**26th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [29thSeptember, 2013]**

READINGS: Amos 6:1, 4-7/ 1 Tim. 6:11-16/ Luke 16:19-31

THEME: THE POOR – GATE TO HEAVEN

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

The gate of heaven is really not far away. By the parable of a rich man and the poor Lazarus who sat at the gate of the house of the former, one could say that ***the gate of heaven is as close to us as our entrance.***  Charity to poor Lazarus would have opened the gate of heaven to the rich man; but he missed this point.

***The poor and needy whom we meet every day are the gate to heaven; and any charity done to them is a key that opens the heavenly gate to us***. While the rich man missed this point, the church celebrates this weekend (27th September), a great model, St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), who understood this point very well. He used to say: **“Those who have loved the poor will meet death without fear.”**

He was born in France to poor parents who were farmers. He was ordained a priest at the very young age of 19 years. From a poor background he would never missed the opportunity to help the poor, the sick and prisoners. At age 38, the King of France made the then Fr. Vincent the General Almoner (one who ensured the distribution of alms to the poor). With this appointment, Fr. Vincent was able to improve the miserable situation of prisoners as well as slaves in France. He also established hospitals to help especially the poor who could not afford the payments of their bills.

Seven years later (at age 45), he founded the Congregation of Priests of the Missions who dedicated themselves to the salvation of the poor country people. At the same time, he found ways of mobilizing funds from the rich Christians to help the poor. In this regard, he organized many women of the nobility into the “Ladies of Charity”. He used their great contributions to operate the general hospital of Paris, where thousands of destitute were catered for. In addition, he established an old people’s home, an asylum for the insane and a home for lepers. Furthermore, poor farmers were given seeds for sowing as well as some money.

Further seven years later (at age 52), in view of a need for a group of nuns to cater for poor women and their children, orphans and some needy sick women, he co-founded the Daughters of Charity with St. Louise de Marillac. The convent of these nuns became like a clinic for the sick, and their chapel became like the parish church. There was daily distribution of bread and soup, with hundreds of poor people going in and out of the convent for one kind of help or another.

To the 30,000 Christian slaves held in North Africa at that time St. Vincent sent priests and brothers of his Congregation to minister to them both spiritually and materially. These missionaries became also messengers for the families of the slaves. St. Vincent personally raised the equivalent of six million dollars to pay for the ransom of 1,200 slaves. In the midst of all this great work of charity, St. Vincent was a very humble and deeply spiritual person.

Today many people attempt to imitate his life and work by joining the Society of St.Vincent de Paul to raise funds and cater for the poor and needy. We may not be members of this Society, but let us not miss the point as the rich man in the parable did: “Those who have loved the poor will meet death without fear,” for their works of charity will open the gate of heaven; and as they enter they will hear the Lord saying: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you ….For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Mt. 25:34-36). Amen!