

Saint Vincent de Paul

Feast Day: September 27 (1581-1660)



How much of a difference can one person make? When you hear the story of Saint Vincent De Paul, you know the answer. One person can make a big difference.

Vincent organized charitable groups to provide food and clothing for the poor, started a congregation of priests, helped begin another congregation for women, opened hospitals and homes for the orphans and for the aged, established training programs and retreats for seminarians, raised money for the victims of war, and sent missionaries to other countries—just to name a few of his projects!

Vincent did not plan for a life of service and self-sacrifice, but rather one of security and ease. He grew up in France, the son of peasant farmers. The life of a priest was more comfortable than that of a farmer, so

Vincent studied and was ordained.

Little is known about his activities during the first few years after his ordination. Tradition says that during this time, while aboard a ship, Vincent was seized by pirates and sold into slavery in North Africa. Eventually he escaped and made his way to Rome. He returned home to France, and there he was appointed court chaplain to Queen Margaret of Valois. He seemed well on his way to the life of wealth and comfort. But at the same time, he came to know Pierre de Berulle, who later became a cardinal. Berulle helped Vincent understand more deeply what it meant to be a true Christian. Vincent came face-to-face with himself and his empty goals.

As he became more aware of God's love and his call to serve, Vincent changed the direction of his life. He worked for a year in a small parish in a peasant area and saw how poor the people were. So he organized groups of people who would provide food and clothing for the poor or needy on a regular basis. But Vincent saw another kind of poverty, a spiritual poverty. Many of the people had no real understanding of their faith. So Vincent organized priests who would go out and preach to the people. Eventually, this group of priests became the Congregation of the Missions, also known as the Vincentian Fathers.

As Vincent saw the needs of others, he reached out to them. At night he would search the city for abandoned babies and found homes for them. He cared for the prisoners who had been made slaves on the galley ships. He remained good friends with many rich and influential people, involving them in his work with the poor and the needy. Vincent de Paul is the patron saint of all charitable societies.