



E-BULLETIN #18

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

ITEM 40

thoughts anticipating an Assembly

"I intend to have respect and opinion for the words and feelings of others, however opposed they are to mine, as long as they are not opposed to the dogmas of most holy religion."

Vincent Pallotti

There is a story about a man who day after day paced up and down the sidewalks of Wall Street, placard in hand, demanding justice for the downtrodden. When a passer-by questioned if what he was doing would change the minds of the corporate giants, his reply was: ***"I'm doing this not to change their minds but so that they may not change mine"***. To maintain our principles and values in an environment that is continually trying to erode us, we need to be equally persistent in reinforcing our convictions and reaffirming our beliefs.

Dorothy Day spoke about it in these terms: ***"We must reiterate again and again what are our aims and purposes. Together with the works of mercy, feeding, clothing and sheltering our brothers, we must ... 'give reason for the faith that is in us'. If we do not keep indoctrinating, we lose the vision. And if we lose the vision, we become merely philanthropists, doling out palliatives."***

Without the vision of St Vincent to energise and compel us, we can become mere functionaries, dispensers of Sacraments or social workers of sort. We have to keep holding up the vision of Pallotti before our eyes like a placard and keep reminding ourselves of the motivating forces in Vincent's life. We have to do this individually and as a community. Assemblies provide an opportunity where we can remind ourselves of Vincent's original inspiration, and articulate that vision for ourselves in this time and place.

The Law of the Society defines the purpose of a Regional Assembly:

"...reviews the life of the Province/Region and its progress in apostolic work. It plans new objectives and decides the more important matters of the Province/Region, especially those which concern the undertaking of new forms of apostolate or new forms of administration, or which entail additional long term obligations for the Province/Region" (n.110).

How we go about doing this is crucial. Here the journey is as important as the destination. We need to adopt a process that will foster transformational leadership rather than a transactional leadership. Transactional leadership – with its buying and selling, rewards and punishments, coercing and compelling to achieve a result – belongs to the worlds of commerce and politics. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, is based on the leadership of Jesus and it is about transforming lives and empowering people. Transformational leadership empowers others to bring about positive change and thus transform our world for the better. As Gandhi said, it's about helping people to 'become the change that they want to see' in the world.

Inherent to this process of transformational leadership is the principle of dialogue. St Vincent, who spent lengthy periods at Camaldoli, must have been familiar with Ch 3 of the Rule of St Benedict enshrining the principles of dialogue: ***"As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call the whole community together and himself explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the brothers, let him ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course. The reason why we have said all should***

be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger. The brothers, for their part, are to express their opinions with all humility, and not presume to defend their own views obstinately."

Genuine dialogue is only possible between equals and where mutual respect exists. Vincent was known to have said, ***"I will listen even to prisoners since they too have been created in the image of God and have something to teach me"***. He was very much aware of the biblical truth that all people are created in the image of God and as such all share in the nature of God – the eternal loving relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – and that we can learn from one another. It is in our nature, our DNA, to yearn for connection and to engage in loving relationships. The scriptural image from Jesus himself is that of the 'vine and the branches' (Jn 15:4-8).

Therefore we dialogue, debate and struggle for understanding especially during Assemblies not so that we may have winners and losers but in order that all may win. According to the former General of the Dominicans, Fr Timothy Radcliffe op, we struggle with those who disagree with us the way Jacob wrestled with the angel so as to demand a blessing (Gen 32:24-29). We wrestle so that the truth can win. We may come away with a limp but we also come away with a blessing:

"The function of discussion within the Chapter is to seek unity of heart and mind as we seek the common good. We argue together, not so as to win but in the hope of learning from each other. What we seek is not the victory of the majority but, if at all possible, unanimity. This search for unanimity, even if it is sometimes unattainable, does not express just a desire to live in peace with each other. More radically it is a form of government born of a belief that those with whom we disagree have something to say, and we therefore cannot attain the truth alone. Truth and community are inseparable. As Malachy O'Dwyer wrote: 'Why did Dominic place so much trust and confidence in his companions? The answer is a simple one. He was profoundly a man of God, convinced that the hand of God lay upon everything and everyone ... If he was convinced that God was indeed speaking to him through voices other than his own then he had to organise his family in such a way that all within the family could be heard.'" (Sing A New Song: The Christian Vocation P.36-37)

May the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, through the intercessions of Mary and Vincent, empower us with the Holy Spirit, guide our every word and deed, and help us to continue the saving work of Jesus here on earth.

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CATHOLIC APOSTOLATE CENTER

The Catholic Apostolate Center is a new ministry of the Immaculate Conception Province of the SAC in the United States of America. Located just outside of Washington, D.C., the Center forms part of the newly renovated Pallottine Seminary at Green Hill.

The Center, which takes its inspiration from the spirituality of St Vincent Pallotti, provides formation programs (on-site, off-site, and online) on New Evangelization, on collaboration in ministry, and for the Union of Catholic Apostolate.

An international community of SAC members from Brazil (SP), Congo (SF), India (BA), Nigeria (CN), Poland (PN), and the United States (IC) is currently being developed whose apostolate will be the work of the Center and the initial and on-going formation programs of Pallottine Seminary. Fr Frank Donio sac is Director of the Center and Rector of Pallottine Seminary.

For more information see: www.catholicapostolatecenter.org

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