



SCHOOL of LIFE

The third of six children of Jean and Bertrande de Moras, Vincent **was born in April 1581** in Pouy, a village near Dax in Gascony, in the southwest of France. The farming origins of the boy soon led him to the care of the family pigs and cows, until the parents becoming aware of his intellectual capacities, decided to make him study in 1595, entrusting him to the Franciscans of the nearby Convent of Dax.

The first HORIZONS

Vincent studied with the Franciscans for only a few months, possibly because on the recommendation of the friars, he earned the unexpected interest of a patron, Mr. de Comet, a

lawyer from Dax and a judge of Pouy. He welcomed him home as a tutor of his children and convinced him **to undertake ecclesiastical studies**. He received the tonsure and minor orders in 1596, he studied theology at Toulouse and in 1600, before finishing his studies, was ordained priest. That same year, **he looked in his diocese for an ecclesiastic benefit**

. With the support of Mr. de Comet he was appointed parish priest of Tilh by the vicar general, but had to abandon it and devote himself only to study because the same appointment was already in possession of another priest who disputed the legitimacy of that benefit. In 1604 he concluded his studies with a Bachelor degree.

1609 -1617

1617 1609: a journey of CONVERSION

The period from 1605 to 1607, is the most discussed of the biography of the Saint. A dark period in which there is no trace. He went to Marseilles to collect the inheritance of a will in his favour, but on his return to Toulouse, the boat on which he was travelling was attacked by Turkish Corsairs and Vincent recounts that he was taken prisoner and sold as a slave. Back in France, he went to Paris in search of a benefit, essential for his economic stability. From the French capital in 1610, he wrote to his mother of his struggles and his plans hoping still to "retire honourably".

In this context of projects, ambitions, dreams and disappointments, **some incidents and characters enter the life of the Saint with great effect**

on his "conversion". In 1609 during his stay in Paris, Vincent lived one of the most bitter humiliations of his life – being accused of theft – to which he reacted, contrary to what one might expect, with great virtue and humility. On that occasion he met

Pierre de Bérulle, a leading man in the French spirituality of that time

. After a few years Vincent chose him as his spiritual director. In the Court of Queen Margaret, Vincent met a doctor in theology who was experiencing great doubts in the faith to the point of wanting to commit suicide. Vincent calmed him down and at the same time, offered himself to God asking him to experience in his own soul the tribulations of the theologian. The theologian regained his faith in God, but

Vincent fell in the whirlwind of a profound spiritual crisis that lasted approximately four years

He came out of it only when, following the impulses of grace, he made the decision to devote his life to the service of the poor, for the love of Jesus Christ

. In

1612 Bérulle

, being in need of a

curate for the parish of Clichy

, on the outskirts of

Paris, proposed the appointment to Vincent

who accepted with great enthusiasm. He took possession of the parish on 2

nd

May of the same year. He preached with enthusiasm and persuasion, visited the sick, the afflicted, the poor.

In 1613 the Bérulle invited him to leave Clichy to become a **tutor**, in **one of the most illustrious families of France**

: the

Gondi

family – a family of bankers from Florence, who had made their fortune with Catherine dei Medici. Vincent accepted the new post while maintaining the parish of Clichy until 1626. As a token of gratitude for

his spiritual favours

and, now

certain of his abilities

, the Gondi

nominated Vincent Chaplain of their fiefs

. Finally his much desired for dream is achieved:

an ecclesiastical office at the French nobility

which ensures a comfortable life without problems. But Vincent has changed.

1617

YEAR of the BIG BREAKTHROUGH

In January of 1617 during a visit to Folleville, he was called to **the bedside of a farmer** of the nearby village of Gannes. He encouraged him

to make a general confession. The outcome was unexpected. The farmer began to confess very serious failings

, never disclosed in previous confessions. After the confession,

that poor man felt liberated from all guilt

that had accompanied him until then and was invaded by

an overwhelming joy

. On

25

th

January

, a few days after that confession, on the feast of the conversion of Saint Paul,

Vincent held a sermon

in which he taught

how to make the General confession

. It was a Tuesday, but there were a lot of people who came to Vincent though he could not hear the confession of all. The Jesuits of Amiens were called to help. This was a sign that the sermon had really touched those souls.

For Vincent it was a revelation. He felt that this was his mission

, the work that God wanted from him:

to bring the Gospel to the poor people of the countryside

. Eight years later

he founded the Congregation of the Mission with this specific charism and always

considered January 25

th

, 1617 as the Company's Foundation day

and the sermon preached on that day as "the first sermon of the mission".

As his apostolic zeal grew, his discomfort as tutor of the difficult children of family Gondi also increased: his spiritual father, Bérulle, entrusted to him the pastoral care of the parish of Châtillon les Dombes (today Châtillon sur Chalaronne), a town near Lyon which had recently passed to France and strongly resented the Calvinist influence in nearby Geneva. He departed immediately, without even informing the Gondi of his new intentions. **It was lent of 1617**. He moved quickly in his parish.

The founding experience of the Company of Charity took place in this parish on August

20

th

, 1617

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On the insistence of the family Gondi, he returns to their house on 23rd December 1617, no longer as a tutor but simply as chaplain of their possessions. He was decided to devote himself entirely to the salvation of poor people through preaching and evangelisation. Since then, Vincent never missed an opportunity to instill the importance of the practice of charity to all the people who went to him for spiritual direction and he

continuously committed himself in establishing the "Charity" and everywhere preached the parish

Missions

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St. Vincent de Paul was a French Catholic priest and missionary who devoted his life to helping the poor and the sick. He was a member of the Society of the Missionaries of Charity, which was founded by Mother Teresa in 1946. He was canonized as a saint in 1737.





Paris: hospital La Charité where Jeanne Antoinette de la Motte wrote the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity