Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“The least among you is the greatest” (Luke 9:47).

Zec 8:1-8; Luke 9:46-50).

St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660), who is commemorated today, has a fascinating biography that includes being enslaved, then serving as chaplain to slaves, then an advisor to royalty, the founder of an order of priests, a collaborator with Louise de Marillac, foundress of the Daughters of Charity in their ministry to the poor, and as a strong advocate for the education of the clergy. His awareness of the humiliation the poor experience is conveyed in a quote: “We must ask the poor to forgive us for the bread we give them.”

Vincent’s evolving vocation to respond to the needs of his time and place has echoes in another French Christian, Peter Maurin, cofounder the Catholic Worker Movement in the 20th Century, whose deep analysis of the systemic ills of Capitalism led to a vision of how the church could help create a new society out of the shell of the old by applying the Corporal Works of Mercy.

The Prophet Zechariah is one of the post-exilic visionaries who celebrated God’s messianic promise to restore Israel after its long purification. His description of the society in which boys and girls play in the streets and the elderly hold places of honor is a vivid and heartwarming description of the peace and justice that the messiah would bring. He is one of the minor prophets who emphasized the

messianic commitment to the poor reflected in Jesus' selective profile of God's messenger so different from the military or royal expectations many held.

Jesus' own disciples had to be disabused of such grand notions of messianic glory. In today's Gospel, Jesus embraces a child to teach them the meaning of greatness and says that anyone who receives a child in his name will be receiving both him and the One who sent him. This is a sharp reminder of the humility he expects of his followers. Jesus also rebuked their notions of how important they were by saying that anyone, even outsiders, could do what they were doing. "Anyone who is not against you is for you."

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to be rejected and killed, and he is stripping away every assumption about how God works to expose the core of the Gospel, which is that love is the remedy to sin and division, not dominance and force. His disciples will undergo a profound baptism of fire at his death to emerge as messengers of mercy and models of charity. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac illustrate this and forgotten prophets like Peter Maurin remind us that real change happens not just with words but genuine service.

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