



# Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - June 2012

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## SAINT VINCENT PALLOTTI – PRECURSOR OF THE APOSTOLATE OF LAY PEOPLE

*(Reflection on the Homily of Pope Paul VI during his visit to Frascati  
to venerate the body of Saint Vincent Pallotti, exposed in the Cathedral)*

***“Throughout the ages, God has endowed men and women with the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to continue the salvific mission of Christ and to promote the building up of the Church”.***

When we think about Saint Vincent Pallotti, we think of a man who knew how to reconcile the apostolate (apostle) and contemplation (mystic), who was able to maintain a “balance” between prayer and apostolic action for the benefit of the concrete realities of his times.

We see different terms currently used in direct reference to Saint Vincent Pallotti, such as: Apostle of Rome, Precursor of Catholic Action, prophet of hope, Apostle of lay people, mystic... These expressions recognise the greatness of our founder in ecclesial life and in his profound experience of belonging to the Church.

The mind of Saint Vincent was directed towards the need to awaken the apostolic consciousness of all the faithful so that everyone would do all that they were capable of for the Gospel. And this is evident from his reference to lay people in all of his many appeals. The Catholic Apostolate, as well as desiring to help with contributions and with spreading faith among non-Christians, wishes to reawaken and preserve faith in Christians and put at its service the exercise of any profession, work, art, prayer and all of the works of

charity and of the apostolic ministry (cfr. OCCC III, 145-146).

We know of the admiration and respect which Gregory XVI and Pius IX had for our saint. Many other Popes make direct reference to our founder during their preaching. His canonisation, performed by Pope John XXIII during the great Second Vatican Council, reveals his importance in the transformation of the Church's thinking especially in relation to the vocation of lay people to the apostolate.

On September 1<sup>st</sup> 1963, during his summer holidays at Castel Gandolfo, Pope Paul VI went to the nearby town of Frascati to venerate the body of Saint Vincent which was exposed for the veneration of the faithful in the Cathedral. During the Eucharistic celebration presided over by him, he gave an important homily in which he underlined the prophetic and pioneering spirit of our holy founder. His homily took on particular importance having been preached between the first and second sessions of the Second Vatican Council and addressing different aspects of the apostolate of the laity which would subsequently be inserted into the conciliar documents dealing specifically with the laity.

Paul VI had the firm conviction and certainty that Saint Vincent was a **precursor** who had anticipated the apostolate of the laity in the Church by almost a century, the discovery that lay people too are called to take on the mission of apostles. He affirmed that Saint Vincent *“released new energies, he made lay people conscious of their potential for good, he enriched the Christian community with numerous vocations, not to a simply passive and tranquil acceptance of faith, but to its active and militant profession”*.

The term precursor reminds us of John the Baptist, the precursor of the Messiah, who prepared the way for the Lord; the great prophet showed Who was really to be followed. In Pallottine spirituality, this term is placed within the context of great transformations which involve the whole life of the Church, not just for a limited historical period but which, from the Second Vatican

Council onwards, will always be present in the Church's reflections because it is a reality which involves all Christians.

We see at present that this great innovation proposed by Saint Vincent and taken up by the Church is, for many lay people, still very unclear and is often not understood, highlighting the need to encourage, develop and update it.

Saint Vincent perceived the vacuum, the spiritual and moral void of his times, marked by social revolutions and by a lack of respect for human dignity. According to him, it is necessary to rebuild a Christian society in which all feel themselves invited to and responsible for the building of a more worth world, more deeply marked by solidarity. *We are responsible, responsible for our times, responsible for the lives of our brothers and sisters; we are responsible for our Christian conscience, we are responsible before Christ, before the Church, before God.* For Saint Vincent, every Christian must seek to “*obtain not only his or her own salvation, but also the eternal salvation of others*”. Human beings, in the image and likeness of God who is charity in essence, are such by reason of their very creation.

Our Saint saw that lay people could become active elements in the life of the Church and could consciously say: “*I too must do something. I cannot simply be a passive and indifferent instrument*”.

We are encouraged not to become discouraged in our journey of faith and to take up our mission with responsibility and love. Today more than ever we are called by God himself to show forth our Christian commitment to the world, not just with lovely words but, above all and especially, by concrete actions, remembering constantly the effectiveness of gestures in a troubled world which has little time for listening. All who commit themselves to apostolic action are called to transmit the love of God and to carry out concrete works in order to demonstrate His presence in this world and more and more to work with untiring zeal for the bringing about of His Kingdom with constant enthusiasm and readiness.

As Pallottines, we wish to express our gratitude to God, One

and Three, for having given this great saint, “*precursor of the apostolic action of the laity*”, to the Church and to our Pallottine family. God enriched him with his gifts and inspirations to the point of making him an instrument in helping the Church to fulfil its mission. The charism of Saint Vincent Pallotti is the inheritance of the Union of Catholic Apostolate.

### **For personal reflection:**

1. Do I truly consider myself to be a member of the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church?
2. Does the great innovation introduced by Saint Vincent Pallotti in the life of the Church that we are all apostles motivate me to grow in holiness?
3. How do I demonstrate my belonging to Jesus Christ and to his Church to the world?

### **Prayer:**

Saint Vincent Pallotti, herald of the Universal Apostolate of all Christians, intercede to God so that all, following your example, may dedicate themselves generously to serving the apostolate. Kindle in us the desire to actively collaborate in spreading faith and charity, so that the Kingdom of Christ may spread throughout the world. Amen.

Saint Vincent Pallotti, founder of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, pray to God for us all!