

**Homily by Bishop Felipe Estévez
For St. Vincent's Centennial Jubilee
Basilica of the Immaculate Conception
September 24, 2016**

Mother Teresa's canonization brought joy to the whole globe. She embodied real care for the poor – in fact the poorest of the poor. Today's readings are among the strongest scriptural statements about justice and responsibility on behalf of the poor.

Prophet Amos is outstanding in revealing God's desire for social justice. The prophet condemns the complacency of those who seek their own comfort regardless of the plight of the poor.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus echoes Amos, exhorting those who have to share with those who have not. Our self-sufficiency must not blind us to the needs of others. Clearly, God is not pleased with social injustice. The fate of the rich man in today's Gospel reveals God's redress for the lack of compassion. We are called to care for the poor because we are all poor. All that we claim to be, that we own, including our lives, we have received from God. Everything is gift.

Pope Francis states, "Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society."¹ The pope reminds us that, "God's heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself 'became poor' (2Cor 8:9)...Salvation came to us from the 'yes' uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire" #197.²

St. Vincent de Paul understood well the care to the poor. Born in poverty himself in the year 1581, his parents had to sell part of their meager property to send him to school. He had to tutor others to pay for his education. He experienced slavery when he was captured by Barbary pirates and sent to Tunis. He always lived in the margins of society. It is from his own personal experience that he understood the plight of the poor and God's desire for social justice. His love for the poor and the sick earned him the title "great apostle of charity." Father Felix Varela once said that Vincent was the most important citizen who ever lived.

While society tends to marginalize the poor, St. Vincent prioritizes them. To his sisters he said: "That's what our Rules engage us to do, to help poor persons, our lords and masters."³ It is out of this good work that the Lord began in St. Vincent's heart that we have all these great health care systems and charity organizations by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul throughout the world.

¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html #197

²Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Today, we recognize the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul for accepting the call to serve the poor and the sick in North Florida. I can see several (14 are in attendance) of them in the congregation and I would like to publicly thank them for all they do for the poor. One-hundred years ago, three Daughters came to this city to bring this great Vincentian charism. The city has never been the same since. Like St. Louise De Marillac and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton they responded to the call to serve the poor and joined St. Vincent without reserve. Thank you sisters!

Even though the daughters have moved on from our diocese, their Vincentian charism and spirit lives on for sure. We are indeed so blessed by their most generous benefactors and administrators, associates, health personnel of remarkable integrity and professional competence.

St. Vincent's mission statement and first core value is service to the poor. Your associates participate in corporal works of mercy by contributing to food pantries and food packing events such as the Thanksgiving Meals on Wheels for the poor of our area. In 2015, St. Vincent's associates helped pack 25,000 meals in collaboration with Hunger Fight.

Your commitment to have local and international medical missions to the poor is commendable. Thanks for the mobile clinics that travel a five-county area providing healthcare to the poor in our neighborhoods. Your faith community nursing, which serves 50 congregations in Northeast Florida speaks about who you truly are.

Your successful medical mission at home event in March is truly Vincentian. In 2015, you gave \$84.8 million in community benefits. Your annual medical mission trips to Haiti, brings Vincentian charity beyond borders. That is how we preach – by action! Please keep this fire of charity to the poor burning! I exhort you to remain faithful to the Gospel, the Church's teaching, and your patron saints in spite of our all kinds of pressure.

That seed planted by the three Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent has indeed grown and produced an abundance of fruit! Thanks to God for this grace!

Since charity starts at home, you strive to care for your own staff as well. I am happy you provide human and spiritual formation, seminars and education that are based on Catholic theology and the Church's social teaching. Your programs help your staff find meaning, spiritual fulfillment and joy in serving others and in being part of a faith-based organization. I am glad you have ethics committees, which are guided by each of the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*.

Please remain strong and vigilant by resisting trends that compromise the dignity of human life by legalizing the intrinsic evil of abortion and immoral practices such as contraception. Thank you for safeguarding the sanctity of human life and personhood. Thank you for taking care of, not just the body but of the whole person. For that purpose you hire enough chaplains to minister to the spiritual, psychological, emotional and social needs of your patients, their families and staff.

I am happy you have enough Catholic chaplains, four of whom are priests who are available 24-hours a day, seven days a week providing the sacraments for patients. I thank you for making sure there is a daily holy Mass at all your campuses.

The poor are too many for us to forget them. Lazarus is always there at the gate. There is always something you can do for the less fortunate.

Pope Francis has said that God's love is seen in the works of mercy. The care of the sick is the work of mercy that this hospital here in Riverside, at St Luke or in Clay County excels because it is the love of Christ that is at the source of the enterprise, it is the Eucharist, In Him, Through Him, From Him that all is given for the glory of the Eternal Father! Amen.