment of the things of the earth ... imitate more closely your Redeemer [and] possess many treasures for your stay in glory. (OCCC, XIII, p. 198)

St. Vincent Pallotti wanted every Christian to live the spirit of the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” He encouraged both the rich and the poor to practice the attitude of interior detachment. He admonished the rich, saying that even in the midst of their riches, they must be detached from material possessions. They are able to manifest their detachment from the plentiful possessions they have by being just and by giving their superfluous possessions to the poor generously. The poor should practice poverty in spirit by not feeling pity for their plight, accepting their state, and not lamenting against Divine Providence. By doing so, the poor are also attached to material things. He called, both the rich and the poor to examine themselves to know if they are chained in any way to material things. St. Vincent presented Jesus as the model for a person’s living a life of poverty. To those who are poor, he said that if they were feeling the rigors of their poverty, they must look at Jesus who was born poor, lived poor and died poor. To those who are rich, he said that they must learn from the attitude of Jesus, who, though he was rich, became poor in order to make us rich. Just as he detached himself from the heavenly glory to save humankind, the rich also must be detached from material goods and store up treasures for the kingdom of God.

Do I live the spirit of the first beatitude in my daily life? Do I cultivate the attitude of interior detachment in my daily life? Do I feel kinship with the poor and am I generous in my attitude towards them? If I am poor, do I feel pity for my state and lament against the Divine Providence? Do I imitate Jesus in his attitude of interior detachment?

Therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. (Lk. 14: 33)

Moderation in One's Action

I wish to mortify my sight by looking only at what I must look at. ... I will ... deal affably and gently with people. [I will be] always moderate in laughter, with a humble, modest and edifying look. ... I will ... be lively and quick in works but not anxious ... [and] do all things with a certain splendor of devotion that renders them pleasing in the eyes of God and venerable in the eyes of men. (OCC, X, pp. 540 -541; STA, 103).

Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher said: "Virtue lies in the middle." In saying this he proposed 'the middle-path' as the means to total self-fulfillment. Even for a true follower of Jesus, the principle of moderation is the sure way to sanctity. It consists of choosing the mean between the extremes. The extremes, that is, too much of anything or too little of anything, do not help a person to ascend to the path of holiness. St. Vincent Pallotti lived a moderate and balanced life which ultimately made him a holy person in the sight of God, and an example for all those who came in touch with him. For him, living the principle of moderation called for the following: the use of one's eyes to look at only those things that one must look at; dealing lovingly and gently with people one encounters; portraying a humble, moderate and edifying look; living a lively and a zealous apostolic life; never getting caught up with situations that make one anxious about life; and living a life of devotion which made him acceptable before God and venerable in the sight of God's people.

Does the age-old principle of moderation guide my spiritual life? Am I moderate in my look, speech and my thought? What are some of the concrete measures that I must take in order to live the principle of moderation in my everyday situation?

You should practice tenderhearted mercy and kindness to others. Don't worry about making a good impression on them, but ready to suffer quietly. Be gentle and be ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember, the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive others. (Col. 3: 12-13)

Value of Suffering

We must always be prepared for tribulations. We must embrace them lovingly because they are necessary to deepen our virtue, make us know God and ourselves. [Hence] sufferings are precious; they must be esteemed and desired. (OCL, II, 397, p. 144)

St. Vincent Pallotti recognized the value of suffering in Christian life. Without it, the life of a Christian has no meaning. A Christian is basically called to live the very life of Christ. One cannot think of living the life of Christ without expecting suffering. Hence, if a person wants to live the life of Christ, he cannot think of it without including suffering. Realizing this truth, St. Vincent advises his followers that they must be always prepared for tribulations and hardships in their life. A Christian should have a mindset that is ready for facing and coping with suffering on a daily basis. For St. Vincent, if a person has within himself this basic openness towards suffering, he is able to accept it in his life. He recognizes its necessity and its value for his Christian living. He understands that the sufferings of daily life are vital for his own growth in a way of life that is virtuous. The situations of pain and hardship often make a person seek God and his assistance in his life. In this manner, the experience of suffering makes a person have greater knowledge of God and of himself. He comes to know who God is, what his plans are, and how he, as a human person, is dependent on God for everything. Thus, according to St. Vincent, suffering teaches the human person true knowledge of God and of himself, thereby directing the human person towards God. Therefore, he concludes that suffering is precious and should be esteemed and desired.

Do I value the importance of the suffering in Christian life? Do I have within myself a readiness to accept suffering? Do the sufferings of my life make me live a virtuous life? Do my sufferings open me to the knowledge of God? Does my suffering give me the right perception of myself and direct me towards God?

We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance. (Rom. 5: 3)

July 4

Preferring God's Glory

I ... desire to see God glorified and myself forgotten ... [Hence] the most efficient way to promote the greater glory of God, [and] to enter into his interests ... [is] to forget one's self. (OCC, X, pp. 218 - 219; STA, 518)

In setting his priority, a Christian who is called to live the very life of God here on earth must prefer God and his glory rather than his own selfish interests. St. Vincent Pallotti often said that he wished to see God glorified and himself totally forgotten. According to him, the most effective means of promoting the greater glory of God was to enter into his interests. Entering into the interests of God and working for it implied that we should become his “business ambassadors.” In other words, the business of God becomes our own and our own interests become that of God. For St. Vincent, the very fact that we opted to make God's interests our priority in life automatically implied that our interests are not more important than God's interests. As a result, all our interests had to be viewed from the perspective of God's interests and must serve his interests. St. Vincent believed that if a person lived this attitude, he would be able to give God the greatest glory. This was an endeavor he constantly attempted to undertake in his life.

Do I make the glorification of God my life's task? Am I a real “business ambassador” for God? Have I made an option to make God's interests my own, even if it means that I must give my interests a second place?

O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.
(Ps. 63:1)

Accepting One's Self and Situation

If you are anxious to see the strength of your passion and the weakness of your spirit, do not get discouraged. ... You must place your confidence in God ... [and say]: 'God has put me in this state [and] ... in his fidelity he will readily grant me the grace to profit from it. (OOCC, XIII, pp. 201, 202)

St. Vincent Pallotti constantly faced the reality of his own personality with its perfection and limitation. He had a perspective that was practical and real when it came to accepting himself in relation to the situation in which he found himself. Whether it was in relation to his spiritual life or apostolic endeavors, he had the gracious attitude of accepting everything as it happened in his life without anxiety and worry. He believed there were elements of his personality that could not be totally altered, and he needed to struggle with these weaknesses, counting on God's grace to help him. Similarly, he knew that there were situations in the realm of his apostolate that could not be changed, and he needed to learn patience to cope with such situations. Thus, both in his personal life as well as apostolic life, he practiced adaptability and flexibility in coping with these unalterable dimensions of his life. He often advised his followers not to worry when they were faced with difficulties of this nature. He exhorted them saying that the knowledge of their limitation should make them raise their hearts to God in prayer, and dispose themselves to divine inspiration which would help them cope with these situations. St. Vincent asked them to have courage if they found themselves in difficult situations. He suggested that instead of worrying, they should remind themselves that God knew the state they were in. He would give them all the grace they needed, and they should carry on living the situation with faith and hope in God's power.

How do I cope with the positive and negative dimensions of my personality? What is my attitude towards difficulties that arise in my apostolate? Do I trust in God's providence and inspiration in coping with them? Do I give my best and leave the rest to God while handling difficult situations?

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. (I Cor. 4:3)

July 6

Suffering: Sign of God's Presence

Anyone who finds himself in tribulations ... must console himself, as tribulation is a sure sign that God is with him. (OCL, III, 545, p. 22)

The presence of suffering in the life of a person, for St. Vincent Pallotti, is a sure sign of the presence of God in his life. Hence, he advised his followers that when suffering comes into their life, they should neither be discouraged nor run away from it, but they must console themselves, because in and through the tribulations they experience, God makes his presence real in their lives. St. Paul, convinced of this truth, stated that while the cross is a folly to the gentiles and a scandal to the Jews, it is a means to experience the power and glory of God to those who believe. Thus, he reiterates the cross as the means through which a person can experience the powerful presence of God. A person may not understand this truth rationally, but he needs a strong faith to recognize and accept this truth. This is clearly manifested in the life of Jesus. Accomplishing the will of his Father implied that Jesus had to accept suffering and death on the cross. It was a difficult task for Jesus, as a human person, to handle. Jesus struggled to accept the will of the Father during his agony in the garden. Finally with the help of prayers he offered, he was strengthened in faith and he accepted death on the cross freely and willingly. From the moment Jesus took the decision to carry out the will of the Father until the moment he accomplished it by his dying on the cross, Jesus experienced the presence of his Father. Despite a few desperate moments, Jesus knew that he could die having entrusted his spirit to the Father. For St. Vincent, a Christian needs to accept suffering like Christ.

Do I acknowledge the suffering as a means to experience the presence of God? Is the cross a means to experience the power and glory of God? Do I have a strong faith to see the presence of God in the sufferings of my daily life? Do I cope with my sufferings of life with a Christ-like attitude?

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? (Rom. 8: 32)

July 7

Jesus: Our Strength in Suffering

Jesus has sacrificed the totality of himself by embracing the tribulations for your sake. Therefore, for love of Jesus accept any sacrifice, by suffering every tribulation. (OIOC, XIII, p. 609)

St. Vincent Pallotti suffered in his own life. For him, suffering meant physical pains, illnesses, persecution by others, slander, misunderstanding, calumny, betrayal, false accusations, or any other form of physical and mental agony. He had a share of all these during his lifetime here on earth. From his own sufferings, he knew that they were often hard to bear, and a person could easily give up his journey towards God because of the weight of his sufferings. Therefore, he advised his followers that they must keep their eyes fixed on the crucified Jesus and learn from him how they must cope with the sufferings of everyday life. St. Vincent always reminded them that their sufferings were of a lesser degree in comparison with the hardships Jesus suffered. He suggested to them that they must study Jesus, in his sufferings as if he were a textbook of suffering. The daily reading and reflection on the passion of Jesus would make them understand the extent of Jesus' suffering. Such an understanding would give them the needed courage to cope with the diverse sufferings they faced in their lives. St. Vincent was convinced that only from Jesus could a person receive the strength, the grace, and the fortitude needed to encounter his suffering and come out victorious. For Jesus, by accepting the cross, living through it, and rising above it at his resurrection, had overcome the world with its pains and sorrows. Hence, Jesus, the Victorious One, is an answer to our daily sufferings.

Which are some of the sufferings I face in my daily life? Weighed down by my sufferings, do I give up my journey towards God? Do I turn to Jesus, the Crucified, in the moments of my daily troubles? Do I take time daily to reflect on Jesus' sufferings? Does the passion of Jesus help me to face my suffering, and become victorious in coping with them?

I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (Jn. 16: 33)

July 8

Spirit of Sacrifice

O most holy Trinity ... [grant me] the greatest infinite pain, torment, tribulations, calumnies and martyrdom. Let me suffer infinitely; let me even be despised for you. (OOCC, X, pp. 67 - 68; STA, 60)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered the spirit of sacrifice as a significant element of Christian life. It involves self-renunciation and stripping away of all that is opposed to Christ. It implies mortification and perfect endurance in suffering. The spirit of sacrifice, besides bringing about purification of the self and reconciliation with others, orients a person to Christ and to his will. St. Vincent Pallotti wished that his life were characterized by a life of perfect sacrifice and perpetual crucifixion. He desired and prayed for infinite pain, torments, tribulations, calumnies and martyrdom, in order that he might become the living and perfect image of the crucified Jesus. Another reason for his desire for pain and hardship in his life was his wish to live the life of a true penitent. For St. Vincent, a life of sacrifice was an integral part of his following of Jesus. He was always ready to embrace it with courage and determination, and live it joyfully. Living in imitation of Jesus, the living stone, rejected by many, St. Vincent was willing to accept a life characterized by suffering, pain and hardships.

Do I have in my life a genuine spirit of sacrifice? Am I ready to accept a life of perfect sacrifice and perpetual crucifixion? Do I have the right attitude that marks the life of a true penitent?

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings ... and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house ... to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2: 4 - 5)

July 9

Crucified Jesus: The Model of Self-sacrifice

In becoming flesh for us, the Son of God ... came into the world and lived a life of perfect sacrifice from the moment of his birth until the moment of his death ... [Hence] Our Lord Jesus Christ ... [is] our divine model of self-sacrifice. (OCC, II, p. 7)

Jesus crucified, for St. Vincent Pallotti, is the perfect model of self-sacrifice, because by becoming a human person, Jesus sacrificed himself completely so that humankind may have life in him. The totality of Jesus' life, from the moment of his birth to that of his death, was a perfect sacrifice offered to the Father on behalf of humankind. Jesus, by living the spirit of self-sacrifice to the fullest especially in his suffering and death, brought about the redemption of every human person. Hence, a Christian, in order to merit the fruits of Christ's redemption, must be united to the life of sacrifice and suffering Jesus lived. Living in imitation of Jesus Christ, the divine model of self-sacrifice, a person opens himself to the life of divine grace. It is Christ's self-sacrifice that gives meaning to the suffering which a person is called to endure in his life. Christ's example of facing suffering must help one to follow in his footsteps. The patience with which Christ suffered must inspire a person to accept sufferings and hardships in his life. St. Vincent Pallotti lived in imitation of Christ crucified and achieved a great degree of self-sacrifice. He yearned to suffer with Christ that he might share in his glory.

Do I imitate the spirit of sacrifice practiced by Jesus, the crucified Lord? Do I make the spirit of sacrifice I live in my life redemptive? Do the sufferings I face in my life open me to divine grace? Do I patiently cope with hardships and suffering in my life?

Because he [Christ] himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested. (Heb. 2: 18)

July 10

Cross of Jesus: A Means to Greater Joy

According to our faith, one must rejoice [at his sufferings], because the more one experiences tribulation the greater the joy and the glory are given. (OCL, I, 194, p. 290)

St. Vincent Pallotti found in the cross of Jesus the true means to achieve genuine happiness and joy. When a person is struggling with his crosses of daily life, it is the cross of Jesus that can give him a sense of encouragement and help him to carry on his life despite the crosses. Hence, St. Vincent advised his followers to look up to Jesus when they were faced with the crosses of everyday life. When a person places the totality of his life at the foot of the cross of Jesus, both the example as well as the grace of Jesus would help that person to accept and live out his crosses joyfully. Christ made every Christian an heir to the Kingdom of God by destroying his sin through his death on the cross. Hence, in order to make oneself worthy of the Kingdom of God, one must become more and more the image of Jesus crucified. Thus, St. Vincent was convinced of the value of the cross to make us truly joyful, both in one's life here on earth and his life in the world to come. Therefore, he advised his followers to carry a crucifix with them always in order to remind them of their need to carry the cross of Jesus in their heart.

How do I accept the crosses that come in my life? Does the cross of Christ give me the strength to accept and live the crosses of my daily life joyfully? Do I recognize the value of the cross in order that I might become worthy of the Kingdom of God?

My eager expectation and hope is that ... with all boldness, now as always, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. (Phil. 1: 20)

July 11

Meditation on the Passion of Jesus

Meditation, on the passion of Jesus and the sorrows of Mary, is a treasure superior to all other spiritual treasures. (OCCC, II, p. 331)

St. Vincent Pallotti urged Christians of every walk of life, that is, the priests, the Religious and the laypersons, to meditate on the passion of Christ crucified as often as possible. For him, such a meditative reflection on the sufferings of Jesus and that of Mary is a superior form of spiritual means that would take man to genuine Jesus-experience. St. Vincent Pallotti often spent time contemplating Jesus in his passion. He used what he called the “Clock of Passion,” which is a brief reflection on the passion of Jesus at each hour of the day, as a means to keep in touch with the sufferings of Jesus. Besides, he spent many hours kneeling in prayer before the crucifix in his room. He also undertook diverse bodily disciplines in order to carry in his body the sufferings of Jesus. Thus, St. Vincent wished to re-live Christ’s life of self-sacrifice by enduring sufferings and companionship with the Lord.

Do I take time to meditate on the passion of Christ? Do my meditations on the passion of Christ help me to encounter the suffering Jesus? Do I re-live Christ’s self-sacrifice by enduring sufferings and hardship?

Be diligent in these matters be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone. (I Tim. 4: 15)

July 12

Perfect Sacrifice: A Life of Universal Mortification

The life of perfect and continuous sacrifice in a person consists in the most perfect, constant and universal practice of mortification of all evil passions. (OOCC, II, p. 7)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, it is the intention of a person when performing an action that gives that action its moral nature of being good or evil. Hence, passions of a person are not necessarily evil, but it is he who makes them good or evil depending on the manner in which he copes with them. Passions are spontaneous inner reactions in a person when he is faced with a concrete situation. A person with right attitude and with a sense of discipline can use them as powerful forces for accomplishing good in his life. A person can stop his passions from bringing about evil in his life by the practice of counter virtues. Self-centeredness is what makes one's passions produce evil in his life. Hence, St. Vincent admonished his followers to root out self-centeredness from their lives by the practice of self-abnegation and love of humiliation and subjection. The practice of these virtues would help a person to check his excessive love of self, which in turn would free one's passions from leaning towards evil. Thus, for Vincent Pallotti, living a life of perfect sacrifice like that of Christ requires a perfect, constant and universal mortification of oneself, thereby curbing the passions from tending towards what is evil.

Are the motivations that guide my life genuine and good? Am I in touch with my passions? Do I allow them to produce evil in my life? Do I have an excessive love of myself? Do I counter my self-centeredness by the practice of contrary virtues? Am I ready for a life of universal mortification?

Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, and the greed that is idolatry. (Col. 3: 5)

July 13

Life of Sacrifice: A Self-emptying

I will try to establish in myself a great poverty of spirit so that I will regard even the least inclination toward what is not a total stripping of the intellect and will as my mortal enemy. (OCCC, X, pp. 6 - 7; STA, 3)

Every Christian is called to commit himself to the Lord perfectly and generously. This requires that a person break his self-centeredness and open himself to a life that is God-centered and other-centered. Making this option to live his life for God and for others implies that a person lives a genuine life of sacrifice. Living such a life calls for emptying one's self. In order to live a life of true self-emptying, a person must live the true spirit of poverty. He must be ready to strip off the self-centered tendencies of intellect and will. St. Vincent Pallotti considered intellect and will as his mortal enemies, not because they were evil in themselves, but because they were capable of leading him to egotism and pride, which runs contrary to the spirit of sacrifice. He constantly attempted to keep a check on his intellect and will so that he would be able to know what God wanted of him and thereby choose it and live the will of God.

Is my commitment to the Lord perfect and generous? Do I opt to live a life that is God-centered and other-centered? Am I ready to embrace a life of sacrifice by the practice of true self-emptying? Do my intellect and will lead me away from God? Do I keep a check on my intellect and will in order to know and choose what God wants of me?

Now those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5: 24)

July 14

Christian Life: A Miracle of God's Mercy

My God, my life is a continuous miracle of your divine mercy, and the greatest miracle is precisely that by which ... you work in me, transforming me ... perfectly in yourself ... as though I had never placed an impediment in your way. (OCC, X, p. 230; STA, 543)

In his infinite mercy and love, God wished to enter into a genuine relationship of love and friendship with the human person. Thus originated the Christian life in a person. It came about not because he deserved it, but because God wanted it. Hence, Christian life began with God's initiative. St. Vincent Pallotti considered his life as a Christian a miracle of God's mercy for the following reasons. First, though undeserving, God invited St. Vincent to belong to him at his own initiative because he loved him. Second, God sustained this relationship even though there were times of unfaithfulness on the part of St. Vincent. Third, God worked in and through St. Vincent both in his own personal life and in the mission with which he had been entrusted. Fourth, God transformed St. Vincent and made him a perfect image of himself. Finally, God does all these things with St. Vincent as if he had never placed any impediment against the accomplishment of God's plan for him, even though the reality was the opposite. Hence, for Vincent Pallotti, his life as a Christian was a miracle of God's mercy. Recognizing his life as a merciful gift from God, St. Vincent spent it generously for God's glory and the happiness of others.

Do I acknowledge that my life as a Christian is a gift from God? Do I recognize that it is given to me even though I do not deserve it? Do I make an honest effort to grow in this life, or place impediments due to my weaknesses? In which way I express my gratitude to God, for the gift of my Christian life?

Your compassion is great, O Lord; according to your edicts give me life ... See how I love your precepts, Lord; in your kindness give me life. (Ps. 119: 156, 159).

July 15

Mortification: A Dying to Selfishness

Through the spirit of sacrifice ... [one] must live perfectly dead to the world and to himself, so that he may possess those spiritual dispositions which make him say: "The life I now live is not my own, it is Christ living in me." (OCC, II, p. 547)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered mortification as death to selfishness in the life of a Christian. For him, dying to himself was necessary for authentic Christian living. By the phrase "dying to oneself," St. Vincent meant that a person was totally and completely mortified, i.e., he was completely free from all forms of selfishness. According to St. Vincent, death to a person's selfishness was brought about through external mortification which consisted of performing external acts of penance. But the value of external mortification consisted in the internal mortification, which St. Vincent referred to as 'the mortification of the spirit.' The practice of internal and external mortification, i.e., by dying to selfishness, a person was able to cultivate the spiritual dispositions of Christ which would make him experience the life of Christ. When this happened, a person felt that the life he lived was no longer his own, but Christ himself was living in him and acting through him. Living a life of true mortification, i.e., dying to his selfishness, St. Vincent often expressed his inner yearning that God would destroy his life and would make Christ's life to be his life.

Am I ready to die to my selfishness? Do I practice both external and internal mortification? Do I attempt to cultivate the spiritual dispositions of Jesus in my life? Do I allow Christ to take hold of my life and live it in and through me?

He [Christ] indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (II Cor. 5: 15)

Practice of Spiritual Cheerfulness

You must manifest joy and spiritual cheerfulness in your faces, in your modest looks, in your mutual interactions with the members of the community, especially with the strangers and many people for whom you work in the sacred ministry. (OCC, II, p. 164)

St. Vincent Pallotti stressed the significance of the actual practice of the virtues of cheerfulness and joy. He wished that every member of the Society he founded would live these two virtues, both in spirit and in practice. He gave them some practical suggestions as to how this virtue must be manifested in the life of the members. According to him, a person must manifest spiritual cheerfulness and joy on his face, for his face is the screen of his inner self. In a person's daily interactions, both within the community where he lives and with other people whom he encounters at his sacred ministry, through his modest looks, pleasant dealings, unassuming conversation, and genuine acceptance of others' perspectives and views, he must manifest holy joy and spiritual cheerfulness. For St. Vincent, the spirit of melancholy and sadness must be rooted out of the life of an apostle at all cost. At the same time, he did not want the practice of these two virtues to appear artificial and superfluous. He suggested some restraints as well. One must deal affably and gently with people, sufficiently serious without pretension, pleasant in his interactions without artificiality, moderate in his laughter, and modest, humble and edifying in his look. St. Vincent Pallotti himself was a great example for living these virtues in his life. Despite being so busy in his life, he made it a point to bring joy and happiness into the lives of all he encountered daily. His motto was "to serve the Lord with gladness."

How do I live the virtues of cheerfulness and joy in actual practice in my life? Do I give myself to the spirit of melancholy and sadness? Do I avoid all forms of artificiality in living these two virtues? Do I serve the Lord with gladness?

For though the fig tree blossom not nor fruit be on the vines ... Yet I will rejoice in the Lord and exult in my saving God. (Hab. 3: 17 – 18)

July 17

Suffering: A Sign of Living a Christ-like Life

Let us give thanks to our heavenly Father, even if we are persecuted ... Indeed this is one of the Father's most precious gifts, in that, with the persecutions, he deigns to make us similar to his beloved Son, in whom rest our consolations. (OCCC, III, p. 54)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the suffering a person experiences in his life is an external sign of the fact that his life is similar to that of Jesus. Hence, in order to be like Christ, he must be ready to accept all forms of sufferings in his life. St. Vincent often thanked God for the persecutions and sufferings he encountered in his life. He considered sufferings as the Father's most precious gifts. For him, a person's ability to crucify himself perfectly is an extra favor God bestows on him. St. Vincent desired to suffer meritoriously and in a heroic manner. By way of meditation, he identified himself with all the mental and physical sufferings Jesus and Mary experienced in their life here on earth. He wished to participate in their sufferings by accepting the sufferings that came in his life in the same manner Jesus and Mary accepted their sufferings in their lives. Suffering, for St. Vincent, is not an end in itself, but rather it is a beneficial tool. It is a means through which he could prove his love for God. He often prayed that he may be allowed to suffer only to love God and that his suffering would be a sign of living a Christ-like life. St. Vincent also believed that suffering would help him to become a great saint in a few moments, even though he was unworthy of so great a grace.

Do I acknowledge that sufferings I encounter make my life similar to that of Jesus? Do I accept the sufferings that come in my life with gratitude to God? Does the example of Jesus and Mary in accepting sufferings in their life inspire me to accept my crosses? Do I accept that sufferings of daily life are tools to holiness of life?

[We are] always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. (II Cor. 4: 10)

July 18

Joy: Consequence of Accepting Suffering

My Jesus ... [give] me the grace to feel joy in contempt, calumnies, oppressions and sorrows ... My Jesus, may perfect participation in your suffering life ... be my greatest enjoyment. (OCC, X, p. 220; STA, 519)

Suffering is an essential aspect of Christian life because Jesus Christ, the founder of Christian Faith, took the path of the cross to redeem humankind. Hence, it is important that a Christian learns to accept suffering in his life. At the end of his agony, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus accepted the cup which his heavenly Father had allotted for him. Jesus felt a sense of peacefulness after he accepted the suffering. There was a sense of joy with which he moved to fulfill his Father's plan for him, even though it was bitter, painful and not easy to accomplish. St. Vincent Pallotti was conscious of this truth in his life. For him, joy was the immediate consequence of a person accepting suffering in his life. He desired and longed for suffering in his life. He often prayed for the grace to feel joy in contempt, in being oppressed, in calumnies and in sorrows. He considered that it was a privilege to suffer because by accepting our suffering we participate in the suffering of Jesus. Thus, for St. Vincent, suffering for the sake of Christ was the greatest enjoyment.

Do I accept suffering as an important aspect in my life as a Christian? Do I consider suffering as a privilege when accepted in imitation of Jesus' suffering? Do I recognize that suffering is the pathway to true joy?

Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves. (Ps. 126: 5 – 6)

July 19

Mortification: A Condition for Life in Christ

The man who does not mortify himself lives like a beast and becomes worse than one because he becomes a slave to the passions ... He who mortifies himself out of love for God disposes his soul to receive the treasures of divinity. (OCC, XIII, pp. 435 - 436).

In St. Vincent Pallotti's perception of Christian life, mortification is a *conditio sine qua non* for a true life in Christ. A Christian's obligation to live the life of Jesus in its completeness calls for dying to himself in imitation of Jesus. Transformation and maturation of a Christian into Christ can come about only through mortification, just as the death of the grain of wheat is a necessary condition for it to become a fruit-bearing plant. Hence, St. Vincent compares a person who is a slave to his passions and has no mortification in his life, to a beast. On the other hand, the person who mortifies himself out of love of God opens himself to receive the treasures of divinity. In St. Vincent's perception, the readiness to accept a life of mortification is very important. Therefore, he did not allow a person to join the community he founded unless he had the right dispositions to take upon himself a life of sacrifice until his death. For St. Vincent, if a member of his community does not have this mind-set of accepting a life of mortification, he is not only an occasion of great harm, but also an occasion of great shame.

Do I accept the need for mortification in my life? Do I acknowledge a Christian's obligation to live a life of mortification? Do I believe in the value of dying in order to grow into maturity in Christ? Do I have the readiness to accept the life of mortification in order to open myself to the life of grace?

For Christ did not please himself; but as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you fall upon me." (Rom. 15: 3)

July 20

Mortification: Being Generous Towards God

I intend to humble my body ... humiliate and mortify my spirit, which has rebelled against God. By doing this, the powers of my soul, the feelings of my body, and everything in me may contribute in giving glory to God. (OCCC, X, p.74; STA, 67)

In St. Vincent Pallotti's perspective, a life of mortification consists of being generous towards God. A person is stingy towards God when seeking his own interests becomes the main goal of his life. Hence, St. Vincent admonished his followers to be generous towards God by living a life of total mortification. Such a life calls for giving up all excesses involving one's passions, opinions, will, imagination, senses, and the use of created things. Living a mortified life in all these areas of a person's life does not mean that he must go to extremes. St. Vincent Pallotti instructed his followers to avoid extremes in the practice of mortification and recommended a path of moderation. Though he was rather strict with himself, he was considerate towards himself in the practice of mortification because of his health. He always advised discretion in doing penance. For mortification should not be considered as an end in itself, but rather it is only a means to growing in the life of God. It is a significant way of showing one's attitude of being generous towards God by seeking him and others instead of one's self.

Do I consider mortification as an act of generosity towards God? Am I stingy towards God due to my self-centered actions? Am I ready to give up all forms of excesses in my daily living? Do I live the path of moderation in living a life of mortification? Do I consider mortification as a means to genuine Christian life or an end to itself?

When you have done all you have been commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do."
(Lk. 17: 10)

July 21

Mortification Produces True Apostles

They will be in the Congregation ... [who] are perfectly detached from the world, live always in perfect imitation of Jesus, and cooperate in the works for the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. (OCC, II, p. 57)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a life of mortification lived in imitation of Jesus, besides making Christians grow in the life of God, can also make them into apostolic men and women who are fit to work for the glory of God and the salvation of God's people. In living a life of mortification, a Christian learns to prefer the good of others and that of God rather than his own. In other words, a mortified person does not seek himself, but rather God and others. Thus, he is God-centered and other-centered rather than self-centered. The qualities of other-centeredness and God-centeredness that is characteristic of a person deeply rooted in mortified living would make him full of the desire to make God known and loved to every human person in the world. Hence, he would constantly think of ways and means through which God may be made known to others and others could be helped to come into communion with God. Thus, a mortified life nurtures in a person genuine apostolic spirit, which gives dynamism to all that a person does. In this manner, genuine mortification can make a person an effective apostle. St. Vincent Pallotti's life of mortification filled him with the apostolic dynamism that marked his life on a permanent basis.

Do I recognize the power of the mortified life to make me a true apostle? Does my life of mortification free me from all forms of selfishness and help me to seek the glory of God and salvation of God's people? What are some of the concrete measures I plan to do in order to make God known and loved? Do I nurture the apostolic spirit in me by living a truly mortified life?

For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (II Cor. 4: 11)

July 22

Coping with One's Failures

When I realize that I have failed in one of my resolutions, I will perform an act contrary to the omission committed, an act of sorrow for the defect with which I was able to darken the purity of perfection. (OICC, X, p. 6; STA, 2)

As long as a Christian remains a human person in the world, he is bound to fail despite his good intentions and resolutions to act in the best way possible. Being aware of this truth, St. Vincent demanded humility and confidence on the part of the one who failed in coping with his failures. A person needs humility to accept honestly his failure. For St. Vincent, discouragement when confronted with failure is a sign of pride, as the person does not want to accept the fact that he is weak, limited, and that he has failed. When a person accepts the situation of his failure in all truthfulness, instead of giving himself to despair and discouragement, he can open himself to the grace of God with confidence. With God's grace he can begin rebuilding his spiritual life once again. Hence, St. Vincent admonishes his followers not to be agitated when they fail, but to learn to be sorry in all humility and hopefully move towards God's throne of grace, because God resists the proud and gives his grace to the humble. A humble person will always be ready to begin again. St. Vincent applied the same principle in his own life as well. He said that if he failed in one of his resolutions, in all humility he would acknowledge his failure before God with deep sorrow in his heart. Then he would perform an action that is contrary to the omission he committed.

How do I cope with failures in my spiritual living? Do I accept my failures in true humility? Am I genuinely sorry for my failures? Do I approach the grace of God with hope and confidence? Do I begin again by performing actions contrary to my omission or commission?

See to it that no one is deprived from the grace of God. (Heb. 12: 15)

July 23

Suffering: The Surest Way to Kingdom of Heaven

The surest way to the kingdom of heaven is the road of tribulations in which our Divine Redeemer has walked ... because [through suffering] one finds oneself heading towards the way to heaven ... after the time of tribulation. (OCL, I, 194, p. 290)

St. Vincent Pallotti was convinced of the manifold benefits a person's right attitude towards sufferings can bring in his life. Sufferings, if accepted as gifts from God, can increase a person's love of God, identify him with Christ, make his life Christ-like and make him truly holy. Therefore, St. Vincent believed that the path of suffering through which Jesus himself walked, is the surest way to the kingdom of God. For if a person decides to walk by the path of suffering, without any doubt, he would be heading towards the way to heaven. But before he arrives at the kingdom of God, which is his goal, he has to undergo the consequences of suffering in his life. Just as Jesus arrived at the glory of the resurrection through his agony and death, so will a true Christian arrive at his destiny of life with God through the patient acceptance of the pains and troubles of his everyday living. If a person dared to suffer like Jesus, he cannot help but achieve his goal of being with God. St. Vincent wished that everyone would take the risk of accepting suffering and living through it, like Jesus, and thereby make themselves worthy of the kingdom Jesus prepared for them through his suffering.

Am I aware of the benefits of suffering in Christian life? Do I acknowledge that the path of suffering is the surest way to the kingdom of God? Am I ready to accept the sufferings of daily life in order to attain my life with God?

For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. (II Cor. 4: 17)

July 24

Jesus: The Gift of Father's Love for the Human Person

A God outraged, offended, disobeyed, [and] ... forsaken by man so much loved the whole human race that he gave it his only-begotten Son. (OOCC, XIII, p. 122; GIL, XXII, p. 83)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, Jesus is the greatest gift of love the Father has given to humankind. The more he contemplated on the nature of this gifting, the more he found it difficult to comprehend. He wondered at the fact of God delivering his Son to the human person, even though he had been unfaithful to God. Thus, it was not human merit that was the reason for this gift. For St. Vincent, there should be no other reason for this gifting than the way God felt about the human person. Even though he had rejected God, a loving Father could not do the same to him. Though he was unworthy of the Father's love, the Father decides to love him in his infinite mercy. The human person has become the object of the Father's merciful love, despite his failure. Thus, Jesus was a gift of a loving Father to him. This gift was bestowed on him for his redemption. In offering Jesus to humankind for its redemption, the Father proclaimed his unending love for every person, and offered him an opportunity to come back to him through his Son Jesus. Jesus, by accepting the will of the Father for him, remedied human ingratitude, destroyed his unworthiness and presented himself as the way to the Father. In the process, Jesus gave the human person once again the opportunity to become a child of God, the Father. A person opens himself to the love of the Father by opening himself to Jesus, the Father's gift of love.

Do I recognize the love of the Father for me as manifested in the person of Jesus? Do I acknowledge the gratuitous nature of the Father's love for me? Am I open to the love of the Father for me by opening myself to Jesus, the love of the Father?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? (Rom. 8: 31 – 32)

July 25

Hungering for Suffering

[You must] long for food as you long for the cross and long for the cross as you long for food. (OCC, II, p.137)

Just as healthy food is vital for physical development of the human person, in the same way suffering is essential for the spiritual life of a Christian. Since suffering is so essential for true Christian perfection, in the perception of St. Vincent Pallotti, he wished that every Christian would develop a spiritual attitude of hungering for the cross. He recommended that his followers place in their dining rooms the following words: "Long for food as you long for the cross and long for the cross as you long for food." This would remind them of the importance of suffering in their Christian lives as they take food everyday, thereby enabling them to give equal importance to the acceptance and living out of their daily sufferings joyfully. In his own personal life, St. Vincent constantly longed for sufferings. In his prayers, he often asked God that he might suffer greatly, so that he would be like Jesus who suffered all forms of ignominy for the salvation of humankind. It was in this spirit that he undertook a number of physical disciplines and penance such as sobriety and abstinence in eating and drinking and the use of cords, strips of leather or balls with iron points to beat himself. He even at times sought the help of others to inflict physical pain on himself. Since St. Vincent believed in the power of suffering to purify himself and make him ready for Christ, he undertook some extreme measures of physical discipline.

Do I accept the value of suffering in my life as a Christian? Do I have a desire to suffer for Christ? Do I acknowledge the purifying power of suffering? Do I believe that suffering makes me ready to accept Christ in my life?

But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6: 14)

A Life of Suffering

[A life of suffering consists of] the perfect spiritual observance of the crosses of our Lord Jesus Christ ... [and] becoming similar to him in living a humble, poor, laborious [and] a contemptuous life.
(OCCC, III, p. 60)

Since suffering is very significant in the life of a Christian, St. Vincent Pallotti, in many of his writings, attempted to explain its nature and characteristics. According to him, a life of suffering consists of the perfect spiritual observance of the crosses of our Lord Jesus Christ. It would imply that a person lives the physical, mental and spiritual pains of Jesus in the context of his everyday life. Similarly, suffering could also imply that one accepts all tribulations, calumnies, oppression, contradictions, misunderstanding and sorrow of his life in imitation of Jesus. A life of suffering also consists of becoming similar to Jesus in living a humble, poor, laborious and contemptuous life. The humility of Jesus made him leave his Godhead, become a human being and die on the cross for the salvation of humankind. The poverty of Jesus made him accept all forms of deprivations during his life here on earth. Jesus' life always involved hard work. During the thirty years of private life, Jesus labored like any other human being. The three years of public life consisted in relentless work as the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Jesus, in his life here on earth, experienced the contempt of many people who were against him. A Christian, called to live a life of suffering, needs to identify every suffering that comes into his life to that of Jesus and attempt to live them with the very spirit of Jesus.

Do I accept a life of suffering which involves perfect spiritual imitation of the crosses of Jesus Christ? Am I ready to accept my physical, mental and spiritual pains in imitation of Jesus? Do I live the humble, poor, laborious and contemptuous life of Jesus in the context of my daily life?

I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.
(Is. 50: 6)

July 27

Suffering: A Stepping-stone to God

Remember, God is found in suffering. (Lett., 1464, p. 321)

For St. Vincent, all forms of suffering, including the various human miseries one faces in his life, are stepping-stones to God. He constantly reminds his followers that God is found in suffering. No one should discard negative experiences which involve suffering, for they can open a person to new avenues. This was the attitude that guided the actions of St. Vincent when he faced negative experiences and painful events. For instance, during his tenure as the Rector of the Neapolitan Church of Santo Spirito, he was often ill treated by the other priests in the rectory. In coping with this situation, St. Vincent used to say that these pains are mercies of God and that he is not worthy to suffer for Christ. These painful experiences prepared him inwardly and outwardly for the greater challenges that he had to face at the foundation of the Society. Thus, St. Vincent always saw the hand of God in every suffering that came into his life. Hence, he made every suffering an opportunity to encounter God and his will. In this manner, St. Vincent used every painful event as a stepping-stone to God.

Do I accept the suffering I face in my life as a stepping-stone to God? Do I believe that negative experiences can open new avenues in my life? Do I believe that God prepares me inwardly and outwardly through sufferings to face greater challenges in the future? Do I see the hand of God in moments of my suffering?

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (I Pet. 4: 14)

July 28

Perseverance in Suffering

For the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must persevere until death, to live lovingly the perfect observance of being nailed to the mystical cross and the life in the Congregation, though humble, poor, difficult and demanding. (OCCC, III, p. 81)

Since St. Vincent Pallotti saw the hand of God behind every painful event and negative experience, he was always courageous in facing even the most difficult situation. He was never disappointed, discouraged or tempted to give up his plans because of hardships, difficulties, or opposition from others. He admonished his followers to appreciate, desire and live a life of suffering. He warned them against getting tired of painful situations and running away from them. For St. Vincent, the reason for perseverance in a situation of suffering was his love for the Lord Jesus. Perseverance in suffering must be lived in a special way in the context of one's commitment to God. Hence, St. Vincent wanted to persevere until death in living a life of perfect observance of the demands of his life in the congregation, which implies being nailed to the cross in a mystical sense. For it implies accepting a life that is humble, poor, difficult and demanding. In living out all these aspects of religious living, a person must look up to Jesus who persevered till the end, and must continue to persevere despite the sufferings that might assail the person.

Do I persevere in the sufferings that come into my life? Am I discouraged or disappointed when I continue to face a painful situation? Do I give up or run away from suffering? Am I ready to persevere in living my state of life, despite the sufferings involved? Does the example of Jesus inspire me to persevere?

Do not be afraid of anything that you are going to suffer ... Remain faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev. 2: 10)

July 29

Suffering: Reward of the Servants of God

All the contempt, persecutions, tribulations, and even imprisonment ... must be expected as rewards and wages, which the world gives to the true servants of the Lord. (OCC, II, p. 498)

In his life, St. Vincent Pallotti made every effort to persevere, never give up, and stand firm in living through the situation of suffering because he believed that sufferings are wages and rewards the world gives to the true servant of God. Whether it was contemptuous treatment by others at various situations of his life, tribulations and difficulties that he faced due to personal and apostolic reasons, or in those moments he had to hide himself from the secret police who were trying to track his whereabouts, St. Vincent stood firm and never ran away from the moment of suffering. He always considered himself an unworthy servant of the Lord. If Jesus, his Master and Lord, could not receive a better deal from the people to whom he was sent as the apostle of love, neither could St. Vincent, the unworthy servant, expect to get something better from the world. Living his life in imitation of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, St. Vincent found it easy to carry on his determination to face every trouble that came into his life with courage, decisiveness and tranquillity. The attitude of accepting every moment of suffering as a reward for being the servant of God brought real joy and profound peace in the life of St. Vincent, for he knew that through his sufferings he was united with Jesus, his Master and Lord.

Do I consider the sufferings I face in my life as rewards and wages for the work I do for the Lord? Am I able to learn from the example of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, how to cope with suffering? Do I believe that my sufferings unite me with Jesus? Do I experience inner joy and inner peace when faced with suffering?

Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ. (II Cor. 12: 10)

July 30

Proportionality of Suffering and Grace

The greater are the tribulations, the greater are the happiness and glory. (OCL, I, 194, p. 290)

St. Vincent Pallotti did not shun sufferings in his life for many reasons: sufferings made him identify himself with Jesus, the Suffering Servant. Sufferings united him with Jesus and sufferings opened him to the life of grace. Hence, St. Vincent constantly prayed to God to give him the courage to participate in the sufferings of Jesus. He was ready to accept all forms of contempt, calumnies, oppressions and sorrows in order that he could participate in Christ's sufferings. He believed the greater the tribulations he encountered in his life, the greater the graces of joy and glory God would shower on him. He also believed this would give him the grace of perfect resignation to the will of God, which in turn would help him to cope with his sufferings. St. Vincent wondered at the fact that many Christians neither desired suffering nor prayed for it, even though they knew how vital it was for their spiritual living. In his pastoral ministry of caring for the spiritual wellbeing of people, he enticed his penitents to have at least the ordinary resignation to the necessary crosses that came into their lives. In guiding them, St. Vincent often reminded them that God was not leaving them alone to suffer, but he was always with them with his graces to assist them and to carry them through their sufferings, as wherever there was suffering, there was also the grace of God.

Do I recognize the value of the cross in my Christian life? Do I believe that God does not leave me alone to suffer, but is present in my suffering with his grace? Do I believe that there is proportionality of suffering and the grace of God in the life of a person? What is my basic attitude towards suffering? Do I accept or reject sufferings in my daily life?

I will rather boast of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. (II Cor. 12: 9)

Radical Self-purification

My God ... destroy me completely; do everything in me. My God ... absorb me, destroy me, reform me, be all in me, now and forever.
(OCCC, X, pp. 216 - 217; STA, 435)

By God's grace St. Vincent became a "receptacle of God's communications," despite the fact that by himself he was "nothingness and sin." This change from a place of sin to a place of God's graces, called for a radical self-purification on the part of St. Vincent. He prayed to God to destroy him completely and to do everything in him. He wished that God would absorb him into his own self, reform him and remain as his everything. The radical self-purification he yearned for was aimed at him becoming completely transformed into Christ, for the purpose of the manifestation of the glory of God. Glorification of God consisted of making God's presence visible, tangible and alive in the lives of others. In this manner, the radical self-purification would arm St. Vincent with the power to manifest God's glory by making the presence of Christ through his own person and his activities. Thus, self-purification destroyed everything that was unworthy in St. Vincent, made him a place of God's communications and helped him to make God real in the lives of others by manifesting the glory of God in and through his person, his life, and activities.

Do I need radical self-purification in my personal life? Does it destroy in me anything unworthy and sinful? Does it help me to be totally transformed into Christ? Does radical self-purification help me to manifest the glory of God in and through my person and my activities?

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. (I Pet. 1:22)

August 1

Theological Virtues: The Animating Spirits of Human Action

We must regulate and animate all our thoughts, words and actions, even the indifferent and necessary ones, according to the fervent and humble spirit of faith, hope and charity. (OCCC, II, p. 62)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, theological virtues are the animating spirit of all human actions. For him, every thought, word and deed of a person must come within the purview of faith, hope and love. First, every action must be animated by faith. With the direction of faith, the action a person performs partakes in the power and strength God gives to a person. As a result, it is not the person alone who performs the action, as it is done in and through God. Second, every action must be animated by hope. When a person's action is regulated by hope, he experiences a great sense of meaningfulness in what he is doing. Even in moments of trials and temptations, hope makes a person cheerful. He neither gives up nor experiences despair, but joyfully and courageously walks the path faith has set for him to follow. Third, every action must be animated by love. When the spirit of charity guides an action, whatever a person believes and hopes becomes enlivened. The virtue of charity brings into a person's action the right spirit of dynamism, and he is ready to give himself to God and others in love. The spirit of generosity and magnanimity marks a person animated by love. In this manner, faith, hope and love animate a person's actions and make them perfect and acceptable to God.

Do I allow faith, hope and charity to animate and regulate my actions?
Do these virtues have an influence on my thoughts, words and deeds?
What do I need to do in order to allow these virtues to have complete control of my actions?

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas. 1: 2 – 4)

August 2

Theological Virtues: Facilitate Perfection

Through the spirit of faith, hope and love, the purpose of all our thoughts, words and actions remains fixed on God, from whom comes all good and to whom everything returns. (OCCC, II, p. 63)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that a person's union with God came about not only through the grace of healing which God bestowed on him in a conversion experience, but also through the help of infused theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Through these virtues, God communicated his life to a person and in the process made him ready for his life with God. With the help of these virtues, God created in a person a capacity for and the actual participation in God's life. As the result of God's reaching out to him through these virtues, he gained an ability to fix the totality of his being on God and be united to him in a real way. For St. Vincent, faith, hope and love helped a person to surrender his life and all that happened in his life to God, believing in him as the one from whom all good things came and to whom everything returned. Thus, the theological virtues assisted a person to accept God as the ultimate source of meaning and purpose in his life. According to St. Vincent, these virtues were principles of action that opened a person to the grace of God, which helped him to direct his life towards God. In this manner, the theological virtues facilitated a person's genuine growth in perfection.

Am I aware of the fact that the virtues of faith, hope and love open me to my life with God? Do I make an honest effort to cultivate and grow in these virtues? Do I believe, hope and love in God as the ultimate source of everything in my life? Do I make use of the graces these virtues provide in order to grow in my life of perfection?

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (I Cor. 13:13)

Commandment of Love: Belongs to Human Nature

God is infinite love in essence; man, by way of creation, is a living image of God. Since God is perfect in loving and glorifying himself [as the three persons in the Godhead], man must be perfect in loving and praising God. ... Since God is perfect in loving man, man must be perfect in loving his neighbor. (OOCC, IV, pp. 308-309)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that God, who is infinite love in essence, has loved every human person into existence. Hence, by the very fact of his creation, every person is a living image of God, who is love. Since a person is the living image of the loving God, loving God and one's neighbor whole-heartedly and unconditionally belongs to human nature. Therefore, a person must aim toward attaining the perfection of love that is found in God. God is a community of three persons, loving and glorifying each other and always attempting to bring to each other the highest honor. A human person must, in imitation of the Trinitarian love, live his life to bring honor and glory to God. Similarly, God loves a person in the most perfect manner. Trinitarian love reaches out to humankind through the acts of creation, redemption and sanctification by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit respectively. Hence, in imitation of God's perfect love for humankind, every human person must also love his neighbor without fail. St. Vincent Pallotti lived this truth on an everyday basis in his life. Having deeply experienced the love of God within himself and in the created world, he could not help but live his life to love God and his neighbor.

Do I realize that God, who is love, has loved me into existence? Do I recognize my vocation to be the image of God, who is love? Do I love God and my neighbor in imitation of the Trinitarian love within the Godhead?

Beloved let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. (1 Jn. 4: 7)

August 4

God Loves the Human Person First

[My God] not withstanding my incomprehensible ingratitude [and] innumerable sins ... You with your infinite love think of me. You love me with yourself and all your infinite attributes, properties and nature. (OCC, X, p. 472; STA, 557)

St. Vincent Pallotti questioned a person's ability to love God and even desiring to love God, if God had not loved him first. God, by loving the human person first, gives him the capacity to love God. Even the desire to love God should have its origin from God. Unless God reaches out to us we cannot reach out to him. By loving us first he raises us from the natural to the supernatural level of existence. Being raised to the level of God, we are able to raise the thoughts of our minds and the love of our hearts to God. Besides, God's loving us first is his invitation to respond to his love. A person humbly admits God's invitation to love when he acknowledges his limitations and expresses his desire to love God in return for his love. St. Vincent Pallotti constantly lived his life with the awareness that God first loved him. Since God loved him first, he could be his true self before God, opening his misery and limitations before God. There is nothing whatsoever that St. Vincent had to hide from God, as everything in his life was open to God from the first moment of God's love reaching him. In this manner, St. Vincent lived a life of total transparency because God's love overshadowed him from the beginning.

Do I acknowledge that God has reached out to me in love, even before I knew of him? How do I plan to respond to the invitation to love him that is extended to me by God loving me first? Does the fact that God loves me make me a transparent and an open person?

We love because he first loved us. (I Jn. 4: 19)

Love: Friendship With God

My Jesus, I confess that I have never loved you ... Destroy earthly love in me ... communicate to me ... all your love. I intend, now and forever, in union with all past, present, and future creatures, to love you. (OCC, X, p. 675 - 676; STA, 515)

For St. Vincent, love, besides being a surrender of his will to God, also is a friendship with God. He knew that God loved him deeply, and he in turn loved God with the totality of being. Thus, despite his unworthiness, through the mercy of God there existed a deep interactive and communicative relationship between God and St. Vincent. Hence, he believed that he had a true friend in God. This faith helped him to do what God wanted of him, even though it implied hardships and pain, with great joy in his heart. He acknowledged the many communications and blessings from God, and received them with genuine gratitude. He attempted to reciprocate to God by desiring to do great things for him, even though he knew so well that due to his sinfulness, he could never give back to God the honor he deserved. St. Vincent actualized his decision of doing great things for God, especially through his dedication to the apostolate he had undertaken. Thus, the various apostolates with which St. Vincent got involved became for him the great acts of love he wanted to do for God who loved him eternally.

Do I consider my love for God as a friendship with God? Does my friendship with God help me to accept challenging tasks that involve hardships and sacrifices? How do I reciprocate my love for God? Do I consider the apostolate I undertake as a means to express my true love for God?

You are my friends if you do what I command you. (Jn. 15: 14)

August 6

Love: A Yearning for God

My God, my Jesus, I intend to have loved you and to love you ... with all the love that was, is, and will be, that could be, and should have been in time and eternity, and with all your infinite love. (OCCC, X, pp. 225 - 226; STA, 540)

Genuine friendship with God deepened St. Vincent Pallotti's desire to love God and to give himself to God totally. His desire to love God became an inner yearning for God. Living the advice of St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent cultivated within himself an insatiable desire to love God, so that his love for God constantly increased both in its quality and intensity. He wanted to love God at every moment of his life. He also wished that he could love God with all the love that was, is and will be in time and eternity. St. Vincent felt a sense of desperation, because he did not know how to love God as much as he should. Just like St. Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration, St. Vincent wished to pitch his tent in God's loving presence. He believed that a person who does not love God genuinely, in fact does not live. True living implies loving and true loving implies living. Hence, St. Vincent wanted to possess within himself all the love that was present throughout eternity so that he could love God with all the love that was present in the world. This inner yearning to love God made St. Vincent Pallotti a very dynamic person. He had no time to idle away for every moment must be used to express his love for God. Thus, the inner yearning for God and the desire to give God the totality of his love were powerful spiritual forces that guided St. Vincent Pallotti both in his Christian living and apostolic undertakings.

Do I have a longing to love God? Do I acknowledge that God is infinitely worthy of my love? Do I admit true Christian living implies loving and vice versa? Does my desire to love God become a powerful spiritual force to guide me both in my Christian living and apostolic undertakings?

One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek: To dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. (Ps. 27: 4)

Love: Pure Self-gift to God

Even if [my God] you never loved me, even if you hated me always and tormented me as much as possible ... still I would love you and want to love you as much as you merit, because you are infinitely lovable, through yourself and in yourself. (OCCC, X, pp. 207 - 208; STA 321)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that there should be no conflicts of interest and personal preferences when it comes to loving God. There should be no expectations, no placing of conditions of 'ifs' and 'buts,' and no seeking of one's own interests when one is called to give himself to God in love. St. Vincent, fully convinced of this truth, loved God unconditionally and totally. He desired to love God without reward of any kind. He believed that his love for God should not depend on what God did to him. This attitude made him say that even if God never loved him and even if God hated him always bringing many torments into his life, still he would love God as much as he merited. In other words, the manner of God's dealing with him would not in any way influence his actions towards God because he believed that God is infinitely lovable. He was ready to sacrifice anything, for he knew well that love is a pure self-gift of himself to God. Spiritual authors call this manner of loving God 'love of delight.' It consists of resting meditatively in God's goodness and perfection without taking into account the blessings we may receive from God's goodness. St. Vincent Pallotti, intoxicated with the love of God, lived the 'love of delight' in the most perfect manner.

Do I love God unconditionally and without expectations? Do I believe that God is infinitely worthy of my love? Do I offer myself as a pure self-gift to God? Do I practice the 'love of delight' in my spiritual life?

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones. (Heb. 6: 10)

August 8

Love: A Total Gift of Self

Hence everyone who wishes to enter the Congregation must also give up the whole world for the love of God, but must believe that he always gives very little, unlike God who, though we are sinners, has given us his eternal Son. (OOCC, II, p. 5)

Love, for St. Vincent Pallotti, is a total self-giving. It also means that a person is ready to give himself for others in the same way Jesus gave himself, without any reservation for the salvation of humankind. Similarly, true love must resemble the love of God the Father for every human person, for he did not spare his own Son, but gave him for the redemption of the human race. Thus, genuine love implies that a person attempts to love others in the same way God the Father and Jesus his Son have loved. One may wonder if it is possible to imitate the love of the Divine Persons, that is, that of the Father and the Son. According to St. Vincent, it is a possibility every human person can achieve if he lives his love in the context of his everyday living. It involves having compassion for those in need, showing respect for everyone, paying attention to those who have no one to care, giving everyone the honor he deserves, and giving good example to others. It also entails taking on the burdens of others, caring for their needs, and doing those things that serve the needs of our neighbor. St. Vincent wanted everyone who wished to join the congregation he founded to be ready to give up the whole world and give himself in love to others, imitating the love of the Father and that of his Son, while believing that he has done very little.

Do I consider love as a total self-giving of myself to others? Am I able to love others in the same manner the Father and the Son loved humankind? How do I express my total self-giving in the context of my daily life? Do I practice this genuine self-giving in the context of my life within the religious community?

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (Jn. 15: 13)

August 9

Suffering: A Prolonged Martyrdom

The martyrdom, which the tyrants gave the Christians of the first centuries, has finished. We are reserved a martyrdom that is hidden and more prolonged ... Hence, comfort yourself with the thought of pleasing God by suffering everything as God wills. (OCL, I, 258, p. 258)

St. Vincent Pallotti viewed sufferings of daily life as a prolonged martyrdom. He said that the martyrdom which involved physical suffering and death in defense of Christian faith inflicted by the Roman kings of the early centuries, had come to an end. But for the people of the present time, God has kept in store a different type of martyrdom which is hidden and prolonged. This perception of St. Vincent requires every Christian of the present time to live his life in martyrdom. The troubles and pains of daily life are not to be viewed as burdens that one has to carry, but rather they must be seen as ways through which a Christian is called to live out his faith and commitment to God. The sufferings of daily life are not to be shunned, but must be embraced with great inner joy for they are God-given opportunities to live a person's Christian faith authentically. Hence, St. Vincent calls every Christian not to die as a martyr, but live as a martyr. Therefore, the type of martyrdom God has kept for the people of the present time does not bring their physical death, but rather it makes them walk the path of suffering which Jesus himself walked as a human person in this world. Since a person is called to live out his sufferings in the spirit of martyrdom, he must accept them with patience and live them joyfully.

Do I view my daily sufferings as hidden and prolonged martyrdom? Do I recognize that accepting and living my suffering makes me a true martyr for the kingdom of God? Do I acknowledge my daily sufferings as God-given opportunities to live my Christian faith authentically? Do I patiently accept and joyfully live my suffering?

We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (II Cor. 4: 8 – 9)

August 10

Our Neighbor: A Human Person

Our neighbor ... is anyone [a human person] who is capable of knowing, serving, loving and enjoying God ... [whether] he is an enemy or a friend, a catholic or a heretic, an unbeliever or a believer, a Christian or a Jew, [and] a countryman or a foreigner (OCC, III, p. 152).

St. Vincent Pallotti, views the term “neighbor” philosophically and describes it to mean a ‘human person.’ It is the most general and realistic way of perceiving this term. The neighbor is not merely “anyone,” but is a human person who is capable of knowing, serving, loving and enjoying God. Since he can know and love God, he is capable of establishing a loving relationship with God and God with him. Having established this relationship with God, he can enjoy God’s presence and spend his life in the service of God. According to St. Vincent, these are fundamental qualities that make a person a neighbor. If these conditions are there in a person, no matter who he is otherwise, he will continue to be one’s neighbor. Thus, if a person is one’s enemy or friend, a Catholic or a heretic, a pagan or a believer, Christian or Jew, a countryman or a foreigner, he would be considered one’s neighbor if he is a human person who has the capacity to know, love, enjoy and serve God. In viewing one’s neighbor in this manner, St. Vincent gives a universal character to this concept and to the commandment of love, which asks a person to love his neighbor as he loves himself. St. Vincent wanted his followers to see every human being as their neighbor and love them without any discrimination.

How do I understand the term “neighbor”? Who are my neighbors in the context of my daily living? Do I discriminate against people depending on nationality, creed, or race? Do I give the commandment of love a universal character by accepting everyone as my neighbor?

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Lk. 10: 29)

Our Neighbor: An Image of God

[Our neighbor is] a living, rational and spiritual substance ... created by and representing [God] (OCC, XIII, p. 60; GIL, VIII, p. 27).

Having described the concept of neighbor in a general and philosophical way, St. Vincent Pallotti attempts to give a theological description of the concept of neighbor when he says that one's neighbor is an image of God. As an image of God, one's neighbor is a living and rational substance created by God. He is not merely a living substance, but also a rational substance, besides being a creature of God. He is also capable of representing God. All these qualities, that is, a living substance, a rational substance, a created substance and a substance capable of representing God, make one's neighbor a true image of God. Thus, one's neighbor is very different from every other type of reality in this world. He is a temple in which the Divine Presence of God dwells. Hence, the manner in which one must reach out to his neighbor is similar to the manner he reaches out to God. By perceiving one's neighbor from the theological perspective as the image of God, St. Vincent wanted to give the commandment of love a greater value. Loving God and loving one's neighbor gains greater significance if one's neighbor is viewed as the image of God. The sacredness of God is implicitly present in every neighbor I encounter and enter into relationship with daily. The more a person understands who one's neighbor is, the more he would be able to love him genuinely and establish a community of love here on earth.

Do I consider my neighbor an image of God? Am I able to recognize the Divine Presence of God dwelling in my neighbor? Do I reach out to my neighbor with respect? Do I give him the dignity he possesses as the image of God in my dealings with him?

Behold, only this have I found out "God made mankind straight," but men have had recourse to many calculations. (Eccl. 7: 29)

August 12

Our Neighbor: A Brother of Christ

Oh my God ... you not only have given us a Savior, but a first-born brother as well. [In doing so] you have raised us [me and my neighbor] up to become your adopted children, your heirs and co-heirs of your Incarnate Son. (OCC, XIII, pp. 150 - 151; GIL, XXIV, p. 92)

St. Vincent Pallotti, having described one's neighbor philosophically and theologically, attempts to give the concept of neighbor a Christo-centric interpretation. According to this perception, one's neighbor is understood as a brother/sister of Christ. Jesus, the First Born Brother came into the world as the Savior of humankind. By accomplishing the plan of the Father for the salvation of every human person, Jesus raised all God's people to the level of God's adopted children, heirs of God's kingdom, and co-heirs with Jesus, the Incarnate Son and the First Born Brother. Christ's work of salvation as the First Born Brother has brought every human person into a special and unique relationship with God, that is, being his children. Understood in this background, one's neighbor gains a special significance. Because of Christ's redemptive act, I not only have a deeper relationship with God, but also I stand in a new relationship with my neighbor. My brother/sister by way of adoption, is an heir of God and a co-heir of Jesus. Understood in this deeper meaning of one's neighbor, the commandment of love takes still a greater significance. Now that I am called to accept my neighbor unreservedly, I need to be self-forgetful in my love of my neighbor, and I need to change my self-centered living into other-centered living.

Do I consider my neighbor an adopted child of God, an heir to God's kingdom and a co-heir with Christ? Do I imitate the spirit of Jesus, my First Born Brother, in dedicating myself to my neighbor? Am I self-forgetful and other-centered in my love for my neighbor?

But those who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God. (Jn. 1: 12)

August 13

Love: Alleviation of Material and Spiritual Needs

Divine Providence commands us to help our brother in his grave temporal as well as spiritual needs. (OCCC, IV, p. 131)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, love is total self-giving and must be expressed in the context of a person's daily living. It implies that a person's love for his neighbor is shown in the alleviation of the material and spiritual needs of others. St. Vincent visualized the human person as a totality of body and soul. Hence, his endeavor was to care for the whole person, both in his material and spiritual aspects. St. Vincent felt that helping his neighbor both in his material and spiritual needs is an obligation placed on every human person by God. Alleviating the material needs consists of assuring that he is able to live a decent life, having basic amenities and requirements. Assuaging the spiritual needs of a person involves giving of spiritual guidance to the one in spiritual need, warning him when he is in danger, encouraging him when he is struggling on his journey towards God, and giving him timely support when he needs it. St. Vincent, during his lifetime on earth, reached out to his neighbor in love in both of these aspects. He organized a mission of universal charity to mitigate the sufferings of the poor and help them in all their needs in the best way possible. Similarly, he spent many hours at the confessional, visited the dying, consoling them and confirming them in the faith, reached out to the people of various social groups, and gave himself in every possible manner for the spiritual well being of all types of people.

Is my self-giving in love reaching out to the whole human person? Do I care for the bodily as well as the spiritual needs of a person? What do I do to mitigate the material needs of the person? What do I do to help a person in his spiritual need?

He who has compassion on the poor lends to the Lord. (Prov. 19: 17)

August 14

Charity Begins at Home

Be diligent in breathing in peaceful fraternal love and mutual reverence among the members of the Congregation. The spirit of respect and perfect obedience to the superiors and the spiritual fathers, recognizing in them the God who speaks, commands and leads. (OCCC, II, p. 284)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that living out a person's love for the other should be first directed towards those persons with whom he spends his daily life. In other words, practice of charity must begin at home. St. Vincent recommended the practice of a mutual, peaceful and reverential love with those whom we live. He asked his followers to be diligent in practicing peaceful fraternal love within the community. Though members within the community live together all the time, they should not lag behind in respect for one another. On the contrary, there must be mutual reverence and the attitude of 'give and take' must characterize the life of the members within the congregation. Love must be specifically shown towards those persons who lead and guide the community. Love for them is usually manifested through member's respectful obedience, recognizing in them the God who speaks, guides, commands and leads. Love of members within the community also implies that each one develops a sensitive attitude towards others so that ones thoughts, words and deeds do not hurt the other, but attempt to build up mutual understanding and concern for one another. In his own personal life, St. Vincent Pallotti took special care that he would truly live his charity towards his brothers within the community.

Do I take care to begin my practice of charity towards those with whom I live? Do I practice reverential love towards everyone with whom I live? Is there the attitude of 'give and take' in the community in which I live?

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Rom. 13: 8)

Mary: Our Spiritual Mother

We should awaken within ourselves ... a livelier trust in the powerful intercession of such an august Mother. As her children, we please her by striving to become ... similar to her Son and our firstborn brother, Jesus. (OCCC, III, pp. 78-79)

St. Vincent Pallotti's perception of Mary as the spiritual mother of every human person is based on the Golgotha scene. Before he died on the cross, Jesus called both his mother and the disciple he loved and handed over his mother as the mother of the disciple. Through the gift of Mary to John, she became not only the mother of John, but also of every true disciple of Jesus. Mary, accepting the words of Jesus from the cross, gives herself as the mother of every human person for whom Jesus shed his Blood. Spiritual motherhood of Mary is a precious gift of Jesus to humankind. Mary is the spiritual mother of every person. He must develop deep and filial trust in the intercession and protection of Mary. One way of accepting her motherhood is to strive to become similar to Jesus in every way. Mary is a great helper in this process of a person becoming similar to her Son, since giving Jesus to the world and bringing the world to Jesus is the main task of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary, as the spiritual mother, helps everyone accept that Christ is born in his heart spiritually. St. Vincent Pallotti fostered a child-like confidence in Mary as the spiritual mother. He often approached her with great trust in order that she may show him the way to Jesus. With the help of Mary, St. Vincent moved towards greater levels of sanctity in imitation of Jesus.

Do I accept Mary as my spiritual mother? Do I acknowledge Mary as the gift of Jesus to every Christian? Do I cultivate deep and filial trust in Mary's intercession and protection? Do I approach Mary's help in becoming similar to Jesus?

For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden; behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. (Lk. 1: 48)

August 16

Love: A Community Virtue

If love, the substantial constituent of the Pious Society, were ever wanting in the Society, it would mean the end of the Catholic Apostolate. Hence, woe to him who dares to offend against love. He would be guilty of the destruction of the Society. (OCCC, III, pp. 137-138)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered love as a community virtue, i.e., a virtue that is very vital for the true life of the community. At the same time, it is the most difficult virtue to keep in the community as its practice calls for a great deal of adjustment on the part of each member of the community. But if this virtue is lacking in a community, it will not be a community in the true sense of the word, as without understanding, acceptance and mutual care for each other, we cannot think of a community. When St. Vincent founded the Union of Catholic Apostolate, he based it on the foundation of love and asked every member of the Society to be motivated by the true spirit of love. Thus, love was the substantial constituent of the Union. Therefore, for St. Vincent, if love were ever wanting in the Society, it would bring about its death. Hence, he admonished all the members of the Union to cultivate the true spirit of love within them, so that by their lack of love, they may not be responsible for the destruction of the Society. Hence, every member of the Union of Catholic Apostolate should take personal responsibility for the life and growth of the Union, specifically by living the commandment of Charity within the Union. Once true love is present among the members of the Union, then as a community, each member within the Union would be able to express his love towards people outside the Union.

Do I recognize the importance of love as a community virtue? Do I take the trouble to practice this virtue in view of giving true life and energy to the community of which I am a part? Do I realize that loving every member within my community is vital for loving people outside my community genuinely?

And over all these put on love that is the bond of perfection.
(Col. 3: 14)

Consequence of True Spirit of Love

If we are truly animated by the spirit of love, we shall always treat all with love, look on all with love, think of all with love and speak of all with love. (OCCC, III, p. 338)

A perspective based on love, for St. Vincent Pallotti, is the consequence of a person possessing the true spirit of love within him. The outlook of such a person is animated by love. He treats all with love, looks on all with love, thinks of all with love and speaks of all with love. Thus, love becomes the dynamic and powerful force within him, and from this dynamism he receives the strength and courage to do great things for God and others. As love takes hold of him, he has the energy and determination to give himself totally to others without any expectations. He is patient and kind. He is neither jealous nor snobbish. He does not show off. He is never rude nor hurting in his remarks. He does not seek his own interest. He is calm, peaceful and does not show any signs of irritation or anger. He takes the hurts he receives from others lightly and does not spend time thinking about them. He does not rejoice when things go wrong in others' lives, but instead reaches out to help them. He is happy when good things happen in the lives of others. He is ready to suffer, trust, hope and persevere in the good he wishes to do for others. These are some of the consequent qualities true spirit of love leaves on a person who possesses it. Such a true spirit of love guided St. Vincent Pallotti in his life.

Am I animated by a true spirit of love in my life? Am I able to view everything that happens in my life from the perspective of love? Is love that dynamic force within me that gives me the energy to accomplish God's plan for me here on earth? Do I possess the qualities of love?

For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather serve one another through love. (Gal. 5: 13–14)

August 18

Love Empowers the Human Person

Love accommodates all, believes all, hopes all [and] bears all. Finally love is as strong as death. It does not stop any difficulty, but conquers; it is not alarmed by any contradiction, but on the contrary is more courageous in charity; and does not offend the one who destroys it. (OCC, I, p. 111)

Love, with its spirit, empowers a person in his life. According to St. Vincent, by opening himself to the power of love, a person can become a powerful instrument in the hands of God. In his writings, he speaks of the transformation love can bring to a person. First, love brings to a person the spirit of accommodation. A person filled with the spirit of love is ready to make adjustments in his life with others. While he makes no compromises, he is ready to give and take in his relationships and dealings with others. Second, love makes a person believe, hope and endure. In every situation, however difficult and painful it may be, a person of love faces it with faith and hope, and in the process endures it until he overcomes the difficulty. Third, love makes a person strong in his spirit. As a result, he is not overwhelmed by any problem and not unsettled by contradictions, but courageously moves on with the charity of God as his only guide. Fourth, love makes a person truly forgiving. Though others might offend him, he would not allow himself to be offended by whatever others do to him. But, instead, he would reach out to them in loving concern. In this manner, love truly makes a person very powerful and able to live a life that truly belongs to God and his kingdom.

Do I acknowledge the power that true charity can bring in my life? Do I live the spirit of accommodation in my life with others? Am I a person of faith, hope and endurance? Am I a person of inner strength? Am I able to forgive the hurts of others? Do I live a life of love that would make me belong to God's kingdom?

If I give away everything I own, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love it is nothing. (I Cor. 13: 3)

August 19

Humility: The Safeguard of Love

The Love of Christ, which through divine mercy makes us brothers and companions in life and in the apostolic undertakings, obliges us to speak up [in all humility] and to ask things with the holy freedom of the sons of God and brothers of Christ. (OCL, IV, 1054, p. 342)

Though love is the greatest of all virtues, it must also have a safeguard. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the safeguard of love is humility. In order that one's love for others is free from self-seeking, it must be tempered by humility. Humility helps one to control his selfishness in loving others, and makes his loving effective and generous. Besides, humility opens love to genuine communication among persons living and working together. If a community consists of a few humble persons who love each other, in that community there would be a great deal of communication among the members about their life, their successes and failures in the apostolic endeavors, their future planning and any other thing that is related to their life and work. On the contrary, if a community consists of persons who lack humility, there would be scant communications among the members which would hamper the effectiveness of their apostolate. Thus, love with a touch of humility gives persons genuine inner freedom as the sons of God and brothers in Jesus Christ. In this manner, for St. Vincent, love guided by the safeguard of humility would not only be selfless, but also effective and fruit bearing.

Does the spirit of humility guide me in my love for others? Is my love for others truly selfless? Is my love genuinely communicative? Is my love genuinely involved with the existential situation of the people with whom I live? Does my love give me the inner freedom as the child of God and a brother of Jesus Christ?

You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6: 8)

Love in Speech

[You must speak] without any frivolity, but with prudence, selflessness and moderation. (OCCC, XI, p. 321)

When love is under the safeguard of humility, it expresses itself graciously through a person's speech. Since what a person thinks and feels is expressed through speech, the nature of love that is characteristic of a person can be discerned from his speech. According to St. Vincent Pallotti a person's speech must be without any frivolity for it must be prudent, selfless and moderate. First, a person's speech must be without any frivolity. A person's speech must not contain anything unsubstantial, i.e., it should not be meaningless chatter or gabbing. As a speech of this type is not serious in nature, it does not build genuine and loving communication between persons. Second, a person's speech must be prudent. A prudent speech consists in saying the right thing, in the right way, at the right time. It is a speech that comes after serious reflection and thought. A prudent speech can build bridges between persons. Third, a person's speech must be selfless. A person of selfless speech does not think of himself while he speaks, but rather it is other-centered and looks for the good of the other. Hence, his speech is aimed at bringing good to the other. Fourth, a person's speech must be moderate. Moderation is the mean between extremes of excess and defect. Thus a moderate speech does not err either by defect or by excess. Such speech is pleasing to the listener. When a person's speech bears all these four qualities, St. Vincent felt it would truly be flowing from a heart that genuinely loves and cares for his neighbor.

Do I express love in and through my conversation with others? Is my speech meaningless chatter? Am I prudent in my speech? Am I truly selfless in conversation to and about people? Am I a person of moderate speech?

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how you should respond to each one. (Col. 4: 6)

August 21

Love in Action

In dealing with our neighbor we should be cordial, foresighted, patient and calm without dejection. (OCCC, XI, p. 322)

St. Vincent Pallotti stressed the importance of making a person's love for his neighbor in concrete action. There must be a sense of balance in the way one deals with his neighbor. He suggested that in dealing with one's neighbor, one should be cordial, foresighted, patient, and calm without dejection. First, a person must be cordial with his neighbor. Cordiality consists in being sincere and friendly with one's neighbor. Second, a person must act with foresight towards his neighbor. It involves knowing the nature and sentiments of the person and acting towards him accordingly. Third, a person must be patient towards his neighbor. Patience implies that a person is unruffled and undisturbed when the behavior of one's neighbor is unacceptable and unwanted. Fourth, a person must be calm without being dejected. In dealing with his neighbor, a person must maintain a calm and serene profile despite the failures of his neighbor, but must avoid dejection at all cost. Fifth, a person must give attention to his neighbor without flattering him. While taking sufficient care of his neighbor, one must not act towards his neighbor for the purpose of pleasing him. In this manner, a person can reach out to his neighbor with sincere love and care.

How do I express my love for my neighbor? Am I balanced in the way I express my love for my neighbor? Am I cordial, foresighted, patient and calm with my neighbor? Do I avoid flattery in dealing with my neighbor?

Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own. (Is. 58: 7)

August 22

Genuine Love of Self: The Measure of Love of Others

The measure of love we must have towards our neighbor should correspond to the love that we must have for ourselves. (OCCC, IV, p. 309)

Though St. Vincent Pallotti stressed the importance of love of God and of one's neighbor, he never undermined the value of true self-love. According to him, a proper self-love is essential for a person in order to become capable of loving God and his neighbor. The commandment of love that regulates a person's love for his neighbor clearly states that one must love his neighbor as he loves himself. The implication of this law is that if a person does not know how to love himself, he also would not know how to love his neighbor. Thus, one's love for himself becomes the measure of his love towards his neighbor. A person's love of himself consists of accepting himself as the one who is created in the image and likeness of God, acknowledging the unique position in which God has placed him as the crown of creation, recognizing his rights as a human person and giving himself the value God has given him. Thus, true self-love consists of a person's honest acceptance of himself, his abilities and his drawbacks. It also means that a person would make every effort to develop himself in the best way possible, both bodily and spiritually according to God's plan for him. When a person lovingly takes care of himself in this manner, according to St. Vincent, he would definitely learn to love and care for his neighbor, who like himself, is an image of God and the crown of creation.

Do I acknowledge the dignity God has placed in me as a human person? Is my love of myself genuine or selfish? Am I determined to develop my God-given gifts and talents? Am I ready to accept my drawbacks and grow out of them? Do I acknowledge that my love of myself is the measure of my love of my neighbor?

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mk. 12: 31)

Humility: The Foundation of Charity

It is a fact that in a soul, which lacks true humility, no charity is found, because the more perfect charity is, the more humble it is.
(OCC, III, p. 136; SD, p. 2)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, humility is the foundation of charity. If a person lacks the true spirit of humility, there can be no charity in his life. The virtue of humility consists of the honest acceptance of oneself. A humble person has the right self-knowledge. He knows who he is before God and who he is before his neighbor. A person who is humble never thinks of himself as superior to others. He knows his capabilities and limitations. Therefore, he never brags that he is the most knowledgeable, the most capable or the most industrious in comparison with his neighbor. The virtue of true humility makes a person view himself realistically, and practically. A humble person respects his neighbor, accepts all the good he has with a sense of admiration, and thanks God for the good he has placed in others. A humble person is never presumptuous. He makes no claims for himself if it is not true. Even if a claim is true, he does not make a big issue of it, except for stating the claim in all honesty and sincerity. These attitudes which are present in the humble person form the true foundation on which a genuine life of charity can be built. A person who does not have these attitudes, which are fruits of the virtue of humility, cannot embody any form of charity. It is easy for a humble person to love his neighbor and offer his life in loving surrender to God. A self-conceited person, who thinks too much of himself, can neither truly love his neighbor nor his God. Hence, St. Vincent sees humility as the foundation of charity.

Do I realize the importance of the virtue of humility for the cultivation of charity in my life? Do I have the basic qualities of a humble person? Do I think of myself as superior to others? Do I respect and accept the good of others? Do I truly cultivate humility in order to be a loving person in my relationship with God and others?

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. Do not speak evil against one another. (Jas. 4: 10 – 11)

August 24

Humble Self-knowledge: Means to Sanctity

My entire life ... is a story only of ingratitude, non-correspondence and malice on the part of a creature against his Creator. You alone [O God] can remedy my situation. (OCCC, X, p. 683; STA, 520)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, humble self-knowledge is a great means to God. In order to attain sanctity, one must have true self-knowledge. In his diary, St. Vincent refers to himself as a man of sin, a traitor, a crucifier, a horrible monster of every vice, an abyss of extravagances, and nothingness and sin. All these descriptions of St. Vincent might sound as if he had a very low self-image of himself. In fact, neither was he suffering from a low self-image complex, nor were these descriptions an over-emphasis of his misery. But these descriptions indicate the way he experienced himself as he placed himself before God who is infinite love and perfection. All these descriptions are attempts on the part of St. Vincent to know who he was before God so that he could open himself to God, who is the fullness of mercy and love. His self-knowledge made him realize that he was nothing before God and that he was in need of God's mercy. This was the spirit of humility that marked the life of St. Vincent Pallotti. As he knelt before God in prayer, he felt that he was similar to the publican, unworthy of God's presence, yet he was confident that God would fill his emptiness. Thus, St. Vincent's self-knowledge did not lead him to despair, but caused him to place his entire life in God, who could make him great in every way.

Do I realize that true self-knowledge is a necessary condition for sanctity? Like St. Vincent, do I make an effort to know who I am before God and who God is to me? Does my self-knowledge lead me to despair or to count on God's infinite mercy?

See you lowly ones, and be glad; you who seek, may your hearts be merry! For the Lord hears the poor. (Ps. 69: 33 – 34)

Living the State of Meditation

In order to live in the state of meditation it is necessary to have custody of one's heart. This is acquired through the mortification of one's eyes. (OCCC, X, p. 546; STA, 106)

Meditation is a state in which a person comes in personal encounter with God. It is not merely an isolated act that is performed one or the other time during the day. But rather it is a state of communion with God, which is to be lived on a regular basis. In the state of meditation, one comes to know who God is in himself, who God is to him, and who he is before God. In short, meditation establishes a deep and communicative relationship between God and a person. Also, in meditation a person becomes aware of his vocation in life and what God wants him to plan and accomplish through every day of his life in this world. In the life of St. Vincent Pallotti, meditation played a very vital role. But meditation is an art and it must be learned. According to St. Vincent, in order to acquire the art of meditation, it is necessary to discipline one's inner self, i.e., his inner faculties of the mind and the heart. The disciplining of the inner self would be possible only if a person mortifies his external senses, especially one's eyes, because they are windows to the outside world. But, once learned, meditation gives a person a sense of direction and purpose for his life, in the process giving him a deeper God-experience.

Do I recognize the value of the state of meditation in my life? Do I discipline my inner faculties of the mind and the heart? Do I mortify my external senses in order to acquire the state of meditation? Do I make use of my meditation to establish a communicative relationship with God? Do I acquire a sense of direction and purpose in my life through meditation?

Stand before the Lord in awe, and do not sin against him. Lie quietly upon your bed in silent meditation. Put your trust in the Lord and offer him pleasing sacrifices. (Ps. 4: 4-5)

Jesus: The Mediator of Every Action

May all my internal and external works of every moment of present life and of eternity be done in our Lord Jesus Christ, through him and with him. (OCCC, X, p. 279; STA, 565).

Genuine imitation of Jesus, according to St. Vincent Pallotti, involves conformity to both the external actions of Jesus and to his internal dispositions. When a person's imitation of Jesus embraces the totality of Christ's life, both in its external and internal dimensions, Christ becomes a living reality in the life of that person. Every action done by the person at this state becomes an action done in, with and through Christ. Thus, at this state of perfect imitation of Jesus, he becomes the mediator of every action a person performs. The relationship between Christ and the person who imitates Jesus' life is so intimate that it is difficult to distinguish between the action of Jesus and that of the imitator of Jesus. In fact, the actions of the imitator of Jesus are expressed through the mediation of Jesus, who is present in the life of the imitator. Thus, perfect imitation of Jesus makes him the mediator of every action of the imitator. St. Vincent Pallotti attempted to live a life of perfect imitation of Jesus by conforming to his life perfectly, both in his external actions and interior dispositions. As a result, he achieved a perfect intimacy with Jesus, in the process performing every one of his actions through the mediation of Jesus.

Do I imitate Jesus both in his external actions and interior dispositions? Do I have an intimate relationship with Jesus? Do I perform my actions in, through and with Jesus? Do I learn from the example of St. Vincent Pallotti, who lived a life of perfect imitation of Jesus?

Jesus [is] the mediator of a new covenant ... [whose] sprinkled blood ... speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. (Heb. 12: 24)

Faithfulness to One's Vocation

You have been favored with a vocation in this little Congregation ... You must live until death in the most perfect exercise of love toward God and toward neighbor. (OCC, VIII, pp. 264 - 265; SD, p. 1)

St. Vincent Pallotti considers a person's vocation as a precious gift from God. It is not something a person truly merits or deserves. But it is a gift, a favor, and a grace God bestows on the human person. Hence, for St. Vincent, his own vocation and that of the other members of the congregation he founded are undeserved favors that come from the infinite love and mercy of God. It is not given to the individual for his own selfish purposes. There is no doubt that a person's vocation enables him to attain his glorification and salvation. This does not mean that a person can use his vocation totally and fully in a selfish way. According to St. Vincent, a person is called to a particular vocation in the little congregation he founded in order to exercise in the most perfect way the love of God and of his neighbor. God calls a person to make a full commitment to accomplish the commandment of love, its twofold precepts, and to live it in the most perfect manner until one's death. A person's faithfulness to his vocation consists of saying 'yes' to the Lord at every moment of his life, in accomplishing the precept of love of God and neighbor, and by living in a person's life the very spirit of this commandment. When a person truly lives the spirit of this commandment in the context of diverse apostolic ministries in which he is engaged, he works out his own salvation, works for the salvation of his neighbor, and glorifies God in and through his work of salvation. When this happens in the life of person, he is truly faithful to his vocation.

Do I consider my vocation a free gift from God? Am I selfish in living my vocation? Do I realize that the goal of my vocation is to exercise the commandment to love, in its twofold precepts? Am I faithful to my vocation? Do I use my vocation to work for my salvation, the salvation of my neighbor and the glory of God?

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. (Eph. 4: 1)

August 28

Pride and Anger: Obstacles to Sanctification

You see that anger and pride are rooted in me, that I am not capable of destroying these two horrible monsters within me. Therefore, my Jesus, destroy them in me entirely and forever. (OCCC, X, p. 362; STA, 390)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that besides acquiring the spirit of sacrifice, cultivating the spirit of humility is very vital for a person's sanctification and spiritual growth. In his attempt to live a spirit of humility and thereby attain true Christian perfection, St. Vincent found two obstacles in his life, that is, pride and anger. His writings reveal that he was struggling with these two obstacles to his sanctification throughout his life, as there were references made to them both at the earlier and later periods of his spiritual life. The manner in which references to pride and anger were made in his writings might sound a bit exaggerated, as St. Vincent always considered himself as the worst of all sinners, even though such a perception about his spiritual state was not really true. But the fact that he refers to them often indicates that it was not easy for St. Vincent to curb these tendencies within him, and that he had to struggle a lot to keep them in check and under control. St. Vincent had a natural fiery temperament and these weaknesses of pride and anger were, without any doubt, related to his nature. The effort he had to put forth to overcome them and remain humble throughout his life pointed to the true spirit of humility he attempted to live in his life. Though St. Vincent struggled with pride and anger in his life, he never allowed them to master him, but rather he was always their master.

Do I recognize the value of true humility in my life? What are some of the weaknesses I suffer from which go against the spirit of humility? Am I honest in accepting my weaknesses? Do I make every effort to master my weaknesses?

God's steward must be blameless, not arrogant, not irritable, not a drunkard, not aggressive, not greedy for sordid gain. (Tit. 1: 7)

Eucharist: Communion with Jesus

Through the merciful nourishment of the Holy Eucharist Jesus destroys me completely ... He does not change in me, but rather changes me into himself. (OCCC, X, pp. 460 - 461; STA, 505).

St. Vincent Pallotti considers the Holy Eucharist an intimate communion with Jesus. Since he is certain of this truth, he invites his followers to accept the challenge of journeying towards this closer union with Jesus, especially by the frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist. For him, the Holy Eucharist is the means through which Jesus continues his most holy life in the human person. Therefore, the more often a person receives the Eucharist, the more he opens the depth of his being for the actual living of Jesus. Jesus, by nourishing a person in the Eucharist, destroys everything in the person that is unholy and unworthy of him. The self of the individual is destroyed. Jesus, his infinite perfection and attitudes remain in the person. St. Vincent says that the transformation and communion that takes place through the Eucharist are unique. Speaking of it he says that Jesus does not change in the person, but rather Jesus changes the person into himself. As the result of this communion with Jesus in and through the Eucharist, the feelings, thoughts, sentiments and attitudes of Jesus take hold of the person, so much so that it is no more the person who acts, but rather Jesus acts in him. For St. Vincent, the constant communion with Jesus, the Eucharistic Lord, is the means through which he received all the energy to carry on his diverse activities.

Do I accept the Eucharist as a communion with Jesus? Do I believe that through the Holy Eucharist Jesus continues his life in me? Do I recognize the Eucharistic communion destroys in me all that is unworthy of Jesus? Do I allow Jesus to live and act in me through the frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist? Do I receive the energy to work tirelessly on a daily basis from my communion with the Eucharistic Lord?

Because there is One Bread, we, who are many, are one Body, for we all partake of the One Bread. (I Cor. 10:17)

August 30

Reflection before Action

Before beginning any action, we must reflect on how Jesus Christ would think, speak or work in the various circumstances of the day. We must aim at what is most perfect always and in everything. (OCCC, III, p. 42)

St. Vincent Pallotti is a wise person. According to him, every member of his congregation must live his life thoughtfully. A life without reflection can become a meaningless and fruitless one. Therefore, he proposes to every member of his community to reflect seriously before he makes any decision or plan of action. In order to make them reflective persons, St. Vincent proposes the life of Jesus Christ as the fundamental rule of the Society he founded. Keeping the life of Jesus as the ideal, every member of the Society is called to reflect upon, to learn from, and to imitate Jesus' life. Hence, St. Vincent wants his followers to reflect on what Jesus would have thought, spoken, or done, before they perform any action. When this is done, a person by way of reflection sets before his mind the ideal behavior he needs to follow in his life. Setting an ideal that is based on the life of Jesus to guide a person's everyday living guarantees him that his thoughts, words, and actions are in agreement with Jesus' thoughts, words, and actions. As a result, in every situation of his life, a person acts as Christ himself acts, and his actions are as perfect as the actions of Christ. In this way, a life of reflection before action, for St. Vincent, helps a person to not only aim at what is the most perfect in everything, but also to accomplish what is the most perfect always.

Do I live my life thoughtfully? Do I think before I act? Do I accept the life of Jesus as the ideal for my reflection? Do the thoughts, words, and actions of Jesus, guide my thoughts, words, and actions? Do I aim to live a life of perfection?

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. (Jas. 3: 17)

Confusion: Result of Unbelief

He who trusts in God will not be confused. So if you are confused it will be a sign that you do not trust. (OCL, III, 601, p. 126)

St. Vincent Pallotti is a person of trust. According to him, confusion is the result of unbelief. A person who constantly trusts in God will not find any situation in his life confusing, for confusion is the sign of lack of trust. In order to clarify this point further, St. Vincent considers the meaning of the phrase “trust in God.” It consists of a person having confidence in God. In trusting God, a person believes in him, places his faith in him, and relies on him. Trust in God calls for a dependence on God. When a person trusts in God, he experiences God as his assurance. A person’s trust in God affirms him, strengthens him, and helps him to have a feeling that he is firmly placed in God’s hands. As a result, in trusting, a person is able to confide his problems, troubles, and difficulties in God. Finally, when a person trusts God, he esteems God as the one to whom he can turn in every situation. For St. Vincent, when a person trusts in God he feels secure, as he experiences God as his stronghold. Thus, trust enables a person to experience God as the reliable one, his inner security, and his assurance. When a person experiences God through his trust in God, then there is no reason for him to be confused as to how to handle his life and its everyday situations. Since he experiences God as his inner security and assurance, if any moments of doubt and confusion arise, a person can totally depend on God and surrender the situation to him. In doing so, he will become certain of the next step to be taken. In this way, if a person trusts in God, he can never be confused.

Do I believe that confusion is a sign of unbelief? Do I truly trust in God? Do I accept God as my stronghold? Am I ready to take my situation of doubt and confusion to God in an act of trust, and thereby arrive at a state of clarity?

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. (Acts. 14: 2)

Child-likeness and Childishness

[In order to be child-like we must have] a profound awareness of our littleness ... a continuous disposition to be directed and led, to give up all [and] be obedient in all. (OCCC, II, p. 19)

Child-likeness is different from childishness. Childishness is an unbecoming behavioral pattern we find in an adult. It points to the immaturity of the grown up person. Though he is grown up, in certain situations his behavior is similar to that of a child. We cannot appreciate a childish behavior. But child-likeness is a virtuous behavior. It consists of a person living the spirit of being a child before God. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the following characteristics mark the virtue of child-likeness: a profound awareness of one's limitations, a continuous disposition to be directed and led, giving up all and being obedient in every situation. Child-likeness first, involves cultivating a profound awareness of one's limitations. It consists of a person deeply and existentially experiencing his smallness and insignificance before God. Second, a child-like person possesses a continuous disposition to be directed and led by God. Thus a person recognizes his total dependence on God. Third, a child-like person is ready to give up all. Since he knows that all he has is from God, he is detached from all and is ready to let go. He is happy in possessing the giver of gifts rather than the gifts themselves. Finally, child-likeness implies total obedience in every situation. It calls for total self-surrender before God. A child-like person feels that he is a child before God, trusting in him, depending on him, preferring him to his gifts and surrendering his life to him.

Am I childish in my behavior? Do I have the attitude of child-likeness? Do I recognize my limitations? Do I depend on God for everything? Do I prefer God, Giver of gifts, to his gifts? Am I ready to make a surrender of my life to God?

Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. (Mt. 19 14)

Spiritual Infancy: Living like Little Children

Our Lord Jesus Christ was born as a child. For love of him, we must form in ourselves a spiritual childhood, that we always live as children in the hand of our Superiors and Spiritual Directors. (OCC, III, p. 43)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the virtue of spiritual childhood consists of a person living his life with the attitude of a child in his relationship to God. We find this attitude in Jesus in his relationship to his Father. Throughout his life, in every situation, Jesus followed the will of his Father totally and with the freedom of the Son. St. Vincent advises everyone to practice this virtue of spiritual childhood in imitation of Jesus. Just as Jesus expressed his love as a son through the total surrender of his life to his Father, every person must express that he is a child of the Father through the surrender of his life to God. In the case of every human person, his surrender is often expressed through his openness in accepting the directives of his superiors and other persons who hold office as leaders. A person who sincerely accepts his limitations, fosters within himself a readiness to accept the authority of those whom God has placed over him as leaders, and enthusiastically accomplishes what they expect of him by practicing the virtue of spiritual childhood. St. Vincent constantly lived this spirit of spiritual childhood especially in his attitude towards his spiritual director and others in authority.

Do I live out the attitude of spiritual childhood in imitation of Jesus, the Son of the Father? Do I acknowledge those persons whom God has placed over me as leaders? Am I able to see the will of God in their directives? Do I enthusiastically accomplish the directives of my superiors in the spirit of Christ?

For our boast is this ... that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially towards you, with the simplicity and sincerity of God. (II Cor. 1: 12)

Qualities of Spiritual Infancy

The virtues of spiritual childhood are ingenuity, candor, simplicity of a dove, gentleness, modesty, and the practice of all these virtues regulated by Christian prudence. (OCCC, II, pp. 20 - 21)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, there are a number of virtues that flow from the virtue of spiritual childhood. They are ingenuity, candor, simplicity, gentleness, modesty, and all the virtues directed by Christian prudence. A person who practices the virtue of spiritual childhood possesses all these virtues. The virtue of ingenuity makes a person skillful in offering himself to God. An ingenious person always finds ways and means to make the best gift of himself to God. The virtue of candor makes a person sincere, frank, open and honest in his attitude towards God. The virtue of simplicity facilitates a person to seek God and his glory in everything he does. It implies forgetfulness of self and seeking God alone. The virtue of gentleness makes a person delicate in his dealings, tender in his love, and sensitive in his responding to God. The virtue of modesty helps a person to restrain his tendencies and passions, and keep himself ready for God in purity of heart, mind and body. The virtue of prudence and virtues associated with it give a sense of balance and moderation in the practice of all the above virtues. In this manner, the attitude of spiritual childhood destroys all forms of selfishness in a person and makes him completely transformed, so that he stands in total availability to God and his fellow men.

Am I ingenious in the way I offer myself to God? Am I sincere as I stand before the presence of God? Am I gentle in my attitude towards God? Do I offer myself to God in purity of heart, mind, and body? Am I available to God and to my neighbor?

If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another. (Gal. 5: 25 - 26)

Practice of Spiritual Infancy

For an appropriate practice of spiritual childhood, a person should not seek an office of authority. But if obliged he must readily accept it ... [And] if one is not elected to an office, he should not complain. But a person must be prepared to accept any office. (OOCC, II, p. 20)

St. Vincent Pallotti gives a clear-cut direction as to how the practice of spiritual childhood should be with regard to a person's attitude towards accepting an office of authority. A person should not look for one. St. Vincent condemned the attitude of vying and competing for an office of authority. It was prevalent among the clerics of his time. Detesting this attitude that was widespread in the clerical hierarchy, and to prevent it among the members of the Society he founded, he introduced the promise of "non-acceptance of the ecclesiastical dignities." While not ambitiously looking for holding an office of authority, St. Vincent was not averse to accepting such an office if he is obliged to hold an office for a good reason. Again, St. Vincent says that if a person is not elected to an office of authority, he should not complain or lament about the denial of such an office to him. For his lamentation amounts to ambitious seeking of an office of authority. But at the same time, a person should cultivate within himself a readiness to accept any office of authority, because it is a way of serving God and his people. Thus, it is clear that St. Vincent was not against holding an office of authority, but he was against ambitiously seeking and competitively vying for any office. If an office were viewed as an opportunity to serve God and his people, he would encourage a person to hold an office of authority. Thus, for him, service must be the motive of holding any form of authority.

Am I child-like in my attitude of seeking positions of authority? Am I ambitious and do I vie for positions of authority? Do I complain when I am not elected to an office of authority? Is the service of God's people the motive of my accepting an office?

This is the one whom I approve: the lowly and afflicted man who trembles at my word. (Is. 66: 2)

Spiritual Infancy: Living an Attitude of Absolute Obedience

I intend to regard every creature as my superior. And therefore I intend to execute all orders for the love of God. (OCCC, X, p. 158; STA, 267)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered the virtue of spiritual childhood as a way of living an attitude of absolute obedience. In his personal life, he cultivated the “attitude of being governed” by and “being obedient” to those in leadership positions. Living the spirit of spiritual childhood demands, for St. Vincent, that the attitude of obedience is directed towards even the lowliest person one encounters in his daily life. St. Vincent practiced this virtue not only towards his spiritual director and his superiors, but also towards every creature. Hence, he said that he desired to regard every creature as his superior. He also pledged that he intended to obey every order given to him, no matter from whom the order came. He made a resolution to obey readily, exactly, happily, and simply any order given by any person, whether he was a superior or an inferior. With the help of the practice of this extreme form of obedience, St. Vincent learned the meaning of humility experientially, his love for God increased, and he became more devoted to God. Thus, the practice of the virtue of spiritual childhood, for St. Vincent, was an open acceptance of his littleness before God. It is a humble submission to God’s will without dejection.

Do I recognize that the living of spiritual childhood calls me to practice the virtue of obedience unconditionally? Am I ready to obey those in authority? Am I willing to obey those who are inferior to me? Does the practice of spiritual childhood increase my love of God and teach me humility?

Your obedience is known to all ... I want you to be wise as to what is good, and simple as to what is evil. (Rom. 16: 19)

Simplicity: Seeking God Alone

[By simplicity a person] seeks God and his glory always and in all things ... The person practicing simplicity flies immediately to God without clinging to anything other than God or without succumbing to temptations of human respect. (OCCC, XIII, pp. 171 - 172)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the virtue of simplicity helps a person to rest secure in God. Since a person finds God as his security, there is nothing that disturbs his inner peace and tranquillity. Whatever troubles assail a person, whatever the hardships he faces, and whatever the obstacles he encounters, he stands firm for he is founded on God, his protector. Therefore, by the practice of this virtue, a person is able to seek God and his glory always unhindered. This virtue enables a person to do all things for the glorification of God. Thus simplicity consists of seeking God alone. As the heart of the person who practices this virtue is centered on God, he is not attached to anything earthly. Nothing distracts his mind from its focus on God. Having fixed his mind on God, the sole motive of his actions is love of God. Neither human respect nor his personal interests prevent him from choosing God. The practice of simplicity gives a person complete inner freedom to do whatever he does. With this inner freedom, a person of simplicity seeks God and finds him without any form of hindrance.

How do I practice the virtue of simplicity in my life? Do I find my security in God? Does my attitude of simplicity help me to seek God and his glory? Is my mind focused on God? Does the practice of simplicity give me the inner freedom to choose God? What is the motive of my actions?

So long as I still have life in me and the breath of God is in my nostrils, my lips shall not speak falsehood, nor my tongue utter deceit. (Ps. 27: 3 - 4)

Conversion: The Result of Simplicity

[Simplicity] separates us entirely from earthly things, overpowers all our spiritual enemies, subjugates our evil passions, leads us to work purely for the love of God and opens for us the door to God. (OCCC, V, p. 319)

St. Vincent believed that the practice of the virtue of simplicity brings about genuine conversion within the person. For St. Vincent, the practice of this virtue separates a person completely from earthly things, overpowers all his spiritual enemies, subjugates every one of his evil passions, makes him act guided by the motive of the love of God, and raises him to the level of God. Thus, this virtue helps a person to detach himself from selfishness and earthly attractions, and guides him to seek God with the purity of intention. As a result, a person is able to turn away from all that is against God and turn to seek him alone. Once a person attempts to seek God always and everywhere, he gets so fully involved in this task that he loses his interest in and desire for selfish inclinations and worldly attachments. Hence, a person acts in every situation guided by good intentions and brings God's blessings in his life and that of others. This in turn leads him to make a total surrender of himself to God. St. Vincent Pallotti practiced the virtue of simplicity with great zeal. He sought God as his treasure here on earth and sought to give him the glory in everything he did.

Does the virtue of simplicity bring about genuine conversion in my life? Am I able to detach myself from my selfishness and the attractions of the world? Am I able to attach myself to God by seeking him alone? Do I perform every act of mine with good intentions? Do I perform my actions for the manifestation of the glory of God?

If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. (Co. 3: 1)

Mary: Way to Jesus

I wish that you give me your heart, so I may give it to my divine Son, Jesus. Once your heart belongs to him, then you will receive from him the necessary graces to remain in him ... So give me your heart that I may give it to Jesus. (OCCC, XIII, pp. 716 - 717)

The spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti has a Marian touch. So the essential element of St. Vincent's spiritual journey is "through Mary to Jesus." The most important task of Mary's life is to bring Christ to the world. Hence, she is interested in bringing Christ into the hearts of every believer and making him/her mature in Christ. Therefore, St. Vincent encouraged all types of people, whether they were sinful, tepid or half-hearted, and the fervent persons to go to Mary that they all may find their proper way to reach Jesus. To the persons who are sinful, Mary offers refuge and helps them to make peace with the crucified Lord who was crucified for their sins. To those persons who are tepid and half-hearted in their attitude towards the Lord, Mary after accepting them, asks them to stop living a life that endangers the gift of the Spirit in their lives. They must start anew with renewed fervor and move towards a life of genuine perfection which in turn would take them to Jesus. To those persons who are fervent in their commitment to the Lord, Mary helps them to increase their efforts in becoming perfect, and thereby makes them more like Jesus. Thus Mary wishes all groups of people would give their hearts to her, so that she can bring about the needed transformation in them. Having transformed them, she can offer them to Jesus. In this manner, Mary becomes the way to Jesus, as far as the spiritual life of every Christian is concerned.

Do I acknowledge Mary as the way to lead me to Jesus? What is the spiritual state I find myself in? Am I in the state of sin? Am I tepid or half-hearted? Am I fervent in my commitment to the Lord? Am I ready to offer myself to Mary despite the fact of my actual spiritual state? Do I believe that with Mary's help I can truly know Jesus?

His Mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."
(Jn: 2: 5)

Experience of Others in God

I see you in God. I speak to you in God. I embrace and greet you in God, and in God I am always united to you. (OCL, III, 694 p. 245)

The more a person practices the virtue of simplicity, the more he seeks God. The more he seeks God, the more he finds God. The more he finds God, the more he becomes one with God. The more he becomes one with God, the more God becomes his everything. In this state, a person begins whatever he does in God, does whatever he does in God, and ends whatever he does in God. His life in its totality is understood in his relationship with God. In this state, a person experiences his action, his interactions with others, his achievements as well as his failures, in God. It is a state of deep experience of union with God. When a person attains this state of union with God, distance does not matter and differences vanish away as a person is able to feel with others, encounter others, and interact with others in the realm of the spirit. St. Vincent Pallotti achieved this state of union with the whole of creation in his union with God. It is to this experience he refers when he writes to Melia and Marinoni the following: “I see you in God; I speak to you in God; I embrace you and greet you in God; and in God I am always united to you.” In this manner, the practice of the virtue of simplicity makes a person experience an intimate union with God.

Does the practice of the virtue of simplicity help me to seek, find and experience an intimate union with God? Does this union with God make me perceive the totality of my life in relationship with God? Does my union with God make me see the whole of creation, especially the human person, in my relationship with God?

But you, my other self, my companion and my bosom friend! You [are the one], whose comradeship I enjoyed ... [and] at whose side I walked in the procession in the house of God. (Ps. 55: 14 – 15)

Simplicity: Centering One's Heart on God

My God, not my intellect, but God; not the will, but God; ... not breath, but God; ... not repose, but God; ... not distinctions, but God ... not promotions, but God; God in all things and forevermore. (OCC, X, p. 131; STA, 187)

The virtue of simplicity, according to St. Vincent Pallotti, is a centering of one's heart on God. This centering, in the initial stages of a person's spiritual journey, calls for hard work as it involves making a preferential option for God. In other words, a person has to give preference to God and give secondary importance to a number of things which are also significant to him. It is important to note that St. Vincent does not deny the value of those things to which he gives secondary importance, but only makes a preferential option for God. Some of those things he has to let go to prefer God are his intellect, his will, his soul, his senses, his breath, his feelings, his heart, his body, the air he breathes, the food and drink, the clothes he wears, the rest he takes, every earthly good he uses, the various riches he possesses, the honors, the dignities, and the distinctions he has received, and the various promotions he has been given. All of these things were dear to him, but he had to let go in order to experience all things in God. When a person makes a preferential option for God and chooses him as his first priority in his life, every other thing takes its proper place in the life of the person.

Does the virtue of simplicity help me to center my heart on God? Do I make a preferential option to choose God as my first priority in my life? Am I able to give every other significant thing in my life a secondary place, without denying its value and worth? Am I able to find all things in God?

May the Lord, who is good, grant pardon to everyone who has resolved to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers. (II Chro. 30: 18 – 19)

My Seeking God: The Motive

Yes, my God, I want you, because this is what you want. Otherwise I should never have the courage to invoke you. (OCCC, X, p. 131; STA, 188)

The attitudes of spiritual childhood and simplicity St. Vincent Pallotti practiced devotedly made him surrender his being and his having to God. There was nothing in his life which he had to hide from God. The totality of his life was completely transparent before God. His life was an open book and it was always available to God. Every action of St. Vincent was done in accordance with God's plan for him. There was nothing in his thoughts, words, and deeds that did not correspond to the Divine Plan. Whatever he did was done because he perceived it as God's will and plan for him in the situation he found himself. Even the sphere of his relationship with God was done according to God's plan. For even in St. Vincent's relationship with God, he did not want to do anything that would be different from God's plan for him. He wished that his journey towards God was totally directed by the grace of God. All that he did was to cooperate with God's grace and responded correspondingly to God's revelations in his life. This attitude made him often say that he wanted to enter into a relationship with God because that was what God wanted of him. He acknowledged that if God did not want to enter into a relationship with St. Vincent, he would neither have the courage to invoke God nor enter into a relationship with him. Thus, we find him totally caught up with God. He experienced the totality of himself in God and God in himself.

Have I made a total surrender of myself to God, like St. Vincent? Am I totally transparent before God? Do I guide my life according to God's plan for me? Do I respond to God's revelations to me correspondingly? Is my spiritual life directed according to God's plan for me?

When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart, because I bore your name, O Lord, God of hosts. (Jer. 15: 16)

Signs of the Servants of the Lord

The Holy joy and spiritual cheerfulness ... [are] distinctive characteristics of the true servants of the Lord. (OOCC, II, pp. 162-163)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that the virtues of holy joy and spiritual cheerfulness are two characteristics that mark the life of a servant of God. A true servant of God must radiate joy and cheerfulness. According to St. Vincent's perception of Christian life, by the practice of the virtues of spiritual childhood and simplicity, a person recognizes his limitations and orients himself towards God, thereby establishing a relationship of communion with God. The virtues of joy and cheerfulness help a person to live this life of communion with deep delight and happiness. While speaking about the virtues of joy and cheerfulness, St. Vincent Pallotti refers to the house at Nazareth where the Holy Family lived. According to him, joy and cheerfulness characterized the life of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Their life of intimate union with each other was marked by these two virtues. St. Vincent encouraged his followers to live the spirit of the house at Nazareth in the communities of the Society he founded. He believed that if everyone attempted to live the spirit of these two virtues of joy and cheerfulness, the communities of the Society would shine forth the joy of the Lord to everyone who comes in contact with them.

Does my Christian life radiate the virtues of holy joy and spiritual cheerfulness? Do these two virtues help me to live my communion with the Lord with delight and happiness? Do I imitate the spirit of the house at Nazareth in living these two virtues in my life? Does the community in which I live manifest the spirit of joy and cheerfulness?

Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (II Cor. 9: 7)

Holy Joy and Apostolate

Let all remember also that if they lack the characteristics [of holy joy and spiritual cheerfulness], they will bring few people to God, because their external looks will discourage others from following our Lord Jesus Christ. (OCCC, II, p. 164)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the virtues of holy joy and spiritual cheerfulness have a great role to play in making the apostolate of a person and that of a community effective and fruit bearing. If a person lacks joy and cheerfulness as he goes about doing his apostolic tasks, he gives the impression that he is not happy about what he does, bored with the mission entrusted to him, or it is a burdensome task. If the person doing the apostolate gives such an idea to others about his apostolic task, his apostolate may not bear the intended fruit among the people for whom it is done. If there is no enthusiasm, joy, and cheerfulness in the manner of doing the apostolic endeavor, there may not be many people interested in what one is doing. In this manner, lack of joy and cheerfulness in the apostle slows down the pace of progress in the apostolate, makes it unattractive, undesirable, and not beneficial. Thus, when cheerfulness and joy are not an inherent part of a person's way of doing the apostolate, he brings very few people to God, as he, with his disinterested attitude, discourages many who otherwise would have turned to God through the medium of his apostolate. On the other hand, if an apostle were cheerful and joyful in his communication of God's love through his apostolic endeavor, he would bring abundant fruit in and through his apostolate.

Do I manifest the gifts of joy and cheerfulness in my apostolate? Do I make the apostolate unattractive and undesirable due to my lack of interest? Do I drive people away from God and his kingdom due the absence of a spirit of joy and cheerfulness?

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them ... with diligence ... [and] with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12: 6 – 8)

Glory Through the Cross

In order to enter the habitation of the Blessed, we must become images of the Crucified. But we can become such only through tribulations. (OCL, I, 194, p. 290)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a person experiences glory only through the cross. No one can think of reaching the state of glory without going through the state of suffering and tribulation. This is very clear from the life of Jesus himself. His suffering and death are preludes to his resurrection. The glory of the resurrection comes about as the consequence of his suffering and death. Therefore, for St. Vincent, in order for a person to become worthy of the glory of God's kingdom, he must become the image of the crucified Lord Jesus. Becoming the image of the crucified Lord implies accepting tribulations and hardship in a person's life in imitation of Jesus, the Crucified. Jesus encounters sufferings throughout his life. At his birth, Jesus' life is under threat. His life in the home of Nazareth does have its share of tribulations. During his public ministry, despite his good will towards the Jewish leadership, they wait for opportunities to find fault with him. Towards the last days of Jesus' life, he willingly accepts mental agony and physical pain, different forms of suffering during his passion, crucifixion, and finally death. Hence, St. Vincent's invitation to become the image of the crucified implies that a person is ready to accept joyfully and live courageously the sufferings of the human situation in the spirit with which Jesus accepted his sufferings and lived them. If a person accepts his suffering with the spirit of Jesus, then he would definitely attain the glory, like Jesus.

Do I believe that I can attain glory only through the cross? Do I live my life as an image of Jesus, the Crucified? Do I accept the sufferings that come into my life, in the manner which Christ accepted his sufferings? By accepting suffering and living it joyfully, do I make myself ready for the eternal blessedness with God?

For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. (Heb. 10: 34)

Prayer: The Means of Divine Grace

I will not only pray for myself, but also my fellow students and teachers, [so that by] the infusion of grace, they may reap an infinitely great fruit. (OOCC, X, pp. 128 - 129; STA, 29)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, prayer is the means of divine grace. God desires that a Christian is open to the gift of grace through prayer. God is ever ready to bestow upon the human person the treasure of his grace. But a person, through prayer, must reach out to God opening himself to him. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, prayer is the essential condition that is most conducive to receiving the grace of God. St. Vincent, analyzing the spiritual state of a person, says that if a person is caught up in spiritual misery and meaninglessness, it is because of two reasons: either he does not pray at all; or he does not pray as he should pray. Thus, the wealth of a person's spiritual life depends on the manner in which a person prays. Similarly, a person finds himself in the state of spiritual poverty if he neglects and ignores prayer in his life. Not only did St. Vincent advise his followers to pray, but he himself spent many hours in prayer daily. He made use of every opportunity to pray. Even as a young person, St. Vincent had the habit of frequent repetition of fervent prayers and ejaculations. His sincere commitment to prayer is the reason for his sanctity.

Do I acknowledge prayer as a means to the grace of God? Do I take time to pray so as to reach out to God's presence? What is the nature of my spiritual life? Do I find myself in a state of spiritual poverty or in a state of spiritual wealth? What concrete steps do I need to take in order to grow in my prayer life and open my life to God's grace?

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, when received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the invocation of God in prayer. (1 Tim. 4: 4 - 5)

Prayer: The Means of Union with God

The life of our Lord Jesus Christ was a life of prayer. He gave us the precept of vigilant prayer as the means of reaching intimate union with God. (OOCC, VIII, pp. 295 - 296)

Besides opening a person's life to the grace of God, prayer also brings about intimate union with God. Union with God is brought about by our imitation of the life of Jesus. It is in prayer that we learn the ways and means of imitating Jesus. Hence, prayer is essential for achieving union with God. Jesus achieved his union with his Father by his fervent prayers. Similarly, vigilant prayer, like that of Jesus, is vital for a person moving towards union with God. Prayer is not an occasional act. It is not enough to direct our minds and hearts to God periodically. Such periodic attempts at prayer may not help a person to build up an intimate relationship with God. Prayer must be habitual. It is a continuous orientation towards God. St. Vincent, therefore, spoke of "a life of prayer" rather than "periods of prayer." Prayer is a continuous and ongoing relationship with God, which, in turn, brings about a person's union with God. Hence, a person who is interested in establishing a lasting relationship of union with God must never cease to pray. Thus, the cultivation of a genuine life of prayer on a continuous basis enables us to imitate the life of Jesus in its fullness, and thereby leads a person to an intimate union with God.

Do I consider prayer as a means of establishing union with God? Does my prayer help me to learn ways and means to imitate Jesus in my life? Do I live a "life of prayer" or spend time in "periods of prayer"? Is my prayer continuous and ongoing?

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you of two minds. (Jas. 4: 8)

God Answers Our Prayer

Before beginning my prayers, I will consider myself unworthy to listen to God or have him listen to mine. Since St. Theresa of Avila says she received the greatest graces in her prayers when she most humiliated herself. (OOCC, X, p. 100; STA, 124)

People often raise the question of God not answering their prayers. Often people take God's not answering their prayers or delaying in answering their prayers as a lack of concern and care on the part of God. As a result, some even give up praying. St. Vincent has something to say to these people. For him, prayer is the infallible means to obtain from God everything one desires or needs. If a person thinks that God is not answering his prayer or delaying in answering his prayer, he must remember that this does not mean that God is not listening to him. Sometimes God denies what a person asks in prayer. This is not because God dislikes him or is not interested in him. But the reason for the denial of his request in prayer is that God is more interested in giving to that person what he really needs for his good rather than giving him what he wishes to have. Sometimes God makes a person wait by delaying in answering his prayer. This is because God wants that person to continue to offer his petitions to him, in all humility, thereby increasing his love and faith. If a person is objective about the way God deals with him, then he will realize that God is more liberal in giving rather than asking.

Do I complain that God does not answer my prayer? Do I give up praying because my prayer is sometimes not answered? Do I try to understand the mystery of God's plan for my life which guides him to respond to my prayer? Do I see God's liberal dealing with me in my life?

And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. (Lk. 11: 9 – 10)

September 18

Prayer: Fixing One's Mind on God

[Prayer consists in] directing all one's thoughts, words and actions on God. (OCCC, II, p. 63)

For St. Vincent, prayer consists of a person fixing his thoughts, words and actions on God. When a person centers himself totally on God in prayer, he becomes aware of God's presence and accepts God as he is in himself, i.e., in His Person. Thus, in prayer, a person's faith-awareness of God leads him to a faith-encounter with God. When a person fixes his whole attention on God, he experiences a faith-encounter with God based on his faith-awareness of God. A person's faith-encounter with God, in turn, makes him aware of his personal presence. This awareness of his personal presence, in God's presence, makes a person experience an encounter with his own self. Thus, in prayer, though a person fixes his mind on God, it not only opens him to a God-discovery, but it opens him also to a self-discovery. Hence, in prayer, though a person's attention is focused on knowing God's personality as the God of infinite love and mercy, he also experiences himself as a sinful creature, unworthy of God's love and mercy. This twofold encounter of God and self in prayer makes a person respond to God's infinite love and mercy, though he is unworthy. God, in turn, blesses the human person with his forgiving love and makes him a partaker in his kingdom. Thus, there comes about a genuine inter-personal dialogue between God and the human person in prayer.

Does my prayer lead me to an awareness of God and an encounter with him? Do I discover myself as I encounter God in prayer? Do I experience God's reaching out to me with his merciful love in prayer? Is my prayer a true dialogue with God?

Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way. (Eph. 4: 23 – 24)

Solitude: Prerequisite for Prayer

For forty days and forty nights he [Jesus] prayed and fasted ... He nevertheless condescended to teach us the practice of solitude, in order to speak alone to God. (OCC, XXXIII, pp. 153 - 154; GIL, XXVIII, p. 107)

St. Vincent Pallotti stressed the importance of solitude in order to arrive at a genuine state of prayer. To maintain a consciousness of God's presence, thereby experiencing an encounter with God, and to discover the nature of a person's self as he stands before the presence of God, thereby entering into dialogical relationship with God, calls for an interior recollection. A person achieves the state of inner recollection with the help of solitude. Hence, solitude is an effective means for deeper prayer. In order to explain the meaning of solitude, St. Vincent gives the example of Jesus going into the wilderness and spending forty days and forty nights in deep communion with God. In order to have communion with God, Jesus goes into the wilderness. For Jesus, being in the wilderness meant being away from every person, being away from every form of involvement in the world, and being totally available to God. This is exactly what solitude means. Solitude totally frees us for God, thereby making a genuine divine-human encounter possible. Just as Jesus embraced the "wilderness," we need to embrace "solitude" in order that we experience God in and through our prayer.

Do I cultivate a genuine attitude of prayer? Do I cultivate interior recollection in order to grow in my prayer life? Do I understand the meaning of "Jesus is going into the wilderness" in the context of my prayer life? Do I have the spirit of solitude, which makes me ready for God-experience?

In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. (Lk. 6: 12)

Pray Humbly

Vincent, before praying ... remember your wretchedness ... your black ingratitude and impiety ... How dare you speak with our ... perfect God ... Confess then your misery and ... impiety. (OCCC, X, pp. 107 - 108; STA, 165)

In prayer, a person experiences who God is and who he is before him. Prayer reveals God in his infinite perfection and the human person in his misery. Hence, a person's communication with God in prayer must necessarily be humble. The interaction of a person with God in prayer must be honest and without any pretension. God knows who a person is. Hence, he need not show off his greatness before God. Prayer, as the dialogue between God and a person, must be done without any form of fear, as God, the Infinite Love, knows humans misery and accepts a person despite knowing this fact. While a person need not fear God to approach him in prayer, the attitudes that should characterize a genuine prayer are the following: a humble adoration of God's infinitely perfect personality; a deep sorrow for one's sinfulness; a sincere gratitude for God's gift of forgiveness and divine life; an earnest placing of one's needs before God; total dedication to the work of God; and joyful praise of God's glory. When prayer is addressed to God in this humble spirit, God accepts and respects a person and his prayer. He responds to the needs of the person with his love.

Am I humble as I stand before the presence of God in prayer? Do I relate to God in honesty and without pretension? Does fear prevent me from reaching out to God in prayer? Which are some of the qualities that characterize my prayer? What should I do in cultivating these qualities in my life?

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. (Jas. 4: 10)

Importance of Silence

Since every violation of silence tends to impede the genuine growth of the congregation, anyone who breaks the silence deserves to be called a 'destroyer of the same congregation.' (OCC, II, p. 25)

For a person's genuine growth in the life of prayer, he needs to cultivate inner contemplation. Solitude facilitates the nurturing of inner contemplation in the life of a person. In the same way, for genuine growth of the attitude of prayer in a community, there must be a communal attitude of inner peace. The practice of silence in communal level helps the community to foster inner peace. Hence, St. Vincent was very strict about the practice of silence in the community. He urged all members of the congregation to follow strict silence in the communities of the Society, especially at the prescribed times of the day. He called the communities of the Society the "Sacred Retreats," indicating that the attitude of inner devotion in the community level must be sustained by the communal practice of silence. This, in turn, helps the spiritual health of the community. St. Vincent went to the extent of saying that a person who breaks the rule of silence must be called "the destroyer of the Congregation." This is because, in actual fact, every violation of silence in the community hinders the spiritual progress of the members of the Congregation in general and the community in particular. The more one practices silence in the community, the healthier the prayer life the community.

Do I recognize the value of silence in my community living? Does the practice of silence in the community level help me to practice the attitude of inner peace? Does silence facilitate a healthier prayer life in my community? Do I break the rule of silence on a regular basis? Is my community truly a "Sacred Retreat?"

Where words are many, sin is not wanting; but he who restrains his lips does well. (Prov. 10: 19)

Power of Praise

[Prayer of] thanksgiving for favors received is a means to obtaining other favors ... Therefore, fall in love with the practice of the prayer of thanksgiving. It will dispose you to other gifts. (Lett., 1173, pp. 253 - 254)

In St. Vincent Pallotti's practice of prayer, he made use of different forms of prayer, that is, prayer of adoration, prayer of petition, prayer of contrition, and prayer of thanksgiving. Yet the most significant form of prayer of his life was prayer of thanksgiving. St. Vincent did give thanks for the favors he received from God, but he added a new dimension to his prayer of thanksgiving. While he placed a favor before God in prayer, he thanked God for it at the moment of his placing it before God as if he had already received it. This form of thanksgiving manifested his complete trust in God's promises. St. Vincent believed that thanking God for the gifts he received would help a person to receive many other favors from God. He gives the example of Jesus' healing of the ten lepers. The foreign leper who came to thank Jesus after he was healed, received from Jesus the grace of deeper faith in him and commitment to him, besides the gift of healing. The other nine who did not return to thank Jesus, received only the gift of healing. The prayer of thanksgiving has a special power which the other forms of prayer do not have. Hence, St. Vincent advised his followers to embrace prayer of thanksgiving as their regular form of prayer in order that they may receive many more gifts from God.

Do I understand the value of the prayer of thanksgiving? What form of prayer is a priority in my spiritual life? Do I thank God as I place a favor before God? What concrete steps do I need to take to make prayer of thanksgiving my way of reaching out to God in prayer?

Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ... giving thanks always and for everything (Eph. 5: 18 – 20)

Pray with Faith and Trust

I have never profited from the precious gift of holy faith ... I intend to make at every infinitesimal moment as many acts of faith as you and your truth has revealed. (OCCC, X, p. 360; STA, 388)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a genuine prayer should be offered to God in faith and trust. Acknowledgement of God as one's loving Father is the foundation of faith in him. A person's prayer is heard when he believes in God's promises and his love for him. St. Vincent never doubted in God's love for him. Neither was he afraid of approaching God's presence, though he was sinful. Even the sinful people of this world knew to do good to their children. If so, God, who is greater than these people of the world, would also give good things to his children. This gospel truth helped St. Vincent to stand before God without doubt and fear. His approaching God without doubt and fear, but in faith and trust, made him certain of God's plan and its accomplishment in his life. Jesus' assurance that whatever St. Vincent asked him in faith and trust would be granted to him and accomplished in his life, made him live his life with the certainty of the fulfillment of the promises of God. This certainty did not amount to mere expectation of something from God in the future, but rather it consisted of the faith that God's promises were already present in his life. Thus, the prayer of faith and trust gave St. Vincent Pallotti the conviction that he was never alone and that God was always with him in whatever he did.

Do I approach God in prayer with faith and trust? Do I ever doubt God's love for me? Do I trust in God's promises? Does my faith help me to see the accomplishment of God's promises in my life? Do I feel that I am alone in my life's journey? Do I believe that God is an ever-present reality in my life?

Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive. (Mt. 21: 22)

Pray in the Name of Jesus

In union with your infinite merits, Oh my Jesus, I offer to your Eternal and Divine Father ... the merits, virtues and fruits ... your creatures have reaped or could have reaped. (OOCC, X, p. 361; STA, 389)

Prayers of faith and trust, for St. Vincent Pallotti, must be offered in the name of Jesus. It means that prayers are offered united with the intentions of Jesus. When a person offers his prayer to the Father in union with Jesus and having his very intentions, then he is praying in the name of Jesus. A person's prayer becomes effective and is of value only when it is ennobled by his meditations on Jesus and being touched by his power. Hence, if a person's prayer is to be offered in the name of Jesus, that person must seek the will of God and assure that the intention with which he offers his prayer is worthy of God. Similarly, if a person seeks anything that is contrary to his own or that of his neighbor's salvation, it cannot become a prayer in the name of Jesus. St. Vincent constantly attempted to make his prayer a prayer offered in the name of Jesus. He meditated on the Person of Jesus and got to know his intentions and purposes. Having understood the intentions of Jesus, St. Vincent made them his own while he prayed. In his prayer, he was aware of his own salvation and that of his neighbor. Similarly, St. Vincent constantly sought things worthy of God and conducive to his life with God. He never allowed himself to be distracted from God. In this manner, St. Vincent approached the presence of God in and through prayers he offered to God in the name of Jesus.

Do I pray in the name of Jesus? Do I offer my prayers with the very intentions of Jesus? Do my prayers seek things worthy of God? Do my prayers help me to do those things that are conducive to the attainment of Divine Life? Do I approach the Presence of God in the name of Jesus?

I in them, and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. (Jn. 17: 23)

Pray with Perseverance

Continue to pray with ... perseverance, often and as well as you possibly can. Do not worry if you fail to find any consolation ... Persevere and act with confidence! You will receive the fruits without being conscious of them. (OCL, IV, 1062, p. 352).

For St. Vincent Pallotti, another important element of prayer is perseverance. Prayer offered in faith and trust and in the name of Jesus, must be a continuous reality in the life of a person. Persevering in prayer becomes more difficult when a person does not receive the favor for which he is praying. But according to St. Vincent, perseverance in prayer is very vital, as it is capable of moving the heart of God. He based this conviction on the parable of Jesus that dealt with the unjust judge and the woman asking him to vindicate her against her adversary. Though the judge neither feared God nor valued the friendship of men, he took time to do for her what she asked of him because of her persistence in her request. Her perseverance in asking moved the heart of the unjust judge. If the persistent request of this woman moved the heart of the unjust judge and made him comply with her request, God, who loved his elect, would also grant them their request when they persevere in their prayer to him. St. Vincent was deeply convinced of this truth. Therefore, he wished that his followers must never falter in persevering in prayer. He wanted them to persevere and act with great confidence in God without being anxious about receiving the favor for which they are asking. In doing so, they will receive the fruits of their prayer without even being conscious of them.

Do I persevere in my prayer to God? Am I tempted to give up prayer when I do not receive the favor for which I am asking? Do I believe that God who loves me would never let me down? Do I continue to place my needs before God, without being anxious about receiving them?

Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, [and] persevere in prayer.
(Rom. 12: 12)

Value of Daily Meditation

I make every day the holy meditation on the material proper to the time ... I always obtain the fruit ... that makes it possible for me to raise my heart to the love of God. [As a result] I am able to rise above myself and the world. (OCCC, XI, p. 65)

St. Vincent Pallotti considered meditation to be the most significant form of prayer. It is a means to enlighten a person's mind. In doing so, it opens his mind to God and helps him to pray well. Meditation, by giving a person a deep insight into his spiritual state, helps him to eradicate his faults, make progress in the practice of virtues, and grow in the love of God and neighbor. Thus, meditation purifies a person from his selfishness, orients him to his own true welfare and that of his neighbor, and helps him to work for the glory of God. When a person enters into meditation, it can give him valuable insights into the Person of Jesus, and lead him to a communion and a dialogue with Jesus. St. Vincent was very flexible in the practice of meditation. He advised his followers to use any aid that helped a person to do his meditation well. For him, the method of mental prayer consists of choosing that which a person finds easier and fruitful. He even suggested the reading of a book during the time of meditation if a person's thoughts fail him and he is not able to concentrate. For St. Vincent, the most valuable topic of meditation was the passion and death of Jesus. It helped him to identify his sufferings with that of Jesus. Besides, it incited the affections of his heart, filled his heart with compassion, sympathy, and sorrow, and helped him to respond to God with greater fervor.

Do I recognize the value of meditation in my spiritual life? Do I fruitfully practice my daily meditation? Do I profit from the time I spend in meditation? How do I do my meditation? Am I flexible and use methods that help me to encounter God through my meditation? Which is the most valuable topic I would like to meditate on?

Finally, Brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious ... think about these things. (Phil. 4: 8)

Contemplation in Action

If possible combine the activity of Martha and the contemplation of Mary. (OCL, III, 776 II, p.381)

Meditation is neither a simple form of reflection that should remain within a person, nor is it aimed at giving a pious feeling to a person. Meditation, for St. Vincent, is a means to actively encounter God and others. Therefore, the communion and dialogue a person encounters in meditation must be brought into life and action. In other words, a person's encounter and communication with Jesus in meditation must be manifested in his apostolate. St. Vincent called his followers for contemplation in action. He told them that they, as far as possible, must combine the activity of Martha and the contemplation of Mary in their life. He considered it as a vital element in a person's spiritual living. Virtuous Christian living is a mean between extremes. Proposing an apostolic spirituality for his followers, St. Vincent neither wanted them to be only persons of contemplation, nor did he want them to be only active social workers. But he wanted them to be persons combining contemplation and action in their life. For St. Vincent, internalizing the apostolate through prayer is necessary to remove the danger of extreme activism a person can get into, while insertion of prayer into apostolate is needed to avoid the danger of prayer becoming a form of escapism from real life situations. Hence, contemplation in action is the way St. Vincent proposed for his followers.

Does meditation lead me to an active encounter with God and others in real life situations? Am I able to combine the activity of Martha and contemplation of Mary in my personal life? By nature am I more disposed to contemplation or action? What should I do to cultivate in me the spiritual disposition of contemplation in action?

Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone. (Jn. 6: 15)

Need to Pray Always

Let us always keep our mind on God and turn our heart to him as long as the circumstances and the occupations permit us. (OCC, XIII, p. 216)

Apostolic spirituality of St. Vincent Pallotti urges a person to live a life in which prayer and activity are well integrated. A life that over-emphasizes activity can disorient a person from his ultimate goal. Hence, St. Vincent advised his followers to concentrate on their prayer so that they could constantly be in touch with God. In order to be in touch with God constantly, a person must keep his mind on God and his heart turned to God on a regular basis. Amidst the various activities of daily life as circumstances and active involvement permit a person, he must be in touch with God, who is the foundation of his life. In order to keep a person's mind on God, it is important that he has the right intention of doing whatever he does. A right intention always keeps a person in touch with his ultimate goal, that is God, the author and source of his existence and functioning. When a person has this right intention, even though he is not able to keep uninterrupted contact with God, he is able to turn back to encounter God whenever time permits without any difficulty. In having the right intention, the person seeks God in and through all his plans and activity. In this way, a person can live in the abiding presence of God despite his diverse activities.

Amidst my diverse activities of daily life, do I keep in touch with God? Do I have a right intention which keeps me founded on God, the ultimate source of my existence? Do I seek God and his glory in and through my plans and activity?

Then he told them ... about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. (Lk. 18: 1)

Balance of Prayer and Work

Out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must keep together the life of prayer ... and the life of Sacred evangelical ministry for the greater glory of God and our greater sanctification and that of our neighbor. (OCC, III, pp. 53-54)

Among the many struggles that an apostolic person faces in his life, there is one struggle that continues in his life. This is to keep the balance between prayer and work, both of which are essential to the effective accomplishment of the apostolate of Jesus. St. Vincent Pallotti had to cope with this struggle in his own life. For him, a well-combined life of prayer and evangelical ministry is essential to bringing about the glorification of God and the sanctification of the human person. He appeals to his followers to build up such a life because of love of Jesus. It is very difficult to achieve a full-fledged balance between prayer and work, because the diverse situations of life may not allow us to have such a balance. But a person can move towards achieving a reasonable amount of balance if he imitates Jesus in his life of prayer and work. If a person enters into his ministry with the spirit of Christ, he is able to bridge prayer and work in a proper manner. When this happens, he would be able to use prayer as a means to strengthen his apostolic endeavors and his apostolic work becomes a means to his perfection. Thus, prayer gives the apostle the inner courage and strength to cope with the difficulties of ministry and to persevere in it. On the other hand, the ministry he is engaged in becomes a stepping-stone to his holiness, because through it he is able to grow in love of God and of his neighbor. This is a life-long endeavor of an apostle. He can bring this about by living the spirit of Christ.

Am I able to keep a sense of balance between a life of prayer and a life of work? Do I realize the importance of achieving such a balance in my life? Am I more inclined to a life of prayer or a life of work? What do I need to do in order to bring a balance between the two? Do I learn from the spirit of Christ in this regard?

He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. (Jn. 15: 5)

Self-examination: Means to Growth in Prayer

[A person should examine] whether he devotes time to prayer, whether he is helped by mental or vocal prayer, to which of them he gives more time, what method he uses, whether he experiences enjoyment or, on the contrary, disgust or mental distraction while praying. (OCCC, II, pp. 76 - 77)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the life of prayer must be nurtured and sustained. If a person does not make any effort to progress in his prayer life, makes only half-hearted attempts, or just does the minimum, a person can jeopardize his relationship with God through prayer. Hence, it is very vital that a person periodically evaluates the state of his prayer life. A person must ask himself questions regarding the time he allots daily for his prayer, the type of prayer he engages in, the particular type of prayer he prefers, the method he uses to pray, and his positive or negative experiences during prayer. Besides raising these questions, he must attempt to think of ways and means to improve in his prayer. Such periodic examinations give a person a clear picture of where he is in his prayer life and helps him to take the needed steps for progress. St. Vincent took this simple and direct approach to his prayer life and suggested it to others. He was just a common man seeking God. This method was very effective for him and many persons whom he guided. The self-examinations he carried out and the steps he took to grow in his prayer life made St. Vincent steadfast in his commitment to God, the Infinite Love. Such a life of deep communion with God had a great impact on his life of ministry.

Do I take care of my life of prayer on a regular basis? Am I committed to a life of prayer? Do I periodically evaluate the progress I make in my life of prayer? What concrete steps do I take to improve my life of prayer?

If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. (II Tim. 2: 21)

October 1

Consecrated Life: The Gospel in Practice

According to the dispositions of the heavenly Father and the loving purposes of the Incarnate Word, religious life has been instituted in the Church to form communities of disciples and perfect followers of the Redeemer. (OCCC, XIII, p. 243)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the consecrated life is the gospel in practice. For him, consecrated life is not a simple human organizational set-up. It is not instituted merely by human whims and fancies, but rather it is established according to the will of God the Father, and the loving purposes of Jesus the Incarnate Word of the Father. It is aimed at forming communities of disciples and perfect followers of Jesus the Redeemer within the Church. The consecrated life consists of like-minded people coming together to live their lives as disciples of Jesus. They come together to form a community, taking one or the other aspect of Jesus' life and mission as their inspiration. In their life together, they attempt to live this particular dimension of Jesus' life that inspired them in an extraordinary manner. They use the particular aspect of Jesus' life that inspired them which forms the spirit of their common living to guide them as they organize a genuine gospel living in actual practice. In this manner, the consecrated life provides a well-formed organizational set-up in which a person can live his life as the disciple of Jesus in the best possible manner. As the result of this living, they can form themselves into perfect followers of Christ, the Redeemer. In short, the consecrated life consists of living the spirit of the early Christians, who in the context of the community of believers, lived their discipleship in the most perfect manner.

What is my understanding of the consecrated life? Do I accept it as the gospel in practice? Do I acknowledge the divine purposes behind this organizational set-up? Does my consecrated living make me a perfect disciple of Jesus? Do I truly live the spirit of the early Christian community in my religious community?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts. 2: 42)

October 2

Consecrated Life: The Mystical Promised Land

[Consecrated life is] the Mystical Promised Land, rich in heavenly milk and honey because of the abundant means readily available with which to obtain heaven. (OCCC, XIII, p. 211)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the consecrated life is a Mystical Promised Land that is rich in milk and honey. He has taken the idea of “the promised land, flowing with milk and honey” from the Old Testament. The land that was promised to Abraham and his descendents is a land that flowed with milk and honey. St. Vincent uses the same concept to speak of the consecrated life. It is not merely the promised land of the Old Testament, but the mystical promised land of the New Testament. The “milk and the honey” to which St. Vincent refers is not the plentiful material produced from the promised land of the Old Testament, but rather it is the abundant spiritual means available in the consecrated life for a person’s journey towards God. By using this image of “the mystical promised land, rich in milk and honey,” St. Vincent brings to light that the consecrated life as a God-willed institution in the Church provides an abundance of spiritual means and possibilities. Using these, a person can live the gospel in practice in the context of his everyday living with the assistance of the community of which he/she is a part. The religious institute provides every member with ample spiritual means to pursue a spiritual path, such as the order of the day, the time allotted for personal and community prayer, the facility for spiritual guidance, the days of retreat and recollection, and the support of the community. If a person uses these available means at the Mystical Promised Land well, a person will move towards his destiny of life with God.

Do I understand the meaning of the consecrated life as the Mystical Promised Land? Do I use the means the religious institute provides me well? Does the living of the consecrated life truly lead me towards the destiny of my life with God?

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul ... they had everything in common ... and great grace was given upon them all. (Acts. 4: 32 - 33)

October 3

Consecrated Life: The House of Nazareth

[Consecrated life is] the House of Nazareth [in which] ... in a real way one finds himself living with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. (OCCC, II, p.104)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the consecrated life must be modelled after the House of Nazareth. He wanted all those who accept the religious life as their way of life to be guided by the spirit that was constantly characteristic of the Holy Family at Nazareth. Joseph, Mary and Jesus lived in the house of Nazareth. The most significant characteristic of these three persons is that they lived in total openness to God. They accepted the will of God for them and accomplished it in complete surrender. They were totally attuned towards God, and they could never think of doing anything that was unacceptable to God. In the same way, they did not live their life for themselves but for each other. Each one stood by the other in whatever happened. This “standing by each other” could mean one reaching out to the other with the help of a gentle touch, a loving look, a kind word, an understanding of one’s point of view or his predicament, offering a helping hand to another in need, and restraining oneself from uttering or doing anything that would hurt and make the other unhappy. St. Vincent felt that this spirit of the Holy Family, that is, the spirit of God-centeredness and other-centeredness, must be lived in the religious community. If every consecrated person within a community is God-centered and other-centered, and makes this spirit as his fundamental attitude that guides everything else he does, the community would definitely be a House of Nazareth. This is what St. Vincent wanted of his followers.

Do I believe the vocation of a religious community to be the House of Nazareth? Does my religious community act like a House of Nazareth? Does the spirit of God-centeredness and other-centeredness characterize my community?

When they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. (Lk. 2: 39-40)

Consecrated Life: A Life in the Cenacle

We must live in [a consecrated] community as if we were living in the Cenacle. We must be practitioners of prayer and charity ... always awaiting an increase of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (OCCC, XIII, p. 252)

The consecrated life, for St. Vincent Pallotti, is a life in the Cenacle. The community at the Cenacle consisted of the apostles, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and a few other women. The members of the community, though thoroughly shattered by the loss of Jesus from their lives, were supported by their love for each other and their openness to God in prayer as a community. In other words, the Cenacle-community was a loving community and a praying community. United in love and prayer, the members were awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit, the advocate and the consoler promised by Jesus. Hence, the Cenacle-community, besides being a loving and praying community, is a community in expectation of the gift of the Spirit of God. By saying that consecrated life is a life in the Cenacle, St. Vincent wanted to stress the loving, praying and awaiting dimensions that should become part and parcel of every consecrated community. The members of the community must be united in love with the Lord and with each other. By constant and regular prayer both in the personal and communal levels, their union with God and each other must move from depth to depth. United in love and prayer, the members of the community must constantly live awaiting the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their personal and community living to inspire, to guide, and show their way, as they accomplish the plan of God through their institute of consecration.

Do I believe that the consecrated life is a life in the Cenacle? Is my institute of consecration a loving community? Is there a regular prayer life in my community? Are we open to the Holy Spirit in understanding our Charism and planning for our apostolate?

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place ... And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts. 2: 1 – 4)

October 5

Consecrated Life: A Withdrawal from the World

[Consecrated life consists in that] we are disposed to lose the whole world and are ready to face death rather than wanting in the perfect observance of our holy obligations. (OCCC, II, p. 291)

The call to the consecrated life implies a withdrawal from the world. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, in order to live one's consecration, one should be ready to lose the whole world and even to sacrifice one's life. When a person accepts the consecrated life, he should draw himself away from the world. This "drawing oneself away from the world" does not amount to the denial of the world and all it contains as evil. The world is the creation of God, and after its creation God found it very good. Hence, by the spiritual attitude of withdrawal of oneself, one neither denies the world nor rejects its goodness. Basically, the withdrawal from the world consists of the avoidance of all forms of evil in one's life. It is a spiritual death to evil and selfishness in the life of a person. The withdrawal is an attitude of detachment towards everything that the world can give. By the practice of withdrawal from the world, a person learns to give the things of the world their proper value and nothing more. It consists of learning to accept things at their value, yet not allowing them to master and take control of the person. Thus, withdrawal is not fleeing the world or running away from it, but accepting the world and its good in the right perspective. The cultivation of this attitude of withdrawal from the world is vital for genuine progress in one's consecrated living.

What do I understand by withdrawing myself from the world? Am I ready to get rid of evil and selfishness in my life? Am I attached to the things of the world? While appreciating the value of every created thing, am I able to prevent it from taking control of me?

For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man be given in return for his life? (Mt 16: 26)

October 6

Consecrated Life: A Life for God Alone

[Consecrated Life consists of] a public manifestation ... to live always in God, to act always for God, to think, to talk and to make use of the senses of the body, the powers of the soul and all created things for the glory of God. (OOCC, II, p. 290)

The consecrated life involves, besides withdrawal from the world, a life for God alone. As a matter of fact, a consecrated person withdraws from the things of the world by giving them the value they deserve and nothing more because he wants to live the totality of his life for God. The choice to live for God, for St. Vincent Pallotti, must be publicly manifested. This public manifestation can take many forms. It can be done by a person's decision to live always in God. Living in God on a continuous basis implies that he gives himself to the cultivation of a genuine prayer life. A person can publicly manifest his choice to live for God by acting for God always. This means that a person does all his actions with the purest of intentions. Likewise, a person can publicly manifest his decision to live for God alone by thinking the thoughts of God, by saying what God wants him to communicate and by making use of the senses of his body, the powers of his soul and all created things for the glory of God. According to St. Vincent, living for God alone calls for a total self-surrender to God on the part of the consecrated person. Thus, when a person makes a decisive option for God by a total self-surrender of himself to God and publicly manifests it in diverse ways in his daily living, he lives for God alone.

Is my consecrated living a life for God alone? Do I, in my daily living, make a genuine option for God? Do I make a complete surrender of myself to God through my consecrated living? How do I publicly manifest my self-surrender in my daily life?

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 5: 1-2)

True Devotion to Mary

True devotion to the Madonna consists in imitating her Son and learning from her how to imitate him. (OCCC, X, 577; STA, 149)

St. Vincent Pallotti cultivated a tender and loving devotion to Mary, his mother. He always had a child-like confidence in her powerful intercession. He pledged to spread the devotion to Mary using every means. He aimed at spreading devotion to Mary among all classes of people in the Church. He, himself, used a number of devotional practices to manifest his love for Mary, his mother, and advised others to follow the same. He encouraged the praying of the Rosary. He promoted novenas to honor Mary and to receive her assistance. He wrote the booklets *The Month of May* for laypeople, religious and priests to deepen the members' love for Mary in each of these groups. He also advocated a number of other practices. These devotional practices were created to honor Mary and to obtain her protection for people in need. But, for St. Vincent, the ultimate aim of these practices is to arouse in people a desire to imitate Jesus, so that they may become Mary's faithful children. Therefore, true devotion of Mary consists of imitating her Son, Jesus, and learning from her how to imitate Jesus. Mary uses her intercessory power to complete the image of Jesus within every person.

Am I devoted to Mary? What sort of devotional practices do I usually follow to show my love for Mary, my mother? What is my motivation in using these devotional practices? Is the sole purpose of these devotions to get Mary's assistance in my needs? Do I realize that true devotion to Mary consists of learning from her how to imitate her Son, Jesus? Do I use her powerful intercession to grow in the love of Christ?

She [Elizabeth] exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"
(Lk: 1: 42 – 43)

October 8

Consecrated Life: A Perfect Holocaust

[A consecrated person is one, who] truly has the disposition of the heart ... to offer his whole self to God as a perfect holocaust for the glory of God, ... and the salvation of souls. (OCCC, II, p. 278)

Living a life for God alone, for St. Vincent Pallotti, entails a perfect holocaust. The consecration a person makes in the community amounts to a personal giving of himself to God as an oblation. The total self-surrender involved in living for God alone is a perfect sacrifice of the consecrated person to God and for his glory. This holocaust, involved in the consecration of a person to God in religious life, is not a burnt offering in the physical sense, but the holocaust consists of the consecrated person living a life of committed faith and a life of loving submission to God's plan for him. Such an oblation calls for a person to dedicate himself to God and conform his will to that of God's will. In this way, the consecration made in the religious life is a personal consecration made to God. As a result, the person is no more his own person, but belongs to God. He cannot claim any right of his own except that of the right of God. Thus, the consecration in religious life makes a person totally God's own, which implies the consecrated person's giving himself to God as a burnt offering in the spiritual sense. In this manner, the act of consecration dedicates a person to God and sets him apart for the service of God, i.e., for the building of the kingdom of God here on earth.

Do I acknowledge that my consecrated living implies the offering of myself as the perfect holocaust? Do I live a life of committed faith and a loving submission of my will to that of God? Is my consecration a personal choice of God or an ideology? Do I realize that by my consecration I belong to God? In which way do I build the kingdom of God here on earth as a person set apart for God?

He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.
(Mt. 10: 38)

October 9

Consecrated Life: A Following of Jesus

[The consecrated person] offers himself to the imitation of Jesus Christ, ... to have the dispositions of the heart [and] to make a total offering of himself to God. (OCCC, II, pp. 277 - 278)

The consecrated life is a life of imitation of Jesus. According to St. Vincent, men and women who have given themselves in consecration to the Lord through their religious life must resolve to imitate Jesus always. The desire to imitate Jesus is the necessary condition and the true sign of a religious vocation. True imitation of Jesus, for St. Vincent, consists of practice of all the virtues Jesus practiced and removing from one's life all the opposite vices. St. Vincent wished that the imitation of Jesus should begin in the novitiate. At the novitiate level, the young religious in formation must work towards the removal of vices and acquiring of virtues under the direction of their Director. St. Vincent visualized the novitiate as the spiritual hospital of the consecrated life where the spiritual illness of removal of vices takes place, and the true imitation of Jesus begins. After the removal of all evil tendencies and vices from one's life, one needs to take upon himself the actual imitation of the virtues Jesus practiced in his life. Imitation of Jesus helps a religious to test his vocation. The journey of imitation of Jesus is a long and arduous one. It begins for a person called to religious life, as he/she enters the novitiate. But it is life-long journey which continues as long as a person lives.

Do I consider the consecrated life as a journey towards the imitation of Jesus? Do I acknowledge the value of imitation of Jesus for my religious living? How do I practice the actual imitation of Jesus? Do I practice the virtues of Jesus and remove the opposite vices from my life? Do I use the imitation of Jesus as a means to test my vocation? Do I have the readiness to undertake the arduous and long journey of the imitation of Jesus?

You did not so learn Christ! - assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. (Eph. 4:20-21)

October 10

Holy Eucharist: Aid to Live God's Holy Will

In the most holy Eucharist he [Jesus Christ] is my food and nourishment, not only because he communicates his holiness and perfection, but [also] because he gives even his life and strength ... abundantly so that I may live ... according to his admirable holy will. (OCCC, X, p. 450; STA, 490)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the daily participation in the holy Eucharist is a great help to live God's holy will in our lives. In the holy Eucharist, Jesus becomes the food and nourishment of every one of us who believes in him. As the spiritual nourishment, the Eucharistic Lord removes from us our vices and tendencies to evil. As a result, our minds achieve clarity of vision and our hearts are purified. With removal of evil tendencies and with the minds and hearts focused on the right direction, we become truly ready for Jesus. Opening our hearts and minds to Jesus through the daily celebration of the holy Eucharist, we truly arrive at genuine holiness and perfection. In the holy Eucharist, Jesus gives his own life and strength to cope with the various eventualities of life. For each time we celebrate the holy Eucharist, we participate in the body and blood of Christ, thereby coming into touch with the author of life in the deepest level of our being. Such a deep personal contact with Jesus in the Eucharist, besides communicating the grace of Christ into our hearts, helps us to achieve a sense of unity among ourselves. True unity of hearts and minds among each member of the Christian community, in turn, helps each one of us to accomplish the will of God in our daily life.

Is my participation in the Eucharist bringing me clarity of vision and purification of evil tendencies, thereby opening me to genuine perfection? Do I, in each Eucharist, experience a deep personal contact with Jesus, and does it help me to do his will daily?

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body. (I Cor. 10: 16-17)

October 11

Consecrated Life: A Perfect Crucifixion

Let us remember that in order to profit from the religious state, one must embrace the cross, both in life and in death. Oh how sweet, lovable and desirable is the crucifixion! (OCL, I, 146, p. 231)

Since the consecrated life is an imitation of Jesus, it is also a perfect crucifixion. In imitating Jesus, the consecrated person commits himself to live every aspect of Jesus' life including his suffering and death. Hence, a life of perfect imitation of Jesus causes the consecrated person to live a life of perfect crucifixion, like Jesus. For St. Vincent, in order to profit from the state of consecrated life, a consecrated person must be ready to accept the cross both in his life as well as in his death. The very fact that a person runs away from situations of crucifixion in his life, he stops being an imitator of Jesus. The readiness to accept the crosses that come in one's life and find glory in and through them, are great means to make progress in a person's consecrated living. According to St. Vincent, the vows/promises a consecrated person professes are, in fact, the means through which he crucifies himself. By obedience, a consecrated person crucifies his will, surrendering it to God and to his superiors. By poverty, he crucifies his desire for material wealth and attachments to the things of the world in order to choose God as his wealth. By chastity, a consecrated person crucifies himself to all forms of selfish love of others in order to offer himself in purity and holiness to God and others. In living the vows/promises perfectly, a consecrated person makes his religious life a perfect crucifixion.

Do I consider the consecrated life a perfect crucifixion? Do I realize that shunning of the cross in my life amounts to giving up the imitation of Jesus? Do I find glory in and through my crosses? Do I practice a perfect crucifixion of myself by living my religious vows/promises?

But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Gal. 6: 14)

October 12

Consecrated Life: A Life of Obedience

[A consecrated person] must obey in the spirit of faith, hope and love, firmly believing that he obeys, loves and respects God in the person of the superior. (OCCC, II, p. 91)

The consecrated life is a life of obedience. For St. Vincent Pallotti, perfect practice of obedience helps a consecrated person to walk in the path of Jesus who spared nothing to subject himself to the plan of God for him. It is a virtue of community life. In living it, a person subjects his intellect, will, and actions to his superiors whom his faith assures as God's representatives. Thus, surrender in faith is that which helps a person to live a life of obedience. For St. Vincent, the religious obedience must be universal, exact, entire, prompt, simple, humble and respectful. A person must obey any superior and every order that is given. He must accomplish the order given in the most faithful manner. A person must complete the command given in its entirety and avoid half-hearted and partial accomplishments. The command must be obeyed immediately without procrastination. One must obey an order without asking any questions. Since a person obeys God himself in obeying his superior, he must be humble and respectful in his obeying without showing any signs of coldness, indifference or sadness. St. Vincent did propagate a dialogical obedience in which the subject can discuss with the superior his point of view of the situation in question and the superior respects the talents and dignity of the subject.

Do I acknowledge that living in obedience is a significant aspect of my consecrated life? Am I able to make the surrender in faith in order to obey my superiors? Is my obedience universal, exact, entire, prompt, simple, humble, and respectful? Am I open to a dialogical obedience?

So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. (II Cor. 2: 8 – 9)

Motive of Consecrated Obedience

No one will obey just because he has to, or because he would be reproached or punished ... We are to obey ... the superior's orders ... for the best judgment is that of God, which manifests itself through him who takes the place of God. (OCC, VII, p. 100; SD, p. 12)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, consecrated obedience is a very important virtue every consecrated person is called to live. He instructs his followers to have the right motive in living the consecrated obedience. The value of the virtue of obedience consists of having the right reason in obeying. If a person does not have the right motive, the act of obedience neither brings any blessing from God nor yields any fruit in his life. If a person obeys a given order because of the fear of censure or punishment, his motive is not proper. Similarly, if a person obeys to please the one who gives the order or to win a favor from him, he does not have the proper motive of obedience. All these motives involve one or the other compulsion, such as fear of the other, pleasing the other, or winning the favor of the other. According to St. Vincent, the right motive states that a person learns to obey not because he has to, but because he chooses to. In other words, the act of obeying is not done out of compulsion, but it is done by free choice. This free choice must be based on the belief that the superior takes the place of God here on earth, and his order truly manifests the judgment of God for the one obeying. Thus, when a person sees the will of God in the order of the superior, accepts it freely and obeys it willingly, he has the right motive of obedience.

Do I have the right motive in my obedience? Do I believe that my superior takes the place of God in my religious living? Do I believe that the will of God for me is manifested in the judgment of my superior? Do I obey compulsively? Is my act of obedience a free choice? Do I obey the order of my superior willingly?

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. (Heb. 13: 17).

True Spirit of Obedience

Let no one show sadness when commanded ... and let everyone avoid carrying it out unwillingly, slothfully, with aversion or murmuring ... In general they should avoid obeying without cordiality. (OOCC, VII, p. 108; SD, p. 15)

According to St. Vincent, a person must not only have the right motive in obeying, but also have the true spirit of obedience. The true spirit of obedience points to the manner in which a person should obey a given order. For St. Vincent, a person should not show any form of sadness when he is commanded to do something. Sadness truly kills the spirit of obedience. Hence, a person must accept the order joyfully. A person must not carry out the order unwillingly, for obeying unwillingly makes the act burdensome and fruitless. A person must not obey slothfully, for slothful obedience makes a person casual and negligent in the way he performs the act and such an act will bring him no happiness. The act of obeying must not be done with an aversion towards the order, for it will bring dissatisfaction and disgust in the person and make his life meaningless. A person must obey the order of the superior without murmuring, for such an obeying makes the person complain and grumble and thereby destroys peace in his life. Hence, for St. Vincent, the true spirit of obedience consists primarily of joyfully accepting the order the superior gives to a person. Having accepted the order joyfully, a person must carry it out willingly, whole-heartedly, without dislike, and happily, thereby manifesting true cordiality to the one who gave the order and to the one who benefits from the order. In this manner a person lives the true spirit of obedience.

Do I obey in a true spirit of obedience? Am I joyful in accepting the order given? Do I carry out the order willingly? Am I negligent and casual in carrying out the order the superior gives? Do I grumble and complain when I dislike the order of the superior? Do I manifest cordiality towards the superior and the beneficiary of my act of obeying?

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God ... Therefore, he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed. (Rom. 13: 1 – 2)

Consecrated Life: A Life of Poverty

It is necessary [for a consecrated person] to find himself in a poor habitation, in an abject place ... to do everything to keep the flesh mortified, the heart detached from pomp and vanities of the earth.
(OCCC, II, p. 36)

The consecrated life is a life of poverty. According to St. Vincent, the living of this promise gives the consecrated person a share in the poverty of Christ. It implies a total dependence on God and a complete detachment from earthly goods. The consecrated poverty expresses our reliance on God and freedom from being slaves to material things. Thus, for St. Vincent, poverty brings about in the consecrated person detachment from earthly goods, therefore he can attach himself to Christ and work for his kingdom. Consecrated poverty also becomes a way to imitate perfectly the poverty of Jesus, who chose to be poor both materially and spiritually. He was born in a stable, lived as an ordinary person, and was buried in a borrowed grave. In the same way, Jesus lived the spirit of complete submission to the will of the Father. Hence, St. Vincent believed that in imitation of Jesus, the consecrated person should live in a poor habitation and accept a poor lifestyle. He also should do everything to keep his flesh mortified and his heart detached from the vanities of earthly life. By living the material poverty fully, a consecrated person can truly surrender his life to the Father and live according to his plan for him.

Do I believe that the consecrated life is a life of poverty? What does the vow/promise mean for me? Does my life of poverty bring in my life a detachment to material things and an attachment to God? How do I live out the material dimension of my consecrated poverty? Does material poverty lead me to live the spirit of poverty?

Moses ... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God. (Heb. 11: 24 - 25)

October 16

Consecrated Life: A Life of Sharing with the Poor

If all our houses offer continuous help to the needy, we can be sure that sufficient temporal goods will be provided as per our needs and we will be lacking nothing. (OCCC, II, p. 505)

The consecrated life is a life of sharing the goods one has with the poor and the needy. This dimension of the consecrated life comes out of the consecrated person's decision to live a life of poverty. In opting to live a life that is poor, the consecrated person identifies himself with the poor. Hence, there is the need to give a share of what one has with those poor he attempts to identify by living the vow/promise of poverty. For this reason, St. Vincent encouraged every member of his Society to practice frugality in the use of things, so that the surplus goods could be given to the poor. He also admonished his followers to take good care of things so they would not be wasted. For, if the members of a community took good care of things and did not waste anything, they could save a lot of things which could be given to the poor. He believed that if all the houses of consecrated persons in the city of Rome offered continuous help to the needy, there should be no want of temporal goods to take care of the poor and the needy of the city. In order to help people to cultivate the giving attitude, he often used the scriptural statement, "Give and it shall be given to you," for he believed that the infallible means to receive gifts from God was a person's generosity to give others a share of what he has. Thus, being generous and sharing a bit of what one has with the poor is very essential for the proper living of the vow/promise of poverty.

Do I believe that consecrated poverty calls me to live a life of sharing? Am I frugal in the use of things? Do I take good care of things and avoid wasting things? Do I believe that if I am generous to others, God will also be generous to me?

Jesus looked upon him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." (Mk. 10:21)

October 17

Consecrated Life: A Life of Chastity

All in the congregation are obliged to live in perfect chastity ... For Chastity is a gift of God ... [Hence] all the prayers of the community must be directed for the perpetual attainment of this gift. (OCC, II, pp. 44 - 45).

The consecrated life is a life of chastity. By accepting chastity as a way of life, the consecrated person frees his heart for the greater love of God and of his neighbor. A life of chastity implies that a person lets go of all forms of exclusive relationships that are found in marriage. Chastity entails that a person totally surrenders his intellect, will, heart, body and sense to God. The love the living of chastity brings in a consecrated person, expands his perspective in life, and enables him to offer himself for the loving service of human persons through his diverse apostolic endeavors. St. Vincent insisted that the freedom to love genuinely which a consecrated person experiences as the result of living the vow/promise of chastity, must be primarily directed towards the community of which he is a member, and secondarily to those persons who live outside the community. To live the life of chastity in a perfect manner, St. Vincent advised followers to practice both internal and external mortification which purifies a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. Internal and external purification gives a person mastery over temptations. Fervent prayer, especially to the Blessed Virgin Mary, also helps a person to live perfect chastity. Practice of the virtue of humility is of great help for the consecrated person to live the life of chastity.

Do I believe that consecrated life is a life of chastity? Does the life of chastity open me to a genuine love of God and neighbor? Does the life of chastity free me to provide the loving service of others in the apostolate? What are some of the means I use to live the life of chastity in a perfect manner?

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. (II Cor. 11: 2)

October 18

Priests' Call to be Holy

The more a priest strives for holiness, the more he will make his people holy. (OOCC, XIII, p. 365)

St. Vincent Pallotti had a deep reverence and admiration for the dignity of priesthood and the responsibilities God had entrusted with a priest. For him, a priest is another Christ and as such, the priest must be as holy and perfect as Jesus himself. According to St. Vincent, a priest must strive for his personal holiness, accepting any challenge and hardship that may come his way. St. Vincent insisted on the importance of a priest's striving for holiness because he believed that if a priest strove for holiness, not only would he become holy, but also he would attempt to make his people holy. Thus, the holiness of the priest will, in turn, make the people he serves holy. St. Vincent also suggested that the priest must practice all the virtues a holy person should have. The mannerisms, speech, appearance, and behavior of the priest must manifest his holiness and the virtues he possesses. The attainment of holiness and habitual practice of all the virtues cause a priest to develop within himself a genuine love for his people. With this love to guide him, he is able to deal with them gently, understand their difficulties, and lead them to God. In this way, a holy priest leads his people to God and God to his people.

Do I value the greatness of priesthood and the responsibilities he holds in the Church? Do I understand the need for priests to be holy? As a priest or as one preparing to become a priest, do I keep the task of attaining holiness as my fundamental aim in life? As a priest, do I lead people to God and God to people?

I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Tim. 6: 14).

Priest: A Preacher of the Word

The priest must preach the Word, not himself. (OCCC, XIII, p.462).

For St. Vincent, the priest is the preacher of the Word of God. This is one of the very important functions of the priest. St. Vincent insisted that the priest should preach the Word of God, and not himself. This statement of St. Vincent means that a priest, in exercising his priestly function of preaching, should not preach any ideology, a philosophy, or any other thinking that appeals to him. But rather, he should preach the Word of God as the Word of God, without any form of dilution and misinterpretation. In his role as the preacher, the priest must imitate Jesus, the apostle of the Eternal Father, who was ever faithful in communicating what his Father wanted him to communicate. The only authority Jesus constantly adhered to in his preaching is the authority of his Father. In this manner, a preacher of the Word of God must constantly adhere to Jesus, the Eternal Word of the Father, as to the truthfulness of the contents of his preaching. St. Vincent also suggested that the priest, as the preacher, needed to refer to the long tradition within the Church as an aid in communicating the word of God to others. A priest must, therefore, make use of the teachings of the Apostles, the Scripture, the Tradition of the Church, the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the developments in Sacred Theology, and Church History, as tools to his preaching. The actual preaching, St. Vincent asserted, must be clear, simple, and in an easy style that all can follow.

Do I acknowledge that the priest is primarily a preacher of the Word of God? Do I preach/teach the Word of God or my own thinking? Do I learn from Jesus the faithfulness to the truth as the preacher? Do I take for my aid the many elements of the long tradition of the Church while preparing my sermons/lessons? How do I communicate as a preacher/teacher?

If you put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine, which you have followed. (1 Tim. 4: 6)

Priest: A Eucharistic Minister

[A priest] should not easily give up the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice, without omitting the preparation and the thanksgiving ... All his life should be a continual and uninterrupted preparation and thanksgiving for the sacrifice of the Eucharist. (OCL, Vol. II, 348, p. 79)

The priest is a minister of the Eucharist. At the Eucharistic celebration, the priest stands as the mediator between God and his people. He takes the offerings and the lives of the people, which the offerings symbolize, to God, and makes God present in the very offerings thereby allowing the grace of God to flow into the lives of the people. He does this act in the person of Jesus, enacting along with him his sacrifice of himself to the Father on Calvary. In and through the various prayers he offers at the Eucharistic celebration, the priest takes the miseries of humanity and the needs of the people to the throne of God, imploring God's blessings on the people. Since the priest does such an important task at every Eucharist he celebrates, St. Vincent felt that he should not easily give up the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. As he does such an exalted task, the priest should take time to prepare himself by bringing to his mind the nature of the task he is going to accomplish, thereby creating within himself the right mind-set to enter the Eucharistic celebration. In the same way, after the Eucharistic celebration, he should spend time thanking God for the marvelous act he has accomplished through him. In this way, the totality of a priest's life must be spent as constant preparation and thanksgiving for the Eucharistic celebration.

Do I believe that a priest is the minister of the Eucharist? How do I perform the exalted task of the mediator between God and his people? Do I give up the celebration of the Eucharist? Do I enter the Eucharistic celebration with the right mind-set? Do I spend time in thanking God after the Eucharistic celebration? Is the totality of my life spent as preparation and thanksgiving for the Eucharistic celebration?

For as often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor. 11: 26)

October 21

Priest: A Minister of Prayer

As a public minister of religion he [priest] constantly presents to God the prayers of the people, just as in heaven angels sing the new chorus to God. (OCCC, XIII, P. 472)

The priest is a minister of prayer. His vocation calls him to pray for God's people. A priest is not only a mediator between God and his people who brings people's offerings to God and God's blessings to them, but also he is called to pray for the people God has entrusted to his care on a regular basis. By this ministry of prayer, a priest shows his personal concern for the people of God. By the very fact of his ordination as a priest, he is a person for others. Hence, he feels with them and places their needs, problems, concerns and worries of life before God as he is with the Lord in prayer. As a minister of prayer, the priest not only manifests his personal concern for the people of God, but also proclaims through his life God's love and care for the people of God in their everyday lives. Hence, the prayers of the priest for the people is a sign of God's care of them. This ministry of prayer, which the priest takes upon himself freely, is externally manifested in a special way by the regular recitation of the Divine Office at different times of each day. Hence, by his faithfulness to the recital of Divine Office, the priest not only tells the people that he cares for them, but also that God cares for them. Besides praying the Divine Office, the priest exercises his ministry of prayer by the various blessings he administers to people, offering the Eucharistic celebration for the intentions of the people and praying with them in every situation of their lives. As a minister of prayer, the priest is truly the sign of the presence of God in people's lives.

Do I acknowledge the priest's role as the minister of prayer? Do I accept the priest's ministry of prayer as a sign of God's love and care of his people? Am I faithful to praying for God's people through the faithful recitation of Divine Office? Do I acknowledge the priest as a sign of God's presence in the life of the people of God?

I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all men. (I Tim. 2: 1).

October 22

Priest: A Minister of Reconciliation

[Priests] in the confessional, open your heart to poor sinners and show your loving desire to help their needs. (OCL, II, 348, p. 79)

The priest is a minister of reconciliation. By virtue of his office, a priest is called to reconcile the people to God. Reconciling people to God means that they turn away from their sinful living and turn to God. It implies that they put off the sinful man and put on the virtuous man made in God's own image. Thus, ministry of reconciliation entails the forgiveness of the sins of the people. The ministry of reconciliation, which includes the power to forgive people's sins, is a ministry Jesus directly granted to the apostles. In one of his appearances after his resurrection, Jesus gives them the power to forgive as well as retain the sins of the people of God. The apostles passed on this ministry through the imposition of hands to their successors. In this manner, the ministry of reconciliation continues in the Church until our time. Like the Eucharistic ministry, the priest exercises the ministry of reconciliation in the person of Christ. St. Vincent Pallotti accomplished this ministry reconciliation with great fervor and dedication. Every day he would spend many hours at the confessional. People flocked to him to be reconciled to God through his mediation because of the manner in which he gave himself to the people. While he was firm in calling them to the change required in their lives, he was compassionate and helped them in every way possible so that they could open themselves to a relationship with God again. He asked the priests of the Society he founded to open their hearts to the poor sinners at the confessional. They were expected to show their desire to help people in their sinfulness by their dedication to this ministry of reconciliation.

Do I recognize the role of the priest as the minister of reconciliation? Do I acknowledge the importance of this ministry in the life of the Church? How dedicated am I to this ministry of reconciliation? Do I set aside a good bit of my time for this ministry?

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. (Jn. 20: 23)

Priest: A Guide to Holiness

[Priests] you who direct souls along the spiritual way ... direct them with greater perfection ... in the spirit of holy simplicity and most profound humility. (OCCC, X, p. 53; STA, 230)

The priest is a guide to holiness. A priest, besides working towards achieving holiness in his life, must help the people entrusted to his care to move towards achieving holiness in their lives. St. Vincent, exercising his priestly ministry, spent a great deal of his time guiding people in their spiritual journey. For many years of his life, he served as the confessor and spiritual director of a number of institutions, convents and monasteries in the city of Rome. Among his various ministries, caring for the spiritual life of the many persons who came to him for guidance was his primary concern. He advised his followers to take up the task of caring for people's spiritual lives. He calls them to do this task with greater perfection, implying that as they guide others, they must not lag behind. While guiding others, they must continue to achieve greater perfection. With regard to the manner of guiding people in their spiritual lives, St. Vincent asked them to do this very important task in the spirit of holy simplicity and most profound humility. As spiritual guides, they are not to lord over those persons they are guiding, but they must deal with these persons with genuine sympathy and concern. They must be able to understand the struggles of the people in their spiritual journey and be patient with them. The attitude that should direct them as spiritual guides is simplicity and humility and they must do this great task as unworthy servants.

Do I recognize the role of the priest as a guide to holiness? Do I give importance to this ministry in my life as a priest? Do I strive for my personal perfection as I guide others to God? Am I able to understand the struggles of those whom I serve? Do I accomplish this task with the spirit of simplicity and humility?

Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (I Tim. 4: 16)

October 24

Priest: A Zealous Pastor

The priest, who does not possess this zeal [for the mission of Christ] is in great danger of losing his own soul, as well as endangering the souls of others (Lett., 1092, p. 236).

The priest is called to be a zealous pastor. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a priest must possess true zeal for the mission of Christ. For it is the zeal for the kingdom of God that gives dynamism and purposefulness to the life and activity of a priest. Without genuine zeal and enthusiasm, his life becomes static, inactive and purposeless. A static and purposeless life is unproductive. If a priest is not able to be productive pastorally, a degree of uselessness and meaninglessness sets in his life. When a priest finds that there is no meaning in his life, he will be in great danger of losing his vocation. If this happens, he will never be able to work for the salvation of his neighbor, but instead he will endanger the salvation of his neighbor as well as his own. Hence, St. Vincent advised his followers to cultivate a genuine zeal for God and his mission. In his own life, he was a zealous and enthusiastic priest who loved Christ and his mission. He was involved in a number of confraternities and pious associations from his younger years. His zeal for God's kingdom made him found the Union of Catholic Apostolate for the purpose of reviving faith and re-enkindling charity among Catholics and propagating the same among non-believers. It is this dynamic and zealous spirit for the kingdom of God that St. Vincent wanted to communicate to his followers. In doing so, he made them priests who are zealous pastors.

Do I acknowledge the priest as a zealous pastor? Do I understand the necessity of cultivating a genuine zeal for Christ's mission? Do I recognize the danger associated with the lack of true zeal for the kingdom of God? How can I imbibe the apostolic zeal of St. Vincent Pallotti and implement it in my apostolate?

Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. (1 Tim. 4: 15)

October 25

Sacred Ministry: Means to Holiness

The sanctity for an ecclesiastic must be found in his actions [the exercise of the sacred ministry] . (OCCC, X, p. 565; STA, 145)

St. Vincent Pallotti makes use of every means to attain holiness. A consecrated person spends most of his time in the sacred ministry. If the time he spends in ministering to the poor and the needy are not related to the attainment of holiness, then a great amount of time of an apostle's life is not connected to his pursuit of holiness. For St. Vincent, apostolic ministry should never be disconnected from a person's pursuit of holiness. On the other hand, the apostolic ministry should be one of the best means through which a consecrated person grows in holiness. He says that a person can become a saint in the exercise of his sacred ministry. A true apostolic ministry consists of making God known and loved. Whatever a consecrated person does for the people he is serving, he ultimately aims at helping them to know God and his love, thereby guiding them to respond to the love of the Lord. Becoming holy consists of working towards the attainment of greater knowledge of God, and loving God totally and fully. Thus, a consecrated person by his apostolic endeavor helps people to attain holiness. Since the main thrust of his apostolate is helping people to attain holiness, there is no doubt that his apostolate becomes a means to his own holiness. By his apostolate, a consecrated person leads other persons to know and love God and thereby attain holiness in their life. This also helps him to know and love God more and thereby attain his own personal holiness. Thus, as the result of his apostolate, a consecrated person not only attains the glory of an apostle, but also grows in his personal holiness.

Do I use my apostolic ministry as a means to my personal holiness? Is the pursuit of holiness connected to my sacred ministry? Do I lead others to holiness?

Like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (I Pet. 2: 5)

October 26

Ministry to the Needy

My God ... in consideration of the great and innumerable needs ... found throughout the world, feeling that you have inspired in me a keen desire to ... minister to all ... permit me to pray that you would take care of them. (OCCC, X, p. 431; STA, 484)

St. Vincent Pallotti had a compassionate heart for the plight of the poor and the needy. Helping the neighbor in need was an obsession with him throughout his life. Among the various needs, the material needs of his neighbor attracted his attention immediately because these had to do with the survival of the person. Experiencing these needs in his neighbor, he could not rest since he wished to give immediate relief to them. He transferred to the poor whatever money he could collect from the wealthy people of the city of Rome. He wrote letters, made appeals, and sent petitions to many wealthy people requesting donations to help the poor. He called these requests for help, the “bank-notes to heaven.” During the cholera epidemic of 1837, St. Vincent organized the system of issuing coupons for bread and meat that saved many people from starvation and death. He was very innovative in organizing and planning relief for the poor. The houses of charity St. Vincent established in Rome speak volumes regarding his love and care for the poor. St. Vincent felt compelled to assist with not only the material needs of the people, but every need. He had a sensitive mind to perceive the need of others, a compassionate heart to feel with them, and a generous attitude of helping them out to the best of his ability.

What is my attitude towards the poor and the needy? Do I have a sensitive mind to perceive the needs of my neighbor? Do I have a compassionate heart to feel with the poor in their various troubles? Am I generous in helping them? Do I make an effort to collect material and other resources to help the needy?

But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry. (II Tim. 4: 5)

October 27

Living in Imitation of Jesus, the Shepherd

My God, through your infinite mercy destroy my hardness of heart, and grant me ... the gift of imitating you as the Shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep. (OCCC, X, p. 675; STA, 514)

Jesus proclaimed himself as the good shepherd. A good shepherd is one who knows his sheep. He has full knowledge of their whereabouts. Having fully known where they are, he keeps constant watch over them, always preventing them from straying in the wilderness. A good shepherd familiarizes himself with the voice of his sheep and makes them get acquainted with his voice so that there is always communication between him and the sheep. He also protects the sheep from all the dangers they face, even if it means that he has to undergo hardships and troubles. If any sheep goes amiss for some reason, the good shepherd leaves the other sheep and goes after the lost one and rejoices when it is found. St. Vincent Pallotti, as a minister of the Church, attempted to live his life in imitation of Jesus, the good shepherd. He accepted his life as the pastor in the Church with the greatest responsibility. He spared no trouble to fulfill the demands of his office. A glance at the manner in which St. Vincent exercised his apostolate for the poor, the needy, the sinners, the outcasts, the prisoners and those condemned to die, proclaims his role as the pastoral minister in imitation of Jesus, the good shepherd.

How do I carry out my pastoral role in the community in which I live and for the people I am called to care for? Do I take the trouble to know their life situation in order to help them? Do I attempt to keep proper communication with them in order to guide and lead them in the right way? Am I ready to accept hardships for their good?

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me ... and I will lay down my life for the sheep. (Jn. 10: 14 –15)

October 28

Jesus: The Divine Model

Jesus Christ ... the God-man is our example, model and practical rule of the totality of our internal and external life. (OCCC, III, pp. 36-37)

Jesus Christ, the Father's gift of love to humankind, by enkindling in every person the gift of faith, commences the process of a person's sanctification. In this journey of becoming God-like, none other than Jesus who came from the Father can be the true model, because Jesus, the God-man, is the perfect image of the invisible God. In the life of Jesus, we see the very life of God concretely manifested. One can understand the life of Jesus as he was a person like any other human being except sin. Jesus knows human struggles and temptations because he felt, lived and worked as any man does. Jesus lived a human life so he can teach how to live as a human being. Therefore, imitating Jesus would never be frightening. Having understood the life of Jesus concretely, one can learn from his life how to live in order to become God-like. Hence, Jesus, the God-man is the best model for every Christian. Having understood this truth, St. Vincent Pallotti lived his life in perfect imitation of Jesus, the True Model of Christian living. St. Vincent lived the ideal of Christian perfection, that is, "Be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect" in its totality, in imitation of Jesus, the Divine Model.

Does the life of Jesus inspire me to live a life of godliness? Do I gain the strength to cope with my life's struggles and problems from the everyday and human life of Jesus? To what extent do I live the ideal of Christian perfection?

For we do not have a high priest, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. (Heb. 4: 15)

Proof of Our Love: Cooperating in God's Plan of Salvation

My Jesus, the proof of love that you wish from me is that I save souls. Therefore, completely destroy in me whatever impedes a total and effective dedication to the salvation of souls, and give me ... your life, your virtues, your qualities, and your energy ... in order to bring all ... souls of the world to your heart. (OCCC, X, p. 676; STA, 516)

Every Christian is called to love God. It is not merely a pious thought a person feels at a moment of prayer, but loving God implies living for him. It means that in the context of his living, a Christian must show proof of his love. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the best way a Christian can manifest his love for God is to cooperate in God's plan of salvation of humankind. He believed that this is what Christ expected of him. Hence, he wished that everything within him and in his environment that hindered a complete and effective consecration of himself to the salvation of human persons, be totally destroyed. Instead he desired to possess the life, virtues, qualities and energy that animated the apostolic endeavors of Jesus in accomplishing his Father's plan for the salvation of humankind. St. Vincent's aim in life was to bring every human person to the kingdom of God and make him a true disciple of Jesus, thereby restoring the image of God in him. Moved by this spirit, he spent his life for the service and happiness of others. In this manner, St. Vincent's love for God was displayed in every act he performed for the good and happiness of others.

Do I recognize that I need to show my love for God by working for the eternal happiness of others? Do I remove anything that blocks this mission? Do I have the attitudes of Jesus in my involvement in the apostolate?

I am grateful to ... Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me trustworthy in appointing me to the ministry ... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost. (I Tim. 1: 12, 15)

Desiring What Pleases God

I want nothing of what is not pleasing to God, nothing, nothing, nothing; but everything, everything, everything that pleases God. I see only God. (OOCC, X, p. 56)

The only desire of St. Vincent in his lifetime was to do what pleased God. In his diary, he often repeats his determination to do nothing that displeases God. But instead he wants to do only those things which please God. Not only does St. Vincent speak aloud his earnestness to do what is pleasing to God, but he does those things that please God, both in letter and in spirit. He is very sensitive in becoming aware of those things that displease God and takes scrupulous care to avoid them. His sensitivity to the pleasure of God comes as the result of his ability to perceive everything that happens in his life from the perspective of God. St. Vincent is totally attuned to the thinking of God so that he can think nothing which God does not think. Nor can he think anything different from the way God thinks. In other words, St. Vincent, because of his closer union with God, is able to see his personal life, the lives of other persons, and the whole of creation in a faith-vision. This faith-vision opens St. Vincent to see God in everything and everything in God. As the result of this unity of perspective between God and St. Vincent, he cannot even think of anything that displeases God. Thus, the only thought that pervades throughout St. Vincent's life in whatever he thinks, speaks and does, is the thought of doing only those things according to the thinking of God and that which truly pleases him.

Do I desire what pleases God? Do I think what pleases God? Do I speak what pleases God? Do I do what pleases God? Is my thinking attuned to the thinking of God? Do I have the faith-vision to see all things in God and God in all things?

He who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him. (Jn. 8: 29).

The Obedient is Exalted

Let us remember that for the truly obedient it has been prepared ... [in heaven] the participation in the glorious exaltation to which the Son of God was elevated on account of his obedience. (OOCC, VII, p. 110; SD, p. 16)

St. Vincent Pallotti is of the opinion that all persons who surrender themselves to God through the practice of the virtue of obedience, will be exalted at his presence. This exaltation of the obedient is similar to the exaltation of Jesus through his resurrection. In St. Vincent's valuation of virtues, the virtue of obedience has a prime place. This is because he sees the path of obedience as the very path Jesus himself walked. Jesus' whole life is a loving surrender of himself to the Father in obedience to his will. It is the will of the Father to redeem the human race from the state of sin and separation from God. Jesus' journey in accomplishing this plan of the Father at every stage involves an act of surrender to his Father's will in complete obedience. Each stage of Jesus' redemptive task - his letting go of his divine nature, taking the human form, accepting the way of suffering as a means to salvation, the actual living out of this path of suffering, and finally his death on the cross - involves a moment of choosing the will of the Father in total freedom and obeying it with a genuine joy. It is following the path of obedience that ultimately brought resurrection in the life of Jesus. Since the path of obedience is through which Jesus achieved his glory, St. Vincent sees that following this path is very vital for our glorification as well. Therefore, obedience is exalted.

Do I recognize the value of the path of obedience? Do I believe that Jesus saved me by his perfect obedience to the Father? Do I realize that my exaltation comes about through obedience? Do I take the trouble of living a life of obedience?

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on a name, which is above every other name. (Phil. 2: 8 – 9)

Imitating the Saints

My God ... you alone know how far I have been from imitating your saints, how much evil I have thereby caused ... [and] how much good I have failed to promote ... Through the holiness of Jesus Christ's life, destroy the deformity of mine and give me instead his holy life. (OCCC, X, pp. 720 - 721; STA, 527)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that the imitation of saints, capturing their true spirit and living according to their example, were important means for a person's growth in his spiritual life. For St. Vincent, saints were our brothers and sisters in faith. They professed the very faith we profess and lived the very life of Jesus, which we live as Christians. They struggled in coping with the demands of life, as we do. Hence, understanding the spirit that guided them in their life would be of vital importance for a Christian. St. Vincent felt that by his failure to imitate the saints, he had caused much evil for himself and for others as he failed to promote the good. Otherwise he could have promoted good in imitation of the saints. He wished and prayed that the holiness of the life of Jesus would help him to destroy in himself the deformity of not imitating saints and learning from their example. He wanted instead the holy life of Jesus to inspire him to live his life in imitation of Jesus and the saints. This spirit helped St. Vincent to learn from others and grow in the holiness of life as a Christian and a priest.

Do I accept the life of the saints as an inspiration to my spiritual growth? Am I willing to understand their life and learn from them how to cope with the demands of life courageously? Do I believe that the imitation of the spirit that guided the saints can help me to avoid evil in my personal life and that of others?

You, brothers, have become imitators of the Churches of God that are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you suffer the same things from your compatriots as they did from the Jews. (I Thes. 2: 14)

Death Comes Unexpectedly

Death comes on unexpectedly. The life is short. Time is passing. Today alive! Tomorrow dead! ... One God who sees us! One moment that escapes us ... One eternity that awaits us. (OCL, I, 16, p. 46)

Death, for St. Vincent, is a reality every human person has to face up to in his life. A person can be sure that his death will take place without any doubt, yet a person does not know exactly when he has to face his death for death comes unexpectedly. Since a person is always moving towards death and it comes unexpectedly, the life of a person is reasonably short. The passing of each moment of time opens the person to his final moment. There is no turning back and having a little more time. Therefore, St. Vincent says that today a person is alive and tomorrow he is dead. All these happen under the plan of the One God who sees everything. Death takes place in one moment. At that moment, death becomes definite, final, and actual. Once that happens, eternity awaits the human person. As a person reflects on death, St. Vincent Pallotti does not want to create a sense of fear in the person. He wants a person to accept the existential reality of his death and live it on a daily basis. Living one's death consists of allowing the reality of death to give a sense of meaning to all a person does daily. Every person must realize that death is a continuous event that happens everyday, as every passing moment is a moment nearer to death. Accepting this truth, a person fixing his mind on eternity must live his life meaningfully, fruitfully and joyfully.

Do I think about my death? Do I own my death as my final possibility? Do I realize that every passing moment takes me nearer to my death? Do I live my death on a daily basis? Do I realize my death opens me into eternity and live in that light?

It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgement. (Heb. 9: 27)

Apostolate: A Fuller Imitation of Jesus

Since the life of Jesus Christ is his apostolate, he is the model of apostolate for all. As all are called to the obligation of imitating Jesus Christ, all, on the basis of their state of life, are called to the apostolate. (OOCC, III, p.142)

St. Vincent Pallotti's inspiration with regard to the apostolate is Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Looking at Jesus, his Model, he understands that the apostolate is the reason for Jesus' life here on earth. Hence, for St. Vincent, the involvement in his own apostolate is nothing but a fuller imitation of and a complete configuration to Christ, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Since the life of Jesus is his apostolate, any person who takes upon himself the task of being an apostle of Jesus should model himself after Christ in accomplishing God's plan for him as an apostle. Hence, the more one gives himself to his apostolate, the more he imitates Jesus in his apostolate. Jesus' life of apostolate does not merely imply he is doing individual acts such as healing, preaching or doing an act of kindness, but rather it also involves the total giving of himself to others. Thus, being an apostle in imitation of Jesus means that the apostle should not limit himself to performing actions for the people entrusted to his care, but rather he must entirely give himself to the service of the Lord and his people. In this way, his involvement in the apostolate becomes a fuller and complete imitation of Jesus.

Do I realize that my involvement in the apostolate is a fuller imitation of Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father? Do I accept Jesus as the model of my apostolate? Does my apostolate make me more like Jesus? Does my involvement in the apostolate imply a total gift of myself to God's people or merely doing a few acts of kindness for them?

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry, which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts. 20: 24)

Union of Catholic Apostolate: An Evangelical Trumpet

[The Union of Catholic Apostolate] is like an evangelical trumpet, perpetually calling everyone ... and awakening the zeal and charity of all the faithful of every class, rank and condition. (OCC, I, pp. 4 - 5)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the Union of Catholic Apostolate is an evangelical trumpet that invites all to follow Jesus in his apostolate. The call to the apostolate cannot be restricted to a privileged class nor to an exceptional few. The universality of persons includes every Catholic whether he is a priest, religious, or layperson. Nothing bars a person from participating in the apostolate. Whether a person is educated or ignorant, rich or poor, belongs to the lower or higher class of society, he is called to the mission. The aspect of universality of persons implies the related aspects of universality of means and universality of place. Since every person is called, he/she brings in his/her talents and abilities at the service of the apostolate. The mobilization of every means formed an important aspect of St. Vincent's apostolic strategy. Similarly, the apostolate must not be limited to a particular place. Since all are engaged in the apostolate, it can be done in different places. Thus, in St. Vincent's pastoral *modus operandi*, every person must be engaged in the apostolate of revival of faith and re-encindling of charity, every means must be used to increase the efficacy of this apostolate, and it must be done throughout the world, both among the Catholics and non-Catholics.

In my apostolic endeavors, do I engage all to participate in the apostolate? Do I use every possible means to enhance the effectiveness of the apostolate? Am I open to accept the talents and abilities of other persons and use them at the service of the apostolate? Do I attempt to reach out to as many people as possible in the apostolate?

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Mt. 28: 19)

Layperson: An Apostle

The idea of apostolate and the name apostle, according to the scriptures, is not such that it cannot be separated from ecclesiastical jurisdiction ... Therefore, one who is not a priest can be honored with the name "apostle" and his work can rightly be called an "apostolate." (OCC, III, p. 140)

At a time when the layperson had little place in the Church's missionary endeavors, St. Vincent visualized an active role for the layperson in the mission of the Church. Living at a time when people in the secular world aspired for freedom and democratic values, St. Vincent saw the need to engage the layperson in a significant way in the life of the Church as well. He saw the laity as a powerful force to give dynamism to the revival of faith and enkindling of charity within the Church. Thus, it was St. Vincent's firm belief that if a person works for the enhancement of the kingdom of God, even though he is not a priest, he can be given the title "apostle" and his work can be declared an "apostolate." In order to substantiate his belief, he gave the following argument. The name "apostle" in the scripture primarily refers to the twelve men whom Jesus chose and on whom he conferred the sacred ministry of priesthood. But we find references in the scripture that the terms "apostle" and "apostolate" are separated from the ecclesiastical jurisdiction and from the sacred ministry of priesthood. Thus, St. Vincent includes in the term "apostolate" not only ecclesiastical ministry, but also various forms of services in which a layperson can be engaged in the Church. Hence, when a layperson engages in the work of the enhancement of the kingdom of God, though he is not engaging in an ecclesiastical ministry, he truly becomes an apostle and the work in which he is engaged in service to the kingdom of God is an apostolate.

Do we acknowledge the role of the layperson in the Church? Do we encourage lay ministry in the Church? Is there cooperation between the clergy and laity?

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they are in Christ before me. (Rom. 16: 7)

Love: The Motivation for the Apostolate

We must be motivated [in our apostolate] in the first place, by a principle of true love of God ... [and] in the second place, by the principle true love of neighbor, which according to the precept of the Lord Jesus Christ means that we must love as much as he loved us. (OCCC, II, pp. 5-6)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the obligation of all to participate in the apostolate originates from the two precepts of the commandment of love, that is the love of God and the love of our neighbor. A true apostle is one who is guided by the motive of love, and the apostolate done with this motive is the true apostolate. It means that each apostolic activity a person undertakes is a means through which he expresses his love for God and his neighbor. Since love is the motivation of the apostolate, an apostle must avoid all other motives in planning or executing any apostolic proposal. A person can engage in apostolic activities because it gives him personal satisfaction in doing an activity that is meaningful. Similarly, one can begin an apostolic endeavor with the selfish motive of using the apostolic project for his personal advantage. Likewise, a person can be involved in an apostolic undertaking to satisfy his psychological need of being wanted and needed. In like manner, a person may be involved in an apostolate because it can enhance his social status as a person. St. Vincent wished that his followers did not follow any of these motives other than that of the commandment of love. He presented to them God's love for us that moved him to send his only Son into the world as the example a true apostle must imitate in his apostolic life. If the spirit of love is missing in an apostle, he is not a true apostle and the work of service he undertakes also cannot be called the apostolate.

Is the commandment of love the motive of my apostolate? Are there any personal motives that move me in engaging in my apostolate? Do I allow God's love for humankind to inspire and direct me to keep my motive of apostolate a genuine one?

Love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one [Jesus] has died for all. (II Cor. 5: 14)

Everyday Situation: The Locus of Apostolate

In the name of Jesus Christ and urged by his love, avoiding ambition ... [and] excuses, interest or adulation ... everyone can be engaged in procuring his own and his neighbor's eternal salvation. One can do it ... wherever one finds oneself. (OCC, IV, p. 313)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, everyday life situations provide the setting for the apostolate. In order to be apostolic, one does not have to leave his everyday life situation and go to a far off mission territory. When a person gives himself to the opportunities to do good which everyday life provides - without any personal interest or ambition but solely moved by the love of Christ - he can be a true apostle, and whatever he does becomes the apostolate. St. Vincent is very emphatic in saying that one can be apostolic wherever he finds himself. One can be apostolic at home with his relatives in his own town. Everyday situations such as the city, the square, the shop, the bank, the hotel, and the marketplace can provide us with ample opportunities to be apostolic. One can be apostolic in his workplace, while another can be apostolic in the college where he studies. A layperson's everyday life in the world can make him apostolic. A monk who lives in the monastery, a priest who works in a parish, a brother who teaches youngsters, and a seminarian who studies in the seminary preparing himself to be a priest - all can be apostles in their respective life situations. In this manner, everyday life situations provide us with occasions for the apostolate. If a person is open to see these situations as God-given opportunities to do his will, he can truly be an apostle.

Do I understand the meaning of a true apostolate? Do I see everyday life situations as God-given opportunities to be apostolic? Do I believe that I am called to be an apostle wherever I find myself? What should I do to use my everyday life situations as occasions for the apostolate?

For you remember our labor and toil, brethren; we worked night and day ... while we preached the gospel to you. (1 Thes. 2: 9)

Everyday Actions: Means to the Apostolate

Everyone according to the respective possibility of his proper state and condition work for the propagation of the Faith ... All cannot be preachers, but all can pray; the others with their talents and science; ... the others with their personal work, ... [and] others with their arts and professions. (OOCC, XI, pp. 250 - 251)

For St. Vincent, while the everyday situations provide us with the opportunity to be apostolic, a person's everyday actions become the means to the apostolate. A person's prayerful life can increase faith of the one who encounters him, enkindle in another the spirit of reconciliation with God, and instill in the third a call to serve the Lord. A good example given by a person can inspire the other to give up his evil behavior. A good suggestion given at the opportune moment helps a person to bring about genuine growth in his life. The timely material help given to the poor, besides satisfying their physical need, can help them to raise their heart and minds to God for his love and care. Actions such as a kindness shown, a help rendered, a word of consolation said, an exhortation given, care given to the sick, can often lighten the burden of the persons involved, making them turn to God with a sense of gratitude and acceptance of his will with patience. An act of compassion manifests the compassionate heart of God to the one who experienced it. St. Vincent Pallotti lived every moment of his life performing diverse actions and used all of them as the means to the apostolate. When the apostolate is expressed through the means of everyday good actions, it becomes the practical and efficient means to bring good to God's people and to bring glory to God.

Do I acknowledge everyday actions are the means to the apostolate? Do I use my everyday ordinary actions as the means to the apostolate? Do I perform each of my actions with the sensitivity that it is going to be a means to the apostolate? What do I need to do to make my actions the true means to the apostolate?

He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. For, we are fellow workers for God. (1 Cor. 3: 8)

Apostolate: Any Human Activity Done with Right Intention

Every Catholic ... should rejoice, because his talents, knowledge, learning, studies, power, nobility, profession, art, earthly goods, riches, service, prayers ... done for the spreading of faith and rekindling of charity ... can acquire the merit of the apostolate. (OCCC, IV, p. 326).

St. Vincent Pallotti considered every human activity which a person performs with right and proper intention becomes the apostolate. Thus, a person's talents, knowledge, learning, studies, nobility, profession, art, earthly goods, riches, service, and prayers are considered as apostolates if they are used for the revival of faith and enkindling of charity. Hence, for St. Vincent, a person can become an apostle by accomplishing the various occupations he is involved in for the glory of God and salvation of the human person. The noble and the people of high society can use their nobility and status as an apostolate. The learned person can use his knowledge. The teacher or student can use his lessons as an apostolate. The farmer can use his work as an apostolate. An office worker's taking care of his job can be an apostolate. The everyday chores of a person in a home can be an apostolate. Each of these occupational activities, if done with true zeal for the kingdom of God, i.e., done for the revival of faith and re-enkindling of charity in the life of the people, can become apostolates. In this manner, any human activity done with right apostolic intention becomes an apostolate. It helps a person to attain growth in holiness and effectively brings about the salvation of other human persons.

Do I believe that every occupational activity can become an apostolate with the right intention? Do I have the right intention in performing the many activities in my life? Do I have the zeal for the kingdom of God in performing all my actions? Do my actions, as apostolates, help me to grow in holiness, and bring about the salvation of my neighbor?

Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one. (Col. 4: 5 – 6)

Being Realistic in the Apostolate

God in his kindness and mercy gives us the satisfaction of doing what we are able and we do not pretend to reach there, where we can never arrive. In the evangelical enterprise we also do not reach what is believed to be impossible. (OOCC, I, p. 17)

St. Vincent is a practical and a humble person. In his perception of the apostolate, he is both practical and humble. The practical nature of his personality is manifested in the fact that he is very realistic about the apostolate he has undertaken. He is humble because he allows no presumptions about the apostolic tasks he plans and executes. Though St. Vincent always desires to do great things for God, always wanting to do more for God and giving himself to God more perfectly, he is never presumptuous. He always maintains happiness and satisfaction within himself when doing what he is able to do. He never pretends to reach where he can never arrive. He expresses in clear terms that in his apostolic endeavors, he does not reach a goal that is impossible to reach. He says that his ability, strength, and resources limit his apostolate. In this manner, we find a good sense of balance in St. Vincent's perception of the apostolate. Though he wishes to do many things for God and his people, he knows the limits his situation places on him, and the limitation of time and resources. In order to achieve success, happiness, and satisfaction in and through our apostolic planning, we must be like St. Vincent, holding a balanced and realistic perspective of the apostolate. Such a balanced perspective would guarantee the glory of God, the good of the people who benefit from the apostolate, and the good of those engaged in the apostolate.

Am I practical and humble in my perception of the apostolic situation? Am I realistic and balanced in the way I look at a pastoral situation? Am I presumptuous or sceptical? Do the glory of God, the good of the people, and the good of the apostle guide my pastoral choices?

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (II Tim. 2:15)

Qualities That do Not Help an Apostle

[An Apostle] should not easily allow himself to be dominated by weariness, tediousness and boredom in his actions. These are effects of constraint, fear or anxiety. (OCCC, II, p. 162)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, there are some qualities which an apostle should avoid in his life. These are qualities that kill his apostolic spirit. Without a dynamic spirit, one cannot carry on his apostolate effectively and fruitfully. The qualities that can destroy the dynamic spirit of the apostle are weariness, tediousness and boredom. Often, these qualities originate from certain constraints, compulsions, fear or anxiety the apostle faces as he carries out the various tasks pertaining to his apostolate. Weariness consists of the apostle experiencing mental and physical exhaustion and fatigue. Weariness makes the apostle irritable and impatient. Tediousness involves getting caught up in the monotony of everyday living and action. The apostle's engagement in the apostolate often consists of routine tasks to perform. The performance of these tasks over a period of time can become mere routine functions rather than meaningful performance of the apostolate. When monotony sets in, the meaningfulness of the apostolate is lost to the person. Boredom consists of getting tired of the work a person is doing. In boredom, a person is disinterested in and indifferent to his apostolic endeavors. All these qualities result in the loss of meaning for the apostolic enterprise. This makes the apostle either give up the apostolate or do it in a half-hearted way.

Which are some of the qualities that dominate me as I carry on my apostolate? Does weariness control me in my apostolate? Do I allow monotony to take hold of my apostolate? Am I bored with my apostolic activities? Am I half-hearted or give up my apostolate due to lack of interest in it?

Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. (Gal. 6: 9)

Qualities that Help an Apostle

When [an apostle] acts with true zeal and fervent love, there is no temptation, no difficulty and no obstacle he cannot overcome.
(OCCC, II, p. 162)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, true zeal and fervent love are two qualities that help an apostle in his apostolic endeavors. The virtue of zeal helps a person to be enthusiastic about his life as an apostle and interested in his apostolic task. A zealous person's mind is totally focused on God. He accepts God as the source of all that he is and all that he has. Hence, his whole life is focused on doing whatever he does to bring the glory of God and happiness to others. A person with true zeal never thinks of himself but always happily gives himself to others' needs. A zealous person is a happy person who is always grateful to God for the many blessings he has received from God. Similarly, the quality of fervent love makes a person dynamic in his apostolate. A person of fervent love is one who has experienced the infinite love of God deep within himself. He knows that he has been the object of God's love. Having experienced the love of God, he attempts to respond to the God of love totally and fully. His apostolate becomes a means through which he expresses his love for God. By reaching out to his fellow men in loving concern through his apostolate, he returns his gratitude to God. According to St. Vincent, when these two qualities of true zeal and fervent love are present in a person, he becomes very effective in his apostolate. Such a person has built himself on the rock of God's love so that nothing can disturb him from being faithful to his apostolate. Neither temptations nor difficulties can become obstacles to the path he has set out for himself in God's name. With true zeal and fervent love he carries on the apostolate despite problems.

Do I have the spirit of true zeal leading me in my apostolic endeavors? Am I a person of fervent love? Am I enthusiastic about my apostolate? Do I consider my apostolate as a means to respond to God in gratitude for his love?

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the house of faith. (Gal. 6: 10)

Essence of Apostolic Life

'Do good, suffer evil and persevere in it until death' is the essence of apostolic life. (Lett., 1566, p. 348)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the fact that a person of true zeal and fervent love engages himself generously in the apostolate does not mean that the apostolate, as a way of love, is an easy task. The way of love always involves the cross. The cross can come not only in the form of hardships the apostle encounters at the apostolate, but also from people's non-acceptance of the help an apostle offers in and through his apostolate. Jesus himself experienced similar situations in his life. Though he gives himself freely and lovingly to the people of his time, only a few people accept his message. Many people do not bother much about his message, while some others see Jesus as a threat to their security and determine to do away with him. Though Jesus foresees the situation, he offers himself to fulfill the Father's plan without discouragement. St. Vincent tells his followers that though they foresee little results from their apostolic activities, they must not give them up without giving themselves to discouragement. He advises them to believe that the apostolate is a work of God besides their work. Perhaps a lot of good is accomplished, even though it looks as if nothing is happening as the result of their work. Thus, for St. Vincent, the essence of the apostolate does not consist of measuring how much fruit a person's apostolate has produced, but rather in doing good, suffering evil and persevering in the apostolic task. Hence, the focus of the apostle should not be the result of the apostolate, but the actual doing of the apostolate and persevering in it despite suffering evil.

Am I open to accept the hardships involved in the apostolate? Am I ready to accept people's rejection of the good I do for them? How do I cope with the discouraging situations? Am I overly concerned about the fruit of my apostolate? What is the essence of my apostolic life?

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed everyday. (II Cor. 4: 16).

Persevering in the Apostolate

The cultivation of the spiritual garden of the soul is very ... [difficult] ... It is necessary ... for you to increase ... your efforts ... Remember that the eternal reward is not proportioned to the size of the harvest, but to the effort expended. (OCL, IV, 869, p. 115)

St. Vincent Pallotti compares a person's engagement in the apostolate with a farmer working in a field or a garden. The task of the farmer becomes easy if the soil of the field is cultivatable. On the contrary, if the field is barren and the soil is hard, it is harder for the farmer to cultivate the land to bring about even a small yield. St. Vincent says that the cultivation of the spiritual garden of a person's spiritual life is very similar. If the inner dispositions of the people we care for spiritually are not genuine, it is very difficult to form them spiritually. In such a situation, there is the need to increase the apostle's effort to bring transformation into the lives of the persons, even though the fruit is not visible and tangible. Though the result of the apostle's work is not apparent in the lives of the people he is serving, he must increase his efforts and continue to serve them. These are the moments in which an apostle can be disappointed and discouraged. St. Vincent reminds us that these are precisely the moments in which an apostle should doubly increase the efforts and persevere in his apostolate. He must believe that God, the Master of every spiritual field, will lovingly bless the efforts of the faithful and diligent laborers, and give a hundred-fold reward. In moments of disappointment, the apostle must remember that the eternal reward God showers on him is not based on the size of the harvest his efforts have brought in, but rather it depends on the size of the effort the apostle has put into his apostolate. This conviction helps him to persevere in his apostolate.

Which are some of the difficulties I experience in my apostolate? In difficulties, do I increase my efforts? Do I believe that God would bless my efforts? Do I realize that God rewards not depending on the size of the fruit, but based on the size of the effort?

For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (II Cor. 4: 11).

Apostolate: Stepping-stone to Perfection

The cooperation in the salvation of souls is not one's own, but a gift of God. For it makes us similar to Jesus Christ, and the image of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; [and] makes us similar to God in his glory. (OCCC, XI, pp. 258 - 259)

A person, by his involvement in the apostolate, works for the salvation of his neighbor. The ministry he undertakes as an apostle calls him to live his personal as well as apostolic life in imitation of Jesus. As a result, he is able to possess the spirit of Christ in himself. Possessing the spirit of Christ, the apostle is able to instill the same spirit in the lives of the many people he is called to serve. The more he inspires others with the spirit of Christ, the more he grows in this spirit. The constant presence of the spirit of Christ in the life of the apostle makes his apostolate an act done in total union with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For he accomplishes the Father's plan of salvation by his apostolate; he lives the very life of Jesus' apostolate in and through his apostolate; and he continues the work of sanctification of the Holy Spirit by his work for the salvation of his neighbor. When every apostolic task becomes an act done in union with the Holy Trinity, the apostolate in which the apostle is engaged becomes a means of his own personal perfection, for he encounters the Holy Trinity in and through every apostolic task he performs. The apostolate thus becomes an avenue through which the apostle perfects himself. By working for the perfection of his neighbor, he perfects his neighbor. Similarly, by doing his apostolate in union with the Holy Trinity, he manifests the glory of God in the life of every person he touches with his apostolate. In this manner, the apostolate becomes a stepping-stone to the personal perfection of the apostle.

Do I consider that I can attain greater perfection through my apostolic tasks? Do I acquire the spirit of Christ through my apostolate? Do I encounter the Holy Trinity in and through my apostolic tasks? Does my apostolate help me to glorify God's goodness?

Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel. (II Tim. 1: 8)

Seeking Neighbor's Salvation: Expression of True Love

No one can love his neighbor ... unless he seeks the salvation of his neighbor. ... [Hence] he who seriously fails to help his neighbor in the needs of his soul is ... guilty. (OCCC, IV, p. 309)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that seeking one's neighbor's salvation is the best way of expressing a person's true love for his neighbor. We have the duty to come to the help of our neighbor in his spiritual need of attaining eternal salvation, because God has loved us by sending his only-begotten Son for our salvation. That which motivates God to send his Son is his desire for our salvation. Hence, our desire for the salvation of our neighbor must motivate us to continue the very apostolate of Jesus in the context of our everyday living. According to St. Vincent, God was perfect in loving humankind and so every person must be perfect in loving his neighbor. The best way to express our love for our neighbor is to desire, seek and work for the salvation of our neighbor. All of us must help each other in experiencing the Lord and finally arriving in his presence. If a person fails to help his neighbor with his spiritual needs, he is guilty of preventing the salvation of his neighbor. Hence, motivated by true love of our neighbor, we must work towards the procurement of his salvation. In doing so, we will become true lovers of our neighbor.

Do I express true love for my neighbor by seeking his eternal salvation? Do I desire to help my neighbor with his spiritual needs? Is working for the salvation of my neighbor an apostolic priority in my life? Do I realize that not taking interest in the salvation of my neighbor amounts to preventing his salvation?

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation? (Heb. 1: 14)

Work of Salvation: A Christian Obligation

All of us are obliged to help each other to obtain heaven ... Everyone must try to prevent his neighbor's damnation and procure his salvation with all possible means (OCCC, IV, p. 131).

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the work of salvation is a Christian obligation. As a Christian, every baptized person is called to continue God's plan of salvation, accomplished by Christ through his death on the cross. For St. Vincent, this obligation to continue the work of salvation stems from our natural makeup as Christians. Every Christian who freely receives his salvation has a duty to offer it to others in the same manner as he received it. Hence, no person can be indifferent to the eternal salvation of his neighbor, for if God were indifferent to us, we would have never attained salvation. Hence, St. Vincent insists that everyone must try to prevent his neighbor's damnation and help him to attain his salvation by every possible means. The salvation won by Christ for us is communicated to us first through the sacrament of baptism and later by the other sacraments. Therefore, the work of salvation is continued in the Church through sacramental life. Hence, in accomplishing this obligation of the work of salvation, every Christian must help his neighbor to enter into a fuller participation of the sacramental life of the Church. This includes catechises on sacramental theology, instruction on the practical aspects of the reception of the sacraments, actually initiating the person in the reception of the sacraments, and above all by the witness of our lives. Thus, by taking personal responsibility for one's neighbor's salvation, one accomplishes this obligation.

Do I acknowledge the work of salvation is a Christian obligation? Do I recognize that this obligation has its basis in my insertion into Christ by my baptism? Do I believe that the work of salvation is continued in and through the sacramental life in the Church? Do I help the other to attain salvation by introducing him to the sacramental life?

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him. (Heb. 2: 3)

Working for Others' Salvation Facilitates Salvation of Oneself

Oh, it is impossible that he who cooperates in the salvation of others would lose his own soul. (OCCC, IV, p. 133)

St. Vincent Pallotti believed that working for the salvation of one's neighbor is, indeed, a guarantee for one's own salvation. A person who is interested in the salvation of his neighbor and works earnestly for it, wants to accomplish God's plan for his neighbor. Thus, he is fully open to the will of God. His openness to the will of God is not only in the aspect of the salvation of his neighbor, but also in every aspect of his life in the world. Hence, the person who works for the salvation of his neighbor as per the plan of God, cannot ignore what God wants him to accomplish with his life. In other words, his total openness to the will of God in every aspect of his life makes him take interest in his own salvation. According to St. Vincent, God never denies salvation to a person who has worked in his vineyard for the eternal salvation of his neighbor. He says that if God rewards a person who has done material charity towards others, more is the reward for the one who has done spiritual charity of working for the salvation of his neighbor. Just as material charity frees us from sin, the spiritual arms of desiring and working for a neighbor's salvation frees a person from all blocks to eternal salvation, bringing him eternal reward. Thus, for St. Vincent, it is nearly impossible to think of a person who is working for the salvation of his neighbor ignoring his own salvation and thereby denying God's plan for him. Since the grace of God is with such a person, he will definitely be saved.

Do I realize the importance of working for the salvation of my neighbor?
Do I consider working for the salvation of my neighbor guarantees my own salvation? Do I believe that working for the salvation of my neighbor opens me fully for the grace of God?

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. (I Pet. 4:10)

Universal Salvific Will of God

God did not create man in time except to lead him to a happy eternity. It was his desire that all men be saved and come to the light of his Divine Truth. (OOCC, IV, pp. 124-125)

It is St. Vincent Pallotti's firm belief that God desires the salvation of every human person in the world. God's plan for humankind is one of salvation and not of condemnation. God's attitude towards the human person is one of solicitude, concern, and love. The universal salvific will of God means that God's creation of the human person in time is to lead him to a happy eternity. Thus, God wants every human person to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The universal salvific will of God is authentically manifested in the Father sacrificing his Son for the salvation of his people. It is to accomplish this universal salvific will of the Father that Jesus willingly comes into the world in human form, undergoes suffering, dies and finally rises to new life. In living through the Paschal Mystery, Jesus authenticates the Father's commitment to the salvation of every human person. St. Vincent Pallotti is deeply touched by this truth in his life. He often expresses the sentiments of wonder and awe in his prayers as he reflects on God's desire, plan, and the execution of the salvation of humankind in and through Jesus, his Son. He thinks that God has fallen in love with the human person despite his human misery, so much so that he sends his Son for his salvation. The awareness of the truth of the universal salvific will of God constantly made St. Vincent work hard for his own salvation and that of his neighbor.

Do I believe that God wants all human persons to be saved? Do I realize that the Father authenticated his desire for human salvation through the sacrifice of his Son Jesus? Do I acknowledge that Jesus accomplished this plan here on earth through his death on the cross? What is my personal response to God's universal salvific will?

This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (II Tim. 2: 3 – 4)h

Economy of Salvation

[Though God could] revive faith and rekindle charity among Catholics and let himself be known and loved ... but, worthy of his infinite wisdom: God wants man to cooperate as much as possible in the salvation of men. (OCC, IV, p.307)

St. Vincent Pallotti acknowledges the role of the human person in the actualization of the universal salvific will of God. The mission to save humankind belongs entirely to God, and its actual execution belongs to Jesus, his Son. Though God is able to revive faith and rekindle charity in a moment, he expects human cooperation in this mission. Similarly, God can let himself be known and loved by everyone in the world by an act of his will. But he does not usually do so in the actual working out of his providence. Instead, God in his wisdom, wants all to cooperate as much as possible in the salvation of the other. Thus, the economy of salvation consists of God's will to save every person through other human persons. St. Vincent's realization that the Father apportions the blessings of his Son's redemptive act on the cross through the weak and the sinful human beings makes him cooperate in the mission of Christ wholeheartedly, working with Christ in true partnership. Though St. Vincent knows that he can do nothing without the grace of God, he believes firmly that the reality of God cannot be made visible without his cooperation as a human person. It is this belief that makes St. Vincent found the Union of Catholic Apostolate to mobilize and activate as many people as possible. This Union consists of those who will base themselves on the grace of God and cooperate in the salvific will of God, and thereby work towards bringing everyone as one flock under one shepherd.

Do I acknowledge my role in the actualization of the will of God? Do I believe that God apportions the blessings of Christ's redemption through me? Do I believe the reality of God is made visible in the world only through human cooperation?

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (Phil. 2: 12)

Christian: A Savior of the People of God

It is possible for anyone to merit the name 'the savior of the people,' if he constantly uses all the means necessary to promote in a real way the glory of God and the salvation of souls. (OCC, II, p. 16)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the vocation of a Christian is to be the savior of the people of God. Every Christian is called to be an instrument of God's grace in the context of his situation. The loving concern of God reaches out to every human person in and through the everyday life of a Christian. Thus, as a savior of the people of God, every Christian is called to be an apostle in his life. This vocation is common to all Christians by virtue of their baptism. Despite the state of life a Christian has chosen to live, his vocation is to be a savior. A Christian may choose to accept the priestly ministry, or give his life in special consecration to God in the consecrated life, or live in the world as a layperson. In living each of these lifestyles, a Christian's vocation to be the savior of God's people is lived out. A priest, religious, or layperson lives out his/her apostolic vocation to be the savior of God's people in different ways. Though the manner of living is different, the apostolic goals are the same. St. Vincent Pallotti proposed three apostolic goals for each Christian to accomplish as the savior of the people of God whether he is a priest, religious or a layperson. They are the destruction of sin, the salvation of people, and the glory of God. Every Christian, whatever the state of life he lives, is called to accomplish these three apostolic goals. When he gives himself in fulfilling these three goals in the context of his life, he truly becomes an instrument of God's grace and love, thereby becoming a savior of the people.

Do I acknowledge my vocation to be the savior of the people of God? Am I a mediator of the grace and love of God in the lives of God's people? Do I wholeheartedly work for the destruction of sin, the salvation of people, and the glory of God?

Yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. (I Pet. 4: 16)

Mary: Example of Zeal for Apostolate

[Mary is] the perfect example of universal zeal and perfect charity. She labored tirelessly in the works of salvation for the greater glory of God. (OCCC, I, p. 7)

St. Vincent Pallotti saw in Mary the greatest example of perfect zeal for universal charity. For she worked unfailingly for the salvation of God's people and the glory of God. From the moment Mary accepted her call from God to cooperate in God's plan of salvation of humankind, she never once looked back. She often did not quite understand God's plan for her, as many things did not happen as she expected. Having offered herself as the handmaid of the Lord, she was totally ready to accept God's plan as it unfolded in her personal history. Working for the accomplishment of God's plan at the initial stage meant for her to care for Jesus and help him to reach his manhood. Then she had to let him go and accomplish God's plan during Jesus' public ministry. When he completed his public ministry, she had to offer him to be crucified. She courageously stood by her Son at the moment of his death on the cross, sharing in his sufferings. After Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension, Mary had to mother the birth pangs of the Church by keeping the apostles together for their strengthening by the Spirit of God at the Pentecost. In this manner, Mary cooperated with God's plan for her and helped Jesus in every way so that he could accomplish the salvation of humankind. All these point to her zeal for the apostolate and the mission of universal charity.

Do I understand and appreciate the readiness of Mary to cooperate with God in his plan for her? Am I ready to say 'yes' to God's plan for me on a daily basis? Do I have true zeal for the apostolate and to enkindle perfect charity in the hearts of the people?

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into a hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth. (LK. 1: 39 – 40)

Imitation of Jesus: A Necessity for Cooperation in His Mission

If all Christians must imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, how much more those who wish to cooperate in the continuation of his mission need to imitate Jesus. (OOCC, II, p. 4)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, every Christian is called to follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ for two reasons: first, imitation of Jesus is the essence of Christian life; and second following the path Jesus walked in his life is a sure road of Christian perfection. If each Christian is called to imitate Jesus, reasons St. Vincent, then those of us who are called to cooperate in Jesus' mission have an added responsibility to imitate his life. This is because the cooperators in the mission of Jesus should be in touch with every aspect of the life of Jesus. A true cooperator in the mission of Jesus should encounter Jesus personally to understand the various dimensions of his personal and apostolic life. The best way to arrive at such knowledge of Jesus is to imitate his life. The more a person attempts to live the very life of Jesus, the more he would be able to know the 'who' and 'what' of Jesus. The more he knows about Jesus and his mission, the more he would be able to cooperate in his mission. For this reason, St. Vincent Pallotti gives the life of Jesus Christ as the fundamental rule of the Society he founded. Thus, for St. Vincent, the obligation of the cooperators to imitate Jesus stems from their apostolic vocation. The more one imitates Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father, the greater the cooperator in the mission of Jesus he becomes.

Do I acknowledge the imitation of Jesus as the sure path to Christian perfection? As a cooperator in the mission of Christ, do I recognize my added responsibility to imitate the life of Jesus? Do I accept Jesus as the fundamental rule of my Christian living?

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord ... so that you became a model for all the believers. (1 Thes. 1: 6 – 7)

Imitation of Jesus in One's Deeds

Every Christian piously thinks of imitating Jesus, but only a few strive to imitate him constantly and really, because only a few pay attention to it. (OOCC, III, p. 34)

St. Vincent Pallotti reminds his followers that talking of the imitation of Jesus is easy, but the actual bringing about the imitation of Jesus in one's life is not an easy task. For him, true imitation of Jesus does not imply mere pious talk, but rather it must be shown in one's actions in daily life. In other words, we must pay attention to the imitation of Jesus on a daily basis. To possess the whole life of Jesus and to live one's life in imitation of him, according to St. Vincent, one must have knowledge of Christ's life. Hence, one must always study, meditate and contemplate on the life of Jesus. The more a person is able to internalize the attitudes that directed Jesus in his life, the more his love for Jesus increases, resulting in a deeper and fuller imitation of Jesus. Hence, true imitation of Jesus involves hard work. It is not a mere sentimental infatuation towards Jesus or a hero worship of Jesus, but it calls for a decision to grow into Christ and to live his life on a daily basis, so as to manifest Christ and his actions in and through one's actions. St. Vincent Pallotti lived such an imitation of Jesus in his personal life and has set an example of true imitation for each one of us.

Does my imitation of Jesus remain at the theoretical level? Do I make an honest effort to imitate Jesus in my daily life? Do I take time to study and meditate on the life of Jesus so as to increase my knowledge and love of Jesus?

See that no one returns evil for evil; rather always seek what is good [both] for each other and all. (I Thes. 5: 15)

Consequences of the Imitation of Jesus

When a soul strives to imitate Jesus Christ in humility and confidence, it obtains from him the grace the destruction of all its deformities and shortcomings. Then, Jesus enters that soul, ... lives there and applies to it the merits of his most holy works. (OCC, III, p. 37)

The task of imitation of Jesus on a daily basis is demanding and it involves a continuous struggle. Sometimes it can be overwhelming on the part of the person attempting to imitate Jesus. While recognizing the difficulties involved, St. Vincent Pallotti assures that Christ, who is present with the person in the struggle, would offer all the assistance required. According to him, when a person strives to imitate Jesus in hope and humility, Jesus makes himself present to that person, destroys all his deformities, and at the same time effects in him the merits of his holy works. St. Vincent believed that God is capable of making great saints out of sinners. By his presence in the person, Jesus destroys every imperfection and gives his perfection instead. As a result, the spiritual state of the person becomes a continuous movement from the state of 'death-to-onself' to that of 'life-in-Christ'. When a person lives out this attitude with an open-handed willingness to be guided by Jesus, every activity of the human person becomes enriched and made holy by Jesus.

Am I discouraged by the difficulties I face in my imitation of Jesus? Do I believe in Jesus' promise of being with me in my struggles? Do I allow Jesus to make his presence in me and help me to move from the state of 'death-to-onself' to that of 'life-in-Christ'?

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15: 13)

Conformity to Christ: The Heart of Imitation of Jesus

Let us remember that we must be perfect in imitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his humble, poor, benevolent, laborious and despised life. (OCL, III, 739, p.321)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, imitation of Jesus calls for a person to become more and more conformed to Jesus. First, a person must be like Jesus in living a life of humility. When we consider the life of Jesus from its beginning to its end, we find Jesus lived a humble and self-emptying life. He left the Godhead and became a human person. Even in his human form, Jesus humiliated himself in accepting the dishonor of dying on the cross as a criminal. Second, a person must be conformed to Jesus in his life of poverty. He was born in a stable and laid to rest after his death in the tomb of someone else. The Son of Man had no place to lay his head. Third, a person must be as benevolent as Jesus. All through his public ministry, Jesus' only aim was to do good for others. Fourth, a person must imitate Jesus in his laborious life. Jesus had no time to rest and relax, because from dawn to dusk he went about doing God's will, which involved hard work. Finally, we must be like Jesus in his despised life. During his lifetime, different people despised Jesus much of the time. But he courageously went about accomplishing what God wanted of him. When these qualities of Jesus take hold of a person, he would become a perfect imitator of Jesus. St. Vincent Pallotti set a wonderful example in this regard.

Do I acknowledge that genuine imitation of Jesus consists of conforming myself to Jesus? Do I conform to Jesus in his humility, poverty, benevolence, life of labor and being despised by others?

Whoever serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by others. Let us then pursue what leads to peace and building up one another. (Rom. 14: 18 – 19)

Imitation of Jesus: A Daily Task

It is not enough to practice this holy obligation [of imitation of Jesus] only one day, one month, one year, or during the two years of Novitiate; but we must practice it everyday until we die, always with greater perfection and fervor. (OCCC, III, p. 35)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, the holy obligation of the imitation of Jesus is a daily task. In other words, it is a task which a Christian must take upon himself and continue until the day of his death. There is no time limit on the practice of the imitation of Jesus. St. Vincent indicates it clearly when he says that this obligation is not for one day, one month, one year or the two years of the novitiate. This statement of St. Vincent points to the fact that one must avoid all forms of complacency in accomplishing the obligation of the imitation of Jesus. Though one may begin the imitation of Jesus with great interest, as time goes by he can become complacent about the practice of this obligation. He may tell himself that since he has practiced it for a long time and he is no longer in the novitiate, that he can take it easy for a while. For St. Vincent Pallotti, such a complacent and lax attitude in living the obligation of the imitation of Jesus is detrimental to genuine growth of a person in his spiritual life. Besides, such an attitude also can kill the true apostolic spirit of a person. Foreseeing this danger, St. Vincent affirmed the necessity of practicing the imitation of Jesus with the greatest perfection and fervor on a daily basis until the day of one's death.

Do I strive to live the imitation of Jesus on a daily basis? Am I complacent about the practice of the obligation of the imitation of Jesus? Do I recognize the danger of being lax about living the imitation of Jesus?

Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making most of the opportunity. (Eph. 5: 15 – 16)

Daily Imitation of Jesus: A Difficult Task

My God ... I have said I will perform this or that act of virtue or good work, and then done nothing. Now, however, I place myself in your hands, my God. By myself I can do nothing; with you I can do anything. (OCC, X, p. 122; STA, 178)

Often at the initial stages of a person's turning to Christ, the idea of imitating Christ may be more appealing and one may be very enthusiastic about living a life in imitation of Jesus. But as a person strives on a daily and continuous basis, he can find the life hard going. Consistency in the daily practice of virtue in imitation of Jesus can often be difficult and arduous. Besides, such a constant practice can become a routine exercise and in the process, lose its meaning for the person. St. Vincent Pallotti experienced both of these difficulties in his own personal life in imitation of Jesus. He himself acknowledged that he encountered such difficulties in his spiritual journey. But he made every effort and took every trouble upon himself to persevere in his practice of this holy obligation. Similarly he worked against the tendency within him for the practice of imitation of Jesus to become a routine exercise. To cope with such difficulties, each morning as he awoke, St. Vincent reflected on the good he would be able to accomplish and the glory he would be able to bring to God, if he lived in imitation of Jesus. Besides, he counted on God's power to persevere in this practice saying: "By myself I can do nothing; with you I can do anything."

Do I persevere in the practice of the imitation of Jesus? How do I cope with the difficulties that come my way? Does the imitation of Jesus become a routine exercise in my Christian living? Do I accept the power of God to carry me through the difficulties?

Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. (Eph. 6: 10 – 11)

Imitation of Jesus: A Practical Task

[Imitation of Jesus is a practical task] because such a precious obligation must be accomplished in actual fact, in our thoughts, in our words, in our deeds, and in the disciplining all the affections of our heart. (OCCC, III, p. 35)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the imitation of Jesus is a practical task. By 'practical task', he meant that it must be accomplished in a person's everyday living. In other words, the imitation of Jesus must be concretely practiced. Thus, the imitation of Jesus has to do with a person's thoughts, words, deeds and the disciplining of the affections of his heart. It means that the life of Jesus must be practically manifested in the thoughts, words, deeds and dispositions of the heart of a person who is an imitator of Jesus. Thus, genuine imitation of Jesus implies the transformation of the totality of the person into the likeness of Jesus. According to St. Vincent, it is not something that happens all of a sudden, but rather it is a long process. Each person pursuing genuine imitation of Jesus must give himself sufficient time. He should neither be anxious nor be in a hurry to accomplish this practical task. But instead, he must patiently persevere in this difficult task of transforming himself into the likeness of Jesus by imitating him. When a person continues in this process earnestly, he would be transformed into Christ and his actions would be such that they glorify God and bring happiness to fellow human beings.

Are my thoughts, words, deeds, and affections of the heart Christ-like because I imitate Jesus? Do I consider the imitation of Jesus as a practical task to be accomplished all of a sudden? Am I patient and persevering in my journey towards the total imitation of Jesus? Do my actions bring glory to God and happiness to others?

All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ. (Eph. 4: 31 – 32)

Imitation of Jesus in the Here and Now

Remember that, now that you are living in the present, you are, with the grace of God, able to do more than all the saints together have done. (OOCC, X, p. 49; STA, 221)

St. Vincent Pallotti recognized the value of the present in the life he lived in imitation of Jesus. Hence, he believed that the imitation of Jesus must be done in the here and now. The way a person lived his life in the past does help him, because looking at what he has done, he is able to evaluate his mode of living and the manner of his behavior. Similarly, the way a person is going to live his life in the future does have a value, because a future perspective helps him to plan for the yet-to-come situation. Both the past and the future are not as real as the present, for the past has come to an end and the future is yet to come. Hence, while acknowledging the value of the past and the future in a person's life, he must focus on the present which is the real and actual piece of time. The significant dimension of one's spiritual life does not consist of getting caught in the past or the future, but rather living in the present in which God reaches out to a person through the everyday situations to live his life in imitation of his Son Jesus. It was St. Vincent's belief that, though unworthy as he was, he could do great things with the grace of God, even more than what all the saints together have done, because he had the gift of the present at his disposal.

Do I recognize the value of the present in my life of imitation of Jesus? Am I caught up in the past or in the future, or focus on the present as I attempt to live my life in imitation of Jesus? Do I make use of God's gift of the present to the fullest?

So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all. (Gal. 6: 10)

December 1

Understanding One's Office Rightly

Imagine that your office of the superior is your Calvary and all the tasks of administration as a continuation of the crucifixion. (OCL, II, 335, p. 56)

St. Vincent Pallotti wants his followers to have a proper understanding of the different offices they hold within the community or in the Church, especially those who hold positions of authority. In one of his letters addressed to a person who is elected to the office of the superior of a community, he states that the superior should consider his office as his Calvary, and all the tasks associated with the administration of the community as a continuation of the crucifixion. He also advises that a superior must live a life of perpetual diffidence, not totally counting on his power, knowing that he is not absolute in his authority. He instead must abandon his total confidence in God and live without any fear, believing that God will support everything he undertakes for he can do nothing without him. A superior should accept his office as a great responsibility and in the spirit of John the Baptist. John the Baptist accepted his life's task to present Christ, the Son of the Father, to the people. In the same way, a superior must discern and communicate the will of God to the members of the community. To accomplish the task of the superior in this spirit implies that the superior should be ready to carry the cross along with Jesus to Calvary. In doing so, like Jesus, he will bring glory and joy to the members of his community.

What is my attitude towards authority? Do I consider the office of authority as a service to the community or a personal privilege? Am I ready to accept the troubles of being a leader joyfully? Do I accept any office of authority as a great responsibility? Do I realize that the task of the superior is to discern and communicate the will of God?

This is he [John the Baptist], who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, when he said: "The voice of the one crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mt. 3: 3)

December 2

Life of Christ: Our Fundamental Rule

Living the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ is the fundamental rule of our little Congregation. (OCC, III, p. 42)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, the fundamental rule of the Society he founded is the life of Jesus Christ. Every member of the Society is called to live the life of Jesus in order to be a true member of the community. According to St. Vincent, if a person does not focus his life on the life of Jesus and does not live the spirit of Christ, he cannot truly be called a member of the Society. Hence, the imitation of the life of Jesus is vital for being an authentic member of the community St. Vincent founded. The manner of imitation, for St. Vincent, must be one of humble confidence. A person must live the life of Jesus in all humility, always being aware of the fact that he is the most unworthy person to live it. Yet he must make every effort to live it joyfully and totally, having complete confidence in God. Imitation consists of all the actions Jesus performed in his hidden and public life. A person must attempt to live in the manner in which Jesus lived his hidden and public life. The hidden life of Jesus refers to the years he lived in Nazareth before his baptism in the Jordan. The public life refers to the last three years of his life during which he manifested the glory of his Father by living his life as the Apostle of the Eternal Father. Thus, for St. Vincent, when a member of his community lives the private and public life of Jesus in his own life and bears fruit for God and his people, that member truly lives the life of Jesus as the fundamental rule of the Society.

Do I accept the life of Jesus as the fundamental rule of the Society? Do I live the life of Christ in humble confidence? Am I ready to live the hidden and public life of Jesus? Do I bear fruit like Jesus by living his life as the fundamental rule?

He [Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (I Pet. 2: 24)

Evil of Domineering Spirit

Since charity is humble, the spirit of domineering will be considered as a plague in the Pious Society, and therefore, shall be excluded from the Society. (OCC, I, p.106; SD, p. 2)

Since the virtue of humility is the foundation of charity, St. Vincent Pallotti considers the domineering spirit detrimental to the life and growth of the community. He compares the spirit of domineering to a plague. When there is an attack of a plague in a place, it kills people indiscriminately. Similarly, if the domineering spirit guides the members of a community, it will bring about disaster in the community. If each person tries to dominate another, there is hardly any respect for each other in the community. One looks at the other not as a person, but as an object to be controlled and possessed. When the other is not considered as a person, there is hardly any relationship on a personal level. Each person reaches out to the other in the community interactions only in the level functions. Hence, the relationship which exists in the community is only superficial and peripheral. Since there is no depth level relationship between the members, the principle that guides the community living is one of toleration rather than acceptance. Without a genuine understanding among the members, and living the attitude of toleration and indifference, the members of the community often react to each other rather than live in a dialoguing relationship. Such reactions bring lots of tension in community living. In this way, a community directed by the spirit of domination is not a community at all in the real sense. Hence, St. Vincent wants the people of domineering spirit to be excluded from the community, for they destroy it.

Is it the domineering spirit that directs me in my community living? Do I understand the dangers the domineering spirit brings to the community? By living the domineering spirit do I kill the community spirit?

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with the humility towards one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."
(I Pet. 5: 5)

No Laziness in Our Communities

Because in the Holy Family of Nazareth there was never even the slightest laziness, we are bound to keep far from our community ... even the slightest mark of laziness. (OCCC, III, P. 51; SD, p. 10)

St. Vincent condemns the attitude of laziness among the members of his community. For him, laziness is dangerous to the genuine growth and development of the community, besides being detrimental to the actualization of the talents and abilities of the person who is lazy. A lazy person has no interest in doing anything. He is a minimalist. He normally does not take any interest in accepting the responsibilities in the community. If he accepts a task in the community, he does it with great reluctance. Even if he takes up a responsibility in the community, he gives the minimum effort in fulfilling the task he has undertaken. Thus, a lazy person lacks the true spirit of generosity towards the community. A lazy person is not only unconcerned about the wellbeing of the community, but also has no interest in his own betterment. He does not take any interest in knowing and developing his talents and abilities. He does not make use of the opportunities that are given to him for his own growth. Taking no interest in his wellbeing and that of the community, a lazy person devises plans to disrupt the genuine life in the community. He spends his time in idle gossip about the members of the community. Often he is also very critical of the authority in the community. In this manner, a lazy person uses his time to bring more harm than good to the community. Hence, St. Vincent wants all his followers to shun laziness.

Am I a lazy person? Do I realize the dangers of laziness? Am I a person who takes the least interest in the life of the community? Am I keen to develop my own talents and abilities? Do I spend my time in gossip and criticism?

Go to the ant ... consider her ways, and be wise ... She prepares her food in summer, and gathers her sustenance in harvest. How long will you lie there sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? (Prov. 6: 6-9)

Not Seeking the First Place

Since our Lord Jesus Christ has deigned to teach us not to take the first place ... who will ever have the courage to seek after honor and dignities of any sort whatsoever? (OCCC, VIII, p. 288; SD, p. 20)

St. Vincent Pallotti was a very humble person. He never sought distinctions, honors, or positions of importance. He always felt that all other persons were more important than he was. St. Vincent lived the teaching of Jesus about not taking the first place both in letter and spirit. Not choosing the first place, for St. Vincent, meant that he put aside the importance he gave to his intellect, will, learning, positions he held, honors that were given to him, and humbly surrendered himself before God. In other words, it meant that in every situation he preferred others and God rather than himself. St. Vincent often expressed this sentiment in his prayers. He wanted his followers to live the spirit of this teaching of Jesus. In order to cultivate this spirit in his followers, he asked the members of his community not to accept any ecclesiastical dignities, and to live their life in the spirit of service. He reminded them of Jesus' condemnation of the attitude of the Pharisees who sought for themselves the places of honor in the synagogues and other places. St. Vincent also set before his followers the example of Jesus, who never sought himself, but always attempted to seek God and his plan for humankind. In Jesus' life he constantly preferred his Father and the people to whom he was sent to preach the good news. St. Vincent wanted his followers to live a life in which they preferred not themselves, but God and others. When they lived such a life in imitation of Jesus, they would not seek for themselves the place of honor.

Do I seek the first place for myself in my day to day living? What does it mean to me to deny for myself the first place, in the context of my every day living? Do I prefer God and others to myself? Do I imitate Jesus' self-surrender to the Father, which made him choose God and others rather than himself?

He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. (Mt. 23: 11)

Balancing Adversity and Prosperity

[We must be] thanking the heavenly Father for the gift of tribulations and in order to improve the gift of a contrite and humble heart so that ... [we] will not make bad use of prosperity. (OCCC, VII, p. 59; SD, pp. 36-37)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, a genuine Christian life is a combination of adversity and prosperity. The life of Christ consists of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. In the same way, the life of every Christian has to have a share of tribulations and abundance of blessings. St. Vincent wants his followers to have a balanced view of both tribulation and prosperity. A person should not be downcast when he meets with tribulations. Nor should he be overjoyed when he experiences prosperity. According to St. Vincent, every person must thank the Lord for the various sufferings that come into his life as if they are gifts from God. They are given to a person in order to help him in his personal growth. Thus, the tribulations do contribute to the wellbeing of the human person. They help a person to cultivate a heart that is humble and contrite, with the help of which he can reach out to God in complete and absolute surrender. If there are no tribulations in the life of a person, he may never realize the need for God in his life. The experience of adversity helps a person to understand the value and importance of prosperity in his life and use the moments of prosperity properly. If a person never experiences adversity, he may take moments of prosperity for granted. The experience of adversity prepares him to accept prosperity with gratitude and use it for his good, the good of his neighbor, and for the glory of God.

Do I acknowledge that life is a combination of adversity and prosperity? Do I accept them with the right sense of balance? Do I realize the value of adversity in my life? Does adversity help me to surrender myself to God and use my prosperity properly?

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you ... Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven. (Mt. 5: 11 – 12)

Community of True Spirit

We must not crave for a large number, but a few and full of spirit. For one filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ will do much. But the one without the spirit of Christ will cause great harm, even in the midst of many good ones. (OCCC, III, p. 327)

St. Vincent Pallotti was a man of practical wisdom. He often prayed and asked his followers to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers for the spread of God's kingdom. Yet he said that we should not crave for large numbers in our communities. For him, even though it would be good to have large numbers, it is more important to have truly spirited persons rather than large numbers of persons in the service of the Lord.. In other words, St. Vincent preferred a small community of spirit-filled persons rather than a large community of spirit-less persons. He said that one person filled with the spirit of Jesus Christ, engaged in ministry, would do much more than many persons involved in apostolic endeavors without the true spirit of Christ. As a matter of fact, those persons who do not have the spirit of Christ would bring more harm to the community's apostolic efforts even in the midst of good ones. One person, without the spirit of Christ, can destroy the good work done by many others. For this reason, St. Vincent showed great interest in the formation of the members of his community. He wanted to establish a community of true spirit, even though it meant that there would be fewer members in the community. Probably because of this attitude of St. Vincent Pallotti, at his death the Society he founded had only a handful of members.

What is the nature of the community in which I live? Does it consist of spirit-filled or spirit-less persons? How do I contribute to making a community of true spirit? Is due importance given to forming members of true spirit?

I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1: 3 – 5)

In Praise of Mary

Let us, therefore, zealously strive to spread the glories of Mary ... Let us instill ... in the hearts of all people, an inexhaustible, infinitely tender love of Mary, our most beloved Mother. (OCCC, V, pp. 447 - 448)

St. Vincent Pallotti lived a life of filial devotion to Mary. He often said to himself that he would not rest until he possessed an infinitely tender love for Mary, his mother. He always felt that he was unworthy of her. He prayed to God to give him the grace to love Mary with the same love with which God loved her. St. Vincent wanted to honor, love and glorify Mary, and wished that everyone else in the world would do the same. He therefore zealously strove to spread the glories of Mary. He attempted to instill in the hearts of everyone whom he encountered the tender love for Mary. By way of his devotional writing on Mary, by commissioning the work of making statues and paintings of Mary, and by way of his own sermons on the glories of Mary, St. Vincent attempted to propagate a true love for Mary among the people. Due to his concerted efforts, many persons came to know more about Mary, loved her and lived a life of loyalty to her. When the angel Gabriel came to announce to Mary her vocation to be the Mother of God, he greeted her as the one who is the most favored by the Lord. Similarly, when Elizabeth met Mary, she greeted her as blessed among women, and acknowledged her unworthiness to receive the mother of the Lord. In the same way, St. Vincent always attempted to encounter Mary and live to praise her glory.

Do I strive to spread the glories of Mary? What concrete steps do I take to make others know the glories of Mary? Do I attempt to give those whom I meet daily a true knowledge of Mary, and instill in them a deep love for her? What concrete steps do I take to encounter Mary in my life and to live it in praise of her glory?

He [the angel] came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Lk. 1: 28)

Respecting Members of the Community

[Members of the community] will all have the greatest respect for one another. They will converse among themselves with every affability and cordiality. (OCC, VIII, p. 326; SD, p. 70)

Life in the community is one of the themes that St. Vincent constantly talks about in his instructions to his followers. For St. Vincent, one important element that builds the community is cultivating genuine respect for each other as members living together in the community. The foundation for mutual respect is the fact that the human person is created in God's image. Since the human person is created in the image and likeness of God, he has an inherent dignity which God places on him. Therefore, it is the duty of every person to honor the image of God as it manifests in the world through other human persons. As every human person is an image of God, in respecting the other we honor God himself in whose image he is created. According to St. Vincent, this respect for the other must be found in a special way in the religious community, because by a person's religious consecration, he professes to live the commandment of love in a fuller and deeper way. The deeper living of the commandment of love calls for true respect for one's neighbor. If no genuine respect for the other is present, one cannot truly love the other. An affable and cordial relationship of communication in a community can be built up only on the foundation of true respect for each other. Hence, respecting each other is the foundation of a genuine community. It is a demand God places on the human person by creating every person in his own image and likeness.

Do I respect the members of my community? Do I respect the members of my community as the image of God? Do I realize that in respecting my neighbor, I respect God, whose image he is? Do I acknowledge that without this basic respect for my neighbor, it is impossible to live the commandment of love within the community?

Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. (Rom. 12:16)

Diversity of Opinion

[Every member in the community] will strive as far as possible to avoid diversity of opinion, even in matters where permitted. No one should obstinately hold on to his opinion to the detriment of charity. (OCCC, VIII, p. 326; SD, p. 70)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, it is important that there is unity at every level in order for a community to remain strong and function well. This point becomes clear if one looks at the early Christian community. The characteristic mark of the early Christian community is the living of the members “having one mind and one heart.” “Having one mind” refers to the unity of thinking. When all think alike, there is perfect agreement despite the differences among the members. “Having one heart” refers to similar sentiments, feelings and attitudes prevailing among the members notwithstanding the natural differences that may exist in the community. The early Christian community was able to withstand persecutions and other difficulties that arose in the community only because the members of the community lived a life characterized by “having one mind and one heart.” Therefore, for Vincent, the religious communities must cultivate in the members a sense of unity in the levels of thinking, feeling, and attitudes. For this reason, the members must avoid diversity of opinions as much as possible, even in matters where diversity can be permitted. St. Vincent wants the members of his Society to not obstinately hold onto their opinions that do not facilitate the living of the commandment of love, thereby creating divisions within the community. Though St. Vincent is never against diversity in the community, he stresses the unity dimension of the community which is vital for the true health of the community.

Does the spirit of one mind and one heart prevail in my community? Is there unity in the thinking, feeling and attitudes of my community? Do I hold on to unwanted diversity in my community? Do I hold on to obstinate opinions, thereby causing division within the community? Do I believe unity is vital for my community’s true health?

Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.
(Ps. 133: 1)

Conversation among Members in the Community

In their conversation, let the members refrain from showing signs of annoyance and resentment or of being offended by anyone. Neither should they offend others by words, deeds, or in any manner. (OCC, VIII, pp. 326 - 327; SD, p. 70)

Just as there is the need to regulate the diversity of opinions among the members in order to build up a healthy community, there is the need to direct the conversation among the members to foster better relationships. St. Vincent Pallotti takes keen interest in helping the members to regulate their conversation in the community. According to him, the members must not show any signs of annoyance in their conversations. Even if a person's behavior might induce annoyance or irritation, the other must see that he does not express his annoyance in public so as to avoid unpleasantness in the relationship. Similarly, if a person has resentment towards some other person in the community, he must not act on his resentment in public which may bring about a conflict situation in the relationship. Likewise, if a person is offended by anyone, he must not pay back his hurt. Not only should a person restrict his reactions to other person's behavior, but he should also regulate his own actions towards others. A person should not offend others by words, actions, or by any other way. Thus, for St. Vincent, the practice of these guidelines on a regular basis by all members of the community, especially with regard to one's conversation with others, helps them to avoid unpleasantness and fosters better relationships with each other in the community.

Does my conversation with others destroy my relationship with them? Do I express my annoyance and resentment in public? Do I retaliate when others hurt me? What are some of the concrete steps I need to take in my life in order to make my conversation with others a means to build up genuine relationships?

Bless those who persecute; bless and do not curse. (Rom. 12: 14)

Duty of Those in Authority

In order to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ all those in authority ... give the ruling not in the spirit of domination, but with an attitude of loving service. (OCCC, I, p. 107)

St. Vincent Pallotti wanted everyone who holds any office of leadership to imitate Jesus, the Master, who always served. Jesus did not come into this world to be served, but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. The leadership of Christ is a servant leadership, i.e., a leadership of service. Jesus taught his disciples the lesson on servant leadership at the last supper by stooping down to wash the feet of his disciples. When Peter objected to Jesus' washing of his feet, thereby objecting to the type of leadership Jesus was proposing for them to follow, Jesus said that if he did not wash Peter's feet, Peter would have no part in Jesus. This act indicated to Peter that he must accept the servant leadership Jesus was proposing for his disciples. Similarly, the words of Jesus to Pilate who said that he had the power to free or to hand over Jesus to the Jews, said that Pilate would not have the power he has unless it was given from above. The gesture of Jesus at the last supper and his words to Peter and Pilate clearly indicate that the leadership among his followers should never be one of domination, but one of loving service. All through his life, St. Vincent was a servant leader. Fighting against his tendencies of pride and anger, he always attempted to humble himself instead of imposing himself on others. In exercising his function as the leader, whether in his community, in the different parishes he served, or in any other offices he held at different times in his life, he was an exemplary leader whose main concern was to serve those who were in need.

Do I hold any leadership position? How do I exercise my authority over the people whom God has given me to care for? Am I a servant leader? Is it domination or loving service that characterize my leadership style? Do I believe that I would have no authority unless it is given from above?

Let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. (Lk. 22: 25)

Duty of Those under Authority

All must cooperate in the undertaking of the pious Society out of pure charity, without any interest and without ambition. (OOC, I, p. 106)

St. Vincent had a word of advice for those who are under authority. He wanted them to cooperate with those in authority in accomplishing the various tasks out of pure charity without any interest and ambition. First, they must cooperate out of pure charity. In accomplishing all the tasks with which they are entrusted, they must be guided by the pure motive of love of God and neighbor. In other words, the glory of God and the happiness of the people whom they are serving must be the purpose behind all they do. Second, they must cooperate without any interest. The phrase “without any interest” means that it is done without any personal interest of the one who is doing the task. In other words, the primary objective of the action should be for the good of the person for whom the action is done and not for the person who is doing the act. The action should be more other-centered rather than self-centered. Third, they must cooperate without ambition. Placing one’s ambitious plans in the works of charity they undertake can vitiate the whole purpose of the work of charity. As a result, every effort made in this manner would not serve the purpose of accomplishing the goal of the work of charity. When a good work is undertaken with these motives in mind, it would bear fruit for the people for whom it is done, bring true joy to the one who is doing the task, and above all manifest the infinite love and mercy of God in the world.

Do I accept the authority of those whom God has placed over me? Do I cooperate with them out of pure charity without any personal interest and ambition in accomplishing the God-given responsibility?

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man’s all; because God will bring to judgment every work with all its hidden qualities, whether good or bad. (Eccl. 12: 13 – 14)

Concern for the Good Name

Let no one ever lightly hurt the reputation of others, especially of the superiors, much less criticize a rule, constitution, or a custom existing in the congregation. (OCC, VIII, p. 327; SD, p. 71)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, maintaining the good name and reputation of every member of the community is vital for the life of the community. A community is made up of members, and whatever happens to a member does affect the community. Hence, the loss of the good name and reputation of a member leaves a mark on the community and its other members. Therefore, St. Vincent advised his followers to do their best to guard the good name of every member of the community. For him, no member by way of gossiping, bearing tales or maligning should bring ill repute on the name of a member of the community. Every member of the community should take special care to guard the good name of the superior, as he is the representative of God in their midst. Similarly, the members are advised not to be critical of the rules that guide the community, the constitutions of the Society, and the customs and practices prevalent in a community. These are rules, regulations, and practices that have come into the life of the community over a long period of time. Though some of them may require revision, modification and alterations periodically, to deny them as totally meaningless and useless, and be critical of them should not be encouraged. The members should have respect for the tradition and heritage of the community to which they belong. The attitude of a member towards these traditions and rules of the community should be one of creative fidelity, i.e., while remaining faithful to them, make the needed changes by way of consensus within the community. In this manner, St. Vincent was deeply concerned about the good name of the members, the Society and its institutions.

Do I have concern for the good name of the members of the community, the Society, and its institutions? Do I malign the name of others by bearing tales? Am I critical of authority? Do I respect the customs, rules and constitutions of the Society?

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches. (Prov. 22: 1)

Working Hard to Accomplish the Good

Let us work. Let us never get tired. Let us work. Let us do good to all people, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (OCL, I, 6, p.11)

St. Vincent was a hard working person. The goal of all his work was to accomplish every possible good in the lives of the people. His historical situation presented ample opportunities to do good. Living in a time of wars, revolutions, and conspiracies, he experienced the manifold evils that existed in the lives of the individual human persons and in the society at large. He often felt compassion for the people who were suffering from the evils of the socio-political set up of the time. Seeing the troubles, pains, and hardships of the people living around him, he was unable to be a passive spectator. He realized that there was much work to be done. But there were very few people who showed interest in taking up the responsibility of caring for the needy. Hence, St. Vincent felt that he needed to work hard. He often told his collaborators to work hard and never get tired. He also advised them that as they work, they were not to forget the real purpose of their work, that is, to do good to all people. While encouraging his followers to work hard for the wellbeing of every human person who was suffering from any form of infirmity, whether it was material or spiritual, he requested them to show special concern for the suffering people who belonged to the household of faith. In other words, St. Vincent wanted his followers to be more concerned about their fellow Christians who were suffering and to respond to their needs. In and through the hard work of the members of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, St. Vincent was able to accomplish a lot of good in the lives of the people of his time.

Do I recognize the suffering that exists in the lives of the people I encounter? Am I sensitive and compassionate to their needs? Do I work hard in my own little way to do good to these people? What is the real purpose of my work? While concerned about every person's suffering, do I specially care for my fellow Christians?

Anything you can turn your hand to, do with what power you have. (Eccles. 9: 10)

Spirit of Charity: The Life of the Community

The community, as a moral body, would be destroyed if the spirit of charity were lacking. (OOC, III, p. 324)

According to St. Vincent, the perfect spirit of charity must dominate the thinking and action of every member of the community in order that there is true life in the community. Without the spirit of charity, there is no genuine community living. The community, as a moral body, consisting of many members and accomplishing specified apostolic tasks, cannot survive if the spirit of love is not guiding the life of the members within the community. If the spirit of charity is lacking, the members will not have a unity of thinking and unity of action. No member will agree on a common program of the community, either with regard to their life together in the community, or with regard to the accomplishment of the goals of the community. If there is no agreement in having a common thinking, it is not possible to have unity in the level of action within the community. Besides, there will be divergent opinions on each matter, and no one will be able to arrive at a particular and proper plan of action. The members will neither respect their superior, nor will they commit themselves to following the rules of the community. Each member will try to look for and speak about the defects of his brother in the community. Every member will be acting out of caprice towards his neighbor. The community life in such a set up will bring disharmony, tensions, and lack of coordination. The apostolic endeavors they undertake with this spirit will not bear fruit. In this manner, if the spirit of charity is lacking, the community for all practical purposes, will be a lifeless one.

How is life in the community in which I live? Does the spirit of love dominate my community living? Is there unity of thinking and unity of action in my community? Is there genuine respect for authority and the rules of the community? Is the community I live in a lifeless or a dynamic one?

Owe to no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (Rom. 13: 8)

An Unassuming Life

People, who are tempted to distinguish themselves in the eyes of others ... in spite of their talents, must courageously suppress their self-love and prefer a withdrawn, obscure life, until a distinct vocation from God invites them to emerge. (OOC, II, pp. 102-103)

For St. Vincent, a person who dedicates his life to God must live an unassuming life. His dedication implies that he chooses God, and him alone, and gives himself to the service of others in the name of God. There should be no self-love in the manner in which he lives out his dedication. Even though a person has many talents and abilities, he must use them without showing off. Every temptation to manifest one's greatness should be nipped in the bud. The distinction of a person is not meant for pharisaic display, but for fruitful use at the service of God's people. Hence, Vincent says that a person should not constantly allow himself to be tempted to exhibit his abilities in front of others. But instead of showing off his talents, he must quietly use them for the purpose of the glorification of God and the good of human persons. He must suppress his excessive self-love and never allow his abilities to be used in such a way that he becomes more selfish. If a person's temptation to manifest his abilities is so great, then he must withdraw and live an obscure and quiet life by going in the background until a time when a distinct vocation from God invites him to come to the forefront and use his talents publicly. For it is better not to use one's abilities, rather than using them for an evil purpose. Thus, St. Vincent wanted his followers to live a life that is simple, unassuming and God-fearing.

Do I live a simple and unassuming life as a steward of God? Do I display my talents in a pharisaic manner? Do I use my talents and abilities for the good of God's people? Am I afraid to be in the background, and allow others to be in the foreground?

For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. (II Cor. 1: 12)

Living like Jesus

If all Christians were to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ ... we would have the gift of the same life of Jesus Christ. With such a gift, we have ... every day innumerable special graces to live like him.
(OCC, III, pp. 35 - 36)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a genuine imitation of the life of Jesus Christ becomes the means to acquire the power to live a life similar to that of Jesus. When a person imitates Jesus, he opens himself to have insight into the life of Jesus. He comes to know the nature of the life of Jesus, the qualities that are characteristic of his life, and some of his sentiments in coping with different situations in his life. He comes to know Jesus not only theoretically, but also experientially. Thus, for St. Vincent, true imitation of Jesus makes the person ready to receive the gift of the life of Jesus. When a person receives the life of Jesus by way of reflection and meditation, he can dwell on the life of Jesus on a regular basis. This reflection on the life of Jesus which is the ideal a person is called to live, opens him to live his life in a manner similar to Jesus. Besides accepting Jesus as the example and model for one's life, the person also is open to the many graces and blessings Jesus showers on him. When a person is inspired by the example of Jesus and is assisted by the divine graces which Jesus showers on him, he is able to live very much like Jesus. In this way, imitation of Jesus - by giving the right insight into the life of Jesus, by placing before the person the example of Jesus as a guide for his life, and by showering on the person the graces Jesus has merited through his death on the cross - makes him live the very life of Jesus in the same way Jesus lived. Thus, for St. Vincent, imitation of Jesus helps a Christian to live like Jesus.

Do I believe that imitation of Jesus helps me to live the very life of Jesus? Does my imitation of Jesus bring me the right knowledge of Jesus? Does my imitation of Jesus open me to the graces and blessings of Jesus? Does the imitation of Jesus help me to learn from the example of Jesus?

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving for you an example that you should follow in his steps. (I Pet. 2: 21)

God's Fidelity

Forget yourself for the love of God and God will not forget you.
(OCL, IV, 832, p. 71)

For St. Vincent, God is a faithful God because he is infinite love and mercy. The God who is infinitely loving and merciful will not be unfaithful. A person is unfaithful because he loses his interest in the one to whom he is called to be faithful. Again, a person takes recourse to an act of unfaithfulness towards another when being faithful becomes burdensome. But God who is Eternal Love, will not be unfaithful because he neither loses interest in his creatures, nor does the act of faithfulness become a burden for him. Since St. Vincent is totally convinced of the merciful love of God which makes him ever faithful to creatures, he was always ready to surrender himself to God in every situation. He tells his followers to forget themselves in the love of God because he will not forget them. As God is ever faithful and never forgets them in their needs, St Vincent asks his followers to cultivate a corresponding attitude towards God. A person's faith in God's fidelity should make him let go of every concern and care by handing it over to the one who can handle it in the best manner. Since he knows that God is always at his side despite his infidelities to him, a person becomes capable of accepting any situation that is uncertain and any circumstances that are challenging. For the fidelity of God is the foundation on which his whole life rests. St. Vincent lived out this attitude towards God on a daily basis, because he believed in God's fidelity towards him.

Do I believe in God's faithfulness to me? Do I acknowledge God's infinite love and mercy for me? Do I respond to God's faithfulness to me in a corresponding manner? Am I capable of accepting any situation that is uncertain? Am I ready to accept circumstances that are challenging? What difference does my belief in God's fidelity bring about in my basic attitude towards my life?

O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. (Is. 25: 1)

Launching into the Deep

Plunge into God and you will find him everywhere; then you ever find him to be all love and all mercy towards you. (OCL, IV, 1047, p. 333)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, God's presence is real and active in the world. He is present as the God who is infinite, immense, incomprehensible, and unlimited in his attributes. By incarnation, the presence of God is real in and through the life of Jesus here on earth. By his birth as a human being, Jesus manifests the love of God for the world in a real way. The immense love of Jesus for every human person is specially manifested in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Jesus presents himself as the nourishment of divine life and as the Purity in essence, purifying the human person from every evil and making him worthy of God. According to St. Vincent, the world is filled with the Divine Presence. It is up to the human person to seek and find the presence of God as present and active in diverse ways in the world. Hence, he advises his followers to launch into the deep and to go deep within themselves to seek the presence of God. When a person plunges himself into God in this manner, he will find God everywhere. St. Vincent adds that a person will find God as the Infinite Love and Mercy, ever ready to shower his mercy and love upon the one who seeks him. He invites every human person to be the seeker of God, seeking him in every situation, in every event, in every trouble, in every good thing, and in whatever happens in his life. The more one seeks God, the more he will find God; the more he finds God, the more he will find him as Infinite Love and Mercy.

Do I believe that God's Presence is real and active in the world? Do I open myself in finding God who is present in ever so many ways? Do I seek God in the concrete situation of everyday life? Do I find God as the Infinite Love and Mercy?

You are a hiding place for me, you preserve me from trouble; you have encompassed me with deliverance. (Ps. 32: 7)

Walking with Jesus

When we believe in Jesus Christ and strive ... to imitate him ... [He] grants to us the grace of being destroyed of our every deformity ... Then Jesus enters into us and continues his life within us.
(OCCC, III, p. 37)

St. Vincent Pallotti visualizes Christian life as “walking with Jesus.” In this journeying with Jesus, a person’s self-centered living gets destroyed slowly and his life with God begins flowering. The first condition to begin this journey is to believe in Jesus. The second condition for this journey is the humble and confident striving to imitate Jesus. Thus, when a person begins a life of imitation of Jesus in faith and love, Jesus showers on him the grace of destroying all of his shortcomings and deformity. This destruction involves the emptying of a person’s egoism in totality. It calls for the removal of the “old man” and the putting on of the “new man.” When a person makes a personal effort to remove all that is evil within him, Jesus purifies the person from every form of selfishness. In doing so, Jesus effects the destruction of all that is unholy in the person. When a person receives the gift of destruction of every evil, he experiences an attraction to Christ and a desire to give himself fully to Jesus. At this stage, a person is sensitive to the wishes of Jesus, responds to him positively, collaborates with him, and enters into an experience of genuine companionship with Jesus. The thoughts, words, and deeds of Jesus influence the thoughts, words and deeds of the person, and he becomes “fixed in Christ.” When this happens, the person is transformed into Jesus, so much so that Jesus lives and acts in the person. In this manner, the life of the person becomes a “walking with Jesus.”

Do I consider my Christian life as “walking with Jesus”? Do I imitate the life of Jesus in faith to begin such a journey? Am I ready to die to myself and live for God? Do I fix myself in Christ, and allow Jesus to transform me and to live in me?

Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the ways I command you, that it may be well with you. (Jer. 7: 23)

Danger of Mistrust

Your most serious infirmity is mistrust. Pray in order to obtain the grace, which will enable you to rid yourself of mistrust and fill you with spiritual confidence. (OCL, IV, 845, p. 87)

St. Vincent Pallotti speaks of the importance of the virtue of trust in the life of a Christian. The absence of trust, i.e., the presence of mistrust, makes a person's life meaningless. A life lacking in confidence makes a person's living indecisive. He is not able to make any decision as he is afraid of making a mistake. He feels helpless and diffident. Thus, a person caught in mistrust is filled with fear and anxiety. He is afraid of going wrong in any decision he makes. If he has made a decision, he is anxious about the outcome of the decision. When the attitude of mistrust takes hold of a person, he is not able to place his confidence in God, in other human persons, or in himself. A person is not able to trust God because he is afraid that God would punish him for his infidelity. He is not able to trust in the other human persons because he is anxious about what others will think of him or speak about his actions. He also does not trust in himself because he is not certain of his abilities to accomplish the demands of life. Living in the state of mistrust brings a great deal of pain to the person. St. Vincent, being aware of the danger of mistrust, asks his followers to accept it as an infirmity or an illness. One must treat this infirmity carefully. St. Vincent suggests that a person who is suffering from this infirmity must take special care to pray to God to fill him with self-confidence and confidence in God. The more a person builds confidence in God's mercy the more he is able to trust others and himself.

Do I recognize the danger of mistrust in my life? Do I fail to trust in God, in other human persons and in myself? Do fear and anxiety dominate my relationship with God and others? What must I do to remove mistrust from my Christian life?

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. (I Tim. 4:10)

God's Perspective

God does not look upon you as you think he does. Even in your anguish and agony he looks upon you with his loving mercy. (OCL, IV, 970, p. 230)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, God's perspective is different from the outlook of human persons. Often a human person is conditioned by his concrete situation. His own feelings, the reaction of other persons, and the effects of the concrete situation affect a human person considerably. Hence, the way he responds to others depends on the situation in which he finds himself. The manner in which he responds to a hostile situation is different from the way he reacts to a friendly situation. Similarly, his attitudes in coping with a sad circumstance and a happy occasion are different. His reaction to a person who is helpful in his need is different from the one who is indifferent to his plight. Thus, the human perspective is relative and conditioned by circumstances. But, according to St. Vincent Pallotti, God's perspective is not conditioned by feelings, reactions of others, and the effects of the concrete situations. God is above all conditions that belong to the human realm. Hence, God views a situation very differently from a human person. God's action towards good and evil is the same, as far as what he wishes to do for them. He makes the sun rise and sends rain on both the good and the evil. In every moment of a person's life, God reaches out to him in love and mercy. One must attempt to understand God's perspective. For Vincent, knowing the nature of God's perspective helps a person to open the totality of his life to God without fear and anxiety. Every human person must learn to acquire the perspective of God so that he is able to deal with his neighbor as God deals with him.

Do I understand that the perspective of God is different from the human perspective? Do I acknowledge that God is unconditioned, while I am conditioned? Does the understanding of God's perspective open me to surrender my life to God? What attitudinal changes must I effect in order to cultivate the perspective of God?

Your Father who is in heaven ... makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. (Mt: 5: 45)

Cast Your Anxieties on God

Be calm and cease worrying once and for all. Do not lament anymore about a state Divine Providence has prepared for you so wisely. (OCL, II, 404, p.153)

The life of the human person, according to St. Vincent Pallotti, is wonderfully guided by the eternal plan of God. Hence, every person's life has a purpose. Nothing happens in his life without a reason, even though an event may appear to the human thinking as meaningless. It is important that the human person attempts to understand the way God looks at his life and guides it. God is beyond time. The totality of time, that is, the past, present and future, is eternally present to God. Hence, God knows not only the past and the present of a person's history, but also the future. This knowledge God has about a person guides him in making his plans for the person. Therefore, every event, whether good or bad, has a definite purpose in a person's life. In and through every happening, God works out what is good for the human person. It is important for a person to understand this truth. For St. Vincent, the more a person comes to understand this truth, the more ready he is to accept everything that happens in his life without any worry and anxiety. He asks his followers to be calm and to give up worrying once and for all. They must never lament the state in which God's providence has placed them at a particular moment in the history of their lives. In other words, St. Vincent wants them to believe in God's plan for each of them and accept whatever happens in their life in this spirit, casting all their anxieties on God. It is St. Vincent's belief that if they live their life in this spirit, they not only learn to overcome the difficulties that come into their lives, but also to be happy in accomplishing God's plan.

Do I recognize that God has a plan for me? Do I accept that in that plan there is a place for both the good and the evil? Do I believe in God's providential care for me? Do I spend my time worrying about whatever happens in my life? Am I ready to embrace God's plan for me, casting all my anxieties on him?

Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. (1 Pet. 5: 7)

December 25

Mary with Child Jesus in Bethlehem

Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the instructions and signs given to the shepherds, allowed himself to be found as a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. (OoCC, III, pp. 66 - 67)

On Christmas night when Christ was born, there was great joy in heaven. The angels and the heavenly host sang the hymn of glory giving God the highest honor and promising peace to persons of good will. The message of the birth of Jesus was announced to the shepherds. The wise men from the East came to adore the newborn King of the Universe with the guidance of a star. They worshipped him, offering him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Though the event of Christ's birth has all these glorious elements, yet it was a very ordinary event. The child is born in a stable; there is no place for him in the inns; and the first visitors were ordinary shepherds. While a few men from the far off country visit, the important and the elite of the Jewish society totally ignore the event. Mary, living through these various mini-events within the event of Christ's birth, wondered and pondered. Probably she did not understand the full meaning of these happenings and doubts might have assailed her mind. But she was not disturbed, she had no words of complaint, and she raised no questions. She silently pondered over the event and surrendered her thoughts and doubts at the feet of God, probably speaking from her heart, "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done unto me according to your word."

What does the event of Christ's birth teach me? How do I cope with unsettling situations that come into my life? Am I able to ponder in surrendering faith facing situations of doubts and anxieties? Do I trust in God's promises, like Mary?

And they [the shepherds] ... found Mary, Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger ... But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. (Lk. 2: 17, 19)

December 26

Encountering Oneself in God's Sight

In this world always look at God and then look at yourself. You will never find that God is without mercy and you are without misery. The mercy of God is favorable to your misery, and your misery is the object of the bounty and mercy of God. (OCL, III, 570 II, p. 67)

According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a person must always encounter himself in the sight of God. A person must know who God is before he can know who he is. Therefore, St. Vincent advises that a person, as he lives his life in the world, must always look at God first, after which he must look at himself. Fixing his eyes on God, he comes to know that God is Infinite Mercy and he is never found without mercy. Opening himself to the reality of his own self in the sight of God, the person realizes that he is never without misery. Thus, viewing himself in the sight of the mercy of God, a person understands his state of misery better. But the most interesting aspect of the relationship between God who is full of mercy and the human person who is full of misery, is that the mercy of God is favorable to the misery of the human person. The misery of the human person is the object of God's mercy. God, reaching out to the human person in his misery, is ready and willing to get him out of his state of misery. In doing so, God showers his abundant blessings on the human person, helping him to rise out of his misery to the level of being his son. Since the human person's misery is the object of God's infinite mercy, says St. Vincent, there is no reason for the human person to be anxious about his state of misery. Instead of being anxious, he must surrender himself totally to the mercy of God in order that he may be raised to the privilege of being a child of God.

Do I encounter myself in the sight of God? Do I encounter God as Infinite Mercy? How do I encounter myself? Do I believe that God's mercy can transform my misery? Do I open my misery to God and allow him to transform me to be his son?

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? (II Cor. 13: 5)

Having the Spirit of Jesus

In order to imitate our Lord Jesus Christ effectively, we must need to have his spirit. Thus, all the interior operations of our soul become similar to those of the same Lord Jesus Christ. (OCC, III, p. 38)

Imitation of Jesus, for St. Vincent Pallotti, does not consist of a mere superficial and external living of the life of Jesus. It is an internal experience in relation to which the very life of Jesus grows and develops in the life of a Christian. Imitation of Jesus consists of having the spirit of Jesus within the depth of a person, which in turn animates every activity of the person. When this takes place, the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, motivations and desires of the person grow more and more like that of Jesus, in the process effectively bringing about an identity with the Lord Jesus. As the result of this experience, it is no longer the person who lives and acts, but rather it is Jesus who lives and acts in the Christian. According to St. Vincent Pallotti, a person can arrive at this depth level of imitation of Jesus, especially with the help of the sacrament of the Eucharist. For in the Eucharist, a Christian encounters the Lord face to face in the depths of his being. Encountering the Lord in the Eucharist would be an apt moment to imbibe the true spirit of Jesus which consists of the true imitation of Jesus.

What is the nature of my imitation of Jesus? Does my imitation of Jesus make me more and more like Jesus? Do I live my life in such a way that Christ can act in and through me? Do I nourish my imitation of Jesus through the sacrament of the Eucharist?

For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth ... [and] in every place your faith in God has gone forth. (I Thes. 1: 8)

Conformity to the External Life of Jesus

In various circumstances of the day, before beginning any work ... we must imagine seeing our Lord Jesus Christ [as acting] in everything ... We must remember that God-Man is our example, model and practical rule in the totality of our life. (OCCC, III, pp. 36-37)

For St. Vincent Pallotti, one important aspect of a person's imitation of Jesus is achieving conformity to the external life of Jesus. It consists of knowing how Jesus performed his everyday human activities and doing likewise. In other words, a person performs his actions in a way similar to that of Jesus. Thus, in imitating the external life of Jesus, a person must become aware of the various activities Jesus performed, understand the particular manner in which he performed them and do likewise. Hence, in imitating the external life of Jesus, a person imitates the diligence with which Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, the purity of intention that marked Jesus' acceptance of the will of the Father, the humility with which Jesus submitted himself to the baptism of John the Baptist, the fervor with which he offered his prayer to the Father at his agony, his prudence in replying to the Scribes and Pharisees, the patience with which he accepted his sufferings and the gentleness with which he treated the woman caught in adultery. Conformity to the external life of Jesus in this manner is not a mere duplication of the actions of Jesus. Each person would do this in his own unique way. Though a person is not able to imitate Jesus' actions in the manner in which Jesus acted, he must do his best in conforming himself to Jesus and leave the rest to Jesus to accomplish in his life.

Does my imitation of Jesus involve external conformity to the life of Jesus? Does the manner in which Jesus performed his actions inspire me to act likewise? Do I conform myself to Jesus' external actions in my own unique way? Am I discouraged when I fail to conform to the external actions of Jesus?

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal. 5: 22 – 23)

Conformity to the Interior Dispositions of Jesus

We, [in performing an action], must consider the thoughts in the mind of our Lord with regard to that action, the affections of his divine heart ... [and] the words of humility, gentleness, charity, patience and prudence he would say. (OCC, III, p. 36)

Imitation of Jesus, for St. Vincent Pallotti, not only implies conformity to the external actions of Jesus, but also conformity to his interior dispositions. It is concerned not merely with the 'how' of Jesus' actions, but rather concerned with the 'why' of his actions. In other words, conformity to the interior dispositions of Jesus involves a person imbibing in himself the motives and dispositions that animated those external activities in Jesus. Here, the person concentrates on the spirit that underlies the actions of Jesus. In other words, he attempts to possess the spirit of Jesus in himself. Thus, a person conforming himself to the interior dispositions attempts to have Jesus' spirit of sacrifice, his love for suffering, his longing to do the will of the Father always, his desire for contempt rather than praise, his love of poverty, Jesus' desire to work for the infinite glory of God and salvation of men, his spirit of prayer, his magnanimity in accepting other's ingratitude and his spirit of forgiveness. When this happens in a person, the spirit of Jesus takes hold of his human spirit and his actions become similar to that of Jesus.

Does my imitation of Jesus involve conformity to the interior dispositions of Jesus? Do I possess the spirit of Jesus in my diverse actions of everyday life? Am I able to manifest Jesus in and through my thoughts, words and deeds?

Put on the armor of God ... stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as your breastplate ... hold faith as a shield ... And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. (Eph. 6: 13 – 17)

Life in Imitation of Jesus

God has given his divine Son to us so that we can imitate him, and become similar to him as much as possible. (OOCC, III, pp. 127 - 128; GIL, XXIII, p. 87)

The mystery and power of the person of Jesus deeply touched the life of St. Vincent Pallotti. He considered Jesus the true model of his Christian living. He knew well that, as a Christian, his life must be lived in imitation of Jesus. St. Vincent understood that the call of Jesus to be his disciple implied that every Christian must have the readiness to accept the path Jesus walked in his life. For St. Vincent, a Christian could not live his life in the way he wished, for the name 'Christian' he bore implied that the life of Jesus became central to his everyday living. Thus, St. Vincent accepted the centrality of Jesus in his life. Whatever he did - whether it pertained to his personal life, his relationship with others or his diverse apostolic endeavors - was done keeping in mind the way Jesus would have acted in those situations and circumstances. He wished that the thoughts, feelings and actions of Jesus would permeate his thoughts, feelings and actions, so that he would be able to live his life in imitation of Jesus. St. Vincent prayed that the life of Jesus would become his meditation, his study and the splendor of the Church in him. Living every moment of his life in imitation of Jesus made St. Vincent give his life generously to the Lord and to the people whom he encountered.

Do I accept Jesus as the model of my Christian living? Do I acknowledge the centrality of Jesus in my life? Do I allow the thoughts, feelings and actions of Jesus to permeate those of mine?

Whatever your task, work heartily ... knowing that ... you are serving the Lord Christ. (Col. 3: 23 - 24)

Following Jesus

The more one internalizes such religious thoughts [regarding Christ], the more he aspires to imitate him and grow in his love towards Jesus Christ. As he grows in love, he also acquires confidence in the grace necessary to imitate him. (OOCC, III, p.34)

St. Vincent gave great importance to the imitation of Jesus in his Christian living. In order to help himself and others to practice the imitation of Jesus, he formulated a “Daily Practical Memorandum.” It contained practical suggestions as to the ‘how’ of the imitation of Jesus. It was meant to help a person achieve a complete and integrated imitation of Jesus. It stressed the practice of traditional virtues, which in turn would help a person in his spiritual and apostolic formation by conforming himself to Christ in the most perfect way. It was also meant to be a reminder that would again and again call a person to live a life in imitation of Jesus. By the practice of the “Daily Practical Memorandum,” a person can internalize his reflections about the life of Christ and form right convictions, evaluate his motivations and make the needed changes in the manner in which he lived his Christian life in imitation of Jesus. When a person attempts to live his life in this way, he learns to know and love Christ. True knowledge and love of Jesus would fill him with genuine desire to live a life in continued imitation of Jesus and the determination and confidence to carry on despite the hardship one may face in living such a life.

Do I reflect on Jesus’ life and internalize my reflections and form right convictions about my Christian living? Do I evaluate my motivations and make the needed changes in my attitudes and actions in order to live a life in imitation of Jesus? Do I carry on living my life in imitation of Jesus, despite the difficulties I encounter?

So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us. (Eph. 5: 1 – 2)

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“If we are to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ, it is very necessary that we possess his spirit. This means that all of our thoughts and feelings must be like those of Jesus Christ, so that we can faithfully imitate him in our actions, which must be true expressions of our inner feelings.”

(OOCC III, 38)

Our hope is that this book may lead you to a closer relationship with God.



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