

Material for reflection – Union of Catholic Apostolate - June 2006

The Life of Jesus Christ: Our Fundamental Rule (The 33 Points of St. Vincent, adapted to the UAC)

No. 7. In order that we might always live in the perfect observance of God's Holy Law and that of the Church and (the Statutes of the Union), we must endeavour to build up a spiritual home in our hearts by imitating Our Lord Jesus Christ and practicing all the virtues as lived by him.



Our Lord entered the world in a spirit of Sacrifice *in the mystery of the Incarnation*; in a spirit of sacrifice *He lived in a spirit of sacrifice*; He *died on the cross in a spirit of sacrifice*. We also out of love for Our Lord Jesus Christ, must live and die in a spirit of sacrifice by mortifying all our passions more effectively and more perfectly. (Our Act of Apostolic Commitment) aims at disposing our hearts for a life lived in a spirit of sacrifice. (cf. OOCC III, 42)

Reflection

In the very first Chapter of Vincent's rule, summarized here in Point 7, we read:

The beloved Son of God on becoming Incarnate sacrificed his total self and all that was his for love of us. He entered the world and lived his years on earth as a perfect sacrifice visibly interacting with people of this world until his death.

On contemplating Christ, our divine exemplar, there is no one whether noble, rich, cultured, or powerful who can justifiably refuse to imitate Him Any sacrifice a person could make, even if it were the most prestigious person in the universe, is as nothing in proportion to what Jesus Christ has sacrificed for us. (OOCC II, 6)

But first he writes an introduction concerning the necessary motives for those who would choose to live the rule: true love of God who loved us so much as to give us His Son (Jn 3:16) and true love of our neighbor, who according to the commandment of Jesus Christ, we must love as much as Jesus loved us.

For Vincent the notion of sacrifice is always associated with the notion of love: who loves is ready to sacrifice for the beloved. The Father sacrificed His Son sending him into the world out of love for us. Jesus sacrificed his divinity in loving obedience to the Father and came among us as the way to the Father; Jesus sacrificed his human life dying out of love for us that we might be reconciled to the Father and live forever with Him. It is also associated with humility: Jesus humbled himself to become one of us and we, aware of our failures to respond fully to God's love and mercy, stand humbled before our God, willing to offer him our sacrifices of praise and worship, the sacrifices that love demands of us, and even the crosses we are asked to bear.. What Vincent asks of his followers is "sincerity and a generous willingness of heart" (cf. OOCC II, 8) to put into practice not the sacrifices Jesus did, but to live the love of God and others that moves us to give of ourselves, totally if necessary, for the love of God and the love of neighbour.

Witness – Gianna Beretta Molla (1922-1962)

St. Gianna Beretta Molla was a physician, a working mom, professional women, and a loving wife. Born in Magenta (Milan) October 4, 1922, she very early showed signs of her willing acceptance of the gift of faith. Strengthened by the Christian education that she received from her excellent parents, she experienced life as a marvelous gift from God, had a strong trust in Providence and was convinced of the necessity and effectiveness of prayer.

She diligently dedicated herself to studies during the years of her secondary and university education, while, at the same time, applying her faith through generous apostolic service among the youth of Catholic Action and in charitable work, among the elderly and needy, as a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. After earning degrees in Medicine and Surgery from the University of Pavia in 1949, she opened a medical clinic in 1950. She later specialized in Pediatrics at the University of Milan and thereafter gave special attention to mothers, babies, the elderly and poor.

While working in the field of medicine - which she considered a “mission” and practiced as such - she increased her generous service to Catholic Action, especially among the “very young” and, at the same time, expressed her *joie de vivre* and love of creation through skiing and mountaineering. Through her prayers and those of others, she reflected upon her vocation, which she also considered a gift from God. Having chosen the vocation of marriage, she embraced it with complete enthusiasm and wholly dedicated herself “to forming a truly Christian family”.

Married to Pietro Molla in September, 1955, in November, 1956, to her great joy, she became the mother of Pierluigi, then in December 1957 of Maria Zita and in July 1959 of Laura. With simplicity and equilibrium she harmonized the demands of mother, wife, doctor and her passion for life.

Her next pregnancy was to put yet greater demands on her. In September 1961 towards the end of the second month of pregnancy, she was touched by suffering and the mystery of pain: she had developed a fibroma in her uterus. She faced a difficult medical decision that she fully understood: to undergo a therapeutic abortion or a surgical removal of the fibroid with considerable risk for herself and the baby. She put her trust in Providence and cautioned the doctors to care for her baby. Entrusting herself to prayer, she spent the seven months remaining before the child’s birth in incomparable strength of spirit and unrelenting dedication to her tasks as mother and doctor.

A few days before the child was due, she was ready to give her life in order to save that of her child: “If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child - I insist on it. Save him”. On the morning of April 21, 1962, Gianna Emanuela was born. Despite all efforts and treatments to save both of them, on the morning of April 28, in great pain and after repeated exclamations of “Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you», the mother died. She was 39 years old.

In 1973, Pope Paul VI recalling her heroic virtue said of Gianna: “A young mother from the diocese of Milan, who, to give life to her daughter, sacrificed her own, with conscious immolation”, a willing sacrifice. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II on April 24, 1994, during the international Year of the Family and canonized by him on May 16, 2004 in the presence of her daughter Gianna Emmanuela.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 50 (51)

Colossians 1:11-30

1 Corinthians 13

Philippians 2:1-11

Prayer

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will - all that I have and possess. You have given it to me: to You, Lord, I return it! All is Yours, dispose of it according to Your will. Give me Your love and grace, for that is enough for me." (St. Ignatius Loyola).

For Personal Reflection and/or Group discussion:

How do I understand the sacrifice of Jesus’ Incarnation and what does it mean for me?

What examples of love and sacrifice have I seen that help me to be more open to desire to follow Jesus’ example of sacrificing love?

What do I need to do to increase my desire, my willingness to embrace the sacrifices love asks of me?