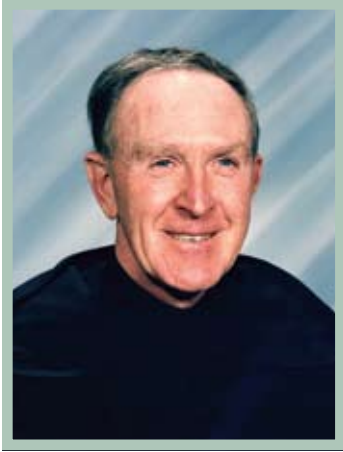


CARMELITE



MISSIONS



Father John Malley, O.Carm.
Director of Carmelite Missions

Our Carmelite Missions in India

In this September newsletter, I want to thank you for your tremendous support of our Carmelite Missions in India. I would like to share with you two stories from my month's visit to that country over the past Christmas holidays. I spent time with 17 communities of our priests and sisters, and because of the generosity of good friends like yourself, I was able to leave a gift at each house where I stayed so that our Carmelites could reach out and respond to the basic needs of the poor people whom they serve.

My first story is about the children at Mount Carmel School in a small town, Kosigi, in the state of Andhra Pradesh. This is an area that is predominantly Hindu (90%), and the school and the neighboring parish, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, are missions of our Indian Carmelite Province of Kerala, a state that is predominantly Christian. There are two priests and five sisters in the school that has 600 students from K to 8th grade.

Since I arrived on December 16, my first day at the school was spent watching each grade put on a presentation for the coming feast of Christmas. Since the great majority of



children are not Catholics and hardly speak English, I enjoyed mostly their smiles, their laughter, and their great fun in marching into the hall and being on "stage." Santa Claus was a constant presence. "Jingle Bells" and "Joy to the World" were obvious favorites, yet there was a sincere attempt to tell the Christmas story of Jesus, Mary and Joseph at Bethlehem. The Sisters had prepared the children well.

The following day, the Headmaster, Father George, asked me to visit each one of the classrooms with him. I observed a very interesting reality. In the kindergarten and primary classes, there was an equal amount of young girls and boys,

approximately 25 of each to a class. As I visited the upper classes, however, the number of girls was constantly less. In the eighth grade, there were only two girls and twenty-seven boys. Father George told me that Andhra's literacy rate is only 62%, and parents still have to be convinced that the ability to read and write are truly values for the young girls.

Mount Carmel School is making a great effort to overcome such a discouraging attitude on the part of the parents. In

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Saint of the Month 🌸 Feast Day, September 27

Saint Vincent de Paul

that would enhance their revenues. This was stage for Vincent's birth.

Birth and Early Life

It was in 1581 that he was born – we do not know the day – the third child of a peasant couple. He had three brothers and two sisters, but they were content to enter the peasant stream of farmers that fed France. Vincent was the studious one, and as a young man told his parents that he wanted to be a priest. Pious people that they were, they relished this, and to make it possible they sold a brace of oxen and provided the money for Vincent to enter the seminary. Well, it was called a seminary. The Council of Trent had legislated for strict seminaries, but for the most part, Vincent learned a smattering of Latin, some Theology, and how to say Mass. He was ordained at the tender age of 19 in 1600.

In those days, priests were not assured of an assignment as they are today, so Vincent started a school. Too many of the students paid no tuition, and soon Vincent was in debt – but he received an inheritance and had to go to Marseilles to collect it. Off he went, received his inheritance, pinned it in his pocket, and then started back home by ship. As fate would have it, the ship was attacked by pirates, and the passengers were taken prisoners. Vincent was young and strong, so he commanded a good price when he was put on the slave block. First one master, then an-

other – a Frenchman who had become a Mohammedan. Vincent converted the renegade Frenchman to the practice of his faith, and the two of them escaped to Tunis, where Vincent originally had been taken, and then back to France.

Relationship to Royalty

In France, Vincent presented himself to the Papal Legate who arranged for him to go to Rome to take some studies and to regain his composure after two years of slavery. While there he met the famous Cardinal Berulle, the confidant of the royal family of France. On his return to Paris, Vincent was surprised to receive a call from the royal family who wanted to hear from his own lips the story of his two-year captivity in Tunis and his escape back to France. Henry IV and Marguerite were thrilled at his words, and they were also taken by his charm and simplicity. Just the one to be the almoner for the royal couple! So Vincent was given a large sum of money to dispense to the poor in the name of the King and Queen.

Vincent was a pious priest but was not thought of as a potential saint. That came about in this way. The Count of Joigny, Philippe de Gondi, met Vincent at the palace and asked the king if he would release Vincent to be the tutor for his children. The count was an important man, the head of the French fleet, and a very wealthy man. This was the circumstance that set the stage for his real vocation and holiness.

How little we know what the future will bring for us. Especially this is true when we are young. We make all types of grandiose plans and dream wonderful dreams, and as we live reality, it is rarely what we planned. So it was with Vincent. In his wildest dreams he could not have thought himself a captive of the Moors and a slave, a confidant of the King, the chaplain to the head of the French Navy and his family, Chaplain General of the French fleet, the founder of the Congregation of the Missions, the Vincent de Paul Societies, and also the Daughters of Charity – and a Saint! That would have been too much for any young boy to dream and yet this was his life.

The Council of Trent sought to reform the Church after the Protestant revolt, but it was a long time before its decrees were enforced. Much like today; the Second Vatican Council is long over, but it will probably be a long time before the many changes that it sought to effect will be realized. During the 16th century, Europe was splintered by the various sects that had broken away from Rome, various kings were seeking to expand their nations, and with the New World still not fully discovered, countries sought colonies

Founding of the Congregation of the Missions

Vincent lived on the Gondi estate and was shocked that the serfs, also living there, were lacking a knowledge of their faith. This he pondered – the answer must come, first by having priests who were better educated – better seminaries, and secondly he and other priests would go about from church to church instructing the people in catechism and urging them to a deeper love of God. Here we have the germ for a new Order of priests that he would begin, the Congregation of the Missions, whose specialty would be running seminaries. He also began the original parish “missions” that have remained popular, even to the present time.

France, in those days, was quite poor, and many people were hungry and homeless. So Father Vincent started little groups in each parish where he and his men worked, collecting food and clothing to distribute to the poor. This is the genesis of the St. Vincent de Paul Societies that most parishes in the United States and Canada have.

His patron, the Count of Joigny, was impressed with Vincent and sought to honor him by having him named Chaplain-General of the French Fleet. This opened a new vista of charity for Vincent. In those days before steam and diesel, ships sailed by the force of the wind. But to get speed, especially when there was no wind, they had large oars manned by hundreds of men to speed the ship on. To get the manpower, they got prisoners from the jails; men were chained to the bunks in the hold of the galley and with rhythm beat out on a block and with a whip to urge them on, they powered the ship. With a large Navy, many men were needed to man the oars – so for small crime, say stealing a loaf of bread, a man could be sent to the galleys for years. They were ill-cared for, had no medical

attention, and each time the ship came to port, they would replenish the supply of galley-slaves with new prisoners. Vincent sought to change that. First, conditions were improved, insignificant crimes no longer merited a man the galley, and a hospital was started in Marseilles for the slaves.

Daughters of Charity

A hospital? That introduced the need for another type of vocation. At that time hospitals were called ‘pest houses,’ and soap and water were strangers to them. Bandages were not changed for days, patients were not washed, and only rarely were linens changed or floors swept. So Vincent tackled this problem, and for this he had the help of another saint. There was a young woman who was widowed early, Louise de Marillac. Vincent got her and many other willing girls to go into the hospitals, clean up the wards and take care of the patients. This was a new concept, and from this group a new Congregation of Nuns was formed, the Daughters of Charity. This implied a radical change. Up to then, all nuns who took public vows had to remain in convents. Vincent changed all that, and because he was well respected and had friends in high places, he succeeded. By now he was a friend of Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII, and later he was made an advisor to Louis XIV, the Sun King.

His life was a simple and poor one, committed to helping the poor, and he crowned his life’s work by starting orphanages. He learned that babies were often abandoned – some by mothers who could not care for them, others by mothers who didn’t want them. So he asked Louise to have some of her sisters run homes for these abandoned children. This subsequently meant homes for thousands and thousands of children since Vincent’s time.

His Death

Thus runs the saga of Vincent’s life. But with the story of his work goes the story of his soul. He was always a pious priest, but for the first thirty years of his life he was plagued with doubts about his faith – just as we are so many times. For a long while he tried to remain faithful, but he was still tempted until he found the answer to dissolve his doubts – the slow recitation of the Our Father.

There were no tremendous miracles in Vincent’s life. Surely, some wonderful things happened, and his work inspired Europe and the Catholic Church with a new concept of charity – a miracle in itself. He had lived a long life, and in his eightieth year he could see his work flourishing. Seminaries were being staffed by his men, missions were being preached to instruct and bring people to Christ, hospitals were giving decent care to patients (and spiritual care too), the galley slaves had a better life, and his Congregation of the Missions was growing (in his last year of life there were twenty-five houses of this new Order). Louise de Marillac was gone, but she left behind hundreds of Daughters of Charity to carry on the work that she and Vincent had started.

With Simeon in the gospel of Luke, Vincent could say: “*Now dismiss your servant, O Lord, in peace.*” And he did die in peace on September 27, 1660, seated in his chair after he had just received the Eucharist and the Last Rites. He was an expert sociologist before there was a science of that name, but his knowledge came from a burning love of Christ. He was a great man and a great saint because he loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and he loved his neighbor as himself – because of his love of God. ✿



CARMELITE MISSIONS

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**Your
offering and your
support are
needed NOW more
than ever.**

Missions in India continued...

the meanwhile, the Sisters have set up a sewing center for 25 of the girls who have dropped out of school and for 11 other young women in the area so that they can learn to make clothes and other articles for their homes.

The second story is about the Mass that we celebrated at Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish. Father Jijo is the pastor; he is assisted by three Sisters, as they care for 16 missions attached to the parish. The welcome at the evening Mass was outstanding, with fireworks before, during and after the Mass, to the delight of all. When we visited the Sisters' convent afterwards, they were so happy to show me a plaque at the entrance, expressing their gratitude to the Koch Foundation in Gainesville, Florida, and to myself, for helping to build the convent. After the meal, Sister Teena asked if our Carmelite Mission office could help her buy a motorbike, costing one thousand dollars, so that



she could visit the 16 mission stations of the parish that are sometimes quite distant. Such a bike would help to bring her nursing skills to the elderly and to the mothers and babies.

We are able to help in Andhra, only because of the great generosity of wonderful friends like yourself. Thank you

so much for your kindness to the missions of our Indian Carmelite priests and sisters. Your help is so deeply appreciated. May God continue to bless you for your goodness and please keep these Indian Carmelites in your prayers.

Love and peace,

Fr. John Mally, O. Carm.

Director of Carmelite Missions

Remember the Carmelite Missions when you write your will.