



Diocese of Richmond

September 26, 2020

Office of the Bishop

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Richmond,

Today we continue the celebration of the bicentennial jubilee of our local Church. This Mass commemorates St. Vincent de Paul, the patron of the Diocese of Richmond, and recognizes the Catholic presence in the Western Vicariate of our diocese.

We honor Vincent de Paul (1581–1660) because he proclaimed the Gospel to the poor in a heroic way. After hearing the confession of a dying peasant, this seventeenth-century French priest was moved to help those in need. He later established a religious order of priests—the Congregation of the Mission, better known as the Vincentians—to evangelize the poor who lived in rural areas (1625). Together with St. Louise de Marillac, Vincent de Paul also founded the Daughters of Charity, a religious order of women dedicated to serving the poor (1633).

The second bishop of Richmond, Right Reverend Richard V. Whelan (1841–1850), probably chose St. Vincent de Paul to be the patron of our diocese. The Catholic Church in Virginia at that time, and for much of its history, was rural, missionary, and poor—just like the focus of the saint’s ministry.

The legacy of St. Vincent de Paul radiates in charitable works carried out across the Diocese of Richmond. Parishes and Catholic Charities serve thousands of people and work to promote justice. They distribute food and clothing; offer housing assistance; minister to the incarcerated; provide counseling, pregnancy, adoption, and foster care services; aid refugees and immigrants; care for disabled persons and senior citizens; and supply disaster relief.

Serving people in need is part of the Church’s mission, and is a theme of our bicentennial. According to St. Vincent de Paul, Christ, “showed... that his mission was to preach to the poor... We also ought to have this same spirit and imitate Christ’s actions, that is, we must take care of the poor, console them, help them, [and] support their cause.”

To commemorate St. Vincent de Paul, I have asked that his feast (September 27), be observed at all Masses this weekend in the diocese. This celebration will inaugurate an Octave of Service, from September 27 to October 4, as parishes, schools, and campus ministries carry out service projects to benefit their communities.

May the prayers of St. Vincent de Paul help us, in keeping with our bicentennial motto, to shine brightly like stars in the world (cf. Phil 2:15–16).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond