

REVISION - CELEBRATION

“Love is infinitely inventive.”

Introduction:

Let us recall the words of St. Vincent at the bedside of a seriously ill brother: “... Moreover, as **love is infinitely inventive**, after being fastened to the infamous gibbet of the cross in order to win the souls and hearts of those by whom he desired to be loved... foreseeing that his absence might occasion forgetfulness or a cooling-off of our love, he wanted to guard against this difficulty by instituting the Most Blessed Sacrament in which he is as really and truly present as he is in heaven. Furthermore, seeing that, if he wished to abase and crush himself even more than he had done in his incarnation ... he made this venerable Sacrament to serve us as food and drink... Because **love can do all and desires all**, he so wished it...”¹

Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical “Deus Caritas est” reminds us of this reality when he tells us: “**God is love** (1 Jn 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.”² “**Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.** He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna.”³

The starting point of our Celebration – Revision could be to reflect and pray on this “inventiveness” of the Son of God, which led him to accomplish something unthinkable for our minds, but which, at the same time, urges us to put into action all our capacities, the gifts that he has given to each one, in order to make the commandment of Love effective. “**Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.**”⁴

Objective:

As you can see from the letter, we are going to “Revise” and “Celebrate” our **creativity**, as Vincentians, in the service of the most vulnerable.

Methodology:

For those groups which are used to doing it, the “*See, judge, act*” method may be very useful. As you know well, the Young Catholic Workers have used this method since their foundation in Belgium in 1925. It was in 1961 that Pope John XXIII confirmed its validity by asserting it into his encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. For those who do not know this method, it would be good to start it by following the steps described in

¹ SV XI, 146.

² Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas est* of 25 December 2005, n° 12.

³ Ibid. n° 13.

⁴ Ibid. n° 18.

numbers 236 to 238 of that Encyclical.

In order to be able to move from the “revision” to the “celebration” it is necessary that, among all the members of the group, we arrive at feeling that we are architects of some action in favor of our brothers and sisters, fruit of our efforts and of our creativity; that we believe that the effort was worth it and this satisfaction is what will lead us to celebrate it. What was just said is valid, whether we are revising the design of a project or that of a concrete service. In this latter case, the ideal would be that we could arrive at doing so with those of our brothers and sisters who will benefit or are benefiting already from that which we have “created” together.

Texts which may help in the reflection:

In the context in which we are “celebrating” our “revision,” a first step could be to consider how we live the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The Encyclical, *Deus Caritas est* can help us:

*“In the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we **experience the love of God**, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives.”⁵*

“‘Worship’ itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.”⁶

*“Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour ... Despite being extended to all mankind, it [**the love of neighbour**] is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now.”⁷*

We have all said many times, and are convinced, that our world is changing at an accelerated rate, the changes being ever more rapid and numerous. In face of this, we have two possible ways of acting: the **routine way**, that is to say, continuing to do the same because “it has always been done thus” or the **creative way**, confronting new situations with new answers, which better respond to them. Great ideas arise from attempts to do something new and different. Let us look at the invitation that John Paul II offered us in his Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.

*“I now wish to propose ... an invitation to ‘look to the future’ at a time when we can already glimpse the third Millennium of the Christian era, so filled with uncertainties but also with promises – **uncertainties and promises which appeal to our imagination and creativity, and which reawaken our responsibility**, as disciples of the ‘one teacher’ (cf. Mt 23:8), to show the way, to proclaim the truth and to communicate the life which is Christ (cf. Jn 14:6).⁸*

In fact, it is exciting to think that creativity is defined as the “faculty or capacity to

⁵ Ibid. n° 17.

⁶ Ibid. n° 14.

⁷ Ibid. n° 15.

⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* of 1 May 1991, n° 3.

create” and that, by it, we are participating in the work of the Creator. John Paul II also reminded us of this truth in his Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*.

*“The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth **that man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation.**”⁹*

There are two obstacles that we might encounter in exercising our creativity:

- the principle of subsidiarity is not respected and
- the fear of risk, of failure.

The principle of subsidiarity is closely related to initiative, for not to respect

*“...destroys the spirit of initiative, that is to say the creative subjectivity of the citizen ... **In the place of creative initiative there appears passivity, dependence and submission to the bureaucratic apparatus which, as the only ‘ordering’ and ‘decision-making’ body.**”¹⁰*

Although, in this paragraph, John Paul II is talking in the context of the world of economics, it is applicable to our projects because an element to take into account is what the persons to whom it is directed think of the project. A human group knows more of itself than all the books that might speak of it, and it is our duty to awaken and set in motion its own resources.

We cited, as a second obstacle, the risk, the failure, that reflects itself in our indecision, in putting things off for later, etc. There are risks that can only be run “in community,” “in a group” and to those Benedict XVI invites us:

“Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community.”¹¹

His invitation also extends itself to collaboration with other organisms, which today we call “networking,” when he says to us:

*“Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, **favouring a mutual coordination** that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.”¹²*

For us, sons and daughters of St. Vincent, “networking” must not be a novelty. Vincent de Paul was precisely the pioneer in the organization of charity. The many situations which he experienced testify to this. For the group reflection, the study of the Combined Charity of Mâcon, founded by St. Vincent in 1621, may be helpful. The documents can be found in *St. Vincent de Paul: Correspondence, Conferences, Documents*, Volume 13b, p. 73ff.

We leave to **your creativity** to complement the above-mentioned texts with others that, according to the situation of the group, may be more appropriate for its reflection.

In this beautiful task of seeking the best for our poorest brothers and sisters, let us be

⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem Exercens* of 14 September 1981, n° 25.

¹⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* of 30 December 1987, n° 15.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *op. cit.*, n° 20.

¹² *Ibid.* n° 30.

enlightened once again by our dear Pope John Paul II when, in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, he tells us:

*"Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ. The Son of God, who became incarnate two thousand years ago out of love for humanity, is at work even today: we need discerning eyes to see this and, above all, a generous heart to become the instruments of his work."*¹³

Possible concluding prayers:

- Collect from the Feast of St. Vincent:

God, our Father, you filled your priest Saint Vincent with the strength of the apostles to work for the salvation of the poor and the instruction of the clergy. May we who follow the examples of his life be driven by unceasing charity to continue the mission of your Son in the world. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

- Prayer of the Vincentian Family:

*Lord Jesus, you who willed to become poor,
give us eyes and a heart directed toward the poor;
help us to recognize you in them –
in their thirst, their hunger, their loneliness, and their misfortune.
Enkindle within our Vincentian Family unity, simplicity, humility
and the fire of love that burned in St. Vincent de Paul.
Strengthen us, so that, faithful to the practice of these virtues,
we may contemplate you and serve you in the person of the poor,
and may one day be united with you and them in your Kingdom. Amen.*

- From the Liturgy of the Hours:

God our creator, you ask humanity to improve itself day by day and to complete with its labor the immense work of creation; help us to obtain, for all men and women, working conditions that respect their dignity: that striving to improve their own destiny, they may act in a spirit of solidarity and service. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

*(Prayer from Monday Morning Prayer Week IV.
Translated from the French)*

Heavenly Father, you who entrusted the earth to men and women to preserve and work it, to advance and aid each other, help us to accomplish our work with a childlike spirit toward you and a brotherly/sisterly spirit toward all. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

*(Prayer from Monday Daytime Prayer.
Translated from the French)*

¹³ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* of 6 January 2001, n° 58.