



# *Apostles for Today*

*Reflection and prayer - June 2010*

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**St. Vincent Pallotti – “God, the Infinite Love”**

Meditation IX

**God has granted us the power of free will so that with the help of his grace we may profit from it in order to make our souls perfect as living images of God**

## **Introductory prayer**

“Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will speak out your praise.  
Sacrifice gives you no pleasure,  
were I to offer holocaust, you would not have it.  
My sacrifice is this broken spirit,  
you will not scorn this crushed and broken heart.” Psalm 51.

## **Reflection**

In this the ninth mediation in “God, the Infinite Love”, St. Vincent Pallotti invites us to meditate on the gift of free will with which God has endowed us. The meditation begins in a tone of awe, Vincent expresses his wonder at receiving this gift, he marvels at the goodness and generosity of God, it almost seems as if he cannot believe nor conceive that God has been so magnanimous in endowing the person with this faculty.

Let us listen to him: “Oh my God, my Father, infinite love and mercy of my soul, You, moved by your infinite love and mercy, deigned to create me in your image and likeness and also to grant me the gift of free will. Throughout my life I will employ it...so that I may strengthen my soul in its very intimate nature, since it was created by you...”

The points that St. Vincent underlines in this mediation are few but precise:

1. God has created me in his image and likeness;
2. God has given me the gift of free will and I can choose to use it in order to perfect myself in becoming progressively more like him;

3. This is not limited to earthly life, God wants me to become like him in his eternal glory of the kingdom of the Father; he wants me to be blessed like him, rich as him, like him in everything;

4. Who could ever understand these merciful desires of God?

5. However, he also recognizes and confesses his lack of correspondence with this gift of free will.

He goes on to further develop the third point by making a reference to the first Letter of St. John, chap. 3,1-3, written when John was already an old man and which reveals a beatific vision of eternal life: “My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is.”

This is the beatific vision, our destiny is to be in the presence of God, seeing him as he is, and in this state to be transformed in perfect likeness of him. A heartening and inspiring vision: “You want me to be blessed like you, rich as you, like you in everything;”. St. Vincent is moved to say: “My God, my Father, my love, my infinite mercy, you know that I will never be able to understand that infinite mercy and love with which you have created me in your own likeness and granted me the gift of free will...”.

St. John adds a further verse to the text already quoted, “Everyone who entertains this hope must purify himself, must try to be as pure as Christ”. St. Vincent follows this direction with a profound and heart-felt recognition of his ingratitude, unworthiness, lack of correspondence with, and even abuse of, the gifts of God.

With the gift of free will God has conferred on us a great dignity, the person is the only being in this universe endowed with this faculty. In exercising free will the person determines his or her own choices, does what he or she thinks best, this gift enables one to examine all the options, to explore all the roads, to risk experimenting, and even to make mistakes and to leave the path chosen if one wishes. While the gift of free will confers a dignity on us at the same time it carries with it a responsibility. We are often very aware that not all our choices are the best ones, they are not all opportune or the best ones for us and for others. In this meditation the truth that we have been created for freedom is reaffirmed, the freedom of the children of God as St. Paul

terms it, however, we do not always choose the path that leads us to greater freedom for a variety of reasons, we sometimes make choices that close us in on ourselves, which create a prison within us and around us.

In the Gospel Jesus offers us a very clear example of the dilemma which we are faced with in using our free will: “He was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, ‘Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You must not kill; you must not commit adultery; you must not steal; you must not bring false witness; you must not defraud; honour your father and mother.’ And he said to him, ‘Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days’. Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, ‘There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything your own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.” (Mk. 10,17-22).

*Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church of Vatican II, in article 17 deals with the “**the importance of human freedom**”. “Only in freedom can a human being direct himself toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly to be sure. Often however they foster it perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases them, even if it is evil. For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within a human being. For God has willed that a human being remain "under the control of his own decisions," so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to him. Hence a human being's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure... he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and since a human being's freedom has been damaged by sin, only by the aid of God's grace can he bring such a relationship with God into full flower.”

Fr. Vincent reflected frequently on this faculty, we can see, for instance, that it was a theme during his annual retreat in November 1841: “November 15<sup>th</sup>: Meditation 2 (1) Man created in the image and likeness of God. (2) Man is

endowed with the gift of free will in order that he profit from it in perfecting himself as an image of God. (3) Man must perfect himself since he is an image of God in order to be like unto God in glory.

My God, I have never lived in accordance with the end for which you created me. My God, I have never truly obtained the salvation of souls redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus Christ as I should have done.

My Jesus, with your holy life destroy all that I have done which has been bad in so far as I did not live in accordance with the end for which I was created: and with the perfection and holiness of your life perfect my life, my soul and that of all people.

God my mercy

Jesus my mercy

Mary, most holy, mercy”.” (OOCC X, 661-2).

**Point for reflection:**

1. Do I cultivate my freedom? In what way?
2. Do I use my freedom to spontaneously seek my creator?
3. What criterion/a determine my choices?
4. In what way do I recognize that my freedom is limited and even badly used in the circumstances of daily living?

St. Vincent ends each meditation in “God the Infinite Love” with a ‘Pious Offering’ which is always the same: “Eternal Father, in union with the most sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, I offer you the most precious Blood of the Immaculate Lamb, our divine Redeemer, in thanksgiving, as if you had already granted all the graces I have requested for me and for all, now and always.”

St. Vincent regrets and repents of his failings in the light of the infinite goodness and mercy of God, however he is not demoralized by these failings, he has found a way to overcome them, by uniting his prayers of contrition to the sacred hearts of Jesus and Mary and by uniting himself with their offering of the blood of Jesus to the Father. Identifying himself with the prayers of the hearts of Jesus and Mary, Vincent affirms that “I firmly believe, rather I am certain” that God will grant him the graces requested. And in this way he advances on the road of holiness.