

Vincent de Paul, Helper of the Poor (1581-1660)

*Observed 27 September*



Saint Vincent de Paul is best known to most of us as the namesake of many soup kitchens and other organizations that help the needy. This would please the priest who dedicated his life to the needs of the poor. He grew up in the country, part of a French farm family. He was ordained young, but his path to normal church service was interrupted when he was kidnapped by Turkish pirates and sold into slavery in Tunisia. He escaped after two years, having meanwhile converted his owner to Christianity. After completing his studies, he served as chaplain to various wealthy families, at the same time leading missions among galley slaves and peasants. He was also influential in drawing others into active service, founding the Vincentian Fathers (officially the Congregation of the Mission) in 1625. After this, as many wealthy individuals were drawn by his teaching about repentance and service, he organized the Confraternity of Charity, a lay order that devoted themselves to caring for the poor in hospitals and in their homes. Out of this grew a new order of nuns, the Sisters of Charity, established in 1633 for the care of the sick poor. Saint Vincent was canonized in 1737 and his teaching and example have continued to inspire people who seek to follow Jesus's teaching and example, disregarding the ever-present temptation to seek worldly advancement and to accede to the demands of the politically powerful, even within the Church. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was established by students in France in 1833, with a mandate to serve the poor of the world. The Society now ministers in 132 countries of the world. Their American website states, "Members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (or "Vincentians") are men and women who strive to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to individuals in need. We are young and old. Our members come in every shade of skin color. Some of us are wealthy, some are financially poor, but all of us are blessed with an awareness that our blessings (time, talent or treasure) are to be shared with our brothers and sisters in need." Our cities are filled with people who have been helped by members of this organization and whose faith has been inspired by their selfless service.

*Lessons*        Amos 8:4-6; Psalm 37:27-33; I Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 9:35-38

*Collect*        Loving God, we thank you for your servant Vincent de Paul, who gave himself to training clergy to work among the poor and provided many institutions to aid the sick, orphans and prisoners. May we, like him, encounter Christ in the needy, the outcast and the

friendless, that we may come at length into your kingdom where you reign, one God, holy and undivided Trinity, for ever and ever. Amen.