

If St Vincent de Paul were alive Today



Vincent de Paul worked tirelessly to improve the lives of those scorned and exploited by the rich and powerful. Together with Louise de Marillac, he founded the Daughters of Charity, a congregation of sisters that was not to be cloistered but present in the world among the most needy persons. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise met with plenty of opposition, especially from self-righteous elites who equated poverty with moral depravity, and elites who did not want to get their hands dirty in any sense. Such persons were adamantly opposed to charity for children abandoned by single mothers, for proper Parisians considered such children the offspring of sin. The Daughters of Charity focused their ministry on just such neglected persons, by creating orphanages and hospitals, and by making health care available irrespective of ability to pay....

But Vincent de Paul did not only appeal for charity on the part of wealthy individuals. He also took his cause to the highest levels of the state, including to Armand Cardinal de Richelieu, first minister to Louis XIII, Anne of Austria, Queen Regent during the minority of Louis XIV, and Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, the overseer of royal galleys to which prisoners were sent for long periods of hard labor so exhausting that it would kill many of them. Once he had witnessed the inhumanity of the galleys, Vincent de Paul insisted that treatment of galley prisoners be improved, and some improvement did indeed follow. Richelieu brought France into the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) between the Austrian Hapsburgs and a coalition of their opponents, France among them. The war brought not only battlefield deaths of soldiers, but civilian mortality as well, and frequent outbreaks of plague and other contagious diseases. Paris filled with desperate refugees, and Vincent de Paul became their advocate, as well as an advocate for peace.

What if St. Vincent de Paul were alive today...? He would be utterly appalled by the war on the poor waged by certain politicians.... Vincent de Paul would support a major increase in the minimum wage, and ... he would denounce the rich who seek ever greater tax reductions they do not need.... He would be horrified by a nation that equates a person's value with how much money he or she has, for such a

perspective makes a thorough mockery of the Catholic Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person.

Vincent would find sadly familiar the dishonesty of those who like to pretend that the poor, and indeed anyone with modest resources, is lazy and lacking in the supposedly virtuous ways that make the rich somehow worthy of their wealth.

Some politicians speak of the need for entitlement reform, and by this they mean that those in need should be told to get a job or starve. But Vincent de Paul would work for authentic entitlement reform: a radical change in the self-satisfied, arrogant mentality of many well-off persons who consider themselves entitled to live in limitless luxury while others around them suffer in countless ways. Vincent would take up the cause of families struggling to keep a roof over their heads and food on their tables. He would take up the cause of refugees and immigrants, welcoming them and finding for them the assistance they need, regardless of their race or nationality....

A Vincent de Paul today would be a prophetic voice, calling the greedy to immediate repentance and total reform. A Vincent de Paul today would be relentless in promoting the responsibility and moral obligation of those well off to assist those in need. He would support both church-sponsored efforts ... and laws and state-sponsored programs that guarantee a decent standard of living. He would denounce the exaggerated individualism ... and promote instead the Catholic ideal of the common good. In these difficult times, may St. Vincent de Paul pray for us, and may God not delay in sending us more saints like him.

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