

Charities - St. Vincent de Paul

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ADDRESS
OF
MR. THOMAS M. MULRY,

*President of the Particular Council of
the Society of St. Vincent de
Paul of New York,*

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

FACULTY AND STUDENTS

OF


SAINT JOSEPH'S SEMINARY,
Dunwoodie, N. Y.,

ON THE EVENING OF APRIL 7, 1899.

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ADDRESS.

REV. FATHERS AND GENTLEMEN :

When first invited to address you, I was strongly tempted to decline. I hesitated for many reasons, but, upon second thought, I gladly accepted your invitation, knowing that my listeners were earnest men, having at heart the best interests of the Church, and anxious to make Her future a glorious one in American history.

This hesitancy does not make me appreciate any the less the privilege of addressing those who are to be the future shepherds of the flock, and I hope that what I say this evening will create a desire within you to learn more of the great Society of St. Vincent de Paul, so that, when you go forth upon your grand mission, each one of you will become an earnest advocate of its advancement, wherever his duty will call him.

I doubt if there ever was a time in the history of the Church in this country when it was more incumbent on us, as Catholics, to stand together, work together, and use every talent and every advantage given us by our

Creator in order that we may take no step backward in the wonderful progress, which has so far marked our pathway. In this great battle, every force will be needed, every energy required, every man will have his work.

There is a spirit of unrest abroad. Discontent is increasing. The lines between the classes are becoming more marked, and, if nothing is done to check this growing evil, the result will be most disastrous to the future of this country. It is not a battle of sect against sect which is to be waged, but of order against anarchy, of religion against infidelity.

The Catholic Church will be the one to whom the country must look for protection against these ills. She alone has the power to control these contending forces. She alone by Her God-given right can subdue the spirit of pride, of rebellion, of envy, and mould the people into one God-fearing, contented people.

Let us not deceive ourselves with the thought that we are unscathed in this struggle.

No priest need be told that material prosperity is dangerous to the growth of the Church. No student of Catholic history, no close observer of passing events can fail to note

the fact that the Church is suffering from "leakages."

This loss is noticeable in the two extremes—the wealthy and the very poor. The craze for social life, the intermarriage with those of other sects, and the spirit of worldliness pervading what is called "society" soon poison the springs of religion, and draw away from the Church many whose means and opportunities could be of such great service in advancing Her interests. On the other hand, humanitarianism or philanthropy, or whatever you please to term it, is rampant. This modern product seeks to benefit the poor by devising means to abolish poverty. It makes destitution a crime, a disgrace, and, while pointing out all the evils of poverty, it engenders discontent and bitterness in the hearts of the poor, because it leaves out of the question the only factor that can make the poor man contented with his lot—the hope of a hereafter, the existence of God.

Far be it from my mind to belittle the great work being done by so many noble men and women of all denominations, who are working intelligently and earnestly to better the condition of their fellowmen. Frequently

it makes me blush to find them taking up the work neglected by us. They are working with us, and, strange as it may appear, often appreciate and admire the Society of St. Vincent de Paul much more than many of our Catholic people.

I have often thought that if the Catholic laymen were more familiar with the workings of our Society, it would be the means of increasing our sphere of usefulness, and that, possibly, while it is commendable to retain that spirit of humility and retirement, which is so necessary to the permanency of our work, there are times when it is well, in the interests of charity, to make known the purposes and works of our Society, in order that others may be privileged to partake of the spiritual and temporal advantages which it offers.

Again, I maintain that the clergy are absolutely necessary to secure the advancement of this great work ; and, if the Church is to advance, the closer the union between the priest and the layman, the more glorious will be its future, and one of the most effective agencies to carry out this object is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, dear

friends, first saw its existence in the backroom of a dingy newspaper office in the City of Paris, in the month of May, 1833.

There was gathered one evening a small band of young men, with M. Bailey, an elderly man, and the editor of the *Tribune Catholique*. These young men were students, but, unlike the majority of their class in Paris, they were devout Catholics, filled with a deep love for their Faith, and indignant at the many attacks made upon it by their comrades.

The soul of the gathering was Frederic Ozanam (then but 18 years of age), a law student of brilliant talents, which were only equalled by his intense devotion to his Church. These young men had frequently defended Christianity before their infidel companions, and Ozanam, by his eloquence and learning, had compelled even his professors to be more careful in their attacks on teachings which had such brave and able advocates.

Living at that time when to be practical in religion was looked upon as a sign of weakness, it required great moral courage to openly live up to the teachings of the Catholic religion. But, they felt that something more than the

profession and practice of their religion was necessary to silence their adversaries. They were told that Christianity was dead, a thing of the past, its mission ended. The infidel student cried :

“ Show us your works and we will believe you have some reason for your faith.”

It was to refute this charge, to prove that the Church was still a live, active force, that this meeting was held, and the first Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was started. Frederic Ozanam and his followers, inspired with the one all-absorbing idea of proving the faith that was in them by their charity to God's poor, never realized that from that small room would go forth a message to Catholic laymen the world over, a call to be up and doing, a forcible reminder that they were neglecting the opportunities placed in their way for advancing the interests of Catholicity. To-day we are amazed at the courage and faith of those men in overcoming such apparently insurmountable obstacles, and placing the Society, in a few years, on such a permanent and prosperous basis. To-day, advanced students in philanthropy hail as new discoveries, ideas which were the very

foundation-stones of the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

M. Bailly, in a few words, gives the best mode of dealing with the poor. He says: "If you intend the work to be really efficacious, if you are in earnest about serving the poor as well as yourselves, you must not let it be a mere doling out of alms, bringing each your pittance of money or food; you must make it a medium of moral assistance, you must give them the alms of good advice."

And, to those who consider the giving of relief degrading, we would point to the eloquent words of Ozanam: "Help is humiliating when it appeals to men from below, taking heed of their material wants only, paying attention but to those of the flesh, to the cry of hunger and cold, to what excites pity, to what one succors even in the beast. It humiliates when there is no reciprocity, when you give the poor man nothing but bread or clothes or a bundle of straw; what, in fact, there is no likelihood of his ever giving you in return. But it honors, when it appeals to him from above, when it occupies itself with his soul, with his religious, moral and political education,

with all that emancipates him from his passions and from a portion of his wants, with those things that make him free and make him great. Help honors when, to the bread that nourishes, it adds the visit that consoles, the advice that enlightens, the friendly shake of the hand that lifts up the sinking courage; when it treats the poor man with respect, not only as an equal but a superior, since he is suffering what we, perhaps, are incapable of suffering, since he is the messenger of God to us, sent to prove our justice and our charity, and to save us by our works. Help, then, becomes honorable, because it may become mutual, because every man who gives a kind word, a good advice, a consolation to-day may, to-morrow, stand himself in need of a kind word, advice and consolation; because the hand that you clasp, clasps yours in return, because that indigent family you love, loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves toward you when the old men, the mothers and the little children shall have prayed for you.

“Do you suppose you pay the priest to whom the State gives a hundred crown's a year to be the father, the schoolmaster, the

comforter of the poor village lost in the mountain, or the soldier who gets five sous a year to die under the flag?

“Why, the soldier gives the alms of his blood to his country, and the priest of his words, his thoughts, his heart! Don’t tell me, then, that I humiliate the poor man when I treat him as I treat the priest who blesses and the soldier who dies for me! Alms are the retribution of services that have no salary. And let no one say that in treating poverty as a priesthood, we aim at perpetuating it. The same authority that tells us we shall always have the poor with us, is also the authority that tells us to do all we can that there may cease to be any. . . . When you dread so much to lay an obligation on him who accepts your alms, I fear it is because you have never experienced the obligation it confers on him who gives.”

I hope you will pardon this long quotation, but the language is so truly Christian, so full of charity that it is refreshing to compare it with the pagan spirit which permeates so much of modern philanthropy.

Is it any wonder, then, that with such a

man at the helm, we find eighteen years after the first meeting, 2,000 members in Paris, caring for 5,000 families, while in other parts of France were also 500 Conferences, not to speak of those being formed in Belgium, Spain, England, and America?

The last census taken, something more than a year ago, placed the estimated number of Conferences, in all parts of the world, at 5,500, with about 100,000 members. To-day, the Vincentian will find comrades in almost every land. The soldier disciple of Ozanam who went to Cuba, found fellow members carrying on the good work there. In Mexico the Society flourishes, in Hong Kong, in Egypt, New South Wales, or Africa, in South America, or Australia will be found Conferences living under the same rules, and reporting to the same head in Paris, as do the Conferences of the United States, or France, or Ireland. In Canada, Belgium, France, and, in fact, all parts of the world, are to be found working-boys' homes, night schools, offices for medical or legal advice, in short every conceivable form of charitable work, fostered, inaugurated, and supported by the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul.

Nor need we fear comparisons with our work in this country. In the United States, where the priests and people have so many calls upon them, there has been found time to organize and build up the Society, and the Report of last year shows, at present, about 9,500 active members. In this country, as in all the other parts of the world, where the Society exists, it does not confine itself to visiting the poor at their homes. In New Orleans they have established a working-boys' Home, as they have also done in Brooklyn. Washington has a Home for the temporary care of unemployed men, while in Boston, Providence and Springfield, and all through the Eastern States, thousands of dollars are paid, annually, for the boarding of children in families, who otherwise would be certainly lost to the Church.

Regarding our own great Archdiocese, I think it is safe to assert, that in no part of the United States has the Society a better record; and, if I appear to be rather certain in its praise to-night, it is because I believe it is well for Catholics, and especially Catholic priests, to realize the almost unlimited possibilities of such an organization, when it has the active support

and encouragement of the Catholic people. Perhaps because of that great cardinal principle of the Society, which forbids publicity of our works, even the members do not realize the splendid record of the last half century. Yet, encouraging as it is, I must confess that the Vincentian, who comes in contact with the needs of the hour, must feel sad when he reflects on all the work left undone, because of the paucity of the laborers in the field.

The first Conference organized in New York City was that of St. Patrick. In the year 1848, it was affiliated to the Society in Paris. In 1856, the Conferences of the city were organized into a Particular Council.

Scarcely had this Council commenced its work, when the members, realizing the great loss to the Church from children picked up by the Children's Aid Society, and placed in non-Catholic homes, appealed to the ecclesiastical authorities for permission to establish a "House of Protection for Destitute Catholic Children." Mr. Jamme, for many years the zealous secretary of the Superior Council, writes on the subject :

"The time did not seem to have arrived for

carrying out this project, and for five years more, our children were, more or less, at the mercy of the proselytizing societies. It was not until 1863, when the evil having become intolerable, that the president and vice-president of the Council were successful, and the active co-operation of his Grace, the Archbishop, culminated in the establishment of the House of Protection in 86th. Street, which grew to the Catholic Protectory of the present day at Westchester."

About the time the Council was formed, (1858), the traffic among the Catholic children sent to Randall's Island was carried to the greatest extreme. They were sent West and East, North and South, and placed, invariably, in Protestant homes.

A priest was allowed on the Island. He was just tolerated, and enjoyed no privileges. The children were compelled to attend the Protestant services, after having finished their catechism classes. A committee of members of the Society was formed, which visited Randall's Island every Sunday, taught the children, formed the choir, and did everything possible to assist and encourage the good priest.

Through the persistent work of this committee, backed by the influence of the Council, the priest was allowed to celebrate Mass, to visit the Island at his pleasure, and, finally, was retained as chaplain.

Through the good offices of Hon. John T. Hoffman, Governor of New York at the time, the outrage of forcing Catholic children to attend Protestant services was forbidden and, from that time on, there was easy work for the committee.

Some of those who worked on that committee are alive to-day, and the old Nativity Conference always furnished the men who led in this field of labor. The little boat made its trip every Sunday despite cold or storm, bearing its living freight of ardent young Vincentians, each eager to do his share of the labor, all full of the spirit which distinguished the little band which started out in France.

It may also be stated here that the first to notice the sad condition of the aged destitute poor, and to suggest a remedy were the members of the Society, who waited on that great friend of the Conferences, Archbishop Hughes, and begged him to introduce the

Little Sisters of the Poor into his diocese. So strongly was he impressed with the appeal that, in a short time, the request was cheerfully granted and, to-day, we have the magnificent homes, which they have built, to prove the wisdom of the suggestion.

In looking over Mr. Jamme's sketch of the Society, we find this very interesting paragraph.

"In the year 1869, the Conference of New York noticed the good results obtained by the Children's Aid Society, in its endeavors to provide for a class of children well known to all of us, the newsboys and bootblacks, whose moral training needs to be looked after to prevent them from going to ruin totally. Besides, in this class our Catholic children predominate. The Particular Council, after carefully considering the matter, appointed a committee to gather reliable data, upon which it would decide, if it were practicable, for the Conferences of New York to undertake the establishment of one or more lodging houses for boys, in which could be accommodated newsboys, bootblacks, and poor errand boys, who should be removed from the bad influences of depraved parents. The result was the

establishment, in the summer of 1870, of the St. Vincent de Paul Lodging House on Warren Street. After having been in successful operation for a couple of years, demonstrating fully its possibility for good, and after consultation with its spiritual advisers, this, like most of the works of the Society, was turned over to the management of a most zealous priest, and the St. Vincent de Paul Lodging House has since grown to be the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, so ably managed by that indefatigable priest, Rev. Father Drumgoole, fully justifying the action of the Society."

Perhaps this last is the offspring of the Society, which has wormed itself most completely into the hearts of its members and, whether under the Saintly Father Drumgoole, or his whole-souled and zealous successor, the Rev. James J. Dougherty, LL.D., the gratitude of the child for the parent has been always manifest, and no request made by the Society has ever been refused, no child sent by a Vincentian has ever been turned from its door.

This recalls another work just organized, the necessity for which has been very clearly enunciated in a pastoral by our Most Rev.

Archbishop. I refer to the establishment of boys' clubs, under the direction of the Catholic Boys' Association.

In a city, dotted with clubs for boys, none were found under Catholic auspices. On the other hand, the membership of the various clubs was found to number a very large proportion of Catholic boys. Again, the members of the Society came to the front, and, by the advice of our Right Rev. Spiritual Director, and the encouragement of the Most Reverend Archbishop, the work has been begun. There are difficulties to be overcome. Constant effort and continual activity are required. But, perseverance and self-sacrifice, on the part of the zealous young men engaged in the work, will meet with success.

The work is so clearly connected with the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin and is, after all, on such similar lines, that we may be permitted to look forward to the day when clubs for Catholic boys will be found in all parts of the city, where religion will be made attractive to them, and the mental and physical requirements of the boys in the crowded tenement districts be carefully looked

after, under the combined care of St. Joseph's Union, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

I will not dwell on the work of the Island committees. You are familiar with it, and there has been more than one occasion when the loss of a member on our committee meant another added to the ranks of the seminarians.

In the report of the Society in New York City, which will soon be issued, other fields will be discovered, but I think I have given enough to show that a well organized body of Vincentians must be a most potent factor in every advance to be made by the Church.

In all that has been said, no mention has been made of the work done among the poor in the parishes, and yet, in the City of New York, with about 1,100 members, 8,100 families were relieved, 48,000 visits made, and over \$60,000 expended during the year 1898.

If the pastors could realize what these thousands of visits represent, we would have a Conference in every parish. As has been stated before, the bread given is but the means to the great end of winning those poor, neglected, sorrow-crushed victims of adversity or of dissipation back to lives of practical

religion and self-dependence, for, sad to say, while we have a large number of pious poor, the great majority are careless in their religious practices, and owe their distress, in many cases, to this very cause.

Therefore, this number of visits means much in the history of the parishes; children baptized, parents reconciled to the Church and, above all, homes kept together. This is a most important work of the Society—the preservation of the home—and the Vincentian feels that every dollar expended in keeping a poor family together is money well placed.

Too often in a desire to dispose speedily of a family or through a sentiment of sympathy with a struggling parent, the home is broken up, and children sent to an institution, when a little expenditure of money, and encouraging, kindly visits, would keep the family together. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul believes that when the home is at all passable, for the sake of the parent as well as the child, the same should be preserved.

To-day, the question of Dependent Children and their treatment is one which is taxing the minds of thinking men of all shades of religious

opinion, and it is very necessary that Catholics should take a very active part in this discussion, and reason, intelligently, as to the best means to be adopted for the development of the child.

To-day there is a closer relationship existing between the various religious denominations in charitable work, than ever there has been in the past. This cordial feeling has been brought about entirely through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and, it can be truthfully said, that many advantages has been derived from this change in the condition of affairs.

Our Holy Father has strongly urged Christian unity, and again the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, acting on the Sovereign Pontiff's instructions, has succeeded, through the spirit of charity, with which it is directed, in opening the eyes of non-Catholics to the many misconceptions with which their minds were filled, regarding our Church. It may be well to state that through the co-operation existing between the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the other charitable organizations, many families have been brought back to the faith, and a large number of children rescued from non-Catholic institutions.

Personally, I have the greatest respect for a

very large number of our non-Catholic friends, with whom I am brought in close contact, through the work of the charitable societies. I find them fair-minded, earnest, and anxious to do what is right, and I would have more faith in their good will than in many who make it a point to stir up the embers of bigotry, and influence us against them, in order to carry out their selfish ends. But, let us suppose they are not sincere, that they are aiming at our destruction! Is it not equally important for us to ally ourselves with the organizations, that invite us to membership, in order that we may the better guard our interests?

But, this is a subject which is likely to stretch out my time, and is, perhaps, a slight digression. I suppose you think, my dear friends, that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is taking unto itself an extraordinary amount of credit, for what good has been done, and leaving the clergy out in the cold. But, in speaking of the Conferences, or of any work, where success has attended their labors, the members all recognize the great fact that the inspiration of a Conference is its Spiritual Director.

The New York Conferences have always been

blessed with the earnest support of the beloved head of the Archdiocese, and no better friend of the Society exists than our venerated Archbishop. I am sure, also, that none of his people have a deeper love and respect for him than Vincentians. Possibly one of the best acts of kindness he has ever shown, and he has shown us many, was to give us our spiritual director, Right Rev. Bishop Farley.

With his encouragement, under his careful advice, there has been a great stride forward in the progress of the Society, and never before have we had such a promise of a bright future. The young men are coming into the ranks ; and the Society is the place to develop the youth, and make him feel that, like Ozanam, he must work as well as pray.

It has been said that the Society is not for the young. This is not true. I heard a priest, a most excellent man, say not long ago, that his idea of a Conference was a body of men who met once a week to vote some old woman a pair of shoes, and work of that kind. He never realized the magnificent purpose of the Society. And why? Because he had been an assistant in a parish where the Conference had the dry rot, had degenerated into a body of debaters,

and the pastor, in sheer desperation, felt called upon to disband it.

Is it not too bad that a few dark spots should dim the brightness of such an organization? There are many priests to-day who will bear testimony to the efficacy, the zeal, and the fervor of the Conferences, generally. In the days of his struggles to form a parish, the right arm of the pastor has been his Conference, and I am sure that no matter how hard the lot of a pastor, how poor his financial support, the organization of a Conference, far from adding to his burden, will bring blessings on his parish and on his labors.

Oh! how sad it is to find a Conference drifting away from its high ideal, and losing the true spirit of charity! How easy it would be for the pastor, in such a case, to reorganize a Conference of the picked men of his parish, men who, by their intelligent and earnest work, would build up a monument to his devotion to God's poor!

No Conference can be a success without the moral support of the Spiritual Director, and the best Conferences to-day are those in which the Spiritual Director, by his tact and

diplomacy, gathers around him a body of representative men, with one who has the respect and confidence of the pastor and members as the president. The very best way to obtain good men is through the confessional. The priest can easily form an idea of the material of the man, and advice and suggestion there to a good man would be almost equivalent to a command.

Every man is not calculated to make a Vincentian. No drones are wanted in the ranks, and no man should be admitted whose mind is not broad enough, and his charity deep enough to look upon every poor man as deserving of his greatest care, regardless of race, color, or creed. This was the motto of St. Vincent de Paul. This is the motto of every true follower of Ozanam.

A Protestant friend said to me recently: "How is it you have so few rich in your Society?" I answered: "the qualities that are necessary to make a man very rich will keep him out of the Society, and the man who is not rich, when he enters, has precious little chance of acquiring riches, if he lives up to its ideal."

Of course, the same spirit exists to-day as

was prevalent in Paris. Ozanam was called a fool because he sacrificed a splendid position to accept a much poorer one, simply that he might have a larger field in which to do God's work. That the work has been done largely by comparatively poor men, and much of it by very illiterate men, does not detract from its merit, but sheds additional lustre on a Society that could make men sacrifice so much. All that is to be regretted is that of the young men who graduate from our colleges, so few enter the ranks of the Society. Sociology is taught in many of the universities. Why can not our colleges give a course in practical Christian charity, in self-sacrifice?

In other societies, self-interest, mutual protection, or social attractions draw men into the ranks. None of those inducements are held out for the Vincentian, and yet, I will say that there is an attraction about the work which grows with years, and makes a man "grapple to it with hooks of steel."

I believe that the mission of the Society is but begun. No other organization brings priests and people so lovingly, so closely together, and, in the great battle of the future,

which is to be a bloodless one, Charity will be the most effective weapon, and the victories, which it will mark upon its shield, will be ones with which no bitterness will be mingled.

It was the great Dominican, Lacordaire, who said: "Ah! Ozanam is an Ancestor:" and it was the same great orator who stood bravely up for the Conferences when they were in danger of suppression, and appealed to the Catholic heart of France in behalf of those young men "who had placed their chastity under the guardianship of Charity—the fairest of virtues under the fairest of guardianships."

"What blessings," he exclaimed, "will not this knighthood of youth, purity and fraternity draw down upon France in behalf of the poor? Let the gratitude of the country prove at least the safeguard of its liberty."

Thank God we have many Lacordaires in this country, whose voices will be raised in the behalf of the Society, and when God blesses you with the realization of your high ambition, let me ask you in the name of that great priest, ST. VINCENT DE PAUL, the Apostle of the Poor, to advocate the propagation of this Society of Charity among the youth of this country.



