

SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE 16TH PRESIDENT GENERAL INTERNATIONAL OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL, OUR FELLOW MEMBER RENATO LIMA DE OLIVEIRA, FOR THE 3RD WORLD DAY OF THE POOR – 2019.

On 17 November 2019 (33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time), the Church invites us to reflect on the World Day of the Poor. So on behalf of the Council General International of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SSVP), our 16th President General, Renato Lima de Oliveira, invites all members in Vincentian Conferences throughout the world, to meditate on this profound truth which motivates our charism.

In the message of the Supreme Pontiff this year, the word “poor” occurs 64 times. The Pope compares the situation of the poor person in the Old Testament, with the current reality, observing that little has changed: *“The condition of the rich and the poor crosses the centuries, but remains unchanged, as if the experience of history teaches nothing. So the psalmist’s words do not refer to the past, but to our present, subject to the judgement of God,”* emphasises the Pope.

Pope Francis also mentions *“the many new forms of slavery to which millions of men, women, young people and children”* are exposed, people who are also offered Vincentian help, as well as families forced to abandon their own country; orphans who have lost their parents; young people seeking professional fulfilment; victims of so many forms of violence, such as prostitution and drugs; not to mention the millions of migrants. The Pope speaks also of the fringes of our cities, full of people wandering the streets in search of food.

“They themselves become part of a human garbage bin; they are treated as refuse, without the slightest sense of guilt on the part of those who are complicit in this scandal. Frequently judged parasites on society, the poor are not even forgiven their poverty. Judgement is always around the corner. They are not allowed to be timid or discouraged; they are seen as a threat or simply useless, just because they are poor,” he laments. *“The inequitable distribution of wealth created a significant number of poor people, whose condition appeared all the more dramatic in comparison with the wealth attained by a privileged few,”* he says.

Francis reminds us that the promotion of the welfare of the poor, including those discarded by society, is not a commitment which excludes the proclamation of the Gospel; on the contrary, it demonstrates the reality of Christian faith and its historical validity. In his message, the Pontiff remembers to praise the work of the countless volunteers around the world, but he reminds us that the poor do not need just *“hot soup or a sandwich”*. *“The poor need our hands, to be lifted up; our hearts, to feel anew the warmth of affection; our presence, to overcome loneliness. In a word, they need love,”* asserts the Pope.

As we can see when reading the Pope’s message, the Church’s invitation is not limited to a reflection on the topic, but above all, it motivates us to the need for practical actions to help those in need to escape from their condition of material, spiritual, emotional and psychological poverty.

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, working for over 186 years to promote the welfare of those in need, also contributes to the reflection on this theme, condemning situations of exclusion, social vulnerability and abandonment of those most in need, serving in hope, particularly as regards new forms of poverty. Our seven founders, men of sincere faith and defenders of the Church's Social Teaching, motivate us in this way, always acting with the inspiration of the Gospel, enlightened by the cry of God for those most in need.

As a lay organisation within the Church, our efforts must focus on the subject of poverty and personal holiness. In our spiritual dimension, moved by prayer and the Eucharist, we seek greater strength to show our faith, our love and our action. We act according to the will of God who is always ready to listen, respond, protect, defend, rescue and save the poor.

The Council General International invites all brothers and sisters, members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, to look at the poor with "*the eyes of God*", eyes of compassion, mercy and unconditional love. It is necessary to work even more effectively and affectively in our Vincentian Conferences and in our work of assisting the most needy in the world, strengthening the "*network of charity*" with more service and effectiveness in the fight against the appearance of new forms of poverty. As members of Vincentian Conferences, let us be true ambassadors of the Lord to those most in need, remembering that "God is not indifferent to the poor".

I would also like to announce that from 2020, SSVP will take a more active role in celebrating the World Day of the Poor (more details in due course). For now, we ask all Vincentian Conferences around the world to include the following intention in the Prayers of the Faithful, at Mass on 17 November 2019 (adapted as necessary):

"For the poor throughout the world, and especially those helped by the Vincentians in our parish. On this WORLD DAY OF THE POOR may they have the courage and faith to overcome their difficulties in life, finding strength in Jesus Christ, and may their hope in the Lord never perish. Let us pray to the Lord".

We also recommend that during the week of 17 to 23 November 2019, as a spiritual reading at meetings, Vincentian Conferences read, reflect and discuss [the Message of Pope Francis for the 3rd World Day of the Poor](#). Enjoy your reading!!



Renato Lima de Oliveira

16th General President