MONSIEUR VINCENT

Dialogues in English

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Saint Vincent played by Pierre FRESNAY,
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CHATILLON-les-DOMBES

In 1617, Monsieur Vincent was named pastor of Châtillon. He walks, with his bag over his shoulders, toward his parish. He asks the way while walking.

Whoa … Châtillon is over there. We don't go there.

He enters the town. Doors and windows are closed; the people fear the plague. Shutters open and stones are thrown at Monsieur Vincent; they resound in the empty streets. Finally, here he is at the door of the church. His heart is wounded when he sees its terrible condition. He sees an elderly woman who seems to be living there.

- Hey, my good woman … hey!
- What are you looking for?
- I'm your new pastor.
- What?
- I'm your new pastor.
- There's no pastor here anymore. There hasn't been a pastor in Châtillon for a long time, and there won't be any soon.
- What's happening? Everything is closed up around here.
- They are all cursed.
- Where does Mr. Beynier live?
- What? Where …?
– Mr. Beynier?
- They are all cursed!

Monsieur Vincent leaves. Sounds of music filter out of a house, and this leads him to believe that there is the place he is looking for.

AT MONSIEUR BEYNIER'S HOUSE

Monsieur Vincent knocks at the door, and the peep-hole opens:

- What is it?
- Am I at the house of Monsieur Beynier?
- What do you want?
- Go tell your master that Monsieur Depaul is here.
- Monsieur Depaul? I don't know any Depaul!

the master says to the servant who spoke with him. And Mr. Beynier continues:

- I told you that the order was not to open the door to anyone, idiot! No one! Is that clear? No one.

He turns toward Louise de Marillac, one of his guests:

- These idiots, my dear, can let the plague enter my house!

The servant goes back to Monsieur Vincent, still waiting outside the door:

- On your way; we don't know any Monsieur Depaul!
- I'm your pastor. I told you that Mr. Beynier is expecting me. I have a letter for him.
- Go away! No stories! I tell you that we are not opening up!
- I am Monsieur Depaul, go tell your master that I am Monsieur Vincent Depaul!

As the discussion becomes tense, Mr. Beynier comes to the door:

- Stop! (and to the servant) *Open the peep-hole … Oh, excuse me, Monsieur Depaul, I had forgotten your name; I was expecting you. Did you just arrive?*
- Yes, during the afternoon.
- And you came directly here? You didn't meet anybody in the village?

- *No. Why?*
- *All right...*(the door is opened) *Welcome, Monsieur Depaul.*

Monsieur Vincent enters; there are people there, eating, drinking, dancing;

Mr. Beynier asks:

- *So, did you have a good trip?*
- *Not bad.*
- *You know, the plague has struck.*
- *Who?*
- *Oh! a woman in the old part of town. She was walled up in her home, with all her possessions. When she dies, everything will be burned, and thank God, we will have a few days to enjoy some music with good friends.*

Mr. Beynier has Monsieur Vincent sit down at a table.

- *A little chicken? … Aren't you eating anything?*
- *How long has this woman been walled up?*
- *Three days. You have to patient, Monsieur: it takes eight to ten days for some to die … you should try some backgammon; nothing better to pass the time!*
- *Something has to be done!* Monsieur Vincent continues.

His host responds:

- *You have* to *eat, drink, dance, be merry! That's the only known cure!*
- *Where does this woman live?*
- *What woman?*
- *The plague victim.*
- *Why Monsieur?*
- *Excuse me, I want to go see her.*
- *You don't know what you are saying, Monsieur! There is no way that you should be uselessly exposed to the contagion. Besides, your quarters are ready here. You should be tired; and the best thing is for you to take a rest.*
- *In fact, Monsieur, I am not going to stay here. I am pastor of Châtillon, and I will live in the priest's house.* (Laughter)
- *Monsieur Depaul, you have some funny ideas about that house of yours; the pastors of Châtillon gave it up ten years ago!*
- *Nevertheless, I will stay there! Please bring me my things, Monsieur, and show me that woman's house.*
- *Ah! Monsieur, no more jokes! We would be delighted to keep you here with us, but if you leave this house, this evening, I am telling you that I will not be able to admit you again.*
- *Excuse me, Monsieur, but I understand.* (To the servant) *Bring me my bag. Hey, you, tell me where this sick woman lives.* (Silence) *I'm your pastor; I'm asking you; answer me!*
- *The little house, with the fire in front.*
- *Thank you.* (To M. Beynier): *Until tomorrow!* (To the servant) *Open, open up!* (And to Mr. Beynier) *Excuse me, Monsieur, but I have to go see this woman. And I thank you for your gracious welcome.*

After Monsieur Vincent leaves, Mr. Beynier says to his guests:

- *Friends, I'm very sorry, but I never imagined … he had been recommended to me by one of my friends in Lyons.*

One of the women picks up a paper that had fallen to the floor:

- *Our little pastor lost something.*

She gives it to Mr. Beynier, who says:

- *Would you like to hear this, my friends? It's very, very funny* (reading in a loud voice): « Resolution toward the poor, my masters, » look what he …

A woman says:

- *On Sunday, I'll go to mass.*

Mr. Beynier continues

- *Sunday? He will either be gone or dead!*

To the sound of barking dogs, Monsieur Vincent goes to the plague victim's house. He finds her dead; near he, there is a young girl whom he bring along with him:

- *Don't be afraid, little one.*

AT THE CARPENTER'S

Monsieur Vincent calls at the door:

- *Hey, carpenter! You have a coffin to make! … Do you understand, carpenter: you have a coffin to make. You have to do it! … Open up… open up! … I'm your pastor. Open up, if you aren't a coward and a …* (To the girl) *Don't be afraid!*

At this moment, some shouting, shouting as at a duel, escape from a neighboring house. It is the house of Mr. de Rougemont, lord of Châtillon.

AT MONSIEUR DE ROUGEMONT'S HOUSE

Monsieur Vincent knocked at the door, and Mr. de Rougemont, who is fighting a duel shouts:

- *Come in! Who are you?*
- *I'm the pastor of Châtillon.*
- *Touché... There's no pastor in Châtillon anymore!*
- *But there is, for the last hour.*
- *What do you want, Monsieur?*
- *You are the lord of this village, Monsieur. I have come to present my respects and to ask you to order the burial of the mother of this little girl who has just died.*
- *Father, I accept your respects and offer you my welcome to Châtillon. But I am fighting tomorrow, and I have other things to do.... En garde...*
- *The carpenter refuses to make the coffin, and this woman cannot remain without burial. You are the lord of this village. Your duty …*
- *Duty? What duty?* (And pointing to the girl) *What is that?*
- *The daughter of that woman who died from the plague. They left her walled up with her mother.*
- *Are you crazy? The plague! Get out of here, now, or I will … you're going to kill us!*

AT THE PRIEST'S HOUSE

With the girl, Monsieur Vincent goes to the priest's house. It is currently occupied by an old soldier, who has lost a leg in combat. He grunts at Monsieur Vincent:

- *What do you want?*
- *To have some lodging, of course.*
- *This is my place; get out!*
- *Mine, too, this is my place.*
- *I told you that this is my place.*
- *And I told you that this is my place. Is there no priest's house?*
- *I am the pastor of Châtillon.*
- *There's no more pastor in Châtillon! No pastor anywhere else, either!... And there's no God, either! Get out of my place!*
- *As to God, you will see him some day. As to the pastor, you'll see him right away. At least there is one in Châtillon, and that's me!*
- *Pastor or not, I just want you to get the hell out!*
- *No. No one wants …*

Monsieur Vincent approaches the fire … where a pot is warming. He asks:

- *Is your soup ready?*
- *Get out of here.*

Monsieur Vincent has the girl sit down at the table and serves her some soup. While the child throws herself hungrily at the loaf, he says:

- *If we leave her with just the bread, she'll choke.* (To the girl) *Wait*! … (To the old soldier): *What do you eat your soup with?*
- *Do you want me to bloody you? Get out of here!*
- *Would you kill me just to protect your soup?*
- *Yes, and you wouldn't be the first!*
- *The little girl is hungry; she hasn't eaten for three days. Put your knife way and get me a spoon.*
- *God damn!*
- *And don't insult the name of the Lord in my presence; he created you with love, just as he created this little one.* (The old soldier tosses her a spoon.)
- *Thank you.* (To the girl) *Slowly, slowly. You'll have more …* (To the old soldier): *I'll make you laugh, but you are the first Christian I have met in Châtillon.*
- *Ah!*
- *Where did you lose your leg? In war?*
- *I spent ten years with Bassompierre.*
- *So, then, you are a brave men and we will get along very well. … Do you believe in the plague? This little girl is the daughter of the plague victim. I am going to make a coffin to bury her mother, but tomorrow, I may have need of you.*
- *Not for that, you won't!*
- *Why? Death is always death; and you have risked it a thousand times.*
- *Not like that… right, not like that.*

- What's your name?
- Lapogne
- If some day I run across Marshal de Bassompierre, I will tell him: your famous Lapogne, who was fearless toward the Spaniards … was afraid of disease, just like an old woman.

Monsieur Vincent begins to make the coffin. Soon, the old soldier takes the hammer from his hands and says:

- Let me do it. I know how better than you do.

AT THE CEMETERY

The bell tolls. Monsieur Vincent, helped by Lapogne, carries the coffin and says the prayers. After the last one, and while Lapogne is shoveling dirt over the coffin, Monsieur Vincent speaks to the curious townsfolk, who are arriving in greater numbers:

- So, you see, I'm still alive! This woman didn't have the plague, and you committed in a crime in letting her die…. If I hadn't broken down the door last evening, this little girl would be dead too … maybe eaten by the dogs … While I was praying for the deceased just now, I also asked God to pardon you too. From where she is now, I have every reason to think that she is praying for you … What are you going to do for this child that God has left you? She needs another home, another mother. Who will adopt her? I am not talking to those who have much. I am talking to the poorest among you, the woman who has just enough for her own family…. She should be the only one to come forward and that this added child. The Lord will smile on her, he who was the poorest and even the most abandoned.

A woman comes forward:

- There are already five at home....
- That's fine. I give her to you. (To the girl) *Go, now!* (To the crowd) *Tomorrow is Sunday. The church will be cleaned up. I will say mass at 8 a.m.*

AT THE CASTLE

Wounded in the thigh during the duel, Mr. de Rougemont is brought it on a litter; he yells at his people:

- Faster, you idiots! Are you going to take a week? Move it, move it.

There is a crowd in the street; the people are leaving the mass.

Mr. de Rougement is finally in bed at home. But he is impatient:

- Really, where is the surgeon? What is he doing?

His daughter answers:

- Father, don't worry; maybe he was called to another village.
- My grandfather had a surgeon in his home when he was ill; they took care of him … but now … In my time, people thought it was honorable to serve their lord well … But now, what is he up to?

Louise de Marillac intervenes:

- Uncle, be calm; he's coming.
- My poor friend, you will always remember your time in Châtillon: a wounded man to nurse and … the plague all over.
- This was not the plague, since our own pastor buried that woman, and he said mass this morning.
- It's all his fault that I was wounded! I know what I am talking about. Since he has been here, everything has gone wrong. Normally, I'm the one who … (To the servants who went looking for the surgeon): *Now, what, you stupid asses? You've taken your own sweet time to bring the surgeon. You are letting me die!*
- Monsieur le Comte, I have been looking …
- You're letting me bleed …
- I went all over the village, Monsieur le Comte ...
- Silence!
- Monsieur le comte, ...
- Silence, I tell you!

Someone else comes in. Thinking it to be the surgeon, M. de Rougemont yells:

- So, is the way you are letting me bleed to death?

But he turns and sees Monsieur Vincent.

- No!?... Why are you here!?
- I came because we can't find the surgeon.
- Get out of here immediately!... My sword … bring me …
- Well! You'll have little use of your sword for quite some time, I fear…

- If you think that this is going to be cured with Latin, you have another thought coming.

Monsieur Vincent speaks to Louise de Marillac:

- Mademoiselle do me … bring me a basin of water and a … I will probably need a scalpel, or lacking that, a very sharp dagger.

Mr. de Rougemont:

- Haven't I bled enough?... Ah! you are one strange pastor! Grave digger, surgeon … Where did you learn how to do all this?

While bleeding his "patient," Monsieur Vincent talks with him:

- I was taken off by the Barbary pirates, and I was a slave for two years in Tunis, kept by a physician. I was wounded during the fight on the ship. He then cared for me and taught me how to care for others.

- During the battle, you were fighting? With what? Your rosary? Did the good Lord say that we could kill someone born in his likeness?

- He never said that we had to let ourselves be trapped like a rabbit!

- Ah! Ah! you please me… If all the pastors were like you, I would go to mass.

- This Sunday is probably too soon, but in two weeks, I count on seeing you there.

- Bring me something to drink! Mr. de Rougemont ordered his servants.

- Ah! yes, said Monsieur Vincent, *I would like to drink a glass of wine; I haven't had any since yesterday. But you, no drinks for you.*

- I can't drink? … Nobody ever talks to me that way!...It was better in the old days; the lords still had their rights. Nowadays, our peasants are just do-nothings; the only thing they think about … Me, too, I'm poor! and he reaches out for the glass of wine. But Monsieur Vincent says:

- No!

Monsieur Vincent wets his lips in the wine.

- Just a drop, a little drop! the lord implores.

- No!

Monsieur Vincent keeps on drinking and says:

- You are less poor than they are; so, you owe everything to them.

- If we listened to you, that would be wonderful!

- Yes, it would be wonderful! … That little daughter of the dead woman, the one you chased away yesterday, do you know she was adopted and that someone is sharing bread with her?

- No.

- The poorest woman in the area, the one with five mouths to feed … Now, the rich folks of Châtillon are safe and snug at home, and it looks to them like the world is just as orderly as their houses are. And she, in her shack, has taken on this additional weight. She will stay awake later at night doing her spinning; and she will get up a little earlier in the morning … She is the rich one.

- Clearly, when we listen to you … But what do you want, the world is the way it is.

- It is the way we make it, Monsieur!

AT THE HOUSE OF POOR WOMAN WHO ADOPTED THE ORPHAN

Louise de Marillac has come to help her. The poor woman is completely overwhelmed, and says:

- A great lady in our house! … Unbelievable! And here I am, standing here, looking at you!

- You have already done enough since this morning with the others. Here, let me!

Louise takes care of the orphan. Other children come in:

- Mama!

- Yes, yes! The mother answers; she turns to Louise: *And then, you can go out with your lovely dress! We haven't even swept up here! Wait … But what has been happening here in Châtillon since yesterday?*

- Well, is this your little family?

PART TWO

AT THE HOME OF THE GONDIS

Without their knowing it, Monsieur Vincent has left the Gondi household to take over the pastorate in Châtillon. But Madame de Gondi cannot abide the absence of her confessor. The following dialogue takes place against a background of music. An important visitor is there; he asks a servant:

- Well?

- Monsieur le Comte, countess begs Monsieur le Comte...

- The countess is not receiving guests.

- All right.

To another visitor:

- I am very worry. Madame de Gondi is in pain and can't receive your respects.
- It's not grave, I hope?
- No, no, she is facing a very large problem.

In another room of the house, Madame de Gondi receives a priest from the archdiocese of Paris, and she is telling him:

- I don't want to overwhelm you with the greatness of our House, but, really, the Gondis should have enough clout with the administration of the kingdom to find one of their men who has fled!
- I think that the search has already begun; if not, you should file a complaint …
- A complaint! A complaint against Monsieur Depaul! A complaint against my confessor? … against the tutor of my children! … He is a priest, Father, a priest! And he can't be found! But we are the archbishops of Paris, from uncle to nephew, for half a century! Really, a priest! Monsieur Depaul is saying mass somewhere right now!
- On your orders, the archbishop has sent emissaries to all the dioceses of France...He didn't leave any notice of his departure?
- Yes, a word of excuse, a very firm word… to tell me that he thought it his duty … Then we also found in his room a draft, a little list of resolutions that contained some admirable things… Yes, where has he gone to devote himself? In what hole? With what savages?

AT CHATILLON

Madame de Gondi finally discovered the "hole" where Monsieur Vincent was putting his resolutions into practice. She therefore went by carriage to Châtillon. She arrived there while Monsieur Vincent was distributing soup to the unfortunate. She interrupted him in his service:

- Can I please have just a moment?
- Madame, heaven has willed this meeting to let me offer my excuses for my errors toward you.
- This is not a meeting. Heaven did not will it. It's me! I finally learned where you were, and I came to find you. Why did you leave me?
- I was named pastor of this village, Madame, I belong to these souls.
- And what about my soul?... You know, Father, how much I need your guidance.
- God will provide.
- And what about the soul of my children, whom you are responsible for?
- Paris has no lack of eminent clergy, Madame. You will find another confessor less unworthy than I am. Excuse me … these poor people, who have nothing, are waiting for the soup that I distribute to them every day; they are hungry, … hungry.
- Monsieur Depaul!... Father!... Like them, I am hungry too; like them, I wait too. The shepherd in the Gospel left all the others to save one single soul!
- It is not enough to save just one soul and, Madame, these people are more unfortunate than you.
- The fact that one woman is disturbed and fears for her salvation – is that too little for you? I have twelve thousand souls on my lands; I give them to you!

Louise de Marillac, who was helping Monsieur Vincent to distribute the soup, and who realized what was going to happen, said to one of the women:

- You have time in the morning; please come and help distribute the soup.
- Why? Is Monsieur Depaul going to leave us?
- I think so!

WITH THE GONDIS

This is the ceremony marking the signature of the foundation contract of the Congregation of the Mission. Besides, Mr. and Mme de Gondi, there is Monsieur Vincent, and some notaries. One of them is reading a passage of the official document:

- Messire Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi, count of Joigny, marquis of the Isles d'Or, general of the galleys of France, and the high and powerful Lady Françoise Marguerite de Silly, baroness of Montmirail, together the aforementioned lord, her husband, agreed to hand over to Monsieur Depaul, a priest of the diocese of Dax, the sum of 45,000 livres, which, following the wishes of the aforementioned lord and lady, will be invested in real estate or in established income, whose profits and revenues will serve to support, clothe and feed six clergymen, who will go from village to village at the expense of their common purse, to preach and instruct the poor country people.

Monsieur Vincent counts and money, and realizing he is being watched, says:

- I know, … I'm counting; this money is now the money of the poor; I owe this to them.
- They are covering him with gold and still he counts, murmured one of the attorneys; *what a strange little guy!*

Madame de Gondi speaks to Monsieur Vincent:

- Well, dear father, are you satisfied?
- Forgive me, Madame, I will be happy later when I have accomplished something.
- You can do everything now.
- Providence can do everything; me, I can try to some little thing, if it pleases God.
- You are dining with us, Monsieur. The duchess of Chevreuse will do us the honor of coming.
- I'm not very used to this world.
- You have to, Monsieur: you have asked the world to help you, and now you cannot ignore it any longer. See you shortly!

MEETING MR. PORTAIL

The same day, Monsieur Vincent gets ready to go to the dinner at which the duchess of Chevreuse will be present. In the corridor of the Gondi mansion, he sees a young priest who scarcely dares to raise his eyes to him. Monsieur Vincent asks him:

- Are you waiting for someone?
- Yes, Monsieur, I'm waiting for Monsieur Depaul. I'm the second assistant at Montmirail.
- Tell me, you don't talk with an accent from Montmirail! Where do you come from?
- From the Landes.
- What part of the Landes?
- Near Dax.
- Ah!... I knew a boy from the outskirts of Dax, ... a little boy who, like you, had no wish to push himself in the world … What did you used to do?
- My folks are very poor…. I kept their sheep.
- And you aren't ashamed of that, are you?... The little boy that I was telling you about kept pigs! Listen, go back to Montmirail, don't go to pay your respects to Madame; I will tell her that you came by. There, go to visit your poor. Or your poor person, if you have only one. Go to see him yourself. Especially, do not let anyone get between you and him. Believe me, you need your poor man even more than he needs you!

A servant comes up:

- Monsieur Depaul!
- What is it?
- The duchess of Chevreuse has just arrived and Madame is asking you to come to the dining room.
- I'm on my way…. See you soon, young man; we will see one another again. I have to appear before the duchess of Chevreuse, who wants to see me. Go and see your poor, and let the two of us not waste our time!

WITH RICHELIEU, THE CARDINAL-MINISTER

Monsieur Vincent enters the office of the Cardinal. Seated as his work table, the cardinal has in his arms some little cats that he is petting. He speaks to Monsieur Vincent:

- Approach, Monsieur Depaul... I had you come here because I have heard a lot about you. From women, besides! Madame de Gondi started this fad: all the great ladies of the Court swear only by you. This is already a good thing, since during this time, they aren't trying to have me assassinated! But I thought that you could still be useful to me.
- I'm afraid that Your Eminence is mistaken about my talents; I am only a poor country priest.
- Not everyone can be that, Monsieur!... Stay and think what one does later. Do you wish to serve me, Monsieur?... These missions that you have organized seem to me to be a very intelligent thing. To guide me, we sometimes lose sight of charity. … (To his cats) Little brutes! *These little beasts, who help me relax from men, are the cruelest in the world; not a day goes by without their making me bleed…. What were we talking about?*
- About charity.
- Your friend!... I would love it perhaps if those who work against France gave me the time. I have no time to think about it, but I can help you, who are thinking about …. Could what you have done on a small scale be undertaken on a large scale? You are with the Gondis. Mr. de Gondi is general of the galleys. I have thought about creating a post for you: Royal chaplain of the galleys of France.
- No?!
- Monsieur Depaul, you have a strange way of learning good news; you're coming apart!
- I'm afraid, Your Eminence; I cannot accept.
- Afraid of what, Monsieur? You are a remarkable organizer; everything you do succeeds. Are you afraid of being below the task that I am proposing to you?
- No, Eminence, with the Lord's help, I am thinking deeply about all the tasks, with patience, with humility.
- So, what are you afraid of, Father? … Tell me!

- I'm afraid of you would like to call my success, Your Eminence. I am a poor son of peasants. I wanted to be a priest to help in the salvation those poorer than I am. And after the powerful of this world laid eyes on me, after they gave me the means to do great things, as they say, I see that what is essential escapes me.

- The essential?

- Yes, Eminence. Since I returned to Paris and started organizing, you want to tell me that I have done a lot. I have seen a lot of important people; I talked to them a lot to persuade them to give a little of their money and their time to help the poor. … But I have never called a poor man by his own name; I know only some faces; I don't know the name of a single poor person.
This is what makes me fearful: I'm never sure that I might not be deceiving myself.

- Monsieur, each one has his role to play here below, as it has been distributed to us. Do you think that I know the names? … that I have the leisure of being moved by the faces of men? I summon an unknown officer whom I do not see. He comes. He takes an order for a province. There, an army of unknown men, without faces, being their marks toward destiny. Or even, in a prison, early in the morning, they cut off an unknown head… It is only my king and France who have names and faces that I recognize…. I am asking for your feelings, Monsieur Depaul, or your preferences; I name you Chaplain of the Galleys, since His Majesty and France need you.

ON A GALLEY

Monsieur Vincent is seated on the rear deck of "La Réale," a new galley taking its measure in a race against another galley, "La Levantine." Trumpets announce the race. A brilliant sun burns the convicts, who are rowing at a relatively slow cadence.

Someone offers Monsieur Vincent a cane; he asks:

- What is this?

A officer answers him:

- The pommel of this cane is furnished with the essence of perfume, since the rowers smell bad.

A commander intones:

- Increase the cadence!... Use the whip, the whip!

An officer, near Monsieur Vincent, exclaims:

- This is exciting!

The captain explains:

- The chaplain general will certainly suffer in his Christian charity, but the whip is a necessity. A necessity which is not at all brutal. And this is a piece of cork that they stuff in their mouths to keep from crying out… Oh, often, what gives out is the heart.

Monsieur Vincent hears less and less. His eyes are fixed with horror on the unbearable spectacle of these bodies badly treated with superhuman effort. Suddenly, he sees one of the convicts giving way. Then, Monsieur Vincent hears nothing else; he leaps up, lurches along the passage and goes to take the place of the convict who can bear no more.

The officers want to give the order to stop the galley. The commandant counters:

- This is a matter between God and him; we have no right to interfere.

A NEW DECISION

This experience caused Monsieur Vincent to want to set aside all official functions: henceforth, he wanted only to serve the poor. Then, barely recovered from the suffering caused by his intervention on the galley, Monsieur Vincent, in the presence of the Gondis, dictates his will:

- Henceforth and forever, I my part in the family inheritance to my brothers and to my sister Marie. I resign my benefices of the priories of Saint-Léonard de Chaumes and of Ecouis... (he repeats) *I resign my benefices of the priories of Saint-Léonard-de-Chaumes and of Ecouis, as well as my responsibility as pastor Clichy with its benefices and privileges, desiring to keep in this world no trace of power or fortune, to better love and serve the poor, my brethren and my masters.*

PART THREE

IN SEARCH OF HOUSING

Wishing to live as a poor man, Monsieur Vincent begins to look for lodging. We see him on a disgusting street. He is shown an attic of a tumbledown house. He meets with the landlady, who tells him:

- It's a few sous per week; I take care of the cleaning, and you will see that you will be fine… Here, Father, there was already a priest who lived her… He's the one who left the crucifix.... It's not luxurious, but the bedding is clean, and the house is decent…

Monsieur Vincent says nothing; the woman continues:

- This doesn't suit you? … It is too expensive? … Perhaps you find that it is not good enough for you?

- No, it's … it's too good! … Thank you!

And Monsieur Vincent goes looking elsewhere. He knocks at the door of another house, as shabby looking as the first one:

- Yes? answers the woman at the door.

- Do you know if someone has room for a lodger here?

- Maybe my neighbor upstairs … (a child crying is heard)

- I have no more milk, and so he's bawling.

Monsieur Vincent went upstairs and makes an agreement with the landlady. She continues:

- Will it be all right if I leave you a little bread? … I have a lot… I rent out a little room. It's no palace, but you can sleep there… I had someone here, but he didn't pay. You have to pay in advance, 3 sous.

Saying nothing, Monsieur Vincent puts some coins on the table. The woman finishes:

- This is your place for a week… My daughter cleans up.

She leaves to go to her own room, where she says to her daughter:

- Did you hear? … He has money … Bring him some water!

The daughter doesn't move: she sees the perverse intentions of her mother, and then she shouts:

- Get going, or I'll smack you!

The girl goes to Vincent's attic room and says:

- Here's some water …

- Thanks.

The girl tries to look provocative, but she is disarmed by the dejected look that Monsieur Vincent gives her. She leaves.

THE MAN WITH TUBERCULOSIS AND MONSIEUR VINCENT

A little later, there is a knock as his door. Monsieur Vincent answers while going to the door:

- What is it?

He opens the door. A terribly thin young man with feverish eyes comes in. He asks:

- Doesn't Lambert still live here?

- No, it's me.

- Well...

- What do you want?

- He used to let me sleep nights on the floor when the weather was bad.

- Stay,… stay. Where do you sleep?

- He let me have a blanket.

- Take it!....

The young man lies down on the floor and wraps up in the blanket. A moment of silence. He starts to cough terribly. Monsieur Vincent says:

- You're coughing?

- I'll say! I've been spitting blood my whole life.

- You have no other shelter than here?

- No.

- How do you make a living?

- I'm not a beggar; I work; I paint fans. Since I cough so much, they don't want me anywhere where there are customers. That makes spots, and afterwards, it doesn't please the ladies.

Terrible noises in the house. The young man assures Monsieur Vincent:

- Don't panic! That's the guy on the first floor; he's just come back. Since he doesn't work, he beats his wife every night.

- What should be done?

- Sleep … try to sleep … The neighbors have understood this for a long time. The kids try to sleep in the corridor … The man and his wife make up; they both drink a lot … You'll see; it will quiet down… Finally … they are making less noise … then another child will come to share the benefits of this world with them ….

A period of silence, then they hear:

- oh! oh!... oh!.. – aow!...

The young man explains:

- That's the crazy woman on the third floor. She yells like that every fifteen minutes. That's what happens, you'll see …

More noises. Monsieur Vincent asks:

- And what's that?

- The weaver … he has ten kids and his parents with him. He gets paid one sou per hour, and so he works also at night … They wouldn't believe this in the churches, eh? It's just like wondering if God Himself believes it. The poor don't sleep at night; they work, they insult each other, they fight, and so on. You can't get soft; you have to act like the neighbors; don't give a damn. It's all right for the rich to become soft, but the poor have enough of this. Each one takes care of himself.

Monsieur Vincent can't sleep. He prays …

NEXT MORNING

Monsieur Vincent hurries over to the church where he knows that Monsieur Portail is hearing confessions; his confessional is surrounded by pious women. Monsieur Vincent knocks at the door of the confessional:

- Portail! Portail!

The priest comes out. His face lights up when he recognizes Monsieur Vincent:

- Monsieur Vincent!

- Come … come! I need you.

- Monsieur Vincent, my penitents!

- Leave them, Portail! Last night I learned something terrible: before thinking about saving the soul, you have to give to the poor a life in which they can realize that they have a soul. Let's go!

THE SERVICE OF THE POOR

The two priests devote themselves to the service of the poor. We see them in a ward of the Hôtel-Dieu, distributing free meals. While serving the meals, Monsieur Vincent notices a poor woman and says to her:

- What have you been doing since the last time? Have you been begging?

- It was with the kids, and then, since my boy got married, my daughter-in-law says: She eats too much. That's not true, I don't eat too much!

- I know. You told me that already. You don't have a lot of teeth, but you still do all right at table!

- Oh! with a good soup.

- You'll have your good soup today, and tomorrow too… but this is expensive. We need a lot every day. We are also poor. You come every day. I don't know what more I can do for you.

- Me neither… I don't know what I can do any more.

- That's good; you have shame … but we'll see you again.

To another:

- Oh! you; now this is another story!

- It's fate!

- Yes! You are helping out fate a little … And then, it's not just fate: there is also Providence. It feeds the little birds, of course, but they spent their days looking for food … (speaking of the physique of his "client") *You're solid; you could hold a shovel.*

- But I don't find anything.

- I'll find something. Come back tomorrow; I'll get you a job. Get a piece of bread from Monsieur Portail, but this is the last time that you'll swindle the good Lord. Tomorrow's bread will be up to you.

A woman with little children says:

- They're hungry … I'm not asking for myself.

- That's good; you can come every day.

Monsieur Portail interrupts:

- Monsieur Vincent, we don't have any more bread!

- Cut up some more!

- It's just that …

- Go buy some more.

- It's just that …

- Ah! OK. Enough.

A group of refugees arrives. The woman who brings them says:

- Monsieur Vincent, we're sending this to you!

- Who's sending me this?

- The hospital can't do anything more for them. The mother superior is insistent: they aren't sick; you have to be sick to stay in a hospital.

- And do you think that there isn't an illness, Sister?
- Which one?
- Misery!
- The mother superior told me: If Monsieur Vincent doesn't want then in his place, put them out on the street.
- Fine. Tell her that I will keep them.

Monsieur Portail asks:

- What are we going to give them?
- Some soup and bread.
- Oh! bread?
- At least soup … and a little prayer on a full stomach.

A man arrives:

- Father!
- What do you want?
- It's about the wood … we don't have any more … the fire will go out.
- But what are you doing with your wood? Do you eat it?
- I put in the logs only one by one, as you told me, to economize.
- Start with prayer: that's what we need the most of. I'll take care of the rest.

WITH CHANCELLOR SEGUIER

Monsieur Vincent comes to see him to resolve the problem with the wood. The chancellor receives Monsieur Vincent:

- Come in!
- Sorry for bothering you again.
- What do you need now, Monsieur Vincent?
- I have no more wood.
- That's crazy, Monsieur Vincent! But you and your poor are being cooked with it!
- I'm trying to economize, please excuse me.
- Your excuses have no basis. I had a large room given to you; then they extorted from me the favor of providing you with wood. I don't even want to know whom you admit to that room… Your weakness … your credulity … but if we listened to those people, Monsieur Vincent, they would be warming themselves the whole day long!

In the fireplace in the chancellor's office, there is a large fire with logs. Monsieur Vincent continues to beg:

- They are weak, Monsieur, old and sick.
- Monsieur Vincent, I am responsible to the Hospital board, an important administration. I have amounts allocated to me that I cannot exceed. I can't give myself up, like you do, to generosity and to fantasy. Me neither, Monsieur Vincent, I don't have any more wood either.

At this moment, the fire crackles and rises higher in the chimney; the chancellor tries to tamp it down.

- Monsieur Vincent, you are a charming man; if you are cold, come here and get warm. You know that I am always happy to chat with you.
- Thank you, Monsieur.

As he leaves, Monsieur Vincent mutters to himself:

- It's money, … money … I need money. You can't do anything in the world without money!

MADAME DE GONDI BRINGS SOME HELP

To get some money, Monsieur Vincent turns to his benefactor, Madame de Gondi. We see her in the hospital ward where Monsieur Vincent is working.

- Madame! You have come here yourself, and so quickly!
- Have I ever been accustomed to keep you waiting, Monsieur?
- That's true.
- Here's the money you asked me for.
- Thanks you … I now have enough bread, and for a long time. We had nothing to hand out this morning.

Monsieur Vincent calls Monsieur Portail:

- Quick, Monsieur, get some bread!
- And wood?
- Wood, too!

A conversation takes up between Mme de Gondi and Monsieur Vincent. She asks:

- Will you let me ever give you nothing but money, Monsieur Depaul?
- You are a great lady; what else do you want to give? … You have to bear the burden of your fortune and your great name, just as these people bear their misery…

Monsieur Vincent begins to wash the soiled bandages, as he was doing when Mme de Gondi arrived:

- Excuse me; I need this linen; the price of a servant is the price of a lot of bread that I can't deprive them of.

Madame de Gondi, to her servant:

- You can leave; I don't need you anymore.

And Madame de Gondi starts washing the dirty linens. Monsieur Vincent is at first amazed, and then he says:

- But, Madame, you can't do this every day!

- I could, too … and others like me could also do so.

In fact, some time after, the first women, who would be called the Ladies of Charity, assemble around Monsieur Vincent. We see them in the following scene:

A MEETING OF THE LADIES

Madame Goussault speaks to Monsieur Vincent:

- Since we are all assembled for the first time, we begin by thanking you, Monsieur Vincent.

- But I thank all of you, Ladies; without you I couldn't do any more. You came down among the poor like angels from heaven … angels who bring them furnishings, broth, warm clothes, and fine words ….

But the ladies interrupt Monsieur Vincent. One of them says:

- Me too, I thought they were going to load me with insults!

- Not at all, another answers; *they are very polite and they say Thank You very kindly when you give them something.*

- Not all! a third answers.

And another

- I insist that they say Thank You. It's like with my little dog. Do you want some sugar? Then give me your paw,

Monsieur Vincent interrupts.

- The poor are very sensitive, Madame. Sometime you have to work out ingenious solutions to give them without wounding them.

Madame Goussault tries to focus their attention on the issue of the meeting:

- We have several little questions of a practical nature. First of all, our number: we are only twelve, and they are many poor folks. Should we accept new ladies?

One lady:

- Do you want my opinion? They want to copy us! Really, no! We should just remain as we are!

Another:

- I think that we should admit certain persons.

A third:

- Madame Guéméné...

Another:

- Madame Guéméné...? with her airs, … and with all her money?

Monsieur Vincent:

- Perhaps the poor would find this agreeable, Madame!

- But, Monsieur, you can't think just about the poor! You have to think about us too!

Another:

- Madame de Guéméné is a very unpleasant person. Imagine, just yesterday, the wife of my clothier …

One lady:

- What does Monsieur Vincent think?

Monsieur Vincent:

- I think that ten thousand écus are really something else...

But these ladies start talking about what to wear. One dominating voice says:

- I just don't know how you …

Monsieur Vincent quietly leaves the room unnoticed.

MEETING MARGUERITE NASEAU:

At the foot of the staircase that he is descending, there is a young peasant woman, holding her wooden shoes. She addresses Monsieur Vincent timidly:

- I beg your pardon, Father? Is there someone here?

- Who are you looking for?
- Monsieur Depaul.
- What you do you want from him?
- Monsieur, I come from Suresnes. I work as a servant on a farm there. I came over here because I heard that in Paris there are some great ladies who were visiting the sick and the poor in the hospitals. Is that right?
- Yes! Well, yes and no.
- So, here I am, since … I am very daring, perhaps, but I wanted to speak to Monsieur Vincent.
- To tell him what?
- These great ladies, Monsieur,... they are accustomed to being served; it doesn't work out very well for them to serve those more unfortunate than they are. But I keep cows; I've grown used to pain. I can do heavy jobs that they can't... And so I thought that I could possibly help them. I'm not asking for wages, just food. I can do bloodlettings, washing, bandaging wounds, making the beds of the sick, emptying the pots, … everything that they don't like to do. And being a servant, I prefer to be a servant of God's poor that of my masters. So! … Is there maybe some pride in this?

While the peasant from Suresnes was speaking, Monsieur Vincent's face lit up. Then he answered:

- No, my child… You came on foot? Did you eat breakfast?
- No, I left before dawn. I had to ask a long time before finding my way here.
- Go to the kitchen. Tell them that Monsieur Vincent has sent you; they will feed you. I'll come to see you shortly.
- Do you think that they will accept me?
- I'm sure.

Alone, Monsieur Vincent whispers:

- Thank you, God, for sending me this simple girl. In her simplicity, she has understood what I couldn't by myself: it is with the poor that I will save the poor.

Several years later, Monsieur Vincent could tell Louise de Marillac and her first Daughters:

- She was called Marguerite Naseau, this poor cowherd from Suresnes. She was the first Daughter to serve the poor in the commune of Paris. And that charity that those world ladies talked so much about she put it into practice simply, laboriously, like a work of the poor.
Soon she wasn't alone: Barbe Angiboust and Madeleine came to join her ... Their life was hard and filled with jibes and sometimes with blows. And yes! Everybody was against us. They could not admit that religious women did not need to be locked up in their convent, but live in the street… For our Daughters, the cloister was the street; their cell was a rented room. Their solitude was extreme; and so I thought of bringing them together. We had to find a house where they could feel at home in the evening, once their hard day was over.
Heaven wish that, in his charity, the bishop would think about this. He gave us the great priory of the domain of Saint Lazare. But the buildings were falling apart; everything had to be redone: the hospital for the sick, the pharmacy, the reception room for the poor where they could be fed and warmed during the day. We also kept some poor who had lost their minds. I had to find someone who would agree to direct these young women.

MONSIEUR VINCENT "CALLS" LOUISE DE MARILLAC

It was to this young widow that Monsieur Vincent decided to entrust the formation of the first young woman who wanted to be servants of the poor. This was the decisive meeting. Monsieur Vincent said to Louise who, for some time already, had been his spiritual child:

- It is not enough to do, as you do, a bit of good around yourself; you should be burdened even more; you should be burdened a little bit more every day.
- What you're asking, Father, is very burdensome. I am doing the good that I can manage.

Through a window, Monsieur Vincent and Louise de Marillac see the refugees passing by. Louise says:

- This crowd is frightening. I'm afraid of the poor.
- Yes, they are terrifying … aren't they, all together, … terrifying like the just of God which they proclaim as frightful… But we move along, with our decent clothes, and our faces comfortably fed… But these rages of these, this horror, these illnesses, these miseries, these gaunt people who look like wolves, … this is its face! They aren't interesting. They frighten me. But they have to be served nonetheless as our masters, and we have to love them.
- I'm a fearful person, week, irresolution, ungrateful. I have none of the qualities needed to direct.
- You are my first soul, the first one to understand me…. Mademoiselle de Marillac, you will be courageous, resolute, capable… I need you.

A Sister arrives:

- Father, … Father… we can't anymore. There are only four of us in the large ward. They have brought in a dying man and no one wants to give up his place.

- I'm coming.

And to Louise de Marillac:

- Follow me; you'll see how much I need you.

IN THE HOSPITAL WARD

The sick are packed several in the same bed. They argue among themselves about getting a place. Monsieur Vincent's voice rises:

- What about me? Are you going to skip over me? Hey? So?

- We can't give him a bed, a Sister says; *there's no more room.*

- Who is better here? Monsieur Vincent asks, in front of a crowded bed. *Who can give up his place to someone who is sicker? You?*

In one bed, a sick man has just died. So Monsieur Vincent says:

- Here's a place. Have the body removed.

A sick person protests (he was lying on the floor):

- And me? What about me? I'm waiting on the floor here three days for him to croak, to take his place! It's my place. Before he passed away, he told he that this was my place. I want to die in a bed. I want to die in a bed!

- All right.

Monsieur Vincent says to a Sister:

- Put the man in the bed; I'll be back….

To Louise de Marillac:

- My daughter, I'm leaving you here for a minute; be sure that this change is orderly.

The sick man still cries out:

- I want to die in a bed. I want to die in a bed.

Another:

- What about me? You think? I've been waiting here longer than you.

The sick start fighting. A Sister intervenes:

- Stop! Stop! I'm going to call Monsieur Vincent... No fighting here!

And to Louise de Marillac, horrified:

- Oh! Madame, stop them!

Another Sisters*:*

- We can't do any more… We aren't enough. They insult us. They spit in our face. We have to …

Another:

- Lie down! Lie down everybody! I'm going to call Monsieur Vincent!

Another*:*

- There aren't enough beds.

A voice:

- We'll have to find others!

A patient:

- The poor aren't dogs, you know!

Several patients repeat:

- We aren't dogs!

The whole ward starts growling:

- We aren't dogs!!!

Monsieur Vincent returns. At the same time, an official comes in who says:

- Is this Monsieur Vincent?... I have an order here to expel you.

- I have 1200 patients in Saint-Lazare, Monsieur. I give out 1200 rations of soup each day. Where will these unfortunates go?

- That's none of my business. I'm here to notify you of your expulsion.

Louise de Marillac:

-Monsieur Vincent, they have revolted! They are fighting! I can't do it! I can't do it!

Monsieur Vincent:

- Go there, Monsieur Portail, I'll be right with you.

To Louise de Marillac:

- Well, my daughter; I'll do it myself… You're trembling.

Louise:

- What is...?

Monsieur Vincent:

- They find Saint-Lazare too small. … They are going to expel me from Saint-Lazare. Providence also wishes it, without a doubt…. I'm responsible for them; I have to find them a new shelter…. I'm accustomed to it…. Another shelter where they will be even less well …

Leaning through a window, Vincent and Louise can see another parade of miserable refugees. Monsieur Vincent says:

- These are the refugees from Lorraine fleeing from the imperial troops. It appears that everything they have has been burned. There are more than 2000 of them!... All this misery… all this misery. This too is for me!

But Louise de Marillac says:

- No; for us! … Please forgive me for being weak. I'm staying.

WITH CHANCELLOR SEGUIER

Years have passed. The works of Monsieur Vincent have gotten the attention of the public authorities. The chancellor has today summoned the one is taking care of so many miseries.

- Monsieur Vincent, what you have done is marvelous: aid to refugees from the devastated providences has been providential. But where do you get your loaves of bread, your old clothes? Here in the Finance Department, we would like to know how you open doors.

- People give them to us, Monsieur.

- You are really lucky! But to us, a minister, no one gives anything; taxes don't come in anymore; the people are begging for mercy; they have lost everything. But where did this happen? We haven't a sou, and the unfortunates are multiplying! Do you know that they are becoming a public danger in Paris? They beg all over, and when they don't give any more, then they threaten.

- But, sir, they are hungry.

- Hunger! Hunger! … from where I sit? There are other hungers to satisfy! France itself is hungry, for security, for order!... I had you summoned to tell you some good news. You should be happy, you who have consecrated your entire life to them. In two days, there will not be one poor person left in Paris, Monsieur Vincent.

- How is that, Monsieur?

- It's very simple, my dear man; I will arrest them!

- But, Monsieur, poverty is not a crime!

- I'm sorry, but it is the surest solution… I prevent crime. … I have the places, the hospitals of la Pitié, le Refuge, la Savonnerie, Bicêtre, la Salpétrière. The problem is that we have to feed them... But, in fact, they will handle it themselves. But, in the end, they will make do. The health of Paris above all else! Do you want to take charge of the General Hospital that I am founding?

- Monsieur, the poor are people. What are you doing to their liberty?

- Liberty from what, Monsieur Vincent? to demand something from everyone on the street? to die of hunger? … I feed them, I shelter them; what else do they want?

- Charity, Sir; this what helps them by giving them their humanity.

- Charity, charity! You're the one who invented charity! Previously, it was nothing more than a virtue. This was perfect, since it concerned the good folks in their parish. They got a little tear from their eye, a little coin from their pocket, and everyone was happy… But you have a larger perspective; you have moved heaven and earth, and you have done so well that you have stuck your charity to the arm of the government. … We already had departments like Finances, … Protestants … the navy … foreign affairs … war… But, sincerely, do you think, too, Monsieur, to get your Charity into the bargain? Before you came along, Monsieur, there were poor folks, but that didn't keep honest people from sleeping. Now, they're everywhere. My word, we think that you invented them!

MEETING OF THE LADIES OF CHARITY

The group met with Madame la Présidente Goussault. Behind her is standing Louise de Marillac, a religious veil over her head. Some Daughters of Charity are also there. Madame Goussault asks:

- Do we have the right to make this reproach to him? Do we have the right to meet against him?

A lady:

- We are not meeting against him, Madame! We have the right to tell him our advice.

Madame Goussault:

- Perhaps if each one of us would give of her time, her effort, her money!

- We give what we can, Madame. All the gold in Peru would not be enough! Yesterday, it was the old folks; that's sad, old folks without work. So, he creates the "Petits Ménages" for them... Then there are the penitent prostitutes, the galley convicts, the prisoners … and just now there is this story about the refugees who are coming in.

Louise de Marillac:

- Following the advance of the imperial troops, the decamped for Paris; everything of theirs was burned.

- The Picards … there are some good women in Picardy!

Louise de Marillac:

- Madame la Présidente...

Mme Goussault:

- What?

- Louise de Marillac:

- He told me once that he suffered for the salvation of all those uncivilized people in our colonies, and that he wanted to send them some missions.

A lady:

- Among the blacks! … You'll see that this must be stopped; if not, where will it lead?

AT THE DOOR OF A CHURCH

It is night. Two men are there, looking at the abandoned infants, and they share their impressions:

- You can see that there are soldiers in Paris, and that they are taking their sweet time!

- Ah! this one is dead.

- That will be one less unfortunate! With this cold, it's not surprising.

- See you tomorrow, Joseph!

- Tomorrow.

After the two men leave, a woman approaches stealthily and puts down a little baby at the door of the church. At this moment, Monsieur Vincent arrives and he asks:

- What have you left there?

- I'm afraid!

Monsieur Vincent leans down to see what the woman has left. He stands up and speaks to the while, while holding the little one in his arms:

- This is a child of God! He's your son. One day he will be a man … This little one is beautiful. You have to have courage.

- I can't. I just can't. I would prefer …

She runs off and Monsieur Vincent tries to call her back:

- Come back! I order you to come back!

She doesn't come back, and Monsieur Vincent stays there, with the baby in his arms. Then a poor cripple comes up. He speaks to Monsieur Vincent:

- How many do you have? Is this one still living? Usually it's in the summer that they live the longest … The other one is dead… It took only two hours since the woman brought it her, after nightfall. He cried a little and now he's quiet.

- And you didn't move?

- I'm a cripple! I walk on my hands. So, to carry children? And then where would I bring them? The people get out of here. They walk by. It's cold; their supper is waiting.

- Do they leave a lot of them in this basket?

- Three or four every day. And most of them croak. The others, I don't know. … They sell some of them to beggars like me, and they maim them. Crooked legs, a hunchback, a little puppet … you know, that really brings in the money!

- And do the women realize this when they come?

- Of course, the ones who bring them are whores, the ones who want them to live! But as for the others … This is just a little white packet in the water! … C'est la vie! That's the life as God made it; everything that shouldn't live, dies.

ANOTHER MEETING OF THE LADIES OF CHARITY

Madame Goussault is speaking:

- Monsieur Vincent, we have presented you with our objects, with our profound desire for charity, but also with our good sense. Women, Monsieur Vincent, know what is possible and what is not. With many weaknesses and miseries, God has given each of them a little kingdom to govern, and has given them also this humble knowledge. Men would make fewer mistakes if they only listened to them more often.

- Madame la Présidente!
- My words exceeded my thoughts. Excuse me, Monsieur Vincent.
- No, I accept it.... Madame Goussault, I am happy to sometimes lack a little good sense. Through our good sense, in fact, we commit as many sins as through folly!
- We are now awaiting your answer, Monsieur Vincent.

Monsieur Vincent opens his mantle and lays the baby on the table.

Mme Goussault:

- What is that, Monsieur?
- That is my answer!

Deep silence. Then Monsieur Vincent speaks:

- You find that I undertake too many things? I think that I don't do enough. I saved this infant this evening, but three or four innocents like him die every evening at the door of each church.
- Maybe God wants them to die, Monsieur Vincent. They are the offspring of sin!
- When God wants someone to die to redeem sin, he sends is Son, Madame! God does not want a single innocent to die in the name of sin. It is cowardice, lack of concern, indifference, the hidden vice of men that accepts it…
- Monsieur Vincent!...
- I hate sin, I hate vice, and no matter now great your love of charity, this will never let me love it! said Mme. Goussault, who continues: *I hate this child of sin and vice!*
- God hears you, Madame la Présidente!
- God cannot love it either!
- I cannot allow you to doubt it. I know that God is asking me to save this innocent child after all other miseries. I go out tomorrow; I go out every evening. I will bring you others on this table. You …
- Monsieur Vincent, we are already overloaded; we told you that this evening. I don't know if you didn't hear us, we who are rich and lazy. But these Daughters who have only the work of their hands to give, and who give it from morning to night, will tell you the same thing. They can't do any more.
- Because God is asking them, they can do more!
- But we are speaking to you in the language of reason, Monsieur Vincent!
- But I'm the one who have spoken to you first with this language. I have always told you that we cannot tread on the heels of Providence. But this evening, I can't tell you anything else; I fear being terribly behind Providence.
- Monsieur Vincent, to gather up these children, there is an institution, la Couche...
- Madame,...
- It pays nurses to raise them.
- I have no idea what is being done for the lost children. I only know that if I had not followed this woman this evening, this child would be laid in trough this evening; it would be dead now!
- You can do what you want, Monsieur, but I am certain when I say that none of the good women present here would wish to soil their hands in caring for these miserable things and then to go home and touch her own children in the evening!

Another lady:

- Don't ask any more, Monsieur Vincent! Don't ask so much! What you want to do is running in to too much rejection.
- You, too! … Is there no one else? Mademoiselle de Marillac?

Louise de Marillac:

- I'm ashamed … I'm ashamed… but it frightens me, too
- Madeleine? (a Daughter of Charity)
- Sin is filthy, Monsieur Vincent! It's very filthy!
- You too!... I have never encountered this before! I have been a fool to think that I could move your souls … to get you out of your filthy solitude! Oh! I beg you, dare to look me in the eye! Give me an alms of a glance, so that I won't be so alone!...

Their heads remain lowered, their glances turned away. Monsieur Vincent leaves and says:

- I have never encountered this before! Never before!

THE VISIT OF CARDINAL GRAZIANI

We are in 1660. Monsieur Vincent's works are the admiration of France and other countries. The envoy of Pope Alexander VII, on his way through Paris, comes to visit the headquarters of charity of Monsieur Vincent, Saint-Lazare. Portail, now an old man himself, who guides the prelate through the large house:

- Monsieur Vincent will certainly be sorry for not being able to receive Your Eminence. His responsibility on the Council of Conscience, which Her Majesty did him the honor of asking him to attend today, is the only thing that could have kept him away.

- *His Holiness the Pope has a great admiration for the work of your superior, Monsieur. He told me: "Graziani, before leaving France, you should go to see Saint-Lazare, and tell us what it's like, since I can never go there!"*

Monsieur Portail gives his explanations:

- *These are our elderly people from the work of the "Petits-Ménages". Uh, … helping those who no longer have the strength to earn a living.* (A little further) *Monsieur Nacquart died in Madagascar, we gave his name to the room of our foreign missions.*
- *Who was Marguerite Naseau? I never heard this name.*
- *The first Daughter of Charity. She died will helping plague victims.*
- *And Louise de Marillac was the first superioress of the Daughters of Charity, if I'm not mistaken?*
- *Yes, Your Excellency, yes. We don't have enough room; we have had to admit here some of our little foundlings.*
- *I think that you have had a lot of aversions to overcome, and that you have had a hard time?*
- *Oh, yes, Your Excellency, many! But, with time, the will of Monsieur Vincent... you see, we have been able to do everything, everything!*
- *Some similar works exist now with us in Italy and in the majority of the countries of Europe, and even of the world. What will future centuries say when they learn that a man, one single man, has wished all this against so many others what now seems to us so natural and just?*
- *Oh! Bishop! Monsieur Vincent will not be late.*
- *I'll wait, Monsieur, I'll wait.*

Pointing out a priest who walks by, Portail explains:

- *This is Father Philippe Emmanuel de Gondi... After the death of this wife, the countess, he entered the priesthood. Our little Congregation is extremely indebted to him.*

MONSIEUR VINCENT AND THE QUEEN OF FRANCE

After he recovered from some illness, the queen, Anne of Austria, kept Monsieur Vincent, following a meeting of the Council of Conscience. The two of them are seated before a large fire in a fireplace. The queen asks:

- *Well, Monsieur Vincent, are you better?*
- *Your Majesty is too kind. I beg you to pardon this illness.*
- *Oh!... Rest a few minutes with me.* (To the valet) *Leave us now … You are doing too much, Monsieur Vincent! We're both old now.*
- *We are old when we want to be, Madame!... when we have the time.*
- *You should take it ... It's also good to have completed something!*
- *I've done so little!*

After some silence, the queen resumes the conversation:

- *I sometimes wonder, Monsieur Vincent, if you do not give in to a certain charm, in speaking of yourself.*
- *I'm full of terrible defects, Madame,... monstrous defects, that I ask God's pardon for every day. … But charm? But, I'll think about it since Your Majesty mentioned it to me.*
- *You know that you have done a lot, and there are only a few who will be able, on judgment day, to present an account of their days as full as yours.*
- *I've slept. I've slept terrible, Madame! ... I had to become very old to learn that cannot sleep only four hours a night. I have often been lax. Also, I've given in. I've closed my eyes so as not to look at misery.*
- *And we, Monsieur Vincent?... We who have thought only of our pleasure, of our appetite for enjoyment? and who without you would have always kept our eyes closed? … I have wanted everything, Monsieur Vincent, and I had everything: gold and power, and finally love. Everything that a little Infanta could dream of in the Escorial: the most beautiful kingdom in the world, the greatest love, for whom she would have risked even her kingdom; she had the most beautiful diamonds… But between this little greedy girl, and this old queen full of glory and jewels, who's dreaming here in front of you, it seems to me now that there has been only a great empty dream: I have done nothing! Answer me, you who have thought only of giving, you who have renounced happiness and power for ever, you who have built something else than vain palaces, vain glory: do you also sense, at the threshold of death, the great emptiness before you?*
- *Yes, Madame, I have done nothing.*
- *So, what should be done in life, Monsieur, to accomplish something?*
- *More, Madame!... We are terribly negligent! They are waiting for me at Saint-Lazare; the poor are waiting for me. Will Your Majesty allow me to go to them?*
- *Go, Monsieur Vincent, and tell them that the queen of France asks their humble pardon for having stolen a moment with you.*

Monsieur Vincent has difficulty standing; he bows before the queen and leaves, his back bent. He crosses the huge hallways of the palace, filled with courtiers who, when he passes by, bow respectfully.

MONSIEUR VINCENT'S LAST POOR MAN

In his carriage, which brings him to Saint-Lazare, Monsieur Vincent feels ill again. He gets out of the coach in time to see a poor man lying in the street. He orders the coachman:

- Stop! Stop!

With great difficulty, Monsieur Vincent gets down from the carriage and goes to bend down over the unfortunate man. The coachman asks:

- Is he sick, Monsieur?

- He's hunger. It's always hunger.

He tries to lift up the poor man to bring him to the carriage, and says to the driver:

- Come, help me!

- But Monsieur, I don't have anyone … You can't do it!

- Yes, I can … We can always do something! but he falls.

- You see, Monsieur, I told you.

As well as they can, the two men succeed in lifting up the poor man into the carriage. Monsieur Vincent is completely exhausted.

AT SAINT-LAZARE

When he sees the state in which Monsieur Vincent arrives, and with a new poor person to care for, Monsieur Portail growls affectionately:

- You're really too imprudent!

- It's nothing!

- Too imprudent!

- Don't worry Portail, and get this poor man to bed.

- You, too, Monsieur, you should go to bed!

- Me?... I haven't done enough yet...

He staggers

- Monsieur! Monsieur!

- I'm not very well. I won't see anyone.

- Cardinal Graziani, the envoy of His Holiness is here, Monsieur, and he is waiting for you.

- This a huge honor that His Holiness deigns to do me. Throw yourself at the feet of His Eminence and ask his pardon for me! But I believe that … that I have, this evening, wait for an even more important visit. … Tell him that I can't… Go … leave me alone.

- Monsieur, may I at least call for a doctor?

- No, no. Nobody! … But, yes, yes! … I will still see someone… Jeanne … you know … the new little Sister who is going to the poor for the first time. Send her to me!

- But, Monsieur, this is of no importance; anybody can talk to her …

- Eh!... At my age, I know what is important and what is really not. Send her to me and thank the others.

Alone for a moment, Monsieur Vincent contemplates the crucifix and, with his eyes fixed on it, murmurs:

- O my God … when will I go to meet you? … Couldn't you finally call me to rest? … But do you think that I have the right to rest? I have done so little! … But I'm tired for sure.

Someone knocks:

- Come in! … Who's there?

Little Sister Jeanne comes in and says:

- It's Jeanne!

MONSIEUR VINCENT'S TESTAMENT

- Come over here, Jeanne... I have wanted to see you … I know that you are courageous and good … You are going to the poor, tomorrow, for the first time?

- Yes, Monsieur.

- I haven't always been able to speak to the Daughters who were going out to the poor for the first time … we can't always do what we should! … But, to you, the youngest, … the most recent … I have to speak. This is important… Remember, always remember!

- Yes, Monsieur.

- You will soon see that charity is a heavy burden to carry … heavier even than the pot of soup and the full basket … But you should keep your sweetness and your smile… Giving out soup and bread isn't everything: the rich can do that… You are the little servant of the poor… The Daughter of Charity,

always smiling, and in good humor… They are our masters, … masters terribly sensitive and demanding—you'll find that out! … So, the uglier and dirtier they are, they more they are unjust and rough, the more you should give them your love… It is only through your love, … through your love alone, … that the poor will pardon you the bread that you give them!

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