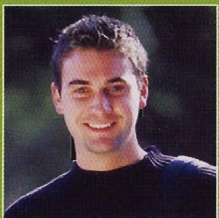
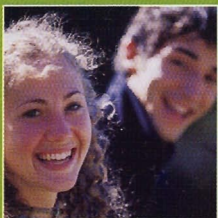
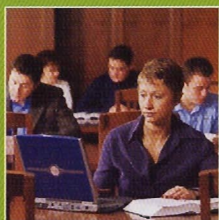
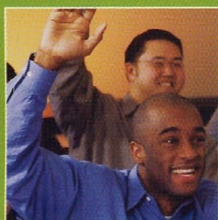
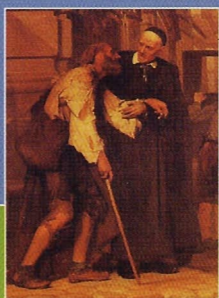


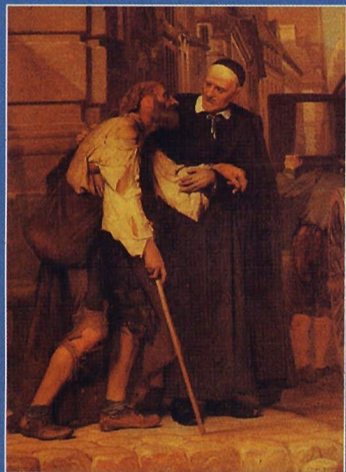
Saint Vincent de Paul:

A Person of the 17th Century.



A Person for the 21st Century.

During the first half of the seventeenth century, a French Roman Catholic priest named **Vincent de Paul** (1581-1660) walked daily through the crowded streets of Paris. What would have caught his eye as he traveled around the city he knew so well? He certainly could have focused his attention on the countless churches, palaces, monuments, and other fabulous sights for which Paris was so rightly renowned. On any given day he certainly could have observed a colorful mixture of royalty and nobles, bishops and priests, lawyers and doctors, professors and merchants, soldiers and every other type of person hurrying past him going about their business in that bustling city. However, Vincent de Paul really didn't pay much attention to these sights, or even to these people. Rather, he was always on the look out for very different sights. His keen eyesight unflinchingly found what he was looking for: countless poor people who were



more likely than not forgotten, marginalized, and even despised and feared, by the world that surrounded them.

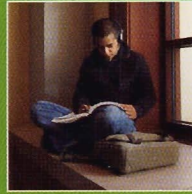
“... shouldn't we, respond on the basis of our shared humanity in the same way as he did to what we can see?”

As Vincent de Paul walked through these streets everywhere he looked he saw homeless people and beseeching beggars. He saw hungry people. He saw children and elderly men and women who were neglected. He saw sick people without health care. He saw refugees from warfare. He saw people who were spiritually abandoned and without hope. In these people he found those whom he had been looking for: his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Vincent de Paul was profoundly dissatisfied with what he saw because he knew it was at odds with his ideal vision of the “good news” of Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus Christ to the poor; a place where each human being created in the image and likeness of God possessed an inestimable dignity and value as a person. He turned his sense of frustration and dissatisfaction into an urgent faith-filled desire to do as much good as he could, as well as he could, to reach out to improve the lives of the people whose gazes he returned so intently and whose suffering moved him so personally.



As a person, Vincent de Paul can be described in many ways. He was innovative and pragmatic, honest and approachable, realistic and visionary. He was opportunistic and a risk-taker. He was values-driven. He was hard-working. He was very intelligent and yet blessed with common sense. He was a master of detail and could design complex systems, but never at the expense of his own or others' humanity. His communication style was simple, straightforward, unerringly to the point, and powerfully persuasive. He was also prayerful and contemplative. He felt equally comfortable in the presence of the queen, or in the presence of a beggar. In the end, his road to sanctity can be explained by his heartfelt desire to model his life of service on the example of Jesus Christ, the evangelizer of the poor and the source and model of all charity.



Always depending on God's grace and the guidance of divine providence Vincent also instinctively looked around to see who was willing to join him with the "strength of their arms" and the "sweat of their brows" in this important mission. He never had to look far to find men and women like Saint Louise de Marillac (1591-1660) a noble woman, widow, and mother who joined with him as a indefatigable friend and indispensable collaborator. The men and women who flocked to Vincent's side were organized into groups such as the Congregation of the Mission (1625), the Company of the Daughters of Charity (1633), the Ladies of Charity, and the Confraternities of Charity. What all these groups had in common, and still have in common almost 400 years later, is a shared mission to serve people in need, and transform the world for the better by doing good and doing it well.

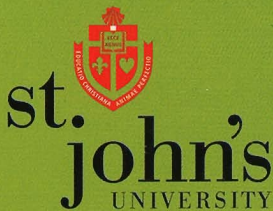
The 21st century world that surrounds us is changing with a rapidity that is unprecedented in human history and that at times can leave us breathless in our attempts to keep pace. In this sense our 21st century world is very different from the 17th century world of Vincent de Paul. However, as we walk down the streets of our cities, or any city in the United States, or any place in the world we can see the people in need. We can recognize the causes and solutions for contemporary injustice and poverty. We may be Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or even a non-believer but can't we, shouldn't we, respond on the basis of our shared humanity in the same way as he did to what we can see?

A Person of the 17th Century.

When Saint Vincent de Paul died in Paris on September 27, 1660 he left behind only a few meager personal possessions. Among these objects were his bachelor's degree from the University of Toulouse and his graduate degree from the University of Paris. From among the many things that he could have saved, his careful preservation of these two diplomas testifies to the value that he placed on his own education, and his realization of how it had given direction and meaning to his life. We pray that you will feel the same way about the higher education that you will receive in the Vincentian tradition.



A Person for the 21st Century.



© 201953

A collaborative publication of the Vincentian Universities:

DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois; St. John's University, Jamaica, New York,
Niagara University, Niagara University, New York.

Text by Rev. Edward R. Udovic, C.M., Ph.D. DePaul University. Copyright ©2006.