

# ST. VINCENT PALLOTTI

APOSTLE OF ROME,  
PIONEER OF CATHOLIC ACTION

## CANONIZATION OF SAINT VINCENT PALLOTTI

"Amongst the beauties of the new fervour which the celebration of the Ecumenical Council has awakened, We rejoice (in) . . . the canonization of Blessed Vincent Pallotti . . . He was a priest of most edifying life, who . . . (founded) the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, which gave the first impulse in Rome to Catholic Action properly so called."

So spoke His Holiness Pope John XXIII on September 9th, 1962, in the course of an Address to Spiritual Directors of Seminaries. Vincent Pallotti was canonized on Sunday January 20th, 1963 in the Basilica of St. Paul. Those who know Saint Vincent for his world-wide vision, for his vital grasp of the world-wide mission of the Church, for his endeavours to mobilize the apostolic energies of the laity everywhere, will see the hand of Divine Providence in this that he was raised to the honours of the Altar in front of a great concourse of cardinals, bishops, priests, religious and laity that assisted in the solemnities of that day—amongst them several of his sons from the distant mission fields of North West Australia.

We hope that this small brochure will help you come to know this great lover of Christ and the ideals for which he lived. We hope still more that you may yourself catch something of his enthusiasm, generosity and love for Jesus and Mary and souls and be an apostle of Christ wherever you may be.

*Fr. John Hennessy, S.A.C.*

### A Riot

Through the Streets of Trastevere surge a crowd of angry men. They shout their grievances and their threats of violence as they go. Others run from their houses to join them. Brandishing cudgels and improvised weapons, they tramp on. The authorities are powerless—and they know it! There will be bloodshed before long.

Unseen, a figure darts down back streets. He stops at a door, raps sharply, urgently. The door opens. The messenger utters a few breathless words...

At a street junction the rioters are milling around in an ugly mood. It will take but the least spark to set their passions ablaze. Down one of the streets hurries a man in black cassock. He approaches the junction, someone sights him . . .

A murmur of recognition . . . heads jerk around . . . his name passes from mouth to mouth.

With quick movements the priest mounts the entrance steps of a building. He turns to face the crowd. His eyes sweep over them . . . eyes that are bright with vitality, eyes that compel attention. Men cease their shouting. They stand still, quiet and expectant.

Then his lips open. His clear ringing voice carries across the square. This man is the friend of the poor, the champion of the oppressed. They listen. Whatever he has to say is said from the depths of his heart, a heart that is sincere, a heart that wishes only their own good. His words are simple, reasonable, forceful. A calm descends upon their turbulent minds . . . the fire of passionate anger subsides, as under a cooling, refreshing stream.

There was no riot at Trastevere—there was no bloodshed after all. Those men went back to their homes quietly.

A man who can calm a crowd of angry riotous Italians is certainly of no mean calibre. Such is the man, the priest, the apostle, Vincent Pallotti.

### Background

Father Vincent Pallotti's life and his ideal of the Catholic Apostolate must be seen together with the background of his times—a background of world upheaval. He was born on April 21st, 1795, in a Europe still overcast by the after-shadow of the French Revolution. He later saw Rome under the heel of the French Army and the Holy Father a prisoner of the impious Bonaparte. He saw the march of revolutionaries on Rome and the accompanying storm of civil

commotion and religious persecution.

It was an era of instability, of political strife and intrigue. Making capital out of all this, the enemies of religion were able to do tremendous harm to the Church and its work. Both directly and indirectly Christ and His Kingdom was the object of a new and most diabolical attack. Father Vincent saw that there was a new mobilization of the enemies of God and man. He saw that the times demanded a new mobilization of Catholics—of Apostles. "Every Catholic an Apostle!"

Against this background we must understand the life and work of this modern Apostle. Against this background we must understand the passionate longings and the ideals that flamed in his heart and soul. Against this background we must understand his forming of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate.

And against the anarchy of his day we see the peace of a man who lives with God. Against the darkness of a new paganism we see one who holds aloft the brilliant light of Faith. Against the tide of unleashed passion, hatred and bloodshed, we see a man spending himself to the point of exhaustion, for the spiritual and temporal happiness of his fellow men—for the love of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

### **His Home and Parents**

The beginnings of that love go back to the truly Catholic home into which Vincent was born. That means a home where Christ is a positive influence in family life, a home where father and mother value their daily round of duties as their task from God, a home where the scale of values is the one learned from Christ Himself. Such was the home into which Peter and Mary Pallotti brought their children.

Peter Pallotti was a grocer; he owned three shops in various parts of Rome. He was a conscientious and capable man, and a prosperous one. But, he was not set upon amassing wealth; there's no doubt he could have done so, had he cared to devote his energies and abilities that way. He was able to provide for his growing family; and outside it to assist many of those in need. His charity was well known and often sought.

He applied himself to business interests, as far as family responsibilities and his works of charity required. The rest of his time and energy he gave to his family and directly to Christ. He used to rise early and begin the day by assisting at two Masses, and at the end of business hours, would again return to his Eucharistic Lord . . . if possible to a church where the devotion of the Forty Hours was being held.

Yet it was the mother, Mary Magdalene Pallotti, who was the greater influence in forming the character of their children; and the best response she found in the third of her ten children, Vincent. It was from her that he learned his first lesson in charity, as he saw her kindness to the needy who came to their door, or saw her prepare a basket, and then accompany her on visits to the poor and sick. She was the one who first kindled the fire that would later become a mighty blaze in the future Apostle of Rome—his love for the Virgin Mother of God.

The Pallotti home had their Madonna shrine, their little altar to Mary; and to the Immaculate Virgin, Vincent and all the children were consecrated.

How often did Peter and Mary Pallotti seek strength at that shrine specially in those hours of grief when children so joyously received from God had to be all too soon surrendered. Only Vincent and three of his brothers reached adult age.

### **Childhood**

Rome in the summer is very trying—hot, humid, enervating. All who can manage to do so seek some respite with a holiday away from the City. So it is today, so it has been for centuries.

Peter and Mary used to take their family out into the country where at least the evening would bring a cool refreshing breeze. The slopes of the surrounding hills were patterned with vineyards and purple with the ripening grapes. The boy Vincent was soon well known amongst the labourers and their children. He was often found giving the little ones a lesson in Catechism—and even the grown ups (who needed it just as much). He would have them say the Rosary with him too. But, it was not always so one-sided—he often brought them delicacies from the table, something he had gone without to give them.

His parents had become used to the generous nature of their son, but did not always approve of this indiscriminate

charity. He was sometimes reproached by his father for his lack of prudence. On such occasions Vincent would receive the reproach in silence, or quietly say to his father that he thought the person to whom he gave the goods, was in greater need. One such occasion was when he had actually given away his bed. Another time he arrived at his aunt's place in the country barefoot—he had given away his shoes on the way.

Boys and girls can find some consolation in this—that for years Vincent found his school work just too tough. He simply couldn't master it at all. "Too bad" his teachers used to say, "Vincent's a fine boy . . . but his school work!" and they would leave the conclusion unsaid. His mother however, found a solution—it is not copyright, so all you scholars have no hesitation in making use of it. She and the boy made a Novena of Prayer and Sacrifice to the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Wisdom. The answer came in remarkable fashion. The following months saw Vincent mount from the bottom strata of his class to the top! The prizes were medals, and many were the prizes he won. However, he didn't care to parade his success; he would take his medals to some favourite picture or statue of the Blessed Virgin and leave them with her. If his parents knew of his prizes, it was through someone else. In his reticence he was simply imitating his parents—they were not accustomed to tell people of the things they did for the love of Jesus and Mary.

### **Vocation**

It was a great joy to Peter and Mary Pallotti (but no great surprise) when Vincent told them of his desire to become a priest. At the age of sixteen he wanted to join the Capuchins. He told his confessor of his wish, but was dissuaded by him from his choice. The priest considered that Vincent was not strong enough to stand up to the austerity of that order. The boy immediately acquiesced in his confessor's decision, but still retained his ardent desire for the priesthood. With his father's permission, he made a retreat in the Mission House of Monte Citorio. Then he entered the Roman College, beginning the long course of study in preparation for the priesthood.

Vincent was an outstanding student. He gained distinctions in all subjects, for example, Greek, Law, History and Languages, and took his degree in both Philosophy and Theology. As in earlier years, so also here he had nothing to say about his success.

Vincent was ordained a priest on 16th May, 1818, in the Lateran Basilica. It must have been an added joy to him that it took place in Mary's own month. The following morning he celebrated his first Mass—it was the Feast of the Blessed Trinity.

Now that he was equipped with the powers of the priesthood, his love for Christ was quickly to expand into an untiring apostolate.

On the eve of his ordination he wrote a sentence that was to be the ideal and inspiration of his priestly life:

"Lord, let me die or love Thee infinitely!"

### **The Young Priest**

In those days a young secular priest would usually have to wait some considerable time before there came a vacancy for an assistant in a parish. Instead of waiting he might take up a position in the administration of the Papal States; for at this time all the main administrative positions were entrusted to priests. Or a third possibility was—and this is what Fr. Vincent chose to do—to remain living at home and undertake any apostolic work approved of by his superiors.

So the young priest came to be chaplain to a boys' club, and also spiritual director to a student confraternity. Before long he was called to assist at a retreat house for young men, and soon after at a second retreat house as well. At night he was often to be found at a home for old and destitute men, which was also a night shelter for men off the streets. Together with a layman he set about establishing night schools for working boys where they could learn reading and writing, as well as the elements of their Faith. (Don Bosco, the founder of the Salesians, was to do the same thing at Turin). For working girls he set up homes and hostels. There existed in Rome a large number of guilds for the various trades, but many of them no longer possessed any real vitality. Fr. Vincent endeavoured to get some of them going again, fully aware of the need among working men and the possibilities inherent in the guilds. He began with the shoemakers' guild; these had a little church of their own near the Ponte Rotti. He went around to visit the shoemakers personally in their shops. Having got to know them it was not long before he had them making a retreat with him.

It can be seen how readily the young priest was able to combine idealism and a very down-to-earth appreciation of everyday needs. "The priest," he said, must seek to be all things to all the people. Not only must he promote their spiritual good but their material welfare also, for the people expect the support and advice of the priest in all fields of action. He must use his moral ascendancy to render the lives of the people more tolerable and more in conformity with human dignity. The poor and oppressed look instinctively to him against the violence and injustice of the powerful ones of this earth, and the people must not be disappointed. Moreover, experience shows that men will not observe conscientiously the Divine Law if they cannot satisfy the necessities of life. The person who is obliged to fight a losing battle against human misery loses his sense of orientation and finds it increasingly difficult to believe in the goodness of God. And then he will easily be deceived by the demagogues and allow himself to join the ranks of those unfortunates who live and die without Faith." How faithful this young priest to the mind of the later Popes on the social problem.

### **Tutor at the University**

To the many pastoral duties he had taken upon himself, Fr. Vincent added another which would have been quite enough on its own. This was the post of repetitor or special tutor at the Sapienza, at this time the university of Rome. His scholarly eminence as a student himself had not been forgotten, nor his deep religious spirit. On both grounds students were drawn to him. It had become customary after a lecture for numbers of them to gather about him in a nearby square to discuss the matter of their professor's discourse. The Rector of the University, observing the results of these discussions, transferred them to the University proper, and required all students of theology to take part in them. Thus Father Pallotti was obliged to assume leadership of what was called an academy. The Rector esteemed these discussions so highly that he would allow no one to receive the doctorate who could not produce a certificate of attendance at the academy. He continued these tutorials at the university for ten years while the less gifted students came to him for special assistance at his home.

### **With the Poor**

Scholarly though he was, Father Vincent had the happy knack of "adaptability." In his sermons he had no time for such styles as are calculated to win admiration rather than souls. His one aim was to bring people to the knowledge and love of Christ crucified. And so the uneducated poor came to listen to him eagerly. He would often preach in one of the public squares of which Rome has so many, or in the working quarter of the Trastevere. The people would quickly gather about him. He understood them—and they him. At the conclusion he would invite them to the nearest church, and in this way many were brought back to God.

The tender concern for the poor that was so strong in Vincent as a boy now became a real fire blazing in the heart of the priest. He was a frequent caller on the well-to-do, and was never slow to plead for his poor. A Cardinal once said of him: "You can't say no to Don Vincenzo! He kneels down, asks your blessing, and then speaks in such a way that you can't possibly refuse him!"

There are still in existence about four hundred letters of Father Vincent written on behalf of his poor. Requests for work, clothing, food, medicine, financial aid, cancellation of debts—all this and so much more.

He availed to the utmost of the ordinary resources of Divine Providence. But when these failed him, he could with all confidence go further. He once asked a Duchess to assist a family that needed some money urgently. The good lady was quite willing to do so, but was unable to give him anything at that very moment—she just didn't have it. "Would you come back later, Father?" "Very well," Father Pallotti replied. "I'll return on the Feast of St. Homobonus." "When is that?" "Today!" "But I told you Father, I simply do not have anything just now." "Have confidence in God, and try and find some. The family's need is urgent. They must have some, and now! Go in obedience. Obedience can work miracles." Reluctantly the Duchess went away, and as she expected found only a coin of little worth. She took it back however, and gave it to him. On falling into his hand, to her amazement, it multiplied into a handful of gold coins. Father Vincent forbade the astonished duchess to speak of the incident to any one.

### **Care of the Sick**

The sick, especially if poor as well, found in Father Vincent tender sympathy and comfort—and often too restoration to health. He saw Christ in the sick, so would spend himself to the utmost for their relief, spiritual and material. To a woman of whom the doctors had despaired he said simply: "Pray to the Madonna. She will cure you." Scarcely had he left when the sick woman felt herself completely recovered. When the doctor called and heard of it he remarked at once: "Father Vincent must have been here." Apparently this was no new experience for the doctor.

Upon entering a sick room Father Pallotti would first kneel and say a prayer. Then going to the bedside he would give the sufferer a picture of Our Lord or Our Lady to kiss. He would try to encourage the sick with words of trust and faith in the goodness of Our Loving Heavenly Father. Then he would hear the confession. But when the patient was unconscious, he would prolong his prayers, give his blessing, and ask that he be called the moment consciousness returned. He was called on one occasion to attend a man known to have led anything but an exemplary life. To the distress of his friends he had lost the power of speech and then consciousness. After his usual prayers, Father Vincent urged those around the bed to pray and have confidence, then departed promising to return after a short time. A few hours later the man recovered consciousness and the power of speech. Father Vincent was able to prepare him for his confession and restore him to God's friendship in the interval before the man lost the power of speech again.

People soon began to realize that Father Pallotti had some supernatural intuition as to the outcome of an illness. They noticed that when he said: "Let us accept the will of God," the patient would not recover. When he said: "Let us recommend him to the Blessed Virgin" the sick person was always restored to health.

### **Among the Soldiers**

The "Union of St. Paul" was a society of Rome aimed at fostering the spiritual and temporal welfare of soldiers. Father Vincent became a member. His work for the troops quickly won from them a ready response and appreciation. Among his letters are to be found numbers written on behalf of his soldiers or received from them. In one he is trying to obtain a furlough for a soldier; in another he begs for mitigation of punishment; in another he seeks fair dealing for someone unjustly accused; in another he intercedes for one of the military police who went home without leave to visit his sick mother. "The reason was his love for his mother," he writes. "Such love is to be commended. He is a good lad. He has been punished enough already. Do what you can to have him set free."

Each year in preparation for Easter it had been the custom to give the retreat to all the army corps gathered together in one of the largest churches in Rome. Father Vincent enlisted the aid of a number of priests to bring the spiritual exercises closer to the men. His standing with the military authorities was such that he was able to have one section at a time free from duty so that these men could devote their time wholly and exclusively to the retreat. Each section would be taken in turn for a retreat until the entire body of troops was included.

He succeeded too in introducing to the barracks special May devotions. The men had their May altar and saw to it that it was fittingly adorned with flowers and candles.

The soldiers came to appreciate their chaplain still more at the military hospital. A visitor to the hospital was amazed at seeing the eagerness and delight with which the sick welcomed the priest, while back at the barracks it was quite common for the guard to give him military honours as he passed by.

### **Souls in Need**

Gradually it became known that Father Pallotti had an extraordinary influence on sinners. He was able to win over even the most stubborn. In his efforts to bring them back to Christ, he was ready to resort to unusual means if needed. Visiting the hospital one day the nurse asked him to see what he could do with a certain patient, but warning the priest that the man had a violent temper, a lurid tongue, both of which he was ready to use on any priest that came near him. Father Pallotti noted the bed and then went along to some of the other patients some distance away. Keeping his eye on the formidable one he worked his way unobtrusively nearer as he went from patient to patient. At last he was at the next bed and the man's eyes were closed. Now was the opportunity! Before the man realized it Father Pallotti was at his side begging him to make his peace with God. The man let out a lurid flow—but fully expecting that to happen, the priest was equal to the occasion. He had with him some biscuits for the patients, and the moment that mouth

opened he very dexterously slipped one in. While the man, purple with rage, was getting rid of the biscuit swallowing it, Father Vincent did the talking: At last the fellow had cleared his throat and at once opened his mouth to give the priest another blast but he was beaten to it again and found himself all clogged up with biscuit. Well, the battle went on until the fellow was exhausted and the priest the victor.

Father Pallotti was called one day to a house where a one-time revolutionary was dying. He was bitter and would have nothing to do with any priest. To make sure that none of his family tried to bring one in, he kept his pistol under his pillow threatening to put a bullet into any priest who should venture near him. Father Pallotti had a plan. But it was necessary to wait till evening when the light was failing. Then taking a shawl he shuffled in like an old lady keeping to the shadow as much as possible. One of the household informed the dying trooper: "One of my friends has offered to stay with you during the night in case you need anything." Then with considerable misgiving withdrew, very fearful as to what the night might bring. Watching for his opportunity Father Vincent quietly moved across to the bed, slipped his little Madonna picture under the pillow, putting the man and his pistol in her capable hands. Then back in the shadows of the corner of the room he prayed with all his heart. Eventually he threw off the shawl moved across to the bed and let the man see who he was. The shock of it destroyed all the barriers. Next morning the family found the man, a crucifix in his hand, the priest at his side. He received Holy Viaticum shortly after, Father Pallotti remaining with him until he died.

### **The Growth of an Idea**

In these few pages we have covered an apostolate as it developed over the first fifteen years of Father Vincent's priesthood. And he was continually finding new opportunities to work for souls. His was an active, dynamic spirit—but his activity was not just a merely natural urge to be up and doing, which is at times mistaken for apostolate. His activity was genuine, the outflow of a heart that is aflame with love for Christ, Mary and souls.

But note well that now others have caught this flame. Around him there has gathered a group of priests and lay people who inspired by this apostle join him in his labours. There was no preconceived idea about this—simply the natural spreading of a flame. Over the years he had made wide contacts, the noble, the lowly, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, men in the professions and workers. More and more of these men and women were being drawn to the ideal of sharing with Christ and Mary the task of winning souls to God. And the ominous situation of the time was making it imperative that that ideal become the very life of every Catholic.

For years Italy had been a fertile ground for the growing menace of anti-religious forces, particularly in the form of secret societies. Fr. Pallotti came to know only too well the obstructions being placed in the way of the work of the Church. He firmly believed, and events proved him all too correct, that the situation was going to worsen as time went on. The apostolate of the Church was going to be hampered more and more. The powers of evil were mounting a fresh attack against the Kingdom of Christ.

It was urgently necessary that Catholics themselves become aware of their responsibility for the cause of Christ—and not to imagine that to be the exclusive responsibility of the priest. The needs of his time and the experience of these fifteen years of intense apostolate had given birth to a great yearning in his heart, to a great ideal. He saw the immense potential for the apostolate in the layman lying unused. He had himself been drawing on this source more and more with the years. He felt the call of Christ in his heart, and becoming ever more insistent, that he should strive to develop that potential . . . strive to inspire each Catholic man and woman to become not only a possessor of the Faith, but a bearer of it to the world in which each moved—the worker in his factory, the farmer in his countryside, the clerk in his office, the mother in her home and among her neighbours, the professor in his university, the doctor, the teacher, the lawyer, in their professions, the young boy and girl in their circle of acquaintances.

Though he did not see how to set about the realization of this ideal, the ideal itself became clear and strong—the mobilization of all possible forces of the apostolate, the laity joining with the priest in the winning of souls to Christ. Every one fulfilling his and her part. A universal (that is, of everyone) or "Catholic Apostolate!" In a word: "Every Catholic an Apostle!"

## **Founder of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate**

We have seen the manifold activities of Fr. Pallotti over the years and his wide contacts with people of every condition. The natural consequence was that a number of his fellow priests of Rome and also laymen formed a close association with him. They were bound together solely by the ideal they shared, the apostolate. Humanly speaking it was almost incidental and by force of circumstances that this group became a consolidated unit, the nucleus of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate.

One of their fields of interest was the foreign missions. In the course of their activities they decided to assist missionaries and converts in the East by having 10,000 copies of St. Alphonsus Ligouri's book "Eternal Principles," printed in Arabic. The cost was estimated at about £200—a considerable sum for the group. One of their number, James Salvati, a merchant, was commissioned to raise the money and direct the printing.

Salvati was far from happy about his commission. He had had tough assignments from Fr. Vincent before, but this, he felt, capped the lot! He hadn't a hope. On his way home from the meeting he decided not to approach anybody at all for contributions, and then to tell Father and the others that he had had no success. But almost as quickly he realized that his chances of getting away with such a story with Fr. Pallotti were nil! So resigned to the inevitable he went to call on a grocer. He explained the project; then mustering up all his courage he asked straight out:

"Can you give us £200?" The man received quite a shock! No! He couldn't!

Then it was Salvati's turn to get a shock.

"I can give you only £50."

Next he called on a baker and again came away with £50. With new spirit Salvati went ahead making more calls; before long he had over and above the required amount. Rather shame-facedly he recalled the parting words of the priest: "Go. In the name of the Crucified you will find all that you need."

Now that the group handled a fund, they saw the necessity of having guarantees to show that the fund was rightly expended, and the necessity of existing as a society with ecclesiastical approval. Petitions for approbation were submitted to the Cardinal Vicar, to the Vicegerent of Rome, and finally to the Pope. The representative of the Holy Father, Cardinal Vicar Odescalchi, immediately gave his approval. This was 4th April, 1835. Three months later, 11th July, His Holiness Pope Gregory XVI, sent his blessing to Fr. Pallotti and the Society, writing:

"A thousand blessings to the Society of the Catholic Apostolate and to all the works of piety and zeal which it may undertake."

From the very beginning the Society was placed under the protection of Mary, Queen of Apostles. Fr. Pallotti constantly held before his fellow apostles the picture of Pentecost. There they saw how a group of bewildered and timid men were transformed into a mighty force for the Kingdom of Christ. They had gathered around Mary, she upon whom the Holy Spirit had descended already at Nazareth. At Pentecost He came once again, while they "were together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.' Although she did not share in the priesthood of her Son, as they did, nevertheless none could compare with her and the part she played in the salvation of souls. She was the living argument for the lay apostolate, and its best example. Therefore to her, Queen of Apostles, Fr. Pallotti and his associates would have their little Society dedicated.

## **Growth and Development**

This new Society (SAC) was not a religious order, as is obvious from the fact that there were no special religious bonds and that its members comprised priests, religious and lay people. It was open to any Catholic and the only condition was willingness to work for souls. After 1836 members were divided according to the manner of their apostolate:

1. apostolic workers: all those who work directly for the salvation of souls.
2. spiritual co-operators: all those who contribute to the works of the SAC by their prayers and sacrifices.
3. temporal co-operators: all those who help by their professional services, manual work, by goods, money and other material means.

In 1837 in the first group, apostolic workers, an important development took place. Up to this time there had been no question of these members dedicating their lives exclusively to the SAC, but only in as much as other duties

allowed.

Nor was there question of any of them living in community; in fact religious living in their own communities were still able to be members of the society. But now a project came up that required some members to be wholly dedicated to the SAC—this was a plan to establish a missionary college. Several priest-members of the first group formed themselves into a community with Fr. Pallotti; later lay members joined them as brothers. This community came to be the central and energising part of the whole society.

### **The SAC is Dissolved**

There is surely hardly any Catholic today who does not know of the work of Pauline Jaricot, her foundation at Lyons of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. On one occasion when she was at Rome she met Fr. Pallotti and they discussed her plans. She founded this society in 1819, the purpose of which was to raise funds for the foreign missions. In 1835, the year of the SAC's birth, there was no branch of the French society in Rome. In 1837 Pope Gregory XVI authorized its introduction into the Eternal City, leaving the matter in the hands of the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda (the Holy Father's governing body for missionary regions.) The Cardinal, after discussion with Fr. Vincent, considered that it would be superfluous to establish a branch of the Lyons society in Rome, since its purpose was being fulfilled already by one of the functions of the third section of the SAC. However in order to carry out the authorization of the Holy Father and yet avoid needless duplication, he decided to combine the Lyons society with the third section of the SAC. It would form a distinct unit within this section, and all funds contributed by its members would be forwarded to the Congregation of the Propaganda.

Authorities at Lyons immediately protested. They objected to the Pope that despite his official approval the society had not yet been introduced into Rome and that the SAC, with its universal pretensions was a danger for the Church. Moreover, it was a useless duplicate of a society already established in 1819.

On July 30th, 1838, Fr. Pallotti was conducting a meeting for the election of office bearers for a new parish branch of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith. Proceedings were interrupted by the arrival of the secretary of the Propaganda. He bore an important letter for Fr. Pallotti. The priest opened it to read the decree of dissolution of the SAC. The title of "Catholic Apostolate," moreover, so he read, belonged solely to the Pope; and the SAC was superfluous because the same work was being done by the Lyon's Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

Sick at heart though he was, no word escaped his lips. He remained with bowed head for a space, then continued with the setting up of the branch of the Lyons Society.

A Father Togni present on the occasion said later:

"I always thought Fr. Vincent was a saint. Now I am fully convinced!"

### **"All This We Did Not Know"**

Fr. Pallotti felt sure there was a serious misunderstanding at the back of these events. In a letter to the Holy Father he set out the nature of the SAC. Its aim was far more comprehensive than the collecting of funds for the missions nor was even its mission aid programme of a financial kind only. While this was inclusive it was by no means its principal aim. The specific character of the SAC was the enkindling of that fire of love, the apostolate, in the heart of each Catholic. This love would find expression in many ways, chiefly according to the three sections outlined above. With regard to the third, the temporal co-operators, there was indeed one part of its work that did coincide with the Lyons society, the collection of funds for the foreign missions; but in fact its scope was far wider.

On reading Fr. Pallotti's letter, the Holy Father exclaimed: "All this We did not know!" The decree of dissolution was withheld.

It had been a heavy cross. Yet Fr. Vincent let no personal feeling enter into the matter; he was still ready to promote the interests of the Lyons society, as in fact he did. With these events in mind he wrote several years later that there had been some who, not understanding the true nature of the SAC, had attacked it so seriously that at one stage it seemed to bear the marks of death. Yet this, he said, but served to make it like to the Crucified—as has happened often enough with other religious works and foundations in the course of history.

The meeting of Fr. Pallotti and Pauline Jaricot is told in L'Album, a Roman news publication of 1850, in an article by Fr. Proia, a former classmate of Fr. Pallotti at the Sapienza University. He tells of the later's enthusiasm for her work and of his constructive ideas. Fr. Pallotti was particularly urging that Rome instead of Lyons become the centre of a world wide organization such as the then proposed society. Pauline Jaricot too, like Vincent Pallotti and countless others, was to know the pain of the cross, worry and suffering, that falls to the lot of those who follow Christ with great love. The Curé of Ars could say of her: "I know someone who understands how to accept the Cross, a heavy Cross, and how to bear it with love! It is Mademoiselle Jaricot."

### **At Camaldoli**

In June of 1839 Fr. Pallotti gave evidence of seriously failing health. He was bidden by the Holy Father spend three months in rest and quiet at the monastery of Camaldoli in the Alban hills. The Holy Father even promised to pay him a visit there—a promise which, to the great confusion of the priest, was shortly after fulfilled to the letter!

He was well known to the monks there and to the people of those parts. He was not long in the monastery before the country-folk got to know about it. That was the end of his temporary retirement! Soon there were growing numbers seeking him for help, spiritual advice and for confession. The three-fold purpose of his visit to the monastery—physical and spiritual renewal, and the preparation of a clear exposition of the nature of the SAC to avoid further misunderstanding was fast slipping out of sight.

At this point Fr. Vincent's spiritual director in Rome came to know of this . . . and he put an end to it. He forbade the priest his external activity and obliged him to confine himself to the purposes of his stay at Camaldoli. Fr. Pallotti could never of himself have refused any who should seek him. However he always looked upon his spiritual director as God's instrument through whom He worked and manifested His will—so it was clear to him what God wished him to do. This period marked a further deepening and growth in Vincent's spiritual life. God had prepared new graces for this heart so aflame with love for Him and for souls—graces which in those days of silence and prayer his heart opened wide to receive.

Then Rome was calling him again. Rome, with its countless needs, souls in danger, hours in the confessional, retreats, care of the sick, the poor, the guilds, the working lads and their night schools, the orphanages he had established together with the SAC Sisters he had founded, the manifold works of the SAC and its own little community. A further span of nine years lay before him; but during this time black storm clouds were gathering. Europe was soon to be plunged into the Year of Revolutions, 1848—and Rome itself was to be one of the storm centres.

### **Revolution**

Italy at this time was divided into four parts—the Papal States and the three states under Austria, Sardinia and the Bourbons of Naples and Sicily. Of these, Austria was the dominant power. Sardinia and the Papal States were thus the only extensive Italian territories not under foreign domination.

The nationalist movement for a united Italy had at first ardent Catholic supporters who cherished a hope that the Papacy would declare for it. At one time the suggestion was made that the Pope should become the head of a federation of liberated Italian principalities. It met however with the fundamental objection that by doing so he would stultify the whole object of the Papal States by identifying the Papacy with one of the nations in the eyes of the world.

Besides this, the movement was largely in the grip of men whose hatred of everything Catholic stamped them as archenemies of the Church.

The Pope decided against intervention.

That gave the radicals the chance to swing the movement directly and violently against the Papacy and the Church. Then came the defeat of the nationalist army by the Austrians at Custoza. Rome was thrown into turmoil, seething with the tension of impending revolution. The situation growing daily more menacing, the Pope as a last resort summoned prime minister Rossi. Fr. Pallotti learned that an attempt on Rossi's life was planned on the occasion of a forthcoming public address. Rossi received several warnings through the priest, but ignored them. The subsequent assassination as he was entering Parliament House touched off the uprising. The first shots were fired upon the Swiss

Papal Guard. A new republican government was set up, the Church subjected to open hostilities, the Holy Father restricted to his residence. Among the very few who had the courage to visit him there was Fr. Pallotti. Concealing his identity and with the assistance of the French and Bavarian embassies, the Holy Father escaped to Gaeta, where the King of Naples sheltered him.

Violent persecution now broke out and it became unsafe for a priest to show himself on the streets. Fr. Vincent carried on as best he could, but the work was becoming more and more impossible every day. On one occasion he was fired on, but somehow managed to escape harm. He became a marked man. The Irish College he had visited so often now offered to shelter him; there at the bidding of the Holy Father he went into hiding. The revolutionaries got wind of his whereabouts and raided the college. Somehow they failed to discover him.

By the middle of 1849 the tide had turned against the revolutionaries and they were fighting desperately to retain their hold on Rome. Road blocks were thrown up throughout the city; the republicans were determined to fight street by street. But they continued to lose ground. They saw there was nothing left but to escape as best they might. As a last act of hatred they massacred some twenty priests and laymen, then fled. On 2nd July the French army occupied Rome and the Pope was able to return.

### **Last Act of Charity**

Fr. Vincent was anxious to return to his work. The aftermath of the revolution meant only the greater need of his people. The French army could restore external order certainly, but the inner turmoil of hearts and souls still remained to be quieted. "What are we waiting for?" he wrote to Cardinal Lambruschini. "The incredible speed with which the sons of darkness have worked makes it necessary that the sons of light do as much for good!"

Back in Rome he was soon carrying out his former exhausting round of toil. But before long he had to admit to himself that the labours and anxieties of the past few years had sapped him of his strength far more than he had realized. Work that he had always attended to he was now forced to leave to others. Nevertheless he soon became the familiar figure once again hurrying about on his errands of mercy, ministering to the sick and dying, and together with his associates, confreres and lay-folk, bringing to life once again their former labours for souls. And so half a year went by.

January 1850 brought a particularly severe winter. Fr. Pallotti and his friends called at many a door seeking assistance for the poor and entered many a dwelling bringing relief. One evening whilst hearing confessions he noticed a penitent trembling with the cold. The confession finished, Fr. Vincent took off his cloak and insisted on the man taking it. Then he went back to the icy confessional. This act of charity brought him to his deathbed.

Next morning it was clear that he had caught a chill. However he carried on his work as usual. Later that day while visiting his old friend, James Salvati, he was taken ill and was brought back home to his confreres in a carriage. A doctor was called; he diagnosed pleurisy and ordered Vincent to bed. It was 16th January.

Years before, Fr. Vincent had shown a small prayer book to his close friend and associate, Fr. Vaccari. "When I am in my last illness I want you to read to me from this book," he had told him. He had never spoken of the matter since. But now he did. "It is time now, Father. Would you get that prayer book please?"

The news of his illness spread like wildfire. The priests and brothers were attending to callers and inquiries throughout the day. In the church, alongside there was a constant stream of people praying for his recovery. But Vincent knew that these days were his last.

He had them bring a statue of Our Lady, his Mother and Queen of Apostles, and one of St. Joseph to his room and place them alongside the large crucifix there, so that he might be able to see them from his bed. His sufferings were severe, but no word of complaint escaped him—only gratitude to all who assisted him and continual consideration lest he cause them too much trouble. Selfless on his deathbed as in life he bore his illness with patience and resignation to the will of God. He gave ready obedience to the wishes of the Father Superior and the doctor. He himself wished to receive Holy Communion fasting; but when the doctor insisted that he receive the Blessed Sacrament as Viaticum and not fasting, he submitted at once. So also regarding the treatment prescribed. He was bled eight times. Leeches were applied and plasters. Everything he bore in patience and offered up to God in a spirit of reparation and for souls.

## **"Let Me go where God Wants me"**

On the evening of Sunday 19th January, he received Extreme Unction, the sacrament being administered by Fr. Vaccari. Those assisting at his bedside begged his blessing upon their Society, for they were distressed at the thought of its future without him. Fr. Vincent laid their petition before His Divine Master: "My Jesus, a blessing for the whole Society. A blessing of goodness. A blessing of wisdom. A blessing of strength." Then turning to them he added: "And now all pray for me that I may die a happy death and go to praise Our Divine Lord. This I will owe only to the pure mercy of God. For our works are nothing." He held a small crucifix in his hands; then pressing it to his lips he exclaimed: "Praised be Jesus and Mary!"

One of the priests asked him:

"Father Vincent, what will happen to the Society?"

"This Society will be blessed. And I say this not only with confidence, but with certainty."

But two days remained to him. He spoke little. Most of the time he was absorbed in prayer. Fr. Vaccari hardly left the bedside and was inconsolable at the imminent loss of his friend and leader. Once again on the Tuesday evening he begged him:

"Father Vincent, ask God for one more year of earthly life. Ask it for the good of the Society. It is still small and weak. We need you, Father! Stay a little longer!"

The dying priest turned his eyes to his friend; slowly but earnestly he besought him:

"Of your charity, let me go, where God wants me."

Too overcome to reply by word, Fr. Vaccari in grief slowly nodded his assent. Vincent smiled with satisfaction. For he wished even to die in obedience. These were his last words. Fifteen minutes later, as the Blessing for the moment of death was being given, he quietly breathed his last.

It was 9.45 of the evening of 22nd January, 1850.

## **CANONIZATION**

### **First Miracle**

On Sunday 20th January, 1963, the Holy Father, Pope John XXIII, proclaimed to the world the canonization of Saint Vincent Pallotti. The people of Rome had spoken the truth when at his death they had carried the sad news all over the city with: "The saint is dead!" This solemnity followed that of his Beatification after a space of thirteen years; he was beatified by Pope Pius XII early in the Holy Year 1950 on January 22nd, the very centenary of Vincent's death.

In the process of Canonization (as also of Beatification) the Church looks for the hand of God as divine approval by the occurrence of two miracles. The first of these took place on February 2nd, 1951—the cure of an Italian farmer who was at the point of death, suffering from a tumor on the neck. On the morning of January 31st, Angelo Balzarini noticed a small abscess on the side of his neck. He did not consider it of any importance and set about his work on the farm. During the day, however, he began to feel ill. The swelling was getting larger and he felt feverish. In the late afternoon he returned home and went to bed. The same evening the doctor attended him. The patient's condition continued to grow worse. The swelling increased and extended towards the chest. He was in great pain, high fever and delirium. A second doctor was summoned. The deterioration continued till by midday February 2nd his death was expected at any moment. That afternoon a relic of Vincent Pallotti was laid upon Angelo's neck. Shortly after this the miracle occurred and Balzarini regained consciousness. This is how he himself later related the event: "All of a sudden I experienced a refreshing sensation on the neck and chest and I awoke. I understood that I was not going to die because my head felt clear and I did not feel ill. I asked my wife to remove the bandage. I asked for something to eat and I ate with a good appetite." The doctor stated later: "I was stunned!"

### **Second Miracle**

The second miracle approved for canonization occurred on December 23rd, 1950. It was the cure of Father Adalbert Turowski, who at the time was Superior General of the Society founded by Vincent Pallotti. On the preceding December 19th. Father Turowski underwent an operation upon the liver. The doctor expressed his grave

fears of post-operative complications. These fears proved to be only too well founded. His patient fell into a state of high fever and there were signs of heart failure. By midday December 23rd, everyone was convinced that death was imminent. Father Turowski was unconscious, his body cold and purple, the pulse imperceptible. A novena to Vincent Pallotti was concluded the same day. Then at 9.30 p.m. the miracle occurred. The doctor himself was there with his patient at the time and described what happened.

"I had remained with the patient to await the moment of death. Then to my great surprise, it was about 9.30 p.m., the patient stopped being restless, grew calm and the colour began returning to his face. The breathing became less rapid and deeper; the pulse became stronger and almost regular and the eyes started to regain their vitality. Shortly after that he fell into a sound sleep. Around 10 p.m. I left the hospital and returned about 12.30 a.m. I could see that the pulse had greatly improved; the breathing was normal and the patient's temperature had dropped. He continued to sleep until 2.15 a.m. I returned to his room to find him fully conscious; he told me he felt well and readily, answered all the questions put to him." Speaking of the change which occurred at 9.30 p.m. the doctor said: "Everything happened within five minutes, so much so that you could speak of a complete reversal of the clinical condition of the patient . . . In the light of medical science I cannot give an explanation of such a sudden and definite cure."

## **THE POPES SPEAK**

### **Vincent Pallotti and the Lay Apostolate**

In his own day Vincent Pallotti was subjected to strong criticism and attack because of his conception of the lay apostolate. This is quite unthinkable today. The Popes themselves are constantly teaching and urging the lay apostolate. And the Popes of our own time in particular have made a point of singling out Vincent Pallotti as a "pioneer and forerunner" and "model" in the work of the lay apostolate.

In the introduction we read the words of our present Holy Father, John XXIII. Let us conclude with those of his predecessors, Pope Pius XII and Pope Pius XI.

Just prior to the Beatification Pope Pius XII wrote to the Superior General of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate concerning its founder: "To this Society he left as an inheritance his achievements and his hopes. This meant the dedication of his followers to the work of the formation of the clergy . . . the recall of Christian peoples . . . to the narrow path of virtue; the propagation of the faith among pagan peoples .... Finally it meant something that is very necessary, particularly in our times, namely, that they should unite the laity, to work under, and in co-operation with the Hierarchy. In this latter, as you well know, Vincent Pallotti should be considered as a forerunner." (December 8th, 1949.)

On the occasion of a decree concerning the sanctity of Vincent Pallotti, January 24th, 1932, Pope Pius XI, the Pope of Catholic Action, declared: "It is at this very time that we are privileged to witness the glorification of a priest who foresaw the thing and the name when he founded the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, which in its essence is the same as Catholic Action, to wit: Lay Apostolate under the guidance of the Apostolate of the Church. Catholic Action everywhere certainly will not miss such a wonderful chance to thank Divine Providence for the new protector and the new model."

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