

## THE DESERT

There are many times in the Bible when someone goes into the desert. Moses, Elijah, even Jesus himself prepared for his public ministry by going alone into the desert. The man who announced Jesus also spent time in the desert, preparing for his life's work:

***When John the Baptizer made his appearance as a preacher  
in the desert of Judea, this was his theme, "Reform your lives!"  
John was clothed in a garment of camel's hair  
and wore a leather belt around his waist.  
Grasshoppers and wild honey were his food.***

The desert can be difficult. It's cold at night and scorching hot during the day. Food and water are scarce. Those who have been alone in the desert can hardly express their feelings about the harshness of that place.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke of deserts in his inaugural Mass:

***There are so many kinds of desert.  
There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst,  
the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love.  
There is the desert of God's darkness,  
the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life.  
The external deserts of the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast.***

Pope Benedict didn't leave the message on that sad note. He also said:

***The Church... must set out to lead people out of the desert  
toward the place of life, toward friendship with the Son of God,  
toward the one who gives life and life in abundance.***

Vincentians are on the front lines. Trying to lead others out of their own particular desert is our ministry, our vocation as Vincentians. We do this by providing the means to help our neighbours who have financial troubles, who are sick or alone or incarcerated. We help to lead others out of their deserts, not by preaching or teaching but by being Jesus to those we serve in 'love, respect, justice and joy' and by seeing Christ in every person we are privileged to serve.

We don't cry out in a loud voice, as John the Baptizer did; we allow our example and our service to speak to the hearts of anyone we have contact with. In a quiet, gentle way we get the message across. That message is: **God loves you. We love you.**

As we continue to engage in personal contact with our neighbours we might ask:

- Where is the desert in my own life as well as in the lives of those who need me?
- How am I doing in this mission of sharing the message of God's love? What can I do to become even more effective?

May God continue to bless us and those we serve,  
*Denise Bondy, National Spirituality Committee  
Ontario Regional Council*