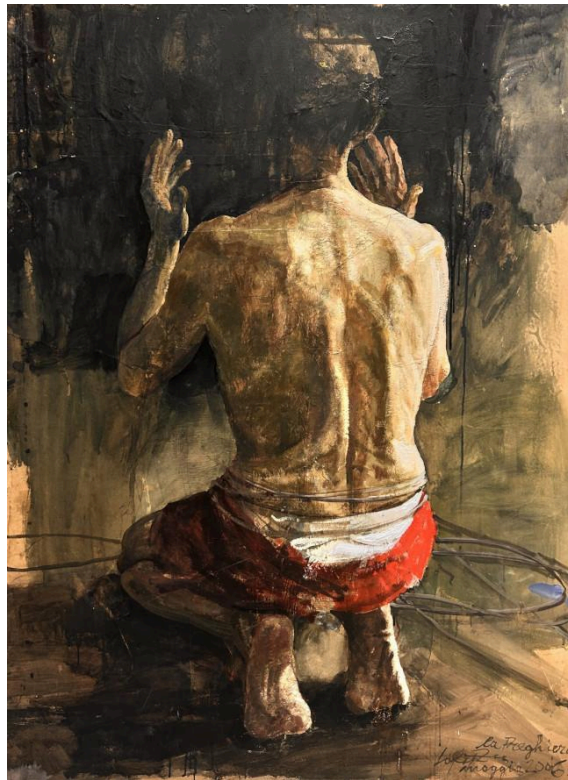


Salvatore Fari CM

**"Hands for prayer"**  
**The prayer of the poor rises up to God**



**Congregazione della Missione**  
Ufficio di Comunicazione



Towards the Jubilee 2/2025

## The prayer of the poor

In 2017, Pope Francis instituted the *World Day of the Poor*, intending it to be the whole Church's response to the poor (pain, marginalization, oppression, violence, torture, prison and war, deprivation of freedom and dignity, ignorance and illiteracy, health emergency and lack of work, trafficking and slavery, exile and misery), so that they would not think that their cry fell into a vacuum. These are the themes of the World Days of the Poor:

- Let us love, not with words but with deeds (2017)
- This poor man cried and the Lord heard him (2018)
- The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever (2019)
- Stretch forth your hand to the poor (2020)
- The poor you will always have with you (2021)
- For your sakes Christ became poor (2022)
- Do not turn your face from anyone who is poor (2023)

On June 13, 2024, on the liturgical memorial of St. Anthony of Padua, patron saint of the poor, Pope Francis sent to the universal Church a beautiful message for the VIII World Day of the Poor, entitled: ***“The prayer of the poor reaches up to God”*** (Sir 21:5). The biblical text highlights how the poor have a privileged place in God's heart, so much so that, in the face of their suffering, God is “impatient” until he has done them justice. No one, absolutely no one, is excluded from his heart!

The *World Day of the Poor* has become an annual event that invites every believer and every community to listen to the prayer of the poor, becoming aware of their presence and their needs. Listening to the poor also means being disciples of the poor; yes, we can go to the school of the poor! In a culture that has put wealth first and often sacrifices the dignity of people on the altar of material goods, they go against the current, stressing that what is essential for life is something else.

In his message, Pope Francis invites us, on the way to the Holy Year 2025, to take care of “the small details of love” in daily fidelity: to stop, to approach, to pay a little attention, a smile, a caress, a word of comfort...

One aspect that, in my opinion, is very important is mentioned in n. 5 of the Pope's message: prayer. “We need to make the prayer of the poor our own and pray together with them. It is a challenge we must accept and a pastoral action that needs to be nourished. In fact, the worst discrimination suffered by the poor is the lack of spiritual care. The vast majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God, and we cannot fail to offer them His friendship, His blessing, His Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and the proposal of a path of growth and maturation in faith. The preferential option for the poor must be translated primarily into a privileged and priority religious attention”.

## Hands for prayer

The fourth centenary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission is, not only for Vincentian missionaries, but for the whole Church and for all believers, an invitation to prayer, to have hands for prayer.

In this second reflection, I also propose to you a painting on canvas, *Man in Prayer*, by the Bosnian artist Safet Zec, who fled the siege of Sarajevo during the Balkan war in the 1990s. The artist portrays a man who, precisely in prayer, finds light and hope in the darkness.

This image can be accompanied by the biblical iconography of the healing of the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:32-37): “*Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd, put his fingers in his ears and touched his tongue with spittle; then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened.’*”

The biblical text reveals that the profound link between love of God and love of neighbor must also enter into our prayer. In Jesus, true God and true man, attention to the other, especially if he is in need and suffering, leads him to turn to the Father, in that fundamental relationship that guides his whole life. But it also happens the other way around: communion with the Father, constant dialogue with Him, impels Jesus to be attentive in a unique way to the concrete situations of man, in order to bring them the consolation and love of God. The relationship with man leads us to the relationship with God, and the relationship with God leads us back to our neighbor.

## Vincent de Paul, between service and prayer

Vincent, touched by his closeness to the poor, looked at them with a theological gaze, that is, the gaze that God has shown himself to have towards the people of the covenant, reduced to miserable conditions in the history of salvation: the understanding gaze of merciful love, which was unequivocally revealed in the gaze with which Jesus caressed sinners, the unfortunate and the weak.

The poor became for Vincent the most sensitive point of his conscience, in whose contact his spirit vibrated. Jean Calvet (one of his biographers) writes: “*He felt and believed that really, without metaphor, the beggar, the ragged one, was his brother. If every day he made two poor people from the street sit at his table and wanted to serve them himself, it was because he saw in them Jesus Christ, but first of all because he saw in them his brothers. And since they were unfortunate brothers, he thought they deserved this particular look: he considered them his “lords and masters”.*<sup>1</sup>

Translating in another language one of his exhortations in favor of the poor, we can hear him again in these words: “*Look at the poor, look at them well. They are rough, disfigured by pain and hunger. They are dirty. They are barely human in appearance. And yet, turn the coin over and you will see in them the image of the Son of God, who in His passion on the cross assumed that disfigured and humiliated face*”.<sup>2</sup>

To Vincent, each poor person was a face full of history. A face to be deciphered and loved with tenderness and cordiality, recognizing the very mystery of the God who became man and shared human suffering.

In this regard, I recall a text taken from the Rules of the Women's Charity of Montmirail, where Vincent educates in service and prayer: “*On entering the house of a sick person she will greet him kindly, then, approaching the bed with a modestly cheerful face, she will invite him to eat, will arrange the pillow, will arrange the blanket, will put the little table, the tablecloth, the plate, the spoon, will clean the bowl, will serve the soup, put the meat in*

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<sup>1</sup> J. Calvet, *La littérature religieuse de François de Sales à Fénelon*, Paris 1938, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Cf SVit X, 26.

*the saucer, have the sick person bless the food and drink the soup, cut the meat into small pieces, help him to eat by saying some holy and cheerful words of comfort to encourage him, serve him a drink, invite him again to eat. Finally, when he has finished the meal, after washing the dishes and the cutlery, she will fold the tablecloth and remove the small table, she will make the sick person say the prayer of thanksgiving and then she will greet him to go and serve someone else”.*<sup>3</sup>

Let us not forget that the poor, the people, the “things to do” did not distract Vincent's heart from his experience of God in prayer: *Dedicated continually to prayer, he was not distracted either by the contemplation of the divine mysteries, or by people, or by affairs, or by happy or sad things: in fact, he always had God present in his mind, and with great effort and holy strategies he had succeeded in making everything that came before his eyes remind him of his Creator; expressing in his own way the glory of God and the divine praises, they impelled him to the contemplation of heavenly beauty. That is why he was always modest, meek, docile and benevolent, preserving in all things a wonderful serenity of spirit: he was neither exalted by happy things nor disturbed by adversities, since he could say with the prophet: “I always have God before my eyes because He is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken”.*<sup>4</sup>

## **Conclusion**

May the Lord grant us the capacity for ever more intense prayer, to strengthen our personal relationship with God the Father, to expand our hearts towards the needs of those around us and to feel the beauty of being “brothers in the Son” (*Lumen gentium*, 62) in order to build fraternity and social friendship (*Fratelli tutti*, 6).

Il Signore ci conceda di essere capaci di una preghiera sempre più intensa, per rafforzare il nostro rapporto personale con Dio Padre, allargare il nostro cuore alle necessità di chi ci sta accanto e sentire la bellezza di essere «fratelli nel Figlio» (*Lumen gentium*, 62) per costruire fraternità e amicizia sociale (*Fratelli tutti*, 6).

Rome, October 7, 2024

Liturgical memorial

Blessed Virgin Mary of the Rosary

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<sup>3</sup> *SVit XI*, 475.

<sup>4</sup> Bull of canonization of St. Vincent de Paul, June 16, 1737.