



Our Patron, Founders and Inspiration

The Patron Saint of the Society – Vincent de Paul



Date of birth – **24th April 1581**

Place of birth – **Pouy, France**

Parentage – **Peasants, worked on a farm**

Death – **27th September 1660**

Occupation – **Priest and servant of the poor**

Canonisation – **1737**

Feast day – **27th September**

Vincent was born poor and initially longed for a life of wealth. He was also intelligent and became a priest to pave the way from need to nobility. On the journey, he underwent a difficult spiritual crisis that resulted in a desire to help the poor.

Exalted positions such as chaplain to the Queen's court and tutor to the wealthy de Gondi family were not fulfilling to him. The profit of an ecclesiastical career was abandoned for a parish and for work with the marginalised and forgotten.

Vincent instituted an order of priests (the Congregation of the Mission or Vincentians) whose mission it was to share Jesus' good news to the villages through preaching and service. With Louise de Marillac, he co-founded the Daughters of Charity.

Vincent pledged his life to the sick and insane, orphans and old people, beggars and the starving, prisoners and galley slaves. There was no form of poverty physical, emotional or spiritual which he did not try to alleviate.

Most of all, though, he was committed to the poor sinful men and women, who did not know what great love God had for them.



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The man behind the Society – Antoine Frédéric Ozanam



Date of birth – **23rd April 1813**

Place of birth – **Milan (French territory at this time)**

Death – **8th September 1853**

Parentage – **Jean Antoine Ozanam, doctor and Marie Nantas, heiress to silk business**

Canonisation as a Saint – **Beatified in 1997**

Occupation – **Lawyer and Professor of Letters, husband and father**

In Paris on 23 April 1833, a group of six university students met with a middle-aged journalist, Emmanuel Bailly, in his office, to form a group to be called the Conference of Charity. The leader of the group of students was Frédéric Ozanam, who was driven by a deep desire to find a way to help build the faith of his peers. Their purpose was simple: as a small group of friends, they would become servants of the poor in Paris just as Jesus Christ had been servant to the people of his time.

Frédéric must have mentioned at that first meeting that only recently, while speaking in defence of the Church in some fiery debates at the university, he was challenged by a young socialist with the demanding words. “What are you doing for the poor now? Show us your works!” Frédéric realised that talk alone would never give full witness to the truth. He acted on this immediately – that same night he and some friends pooled what money they had and bought firewood for a poor family. He continued leading the group with the help of Sr Rosalie Rendu, who assisted them to meet the poor in Paris. Their efforts grew and developed. Others were moved by their example to commit themselves to serving the poor.

The Society grew with a firm practical commitment to providing charity with justice to any person in need. They chose to call their group the Society of St Vincent de Paul, based upon the exemplary charitable life led by St Vincent de Paul. Frédéric’s life was very active, but not solely based in the Society he founded. In 1839 he completed his thesis on Dante, which led to his appointment as lecturer of foreign literature as well as law at the University of Lyon. He considered joining the Dominican order, but instead chose to marry Amelie Soulacroix in June 1841. Frédéric’s health had always been poor. Under the strain of considerable literary work (including many calls for social justice), he continued lecturing and service to the poor through the Society, his health finally gave out. He died in 1853, aged 40.



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The woman with experience – Sr Rosalie Rendu



Date of birth – **9th September 1786**

Place of birth – **Contort, France**

Parentage – **Successful business**

Occupation – **Daughter of Charity**

Death – **7th February 1856**

Canonisation as a Saint – **Beatified in 2003**

As a novice, Sr Rosalie was a sensitive and nervous person. She would have initially seemed an unlikely woman to spend 50 years of her life helping Paris's most impoverished.

When, in 1803, she arrived in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Paris, she was horrified by the poverty caused as a result of the civil revolution. She and her sisters distributed relief in the form of clothing, food and linen, and ran a school for children. She also used her energy to pressure the authorities and to involve others in her work. Through Rosalie's assistance, Frédéric and his companions made their first contact with the poor.

Because Rosalie's good work had made her a recognised household name, the new group gained an instant respect which they would not have had otherwise. Rosalie was a very important guide for Frédéric and his friends and was a living example of how we should put our faith into action. "Love is the first gift we give the poor."



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The woman behind the Saint – Louise de Marillac



Date of birth - **12th August 1591**

Place of birth - **Auvergne, France**

Parentage - **Nobility, but illegitimate**

Occupation - **Wife and mother, founder of the Daughters of Charity**

Canonisation as a Saint - **1934**

Death - **15th March, 1660**

Louise was a wealthy widow who became a close friend and confidante of Vincent. She founded with him the Daughters of Charity. During Louise's marriage, and especially after the death of her husband, Louise found herself with spare time which she dedicated to helping abandoned children on the streets. She graduated to visiting the sick men of the chain gangs in their prison hospice (a truly horrible place) and started a house nearby where a number of women cooked food for those who visited the prisoners daily to take with them.

Throughout the country, centres staffed by wives of people in the village were set up to serve the poor. Louise pushed for every village to have its own clinic, school, nurse and teacher. The women who came to do these jobs made up the Daughters of Charity.

It was a revolutionary order of sisters who left their convents to work on the streets and in the homes of the poor. At the time, this was a truly scandalous thing to do. Louise worked with untiring devotion fostering in her sisters respect for the individual, friendliness, devotion, no condescension, but just unlimited patience and compassion.