

GETTING TO KNOW VINCENT DE PAUL

1581-1660

A MAN WHO
MADE
A DIFFERENCE



The power of Vincent de Paul's legacy needs to be seen against the back drop of his times, 17th century France

Society was hierarchical and largely agrarian, dependant on the weather for good crops. When crops failed, famine followed. It happened frequently during the 1600s caused by a 'little ice age' as well as unprecedented spring floods.



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Added to inclement weather, life in the first half of the 1600s was scarred by religious wars, a Spanish invasion and local skirmishes as well as two outbreaks of civil war.

This meant high taxes, marauding soldiers foraging for food as well as fields and crops destroyed by fighting.

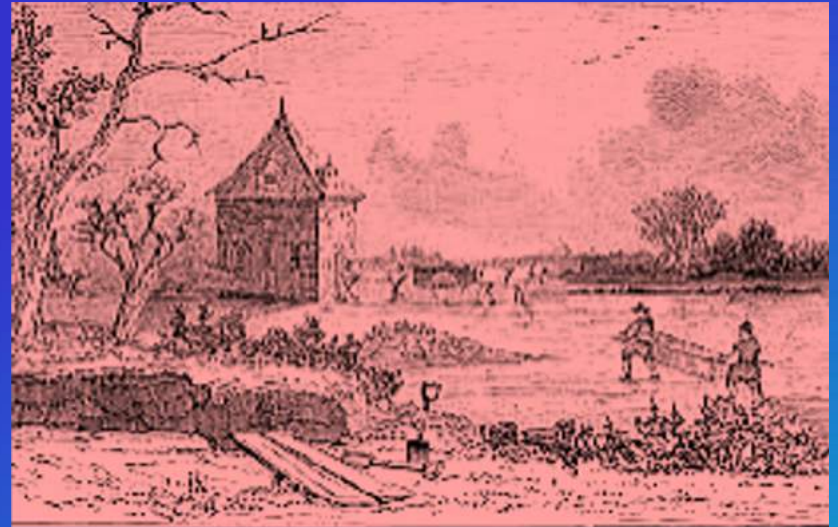
The poorest classes living off the land made up 90% of the population. They bore the burden of taxation and disruption and the brunt of famine and disease



Pandemics in 17th Century France

Scarlet
Cholera Typhus
Fever
Dysentery
Smallpox
Flu
Plagues
Yellow
Malaria

In former times the churches and monasteries provided care for the sick. The Protestant Reformation brought disruption to this provision. Disease was rampant particularly among the poor. To limit contagion some of the sick were sent to pest houses which provided minimal care.





Born in Pouy towards the end of the 1500s Vincent lived most of his life in 17th century Paris. His family were peasant farmers not rich but not desperately poor. They recognised his potential and sent him to school in Dax.

He wanted to become a priest, giving him a better social standing and enabling him to earn money from church benefices to help his family.

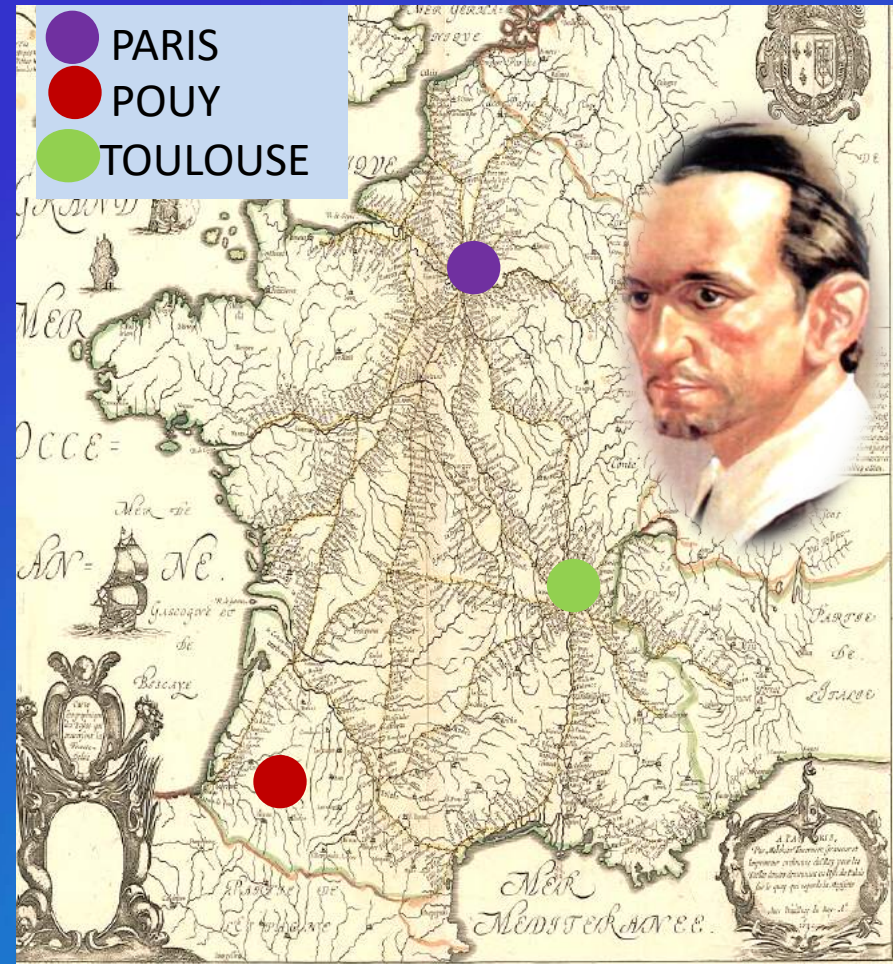
He studied in Toulouse and was ordained at the age of nineteen.

After ordination Vincent found it difficult to find a parish or benefice. He was either too late or someone else had got there first.

He visited Rome, continued his theology studies in Toulouse and eventually, in pursuit of money he was owed, found himself captured by pirates and sold into slavery in Tunis*. After two years he was in Rome again and in 1608 ended up in Paris.

None of the experiences of these 'wandering years' were lost, they prepared and shaped him.

(*the latter is questionable)



Map of the first postal coach routes crisscrossing France in 1632.



In response to the Protestant Reformation there was a Catholic Counter-reformation which acknowledged the church's mistakes of the past and sought to reinvigorate religious practices. In Paris, Vincent met many leading figures in what became known as the French School of Spirituality. These people and others befriended, inspired, shaped and guided his understanding of what God was calling him to do.

Charles
de Condren



Andre
Duval



Michel
de Marillac



Madame
Acarie



Jane
Frances
de Chantal



Pierre
de Berulle



*These Spiritual Leaders
were contemporaries of Vincent
many of them profoundly influenced him*

Jean
Eudes



Benet
of
Canfield



Francis
de
Sales



Jean
Jacque
Olier





Pierre Bérulle

They met in 1609 through his help Vincent was appointed Parish Priest of Clichy, became Tutor to the de Gondi family, moved to the Parish of Chatillon-les-Dombes and returned to the de Gondi's.



Francis de Sales

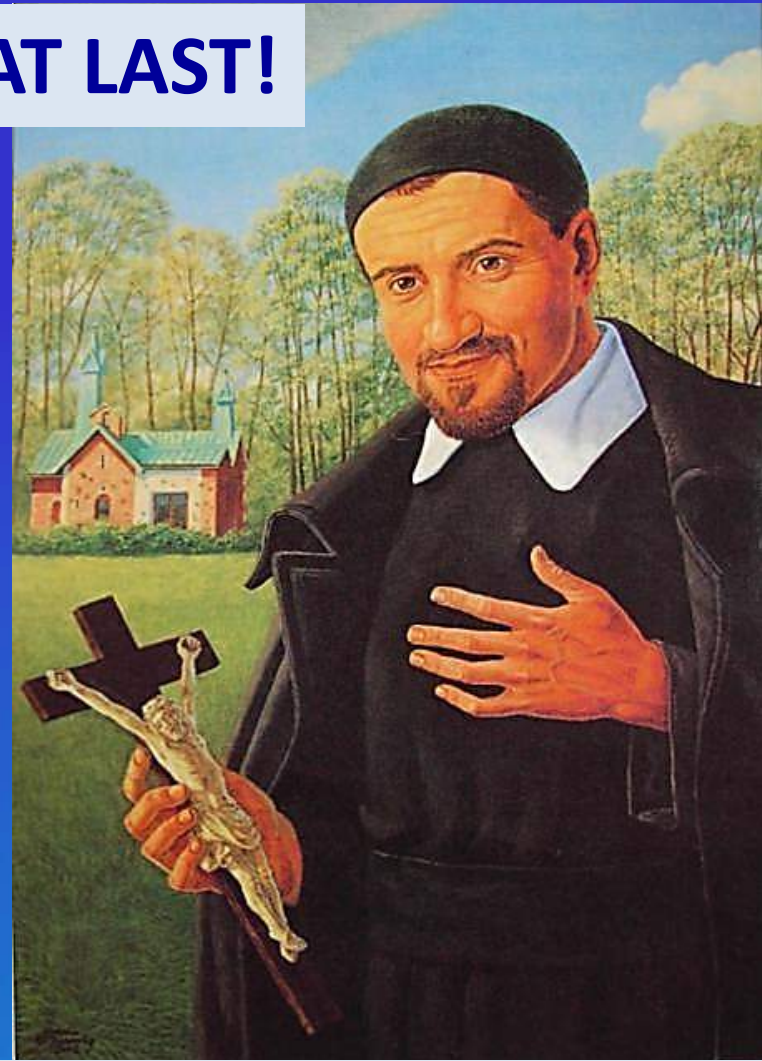
They met when Francis visited Paris in 1618 and inspired each other. Francis wrote the Introduction to the Devout Life to help ordinary people lead an authentic Christian life in their daily pursuits.



Andre Duval

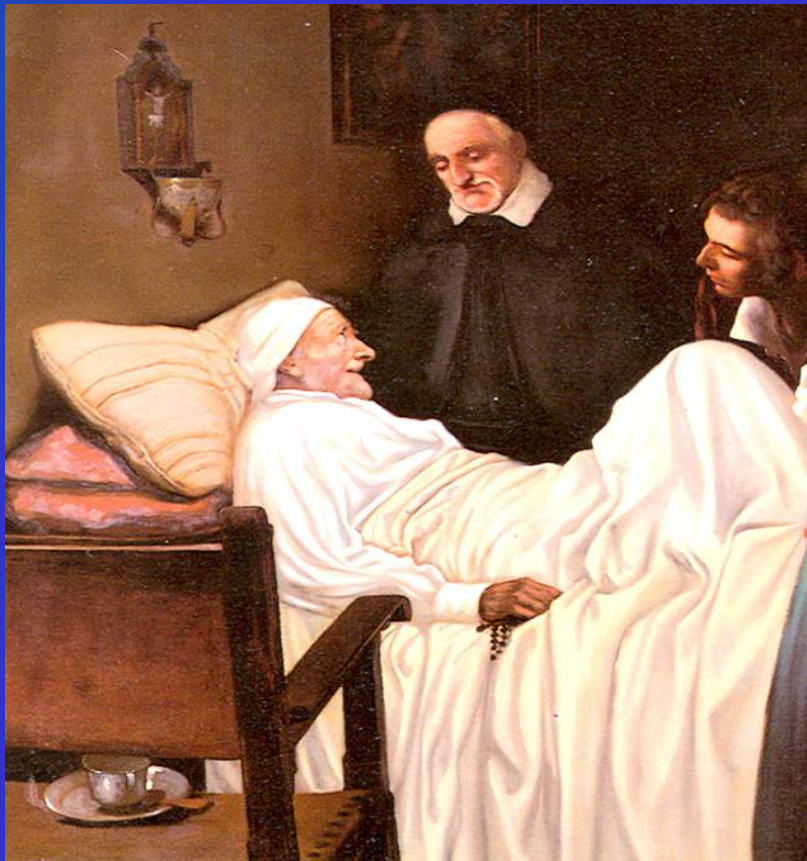
was Vincent's unfailing counsellor for twenty years from 1618 until his death in 1638. Unlike Bérulle, Duval supported Vincent in founding the Congregation of the Mission.

A PARISH AT LAST!



Vincent became Parish Priest of Clichy in May 1612. He later said “I think that not even the Pope is as fortunate as a Parish Priest in the midst of a congregation of such good heart”.

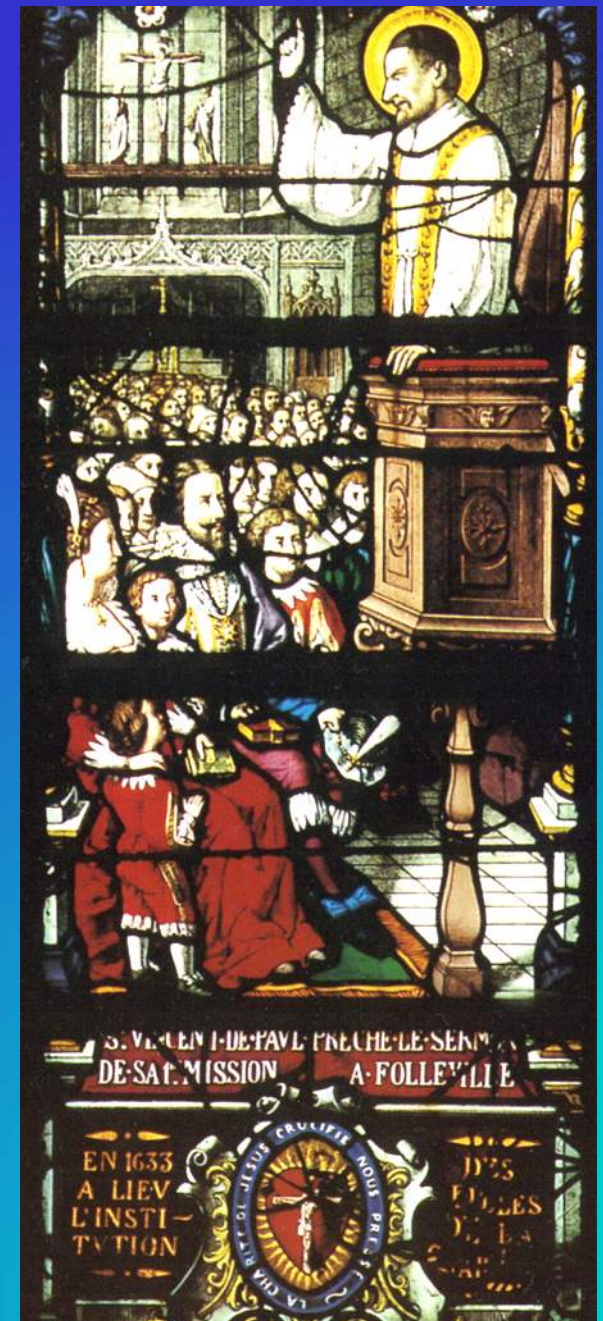
1617 WAS A PIVOTAL YEAR FOR VINCENT HE BECAME AWARE OF SPIRITUAL POVERTY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE



When Vincent become tutor in the de Gondi household he also found himself Spiritual Director to Madame de Gondi. Whilst accompanying her on a visit to her estate in Folleville, she took him to visit a man dying in terrible turmoil. Vincent listened to him, assured him of God's love and encouraged him to seek God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The man died at peace with himself and God.

The next day realising that many people may be in a similar situation and encouraged by Madame de Gondi Vincent preached about God's love and the blessing of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So many people came to receive the Sacrament Vincent had to send for priests to help him.

Vincent's eyes were opened to the spiritual poverty of poor people in the countryside. It was the beginning of a concerted effort to spread the Good News of the Gospel to poor people and a foreshadowing of the Congregation of the Mission.



LATER IN THIS PIVOTAL YEAR OF 1617

HE BECAME AWARE OF THE EFFECTS OF MATERIAL POVERTY



After Folleville Vincent wanted to leave the de Gondi household to work with poor people.

With de Berulle's help he travelled 264 miles to Chatillon les Dombes to be Parish Priest there. He stirred the hearts of many to change their ways.

One Sunday a couple of women of the Parish told Vincent about a family who were ill, with no one to help them. They had no food and no medicine.

Vincent told the congregation about their plight.

ORGANISATION OF CHARITY

Later that afternoon when Vincent visited the family himself, he met a procession of people returning from delivering food. He realised there was great charity but it needed organising. He invited pious women from the Parish to form an association to provide help on a rota basis. This was not unusual. Many parishes had similar groups of devout women doing charitable works caring for the poor. What was unusual were the detailed regulations Vincent stipulated to ensure the quality of care given to the people visited.



*Charity of Women
Chatillon-Les-Dombe
1617*

...she will prepare the dinner and take it to the patients, greeting them cheerfully and kindly. She will set up the tray on the bed, place on it a napkin, a cup, a spoon and some bread, wash the patient's hands... pour the soup into a bowl and put the meat on a plate... She will do this as lovingly as if she were serving her own son....

VINCENT RESPONDED TO THESE TWO EVENTS IN FOUR SIGNIFICANT WAYS

- 1. He listened to the women who drew his attention to the sufferings of people in distress.**
- 2. He engaged others in trying to alleviate their suffering.**
- 3. In both cases the women who alerted him to the suffering became involved in the solutions.**
- 4. He provided clear guidelines of ways to help.**

**THROUGH THESE EVENTS HE RECOGNISED HIS VOCATION
AND GREW TO DEVOTE HIMSELF TO
THE LOVING SERVICE OF GOD AND THE POOR.**

**THE SEEDS OF 4 KEY ORGANISATIONS
WERE SOWN AND DEVELOPED OVER THE FOLLOWING
YEARS**



- | | |
|------------------------------------|------|
| 1. The Confraternities of Charity | 1617 |
| 2. The Congregation of the Mission | 1625 |
| 3. The Daughters of Charity | 1633 |
| 4. The Ladies of Charity | 1634 |

**THEY PROVIDED AND CONTINUE TO PROVIDE
CARE AND SUPPORT FOR THOSE SUFFERING THE EFFECTS
OF SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL POVERTY**

WITH THESE GROUPS AND IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHERS VINCENT DEVELOPED A NETWORK OF CHARITY



Caring for and supporting poor sick people in their homes

Helping to educate poor children

Meeting the Spiritual needs Of poor people in the countryside

Providing homes for abandoned and orphaned children



Nursing the sick in hospitals

Caring for galley slaves

Responding to disasters

Providing care and skills training for homeless and elderly people

Providing famine relief for victims of civil war and crop failures

Visiting Prisoners



**LOUISE DE MARILLAC WAS
VINCENT'S MAIN
COLLABORATOR AND PARTNER
IN
DEVELOPING THESE CHARITABLE
WORKS**



He met Louise de Marillac 7 years after he set up the first Confraternity of Charity. She was a pious young widow with a young son. She sought Vincent's spiritual guidance, and was already involved in a Confraternity of Charity when they met. Vincent recognised her organisational skills and vision. In 1629 he asked her to visit the Confraternities to make sure they were following the regulations. This was the beginning of their collaboration. They worked tirelessly to care for suffering people until the end of their lives. Together they founded the Daughters of Charity to be servants of the Confraternities.

Louise Marie Gonzague

**Queen of Poland Lady of Charity brought
the Vincentian Family to Poland**



Antoine Portail CM

**Supporting the Daughters
of Charity**



**Cardinal Richelieu
Benefactor of
Richelieu Charity**



**SOME KEY
COLLABORATORS
WITH VINCENT IN
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
NETWORK OF CHARITY**

**Madame & Mademoiselle
Lamoignon Ladies of Charity
supported
many
services**



**Duchess d'Aiguillon
Supported the CMs
major funder of
services**



**Madame Goussault
President of the Ladies
Charity
Care of Orphans**



**King Louise XIII
funded 13 houses
revenue from
Coach company
for on going costs**



**Madame de Gondi
Congregation of the Mission
Meeting Spiritual needs**



VINCENT'S LEADERSHIP STYLE

Vincent was a hands on leader. His belief in doing the will of God and responding to Divine Providence meant he didn't anticipate events. He prayed, sought advice and then responded collaboratively with the genius of his creativity and experience.



His awareness of the presence of God in everyone especially the poor meant that he treated everyone with respect and consideration recognising their gifts with pleasure and faults with compassion.

His trust in God's Providence meant that he was not afraid of failure if things didn't work out at first, he knew they would in God's time. Communication was key for him, his many letters, guided, energised and showed his care for those serving the poor.

VINCENT A MAN OF PASSION

Vincent's journey from the ambitious young man of his youth to the humble man of later years is a journey from self interest to God interest. It took 36 years for him to discover his vocation in life. Then his contact with people suffering poverty began to seamlessly merge with love for God until it was one.



He had a certain charisma which despite his peasant origins made him welcome in the salons of the rich and powerful as well as the hovels of the poorest. He learnt kindness and gentleness from his encounters with galley slaves. He was sensitive to the pride of those dependent on charity.

VINCENT'S VALUES AND VIRTUES SHONE THROUGH HIS LIVING AND WORKING



meekness
action
contemplation
prayer
Simplicity
Charity
love
gentleness
collaboration
zeal
meditation
Humility
compassion
justice
Respect
Faith
mortification
laughter
honesty
communication
kindness
justice



“IT WAS MYSTICISM

THAT GAVE US

THE GREATEST OF OUR

MEN OF WORKS”

Henri Bremond quoted by R Maloney, Mystic of Charity p. 12

His life and work are an inspiration for us in the 21st century.

Through his Correspondence Conferences and Documents his presence and wisdom continues to speak to us. Through them we can see he was a true servant leader; collaborating, communicating, affirming skills, acknowledging weaknesses including his own, encouraging excellence and above all abandoning himself to God’s will.

**NOW YOU KNOW
ABOUT
VINCENT DE PAUL
1581-1660**

**A MAN WHO
CONTINUES TO MAKE
A DIFFERENCE**



SOURCES

**Mystic of Charity, R P Maloney C.M.
Vincent De Paul The Trailblazer, B Pujo
St Vincent De Paul, J M Romám C.M.
Correspondence Conferences Documents
Vols. 1-14, ed. Marie Poole D.C. et.al
Images: DePaul image archive**