



Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - October 2012

PALLOTTINE JUBILEE: 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CANONISATION OF ST. VINCENT PALLOTTI

The Pallottine Family is celebrating; it is good, right and worthwhile to recall and celebrate an event which gave much joy and a great spiritual impulse to the members of the UAC and to its individual Institutions.

Remembering also means reliving an event of grace and of great joy.

Bl. John XXIII, in his homily for the canonisation, introduces it as follows: “*Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*” (God is wonderful in his saints) (Ps 68,35) “*Exultabunt sancti in gloria; laetabuntur in cubiculum suis*” (Let the saints rejoice in their glory; shout for joy and take their rest) (Ps 149, 5).

That day, those present in the Basilica of St. Peter’s, which was filled to overflowing, heard the following: “Having invoked the abundance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, ... we declare and define **that the blessed Vincent Pallotti is a Saint, and we enter him in the register of Saints**, arranging for his memory to be devoutly venerated every year on the day of the anniversary of his death, the twenty second of January”.

TESTIMONY:

I am happy to share with you, even if only fleetingly, that unforgettable experience of the canonisation of St. Vincent Pallotti which took place on January 20th 1963.

I couldn’t, however, speak about this event of grace without making brief reference to what preceded it, that is, the Beatification of St. Vincent, which took place on January 22nd 1950, exactly one hundred years after his death, while Pius XII was Pontiff. I consider it a great grace to have been present and to have enjoyed such a great privilege. Returning with mind and heart to such a particularly significant event for the whole Church and for all of the followers of Pallotti means reliving emotions, feelings and memories which have not only become part of my life, but which have marked it, enriched it and in some way even determined it. The Holy Father Pius XII had only recently opened the holy Door which began the holy year of the Redemption. In this way, we were offered a happy and holy coincidence.

I also regard it a great favour to have been present at the exhumation of the body of St. Vincent from the niche prepared in the left-hand wall of the Church of SS. Salvatore in Onda. A simple inscription marked the humble tomb where St. Vincent’s body rested for one hundred years, awaiting God’s time. The body proved

to be intact, incorrupt. I will let you try to imagine the emotion to which it gave rise in those present at this event.

Participation in the solemn celebration and rite of Beatification of venerable Vincent Pallotti in the Vatican Basilica, all resplendent with lights and with beauty, was something truly worth remembering. Everything gave rise to joy and emotion, but more than anyone else, Fr. Giuseppe Ranocchini, general postulator, who for many years had worked, waited and really longed for this day which marked an important milestone on the way towards the canonisation, seemed to me to be overjoyed.

We now skip over the thirteen years separating the two events of the Beatification and the Canonisation of our saint: 1950-1963.

I really enjoyed going back in spirit to remember and, in some way, to relive that most solemn day of January 20th to help those who didn't have the joy of being present, but who are keenly interested, to in some way participate in it.

But I also feel obliged to mention the preparations, the excitement of the various wisely distributed undertakings. The delicate and pleasant task of preparing the "relics" of the saint was entrusted to us Sisters: little fragments of skin taken from the body of the saint or tiny scraps of clothing used by him were placed in small reliquaries. Everything was adorned with nicely-arranged beads and golden thread. Many cloth relics were attached to small cards bearing the image of the saint, for distribution to the people. Another task was preparing music for the solemn celebrations which would take place after the canonisation in the various Pallottine churches and communities, and also choirs with suitable hymns. Another practical task was taken on by the community of the Pia Casa di Carità of Rome, including the students: in addition to preparing many relics for the images to be given to the people, they embroidered the cushion, placed under the Founder's head, in gold and also the chasuble, all of which can still be seen today, which clothed the remains of the saint which rest under the altar of the Church of SS.. Salvatore in Onda.

And finally, the moment of arriving in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican; already many people were walking towards the Basilica. We had special entrance tickets and reserved places in the various sections of the Basilica: St. Longinus, St. Andrew, St. Helena; we felt the celebration to be ours and we enjoyed that awareness. The Basilica was really decorated festively, adorned like a bride ready for her wedding, illuminated splendidly: a vision of heaven, observed and enjoyed with indescribable emotion. The seats prepared for the Council Fathers were arranged in tiers on both sides of the central nave of the basilica. The happy coincidence with the celebration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council allowed many Council Fathers to be present at the canonisation and they were visibly joyful. The Vatican personnel guarding and supervising the area also gave it a festive note; their multicoloured outfits and elegant uniforms contributed to creating a joyful atmosphere.

The Holy Father, John XXIII, joyful and smiling, passed through the basilica along the central nave greeting the faithful, who acclaimed him with joyful gestures and shouts. The organ meanwhile filled the air with sacred music, arousing devotion in

those present. In a similar way the angelic voices of the “*pueri cantores*” (young singers) further contributed to raising hearts which were already visibly moved and as if suspended between heaven and earth.

The rite began and proceeded according to what was established, precise to the smallest details; the Holy Father preached his Homily, which was rich in content and stimulating above all for us, followers of Pallotti. A moment of particular excitement was when we saw uncovered the painting with the image representing the saint, well framed by the “glory of Bernini”. The painting represented St. Vincent as raised up on great clouds with two angels at his side. The arms of the saint gently open: according to a personal interpretation, the left arm pointing downwards, his hand placed on the angel who accompanied him on his earthly pilgrimage (remember that Vincent had a great devotion towards the angels), the right one raised upwards, indicating the angel who was to introduce and present him to the Father. Vincent, from the meek and smiling face, seems to want to hide himself in the face of so much glory.

At the end of the sacred rites, in a sudden burst of happiness, all of the energy and joy pent up during the celebration was unleashed. Shouts of joy and exultation, with everyone singing and shouting for joy. The greetings, the congratulations, the good wishes followed. The crowd prepared to leave the basilica, and we too returned to our communities, our hearts full of emotion.

The house which welcomed all of the Sisters who came from various parts of the world and also from the Italian communities was the mother House, the general house situated in Via di Porta Maggiore. Here, as you can imagine, everything was prepared for the celebration and here the festivities continued. In the dining room, and then in the refurbished chapel, the hymns prepared for the occasion re-echoed. Everything was enjoyed and shared fraternally, with simplicity and holy joy, as St. Vincent wanted.

But the celebrations couldn't finish with the day of the canonisation. According to the programmes established, the casket containing the saint was carried in procession, through the streets of Rome, into the Church of S. Andea della Valle, escorted by a tide of the faithful; yes, precisely in that Rome and in those streets which had seen him move hastily and modestly, on his way to give help in places of human, spiritual and apostolic need. The Church of S. Andrea welcomed him for consecutive years, when St. Vincent celebrated the solemn Octave of the Epiphany, which he himself established. What a triumph that day, for that humble servant who, during the solemn celebrations, used to remain almost hidden in a corner of the Church.

The celebrations continued throughout the year at particular times. Another occasion, which has remained in the heart's memory, was when the casket of the saint was transported to Frascati, a town of the Castelli Romani, full of charm and beauty. Here from the time he was a baby, Vincent used to spend some parts of his

summer holidays at his uncle's house, and here, in the Church of Jesus, he celebrated his first Mass. The Diocese in its representatives and the citizens welcomed the saint, almost their fellow citizen, with enthusiasm; the Camaldolese monks also rejoiced in having had such a precious guest during the time of his illness. Here in Camaldoli, according to Vincent himself, he was experienced such favours and so many of them that he felt as if he were "immersed in a deluge of infinite mercies".

The Lazio bishops, clergy, religious, consecrated and the people responded to the appeal: a sea of people in the streets of the town followed the casket as far as the Cathedral of St. Peter where the solemn celebration, presided over by His Holiness Paul VI, took place.

At the end of this summary description of the experience of the great event of the canonisation of St. Vincent, I would like to quote part of a prayer made by St. Vincent himself and which seems to me to bring to life his feelings towards God and towards himself:

My God, my mercy, my paradise; may the desire to work for your glory and for the salvation of souls, without paradise... be in me a flame burning infinitely for your glory. My God, act in me in your own way; expand my desires, give me the grace to work as you wish. My God, take away everything that I am and do everything in me yourself, so that you, Lord, may be infinitely glorified and I may be infinitely disdained. May this be my paradise, through the merits of Jesus Christ, of Mary Most Holy and of all creatures... (OCCC X, 727-728).

What a surprise St. Vincent will have had on seeing himself welcomed by you, O God, as a saint in your paradise! Did not you, my Lord, inspire Mary to sing that you are the God who humbles the proud and gives grace to the humble? Give us, Lord, the virtue of true humility which your only begotten Son made a model for the faithful, and which our Founder understood well and lived profoundly, in such a way that it was You who lived and worked in him during his life. Amen.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What do you understand by legacy with reference to St. Vincent? If his charism is always current and living, what can you do to make it alive today, in your vocational situation?
- 2) At the time of St. Vincent the challenges to faith were many. What, today, challenges you most as a Pallottine?
- 3) What is the relationship between the New Evangelisation and the project of St. Vincent Pallotti?

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