

When Vincent de Paul was born (1581-1660), he was one of the many peasants of his time. He didn't have blue blood in his veins! His was a culture that did not allow him to write great works, every career was barred to him. Yet, while many were asking the why of things, he overturned the existing values, wondering: "why not?" Why can't things change, innovate, improve? This was the question of courage, of the Mission, of the charism of charity.

With his action and his sensitivity he changed the way things are understood, so much so that after him the Church and the world were no longer the same. He invented a new role for the woman, placing her at the centre of the life of humanity with its needs and hopes. He did not invent charity, but discovered it within the Church and placed it at the top of the interests of the world.

In him there isn't only the "saint". There is also a century, a people, a landscape. There is a lifetime. There is a church. There is God.

We are in 17th century France, characterized by **wars** and **political struggles**, **famine** and **epidemics**

,  
**appalling poverty**

of populations, especially in the countryside. The French State was not only unconcerned, but its politics were aimed at "elevating the name of the King over foreign Nations". And this led the

**socio-economic situation to tragic levels**

: many beggars, tramps, abandoned children;

**begging in the 17th century is a worrying and disturbing problem**

.  
**Infant mortality grows**

: 50% of children die before one year of life. The

**situation in hospitals is terrible**

, where the poor and the tramps are locked up, considered to be vehicles of diseases, disorders and immorality.

**The treatment reserved for prisoners is inhuman**

.  
**The French peasant**

, living in poverty

**suffers hunger**

, is

**oppressed**

by all kinds of burdens and tithes, conditions that provoke furious riots in the country.

Productivity is low due to

**backward agricultural techniques**

, to

**bad weather**

(years of freezes, floods, droughts), to

**raids of bandits**

, the lodging and

**presence of troops during the thirty years' war**

, which resulted in famines that also produced epidemics and plagues.

**Vincent summarized this distressing reality in the famous phrase: "The poor starve to death and damn themselves"**

. Moreover, at that time, the poor person was not considered as the Christ to be clothed (St. Martin) or to be helped to ford the river of life (St. Christopher):

**the poor man represented**

—

**according to scholars – the "great fear" of the century**

.

At the same time, the **French Church was shaken by heresy, rejected due to the opulence** and the worldliness of bishops and prelates,

**for the decadence**

of fervour and the scandals in the cloistered monasteries and

**for the ignorance and the immorality of priests**

. Some enlightened Bishop had tried to create groups of consecrated virgins dedicated to the poor, the sick, orphans, illiterates. But he hopelessly collided with the mentality of the time: it was unthinkable for a nun to be outside the security of the enclosure, deemed necessary to protect the female fragility.





Saint Vincent de Paul, the apostolic life of the Society of the Priests of the Holy Spirit, the founder of the Society of Charity, called him  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]





Foron (F...)