

Homily

4th Sunday of Lent – A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski

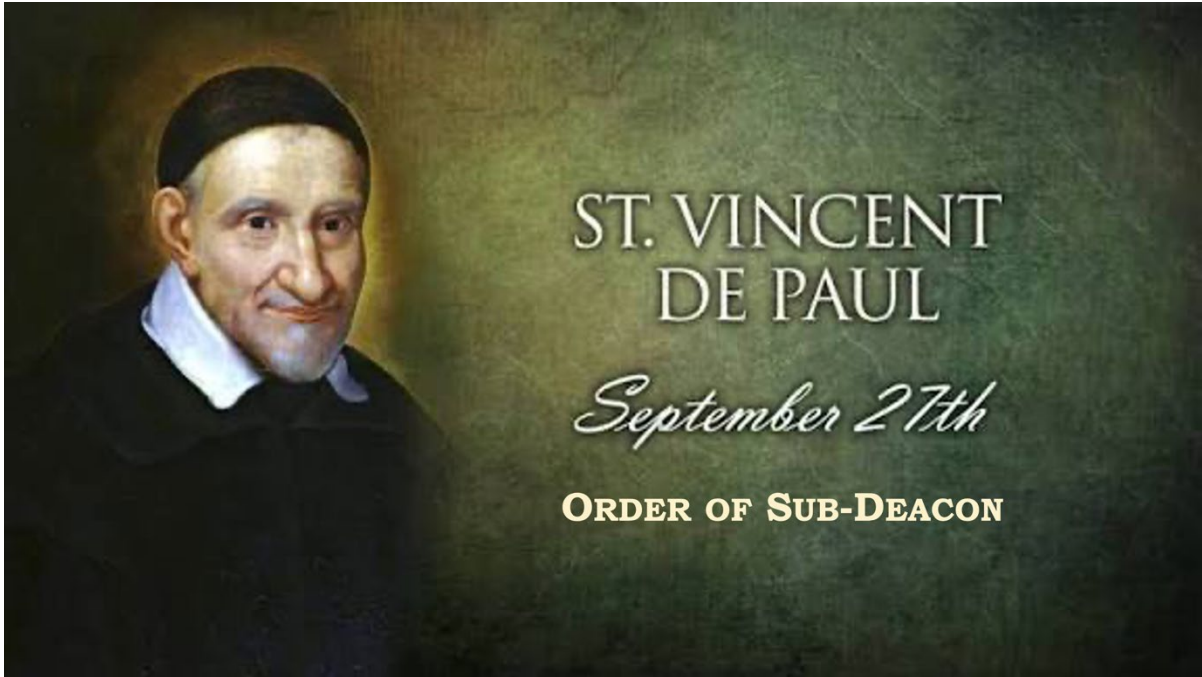
March 14-15, 2026

1 Sm 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

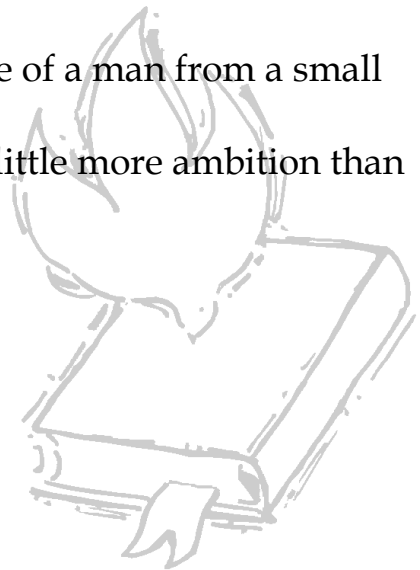
Ps 23: 1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

Eph 5: 8-14

Jn 9: 1-41



The deathbed confession of a dying servant opened St. Vincent de Paul's eyes to the crying spiritual needs of the peasantry of France. This seemed to have been a crucial moment in the life of a man from a small farm in Gaskiny who had become a priest with little more ambition than to have a comfortable life.



The countess of Gandhi, whose servant he had helped, persuaded her husband to endow and support a group of able and zealous missionaries who would work among the poor tenant farmers and country people in general. Vincent was too humble to accept leadership at first, but after working for some time in Paris among imprisoned Galley slaves, he returned to be the leader of what is now called the *Congregations of the Mission (or the Vincentians)*.

These priests with vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability were to devote themselves entirely to the people in smaller towns and villages. Later St. Vincent de Paul established confraternities of charity for the spiritual and physical relief of the poor in the sick of each parish. From these, with the help of St. Louis de Marlock, came the *Daughters of Charity*, whose cloister is the streets of the city.

St. Vincent de Paul organized the rich women of Paris to collect funds for his missionary projects, founded several hospitals, collected relief funds for the victims of war and ransomed over two-hundred galley slaves from North Africa. St. Vincent was zealous in conducting retreats

for clergy at a time where there were great laxity, abuse, and ignorance among them.

St. Vincent was a pioneer in clerical training and was instrumental in establishing seminaries. Most remarkably, St. Vincent DePaul was by temperament a very irascible person; even his friends admitted this. Vincent said that except for the grace of God, he would have been hard and repulsive, rough and cross but he became tender and affectionate, very sensitive to the needs of others.

As the end of his long life drew near, Vincent endured much suffering. On September 27, 1660, he received the last sacraments and died calmly in his chair, being then 85 years old. St. Vincent was buried in the Monastery of St. Lazare, Paris. In 1729, he was beatified by Pope Benedict XIII and then canonized in 1737 by Pope Clement XII. Pope Leo XIII proclaimed St. Vincent DePaul as patron of all charitable societies. His emblem is most appropriately children.

I received this letter from Cape Coral, Florida, right after I had returned from my trip to Antarctica (starting in Santiago, Chile, going

through Cape Horn, the Chilean fjords, the Falkland Islands, and then ending up in Buenos Aires, Argentina).

During my voyage through Antarctica, I preached about all the foods that had been delivered to the garages of St. Patrick's (Mokena, IL) and St. Anne's food pantry (St. Anne, IL) so that people could take whatever they needed for their families. I told those on the ship on which I sailed about all the foods we would receive from businesses and good people and how I distributed them to the food pantries and the institutions of care within the areas I served. After the pantries had their fill, I would open communications to all families who truly were in need to visit my garage and collect whatever they wanted from what remained of donations.

I preached on the cruise ship that tens of thousands of dollars' worth of food products from Costco grocery store in Oakbrook, IL were distributed to the needy of the area. I preached that whatever we had left in our garages were offered to whomever we could in our pews.

(The only foods that people *would not take* for some reason was butternut

squash and old bananas). I joked that one of our parishioners, Madison Meyer, could have made the world's largest banana bread with what we had left over with bananas.

So, this couple on the cruise ship decided to write the following letter to me after I preached about what we had done for the people of our community. The couple wrote,

Dear Reverend Peter, thanks for the boat ride. I think you need to buy more butternut squash and bananas. a small appreciation for a great ambassador of the church. Keep this money from the bishop. They sent us a check to St. Anne's in the amount of \$1,500.

That cruise ministry really does pay dividends!

Of these eight steps prior to Vatican II which were associated to the sacrament of Holy Orders and the major orders of the sub-diaconate, diaconate, the priest, and the bishop is to focus on saints or a holy person associated to each one of these steps and the kind of suffering they had to endure to hold on to what each step of Holy Orders actually mean.

In our journey through these eight steps during this Season of Lent, today we focus on a sub-deacon and saint who was a slave, who was imprisoned and who lived a terrible life concerning those that oppressed him. In the world of slavery, in the United States we often focus on one particular cultural group but, in reality, so many cultural groups have been enslaved throughout history and all those cultural groups can tell us stories of harassment and brutality that go against everything the gospel preaches.

In the first steps our country took as a “one nation under God,” initially many in our country oppressed good souls who came from Ireland, the Far East and Germany. Certainly those captured from African countries and enslaved were considered no more than property to many in this country until President Abraham Lincoln wrote and proclaimed the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Our history focuses on discrimination and enslavement of all kinds of people including St. Vincent de Paul, who decided once he escaped from his own captives to focus on serving the poor and the needy. St. Vincent dedicated his life to

stablishing a religious community (the Vincentians and then the Daughters of Charity) who devote themselves to serving the needy and the oppressed.

The way St. Vincent lived is *not* the kind of life that a lot of people aspire to have because Vincent was kind of irascible during his life; Vincent was mean at times with those whom he associated. I often tell people that we honor saints but I am not sure we want to *live* with many of these saints by the way they conducted their lives because often these saints took the gospel message to an extreme position. Nevertheless, the radical manner in which they lived the gospel resulted in a great deal of *good* in our society.

Look at the good that came from St. Vincent de Paul. Look at the good that comes from our folks in our community who take care of the needy. In my last parish, we had established a *St. Vincent de Paul Society* which helped a sizable number of our community who came forward and asked for help. My last parish was poor; we did not have the great resources at a poor parish to take care of *everyone*. That said, we

established a *St. Vincent DePaul Society Fund* and then, if people were in need, they would call us and then members of our community would interview these good folks. If those in need truly had a problem, if they needed the resources which we could provide, then we directly paid their bills and such.

In this ministry, I specifically remember one family who lived right next door to us. In a time of need, this family drove their truck through our property (leaving tire marks in our grass) so that they could use their truck to power a house that lost its electricity because they could not pay their electric bill. As a result, I contacted the police and the police found out that this truck who made these tracks all through our property was driving down the other side of our fenced area and ended up parking behind their house. The police told me that the father jerry-rigged the house to connect it to his car battery to the electric panel so the house would keep its utilities through the power of the car's battery. The only problem was that the father would have to keep filling that car

up with gasoline to make sure that the house could keep power for electricity and the kids were taken care of on hot summer days.

As a result, we visited the house. I drove the man to a gas station to fill up all of his gas cans to keep the car powered. I then asked the man *not* to drive through our property anymore. The next day, I drove this gentleman to the utility company and our St. Vincent de Paul Society paid his electric bill so his power could be restored to the house. We then told the man, “Look, we cannot help you all the time; we cannot help you the rest of your life. That said, if you run into a problem once or twice or whatever it may be, with our limited resources we may be able to help you every so often.” As a parish, we can help a family get through a day with an electric bill, a meal or even basic supplies of life. We often need to teach people how to fish but every so often, we can put a fish on their table for them to get by for one day.

Over at St. Anne’s, there was a gentleman that almost set our parish hall on fire. He was so cold that he decided to burn leaves right next to the generator at St. Anne’s, right next to the power unit. The man was

about to cause a fire hazard on the property so, when the police found him trying to burn down our parish hall, the chief contacted me and told me of the man's situation.

I guess the man did not have money to pay for his medications; he was divorced, he had no job and he had no place to stay. The police chief gave the man shelter for one night so we could figure out what to do. With the help of St. Anne's mayor, we ended up renting a hotel room for the man for a couple of weeks while we figured out a game plan for him. We found out that the man's ex-wife very much cared for him but realized that he was not always taking his medicine.

In the end, the police chief, the mayor and I collaborated with the man's ex-wife and made a deal with a local homeless shelter which refused him entrance because of his condition. We promised the shelter that the ex-wife would monitor the ex-husband, that she would take care of him, and that we promised that if the shelters that took him in at night, that he would behave himself as long as he took his medication. Because the man's ex-wife helped us, ultimately the man got back on the

right track with this life “with a little help from his friends,” as the song goes. Obviously, we did not want this man to blow up our church, but we also care about the people who live in our community and we really do wish to help.

Towards this cause and in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, we give out all kinds of food products, we make mention to people what we can do to help them out and people have been exceedingly generous to us in trying to us help others. We follow the spirit of what St. Vincent DePaul would want us to do; we try to follow the 25th Chapter of Matthew’s gospel, which says, “When I was hungry, you gave me food, when I was thirsty, you gave me drink. When I was naked or ill or in prison, you came to visit me.” When asked, “When did we do this, Lord?” then I responded, “When you did it for the least of my brothers, you did it for me.”

As we celebrate Laetare Sunday, we wear rose to signify the coming of the dawn, which is not yet here but is close. For me, my progression and understanding of God comes in stages, as Laetare Sunday signifies.

This day in Lent reminds me that I am close to Easter but I am not there yet. The feast day reminds me of my glasses. I have 2/120 vision in my right eye and my left eye has exotropia; I have a wandering left eye. I cannot see through it unless I absolutely must – this reminds me of my faith.

The point of Laetare Sunday, the point of St. Vincent de Paul, is that all of need help; we need to learn how to see God, which is hard to do because we are in a society that likes to live in the dark, that likes to have obstacles in our way. Because we cannot see God clearly, instead we focus on the gods of the world that we can see rather than the one God who created us and wants to get us home. St. Vincent DePaul dedicated his life in a very radical way of taking care of the poor, of taking care of those who could not see metaphorically, of taking care of children in need... and we must do the same.

To conclude today's homily as I did for St. Benedict, I would like to offer a litany on behalf of St. Vincent de Paul and all those that he served that as a sub-deacon, deacon and then as a priest. St. Vincent dedicated

his life to taking care of those least in the kingdom as we need to do as well. For God commanded us to do the same.

The Litany of St. Vincent de Paul

Lord, have mercy on us,
Christ, have mercy on us.
Lord, have mercy on us.
Christ, hear us, Christ, graciously hear us.

V. The just shall spring up like the lily,
R. And flourish forever before the Lord. Alleluia.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us.
Holy Mary, comforter of the afflicted, Pray for us.
Saint Vincent de Paul, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, who at the tenderest age didst display a wisdom most mature, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, who from thy childhood wast full of pity and compassion, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, who like David, from a simple shepherd became a ruler and pastor of the people of God, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, who in thy captivity by Turkish pirates didst preserve perfect freedom, Pray for us.
St. Vincent the just man, who didst live by faith, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, always supported on the firm anchor of a Christian hope, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, always inflamed with the fire of perfect charity, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, truly simple, upright, and fearing God, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, true disciple of Jesus Christ, always meek and humble of heart, Pray for us.

St. Vincent, perfectly mortified in heart and mind, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, ever animated with the spirit of Our Lord, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, generous maintainer of the glory of God, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, ever inwardly burning and ever outwardly transported
 with zeal for souls, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, who in Christian poverty didst find the precious pearl
 and the rich treasure of the Gospel, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, like to the Angels in thy purity, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, faithful in obedience and victorious in word and deed,
 Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, who didst fly the slightest appearance of evil, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, who in all thine actions didst aspire to the practice of
 perfect virtue, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, who didst remain like a rock amidst the stormy sea of
 this world, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, invincible amidst the arrows of adversity, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, as patient in suffering as thou wast indulgent in
 forgiving, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, ever docile and obedient son of the Holy See, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, who hadst exceeding horror of the novel ways and subtle
 words of heretics, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, destined by a special Providence to announce the Gospel
 to the poor, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, father and model of ecclesiastics, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, prudent founder of the Congregation of the Mission, Pray
 for us.
 St. Vincent, wise institutor of the Congregation of the Sisters of
 Charity, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, tender in compassionating and prompt in relieving the
 necessities of the poor, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, equally fervent in the practice of prayer and in ministry
 of the word, Pray for us.
 St. Vincent, admirable in imitation of the life and virtues of Jesus,
 Pray for us.

St. Vincent, who didst persevere to the end in shunning evil and
doing good, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, who as in life so in death wast most precious in the sight
of God, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, glory of France and pride of Paris, Pray for us.
St. Vincent, patron of all charitable associations, Pray for us.

Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
Spare us, O Lord.
Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world,
Graciously hear us, O Lord.
Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.

V. The Lord hath led the just man through right ways,
R. And showed unto him the Kingdom of God.

Let Us Pray: O God, Who by an effect of Thine infinite goodness, hast
renewed in our days, in the apostolic character and humility of Thy
blessed servant Vincent, the spirit of Thy well-beloved Son – to
preach the Gospel to the poor, relieve the afflicted, console the
miserable, and add new luster to the ecclesiastical order – grant, we
beseech Thee, through his powerful intercession, that we also,
delivered from the great misery of sin, may labor to please Thee by
the practice of the same humility, through Jesus Christ Our Lord,
Who liveth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world
without end. Amen.

O God, Who for the preaching of the Gospel to the poor, and for promoting the honor of the priesthood, didst endue blessed Vincent with the zeal of an apostle, grant, we humbly pray Thee, that we who venerate his holy life may profit by the examples of virtue he has left us. Amen.

This is our prayer.