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ST. VINCENT STRAMBI, C.P. BIOGRAPHY

'The Faithful Servant'

by
ELMER SCHEPERS
Passionist Oblate

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Introductory Word

The saying goes that God raises up saints for each century, according to its needs. The 1700's and 1800's were certainly in desperate need of a saint.

The Age of Enlightenment, or the Age of Reason, and Jansenism reared their ugly heads during this period, and were the cause of much turmoil in the Church. These influenced all political, social and economic ideas as well.

There appeared a science of natural law, as opposed to Divine Law. Its concepts of "nature" and "reason" were that man must see with his own eyes, and examine with his own mind in order to arrive at critically founded judgments.

"Reason" was accepted as the sole test of truth and prevailed over all other values. It established reason as the principle and supreme value of people. They made a mockery of anyone who did not believe as they did.

Consequently, people turned away from the need of God, and many souls were lost.

Then, as if that weren't enough, in 1789, the French Revolution occurred. The French Army dominated much of Italy through their victories on the battlefield. Once they had control of the temporal lives of the citizens, they attempted to control their souls through anti-clerical and anti-religious propaganda. Everyone was expected to pledge allegiance and loyalty to the state, particularly the hierarchy of the Church; the Pope, Cardinals, Bishops, as well as priests, and those in convents and monasteries. Anyone who didn't, was subject to persecution or exile.

The natural consequence of this was that morality, and laxity in religion, was at an extremely low point and caused much distress.

The Church needed strong leaders. Many good and holy men and women attempted to rise up against these heresies, but were induced to "lay low" rather than be slaughtered by the Army.

God raised not just one, but at least two, saints during these two centuries, St. Paul of the Cross, and St. Vincent Strambi, both from the young

Passionist Institute. Each one was filled with a deep love of Jesus Crucified, and burned with the same zeal for the salvation of souls, and of transforming lives.

Their lives overlapped for about thirty one years, from January 1, 1745 to October 18, 1775. They intertwined for about eight years, from December, 1767 until October 18, 1775, when St Paul of the Cross died.

Although St. Vincent Strambi was destined by God to be a saint, St. Paul of the Cross was very instrumental in molding the young Passionist priest. His life was said to be a reflection of the great spiritual master, St Paul of the Cross.

There was a sort of "mutual admiration" going on between them. Each thought the other was a saint, while in his humility, each thought himself to be unworthy.

In St. Vincent Strambi, we have this portrait of a saint; a man who wanted only to be obscure, and bring the Word of God to all men. But obedience got in his way, as we shall see.

He was a man who could have had anything he wanted in life, wealth, luxury, fame or position. Yet he chose to give all to God for the love of Jesus Crucified. He died penniless; wanting it no other way. ***"The poor are my masters. I am merely their servant"***, he said.

St Vincent never spoke or bragged about what he did, or how, or why. He simply "did", and let his example speak for him. In other words, ***"Don't tell me, show me, and keep quiet."*** I admire this in him. So, with that, let's proceed with his life.

Elmer Schepers
Passionist Oblate

CHAPTER 1

Vincent's Early Life

Vincent Dominic Salvatore Strambi, he cherished the name Vincent; after St Vincent de Paul, whose feast he celebrated every year.

Vincent was born January 1, 1745 at Civita Vecchia, 50 miles north of Rome on the West Coast of Italy. Baptized on January 2, 1745 the day after his birth and received the sacrament of Confirmation on May 7, 1752 at the age of 7. He had three older siblings, two brothers and one sister, but they all died in infancy.

His parents were Joseph Strambi and Eleanora Gori. His father Joseph was from an aristocratic family, which originated in Spain, and they were of noble birth.

Just like his father, Joseph was a prosperous and successful pharmacist, whom everyone respected and held in the highest esteem. He was very prominent in religious and civil affairs of the community. He was a devout Catholic, deeply pious, perfectly honest, and very polite.

Blessed with an abundance of material goods, Joseph devoted his life to unbounded acts of charity, particularly to the poor and needy. In what would be apropos to our modern time, he gave of his time, talent and money.

Joseph's compassion for the poor and needy provided young Vincent with many examples of generosity and, most certainly, was largely responsible for his own limitless acts of charity for the poor and downtrodden.

We'll look at just a few examples of Joseph's generosity. He provided medicine, free of charge, to the poor who were sick. Many times a young Vincent was sent to some impoverished family with food and clothing. He cancelled the rent of any tenant who was unable to pay due to financial difficulty.

Not only must we admire his generosity, but the courtesy, cheerfulness, and politeness he displayed in giving. He gave generously to worthy causes as well. One example: Evidently, there were many schools around for boys who

wanted to receive an education, but a shortage of schools for girls. So, aware of this situation, at age 60, and shortly before his death, Joseph provided in his will that money should be set aside to build a large and imposing school for girls. When the school opened in 1816, Vincent sent a letter to the Bishop of Civita Vecchia, expressing his satisfaction in seeing the school completed.

Vincent's mother, Eleanora, was a faithful mirror of her husband. She attended Mass and received Holy Communion daily. Whenever anyone visited her, she was in prayer. Everyone, especially the poor, referred to her as a "saint".

The influence his mother Eleanora had on Vincent was very significant. Even before Vincent reached the age of reason, she instilled into his heart fervent sentiments of piety, and love for Jesus and the Blessed Mother. With tender love she would invoke the Most Holy name of Jesus, and Mary. She taught him to pray reverently and with devotion, and she spoke often to him about God, Heaven and Angels. When Eleanora went to Church for Mass and Holy Communion or to make visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Vincent would follow.

All the outstanding qualities possessed by Joseph and Eleanora were manifested in Vincent throughout his life. What a blessing Joseph and Eleanora had in Vincent, and from them sprang the flower which we are invited to admire. However, let's not forget what a wonderful blessing Vincent had in his parents.

Vincent displayed a quick and impulsive temperament, causing him to be full of mischief and life, and to be very active. He was stubborn, impatient, irritable, selfish and inclined to anger. As might be expected, this made him difficult to manage. I guess you would say he was just a normal boy. Being the only surviving child, and realizing their responsibility to raise him properly, his parents were careful not to spoil him.

He was very athletic, and excellent at the games youths played in those days. His mischievous nature got him into trouble many times. One particular incident might summarize his nature. In Vincent's day, drinking water was drawn from a public well and carried home in large pitchers on the shoulders of housewives. (I don't know why not husbands.) Vincent was considered an expert with the sling-shot. (You can imagine what's coming.) One particular day, Vincent just could not resist the temptation any longer. He took dead aim, fired, and bulls-eye, he broke the pitcher filled with water, suddenly drenching the woman. For some unexplained reason, the woman got very angry. Now

that's my kind of boy! Later, he was extremely sorry for this incident and all the other mischievous pranks he pulled, and made reparation for them.

The townspeople admired Vincent for the radical change taking place in him. A sure prelude to greater sanctity! All Vincent's "bad" qualities were counter balanced by many acts of charity toward poverty stricken children. From the example he received from his parents, it is understandable that he had a deep and tender compassion for the poor and needy. But it is remarkable that such a young child would display such compassion and anguish for them in the ways he did.

Just a few examples:

Time after time Vincent's mother had to give him another shirt, or pants, or shoes and socks, or coat, after he had given them to some poor and ragged child he met in the streets. He would give them away right on the spot, without hesitation.

Once, Vincent received a very nice overcoat from his parents. The first time he wore it outside, he came across a very ragged boy. Instantly, he gave the coat to the boy.

Another day, when Vincent was walking through the streets of the city, he met a boy so poorly dressed that he was almost naked, and who was asking for charity. Vincent was stirred to his inmost soul. He didn't have any money to offer, so he took his clothes off and gave them to the boy. Then he ran home as fast as he could, wrapped only in a piece of cloth. We can just imagine how startled his parents must have been to see him come in from the streets in his underclothes. His mother provided him with more clothes, while the people praised him for his act of charity. This time, however, Vincent's father thought he had gone overboard. Joseph scolded him because of the embarrassment he had caused, and to teach him about the value of the clothing he was giving away. He informed Vincent that these items of clothing were not his own, and he did not have the right to dispose of them as he saw fit. In the future he was required to ask his parent's permission first. Out of obedience, and to gain the proper merit, Vincent did seek their permission first. It must be assumed though, that he did not discontinue giving his clothing away.

Whenever Vincent did have money, he would give it to some needy person. One day a hermit came to see Vincent about an orphan girl who could not get married because she did not have the necessary dowry. He asked Vincent for the money. Vincent had saved some money, and he gave it to the

hermit to give to the girl. I presume she got married. This is some evidence that the people were aware of his generosity.

Vincent's parents were proud of his charitable acts, and it brought tears to his father Joseph's eyes when he witnessed them. You wonder though, who is to be admired more, Vincent for performing them, or a mother and father who set the example, and encouraged and praised him. Vincent exemplified his compassion for the poor and lowly to the very end of his life.

Grace shows up

In time, Vincent gave up his childish amusements, and, with the help of his parents, developed into a well mannered and sincerely pious boy. From birth, Vincent seemed to be blessed by Heaven, and his mind predisposed to grace. Now he took pleasure in only those things which tended to increase his piety and devotion. He gave God all of his time after studies and domestic duties. From school, he went straight to church, got on his knees, joined his hands, and was wholly absorbed in prayer, with his eyes fixed firmly on the door of the tabernacle. Prayer took on a new, and more profound meaning. Any spare time he had was spent in fervent prayer. He took great delight in serving at Mass, and assisting at the Divine Office.

One episode which occurred at this age displayed the great grace that operated within Vincent, and how he corresponded to it. One day Vincent had an audience with Cardinal Albani, a family friend. His mother was very proud of Vincent for such an honor. She was particularly interested in how well he was dressed for such an occasion. She dressed him in his best suit, and even put ruffles on his wrists. He was embarrassed, and filled with sadness, and almost shame, yet, out of respect for his mother, he was silent through the whole affair. Vincent feared that he had committed a sin of vanity, and cried the remainder of the day.

Early signs of priesthood

At a very young age, there was a foreshadowing of Vincent's vocation to the priesthood. Whenever he went to Church, he concentrated on and was very observant of the particular services being held. He would then go to the room in his home where he had set up a table with a crucifix placed on it. This was his altar. Here he would pray, and imitate the services he had seen performed. Being a typical mother, Eleanora became curious after a while, and wondered what he was doing spending so much time in his room. She tip-toed to the door and looked through the keyhole to observe him. She saw him kneeling in

deep devotion before the crucifix on the "altar." She watched as he then raised his arms to the sacred image, and bowed his head in prayer. Another time she saw him prostrate, on the floor. We can just imagine the joy his mother must have experienced in what she witnessed.

Vincent's playmate

Vincent had a playmate about his own age, and who had similar pious inclinations. On occasions, Vincent would invite this friend to his house. They would go to Vincent's room to pray together. Sometimes Vincent would imitate a priest saying Mass. After praying, he made his friend sit down, and Vincent would stand as if to deliver a sermon in Church.

The mother of Vincent's playmate encouraged this friendship, and invited Vincent to their home. On one visit they went to a room in his friend's home and shut themselves in. Of course, like Mrs. Strambi, she too became curious as to what they were doing. Guess what! She went to the door and listened, and it sounded as though Vincent was preaching. The mother was absolutely amazed to hear Vincent speaking about love, and devotion to the Mother of Jesus.

Education

There were no regular schools for children, so Vincent's early education was conducted by his parents in their home, where he learned to read and write. With their help, he mastered the catechism so well that he was allowed to be Confirmed at the age of seven.

In order to receive some elementary education, he was enrolled with the Friars Minor at the local monastery, where he learned Latin, and was taught in Latin. By the age of twelve, Vincent was so proficient in Christian Doctrine that the Pastor appointed him official instructor of the young children.

Reminiscent of what St Paul of the Cross did, Vincent walked through the streets of the town ringing a bell and inviting children to gather in the public square near the Church. While they sat on the ground around him, he explained the Catechism to them. After the lesson, he would make up a little sermon and preach to them. To illustrate how seriously he took this responsibility, he rewarded the good scholars by giving them religious pictures, and scolded the negligent ones. Not only were the children eager to learn what Vincent taught them, but he attracted the attention, respect and affection of adults who stopped to hear him.

Vincent had found his vocation. He now knew he wanted to be a preacher. Thus, he displayed in boyhood the zeal and talent that eventually made him one of the most noted and respected preachers of his time. As people passed by him they would remark, "*There goes a saint*". (Did they not remember the sling-shot incidents?)

Vincent was blessed with a keen intellect and much talent, and applied himself through a lot of study to develop these gifts in order to make them meaningful and fruitful. Prayer and study were the only things Vincent was interested in doing. (Prayer was study; study was prayer.) Church and school were the only two places he went so that he would keep his soul free from worldly affairs.

CHAPTER 2

On the way to Priesthood (Seminarian)

Vincent's desire to study for the priesthood began in 1760 when he was fifteen years old. When he asked for his parents' permission, they, particularly his father, put up considerable resistance. They thought they could not part with him, thinking that there wouldn't be anyone to take care of them in their old age. This offended Joseph.

Joseph wanted Vincent to get into the business he was in, or, maybe, some other profession, such as law. He even offered Vincent a position in the world. He thought Vincent should get married and continue the family name. He went so far as to propose a very desirable marriage partner for Vincent. How thoughtful of him!

But Vincent remained steadfast in the conviction of his priestly call, and to consecrate himself totally to God. His parents, realizing the danger of keeping him from following God's call, finally relented, and gave their consent. He received his surplice and black cassock prior to his fifteenth birthday.

After completing philosophy studies, Vincent entered the seminary at Montefiascone to study Theology on November 4, 1762. The seminary was noted for the learning of its Professors. The diligent and studious Vincent was in the perfect place. In his two years here, he gained much respect for his piety.

Call to religious life in a monastery

While at Montefiascone he felt attracted to the religious life in a monastery, especially to an Order devoted to missionary work. He sought admission to the Capuchins, and later, to the Vincentians. Both times he was turned down. They thought he was too frail, and, therefore, didn't have the stamina to endure the rigors of monastic life. This frustrated him because he had never been sick. Also, they were well aware of Joseph's disapproval of Vincent's vocation in the first place, not to mention what he would say if he entered a monastery. He knew what his parents' response would be if he divulged his plans, so he kept them a secret.

Studied Sacred Eloquence in Rome

Vincent's oratorical gifts, as well as his command of languages, became apparent while in the seminary at Montefiascone. Realizing the importance of a solid oratorical preparation for the preaching ministry he had already chosen for himself, he interrupted his theological studies to go to Rome in 1764 to take a two year course in Sacred Eloquence. Only the best students were at this school of eloquence, but none were as gifted as Vincent. These oratorical gifts, as well as his forceful composition, drew the attention of the Master and his fellow students.

Inheritance rejected

Being the only child in his family, Vincent stood to inherit his parent's wealth upon their death, even as a diocesan priest. But Vincent wanted to renounce his entire inheritance now, even if he could not enter a religious order, where he would take a vow of poverty. So he asked his father for his inheritance. Mr. Strambi was puzzled at such an odd request, and asked Vincent why he wanted it at this time. ***"I want to renounce it now, and to have nothing in this world, so as to love God all the more"***, he stated. As he looked at the crucifix on the wall, he said; ***"I want to have Christ Crucified as my only Possession"***. Although Mr. Strambi was pleased by Vincent's virtue, he would not allow Vincent to renounce his inheritance.

Dominicans at Viterbo

In 1765, after his course in Sacred Eloquence was completed, he entered the Dominican Seminary at Viterbo to resume his Theological studies. But not before Joseph made one last attempt to lure him away from the priesthood and into marriage. But Vincent had his answer prepared. He took a picture of Our Blessed Mother and wrote on it; ***"This is my spouse"***, and sent it to his father. This was the last he heard about marriage from his father.

It was at Viterbo that he became inspired with the theological spirit of St Thomas Aquinas, Vincent's love for the rest of his life. Vincent stood out among all the students, and was admired by everyone. (This would be the story of his life.)

On May 24, 1766, Vincent received the sacred order of sub-deacon. In this first step of Major Orders, he took the vow of celibacy; this definitely stopped all further arguments with his father regarding marriage.

At the end of 1766, the seminary at Montefiascone was in need of a Prefect. The Bishop contacted the Dominican Fathers at Viterbo asking them to recommend someone trustworthy. Vincent, though still a seminarian and a Sub-Deacon, was highly recommended. In November, 1766, he was appointed Prefect, the first of many extraordinary appointments he received during his lifetime. He took his responsibilities and obligation seriously, and they were not disappointed with their new Prefect.

Seminarian at Bagnorea and Rector

March 14, 1767, Vincent received the Major Order of Deacon. On November 23, 1767, he entered the seminary at Bagnorea. His tenure as Prefect at Montefiascone was so successful that he was appointed temporary (acting) Rector at the seminary at Bagnorea during the absence of the Rector. This was unheard of, but this was Vincent. As Rector, he displayed many of the qualities that are called for in an ideal superior; courage, common sense, and high principles so requisite for the successful leadership of men. He possessed the rare ability to blend; paternal liberality with conservatism, firmness with fairness and discipline with kindness. He was blessed with keen business insights, which he inherited from his father.

Vincent wasn't a Passionist yet, but he surely was one at heart, displaying an ardent love for Christ Crucified, fostering devotion to the Sacred Passion among the seminarians, urging the seminarians to wear a small crucifix under their cassocks, and encouraging them to form a habit of turning their thoughts to Jesus Crucified from time to time. Although only a twenty two year old seminarian, he molded a model seminary.

CHAPTER 3

Priesthood Ordination Retreat

Dec 9, 1767 Vincent began a ten day pre-ordination retreat at the Passionist monastery of St Michael's, at Vetralla, where he was greeted at the door by Fr. Paul of the Cross.

During this retreat, Vincent had ample opportunity to observe the Passionist way of life; their spirit of poverty, prayer and solitude, penance and study. And he observed how the Passionist Community lived and worked together.

After learning that the Passionists make a special vow to spread devotion to the Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ, particularly through missionary work, he felt a strong attraction to become a Passionist. All this appealed to him and he was convinced that his vocation was to be a Passionist.

He went to Paul's room, and, on his knees, asked Paul to admit him into the Congregation. But Paul didn't think Vincent had the physical stamina to embrace the Passionist Rule, so he kindly, but firmly, refused to admit him. As before, this puzzled Vincent because he had never been sick. But Vincent accepted it, for now.

Vincent's ordination

Vincent lacked several months in attaining the required age for ordination to the priesthood. A special dispensation was obtained and he was ordained December 19, 1767. December 20th he celebrated his first Mass at Bagnorea with his seminarians present. He then went home for Christmas to celebrate Mass with his parents at Civita Vecchia.

During Lent 1768, Vincent was relieved of his duties as temporary Rector when the aging Rector returned to the seminary. Immediately, the Bishop put Vincent's oratorical skills to the test, appointing him to preach Lenten courses at Vetralla, and then assigned him to preach in other parts of the Diocese. He proved to be a perfect orator.

After Easter 1768, Vincent returned to Rome to continue his theological studies at the famed Dominican school at St Sabina. He specialized in the

study of the writings of St Thomas Aquinas, who became his "author", and the Summa, his "book". It was his constant companion. One noted professor said it seemed like Vincent knew all the words of St Thomas by heart.

CHAPTER 4

Enters the Passionist

Vincent's ordination only served to increase his greatest and strongest desire; to be a missionary in a religious order through which he could win the salvation of souls.

He spoke to his Bishop regarding his feelings, and was encouraged to follow up on his dreams. The Bishop displayed a great amount of character and open-mindedness because he knew the Diocese would lose a dedicated and holy priest.

Vincent was certain he had found where he needed to be. The sweetness of solitude, and the holy and austere life of the Passionists appealed to him. The great love and respect he had for Fr. Paul of the Cross didn't hurt either. So Vincent increased his prayers so the Lord would grant his request. He made several trips to Vetralla to plead with Fr. Paul of the Cross to admit him to the Congregation. It worked. September, 1768 Paul finally accepted Vincent into the Novitiate, and sent him a letter of acceptance. Fr. Paul of the Cross rejoiced, and thanked God for the precious gift from Heaven they had been presented. Paul knew God had sent him an angel of virtue, and, rightly so, predicted sainthood for Vincent.

But before Vincent entered the Passionist Community, he returned to his home for a short visit. He still didn't disclose to his parents what was transpiring. He knew what their response and reaction would be, and he did not want any further arguments with them.

Novice and Postulant

September 20, 1768 with Paul's letter of acceptance in his hand, he climbed up Mt. Argentario, and entered the Novitiate of St Joseph, where he was greeted by each member (20 clerics and a lay brother). September 24, 1768 after just a few days as a Postulant, Vincent was admitted as a Novice. Clothed in the Passionist black habit, with the heart shaped badge, he began his one year probation as required by the Rule. Because of his love for St Vincent DePaul, he didn't change his name Vincent, he added the name Mary, and substituted the name of St. Paul (the Apostle) for Strambi. So, now he is Fr. Vincent Mary of St Paul.

His father Joseph's Objections

But not all is peaceful just yet.

Mr. Strambi was infuriated when he finally learned what Vincent had done. He wrote a bitter letter of protest to Paul, demanding that Vincent be dismissed from the Passionists. Fr. Paul replied, basically saying that he sympathized with Joseph's feelings of fatherly affection, and that he was sorry for Joseph's anxiety. Paul assured Joseph that neither he nor anyone else asked Vincent to come, and, on several occasions, had even opposed Vincent's entering. If Vincent wanted to leave, he was free to do so.

But Mr. Strambi wasn't convinced. So he asked a priest to write to Fr. Paul on his behalf. Paul replied that Vincent had a true vocation, and he could not, in good conscience, ask Vincent to leave. That didn't pacify Joseph either. If at first you don't succeed, go to a higher authority and get what you want; or, so Joseph thought. Finally, he appealed to Cardinal Oddi, Bishop of Viterbo. The Cardinal sent a priest, as his personal representative, to interview Vincent at Presentation. The priest was supposed to appeal to the grief of his parents, and to the great good he would do as a diocesan priest, and, therefore, return to his Diocese. He failed. The priest made this report to Cardinal Oddi: Vincent was enjoying the best of health, and was perfectly contented. He said that if he had not left when he did, he might have been persuaded by Vincent to become a religious himself. This report eased Joseph's mind and stopped any opposition he had. Vincent spent his Novitiate in undisturbed peace. His father, Joseph approved of the life, and became a great admirer of Fr. Paul of the Cross. He became a notable benefactor of the Passionists, even donating money to further Fr. Paul's canonization.

Religious profession

On September 24, 1769 Vincent, not quite twenty-five years old, pronounced his vows as a Passionist. Only four months later, Fr. Paul, who held such high esteem for Fr. Vincent, appointed him to give the annual retreat at Presentation to all the religious. The whole community praised him and the results. His preaching career had already taken flight. Vincent's first two years as a Passionist were hidden in the spirit of prayer, recollection, obedience, piety, mortification and meditation, in intensive preparation for his preaching mission.

In November of 1770, Fr. Paul called Vincent to St. Michael's in Vetralla, where he absorbed himself in more prayer and profound studies. He studied all the great Masters of Christian eloquence, the early Holy Fathers of

the Church, St. Augustine for his noble ideas, St. Gregory for dignity, St. Bernard for exquisite feeling and above all, St John Chrysostom (whom Vincent read in original Greek, which he knew with perfection.)

Sacred Scripture was his greatest joy. He loved St. Paul and Isaiah. And, of course, there was St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa, which was always at his side, it was his constant guide. Nor can we forget the guidance of Fr. Paul of the Cross. With all these studies behind him, and his burning thirst for the salvation of souls, he was now ripe for the Apostolate, and ready to become one of the most noted preachers of Rome. Popes, Cardinals, Bishops, clergy, nobles, everyone, would come to hear him preach.

Missions

Fr Vincent began his missionary career at Montecchio in October of 1771. It lasted until Christmas. Fr. Paul of the Cross and the whole community were very happy and excited with the success of his first mission. The Bishop was so pleased that he asked the Passionists to hold more retreats in other parts of his Diocese. The Passionists were still a very young community, so this was a very welcome gift.

Whenever Vincent preached a mission, the crowds were so big that they had to be held outdoors, weather permitting. This became a norm for him. Vincent's talent and gift as an orator was revealed. Before each sermon, which he prepared at the foot of the crucifix he placed on his study table, he spent considerable time in deep meditation in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

Vincent went wherever and whenever he was told, without question, and totally obedient. Sometimes, when he returned from one assignment, he was sent out immediately to another without rest, without complaining. He was untiring. And to think, he was rejected several times, even by Fr. Paul, because they thought he was too frail and didn't have the stamina for missionary work, which, by the way, he did for at least thirty years before he was interrupted by being named a Bishop. (Remember, he could be living a life of wealth and leisure.)

His journeys were made in his bare feet, in snow, ice, rain, or scorching sun, without money and little food, which he probably would have given to some needy person anyway. Vincent's name was pronounced everywhere, being accorded love, affection and admiration. He gained universal esteem through his virtues, wisdom and his zeal for the glory of God, and salvation of souls. Yet, he never wavered in his humility

I'll mention just a few of his more noteworthy missions to show how well respected he was, and the confidence people had in his ability. He preached to most of the people in the Kingdom of Naples. In May of 1772, he gave a mission to the prisoners at Civita Vecchia. His eloquent words penetrated even the hardest hearts and moved them to tears. August of 1772, by order of Pope Clement XIV, he held a mission at Spello to bring peace to the town: people were rebelling against changes in the Diocese. Similarly, the Bishop of Anagni was holding a Diocesan Synod, and there was much discord in the Diocese. Fr. Vincent was asked to give a mission, successfully bringing peace to the city and the Synod continued.

Several times he was called to give missions in Rome. The Pope even asked him to give spiritual exercises in the Sacred College of Cardinals. Popes, Cardinals, Bishops, everyone, admired Fr. Vincent tremendously, and had complete confidence in his work. He seemed to be the one they called upon in a crisis situation.

Interesting incidents or miracles occurred during his missions. I will mention a couple. While giving a mission at Ancona, a ray of light from a statue of Our Lady shined on him as he preached; it appeared to penetrate the heart. And, at a mission at Issi, the sky darkened, rain appeared and the crowd dispersed. He called them back, and said the Litany to the Blessed Mother. The rain ceased and the mission continued.

Called to Sts John and Paul

In November of 1773, two years before Fr. Paul of the Cross died, he called Fr. Vincent to Sts John and Paul in Rome, to be Professor of Theology and Sacred Eloquence at the seminary. In addition, he was Spiritual Director of Novices. He remained here for seven years. Fr. Vincent thought he was obligated to arm the future defenders of the faith very powerfully. Just as Vincent had prepared himself so extremely well, he made certain that his students were just as well prepared to meet all the distractions going on at that time. As we might expect, most of his students were very successful. Because of Vincent, the school of knowledge became a school of sanctity.

Self-sacrificing care

The self-sacrificing care Vincent gave to his sick brethren was most admirable, even to his very last act while on earth. At the bedside of the sick *"he had the heart of a mother because he had the charity of a saint"*.

In 1816 A typhus epidemic broke out. Vincent and others were caring for the sick. Evidently the helpers were afraid they might contract the disease, and many refused to help. He informed them they would not contract the disease, and should not have any fear in giving aid. They were spared, and they did not get so much as a headache. Fr. Vincent was 71 years old at the time.

Merchants were overcharging people for some products, and this angered Vincent. He asked them to discontinue their price gouging, threatening to open his own stores. They did not heed his warning, and he did, in fact open a store to sell grain to the poor. He did the same with a bakery, in order to get lower prices for the poor. Happy the Diocese that can have for a Bishop someone like Bishop Strambi. He was truly the friend and father of his people.

When Fr. Paul was dying, he asked for Fr. Vincent, over and over again, to speak to him about the benefits of Extreme Unction. In Fr. Paul's last moments, he asked Fr. Vincent to read to him the Gospel account of the Sacred Passion. As he lay dying, Fr. Paul said in farewell to Vincent, ***"Good Fr. Vincent, you are going to do great things. To you I recommend the Congregation"***. Fr. Paul of the Cross died October 18, 1775.

CHAPTER 5

Gift of governing

Vincent's marvelous gift of leadership and governing was first attested to when he was appointed Prefect, and, later, as temporary Rector, while still a young seminarian. These extraordinary appointments continued throughout his life. He was appointed Vice Rector at Sts John and Paul. In May of 1780, he was appointed Rector. In April of 1781, at the Provincial Chapter, he was elected Provincial of the Roman Province. In 1784, he was relieved of his duties as Provincial, and commissioned to write the life of St. Paul of the Cross. However, he was elected Provincial Consultor, a position he held for six years. Using the small cell of Fr. Paul of the Cross, he wrote the biography of St. Paul of the Cross. Fr. Vincent had such tremendous respect for St. Paul of the Cross that he wrote the whole biography while on his knees. It was published in 1786.

In 1790, he was appointed Consultor-General for the entire Congregation and lived with the Superior General at Sts John and Paul. He held this office until he was appointed Bishop. Fr. Vincent was also Confessor and Director of souls, some of whom are under consideration for canonization. In 1792 he was appointed Postulator in the beatification process of St. Paul of the Cross.

Pope Pius VI nominated a committee of three Bishops to study the effects of Jansenism, creeping its way through Italy. Their task was to rebut its heresies and excesses. From among the most learned of the learned, Fr. Vincent was selected by them to be the collaborator. They presented him with the most difficult questions, and they made no decisions without him. In his work, he displayed his deep learning, as he revealed Jansenism for what it really was; the enemy of God, Christ Our Lord, the Sacraments, the Church, and the Roman Pontiff. Amazingly, he accomplished all this while still fulfilling his missionary duties. He went from one office to another until he was appointed Bishop in 1801.

What were some of his special qualities?

He was always kind, humble, and charitable; always smiling and praising others, he was indulgent to others, but severe on himself. He never abused his authority, nor did he seek privileges, exemptions, conveniences nor liberty. He never asked anything for himself. When he became Rector at Sts

John and Paul, he used the cell he picked for himself, and which was located in the most inconvenient place in the monastery, instead of the room designated for the Rector. No chore was beneath his dignity he helped with everything; dishes, cleaning his cell, or sweeping.

He was always the first to obey every Rule; he was referred to as "The Living Rule". Mainly, the Rule that all must pray and keep silence. His aim was to lead, rather than drive. He led by perfect example and not many words. He had the most competent advisors, but no one dominated him. He listened to advice, weighed it and then made a decision. His door was always open, and he never made a distinction between people. He spoke frankly to all, regardless of rank. ***"He did not seem like a superior, but an equal."*** He saw God in everything, and everything in God.

He had the gift of pacifying souls. There is a story of a man who was well known as a drunkard. He said he heard a rumor that Fr. Vincent was one also. The man was using some word about Fr. Vincent that he did not know. When Fr. Vincent was told what it meant, he laughed and told the man; ***"Well, let us both amend."***

CHAPTER 6

Desperate Times - French Revolution

Europe was in much turmoil at this time, and the plight of the Catholic Church seemed desperate. After the French Revolution in 1789, a National Assembly was established, and its controlling members were very anti-clerical. Their objective was to subjugate the Church to the State by intrigue and persecution. One of its first acts was to secularize all ecclesiastical property, and suppress all religious orders. Churches were profaned, pillaged and demolished.

In 1790, the French government promulgated a "Civil Constitution For The Clergy". It abolished all existing dioceses, and set up new ones. These Bishops were not to be filled by Papal appointment, but by election. No religious qualifications were necessary, and elected Bishops were forbidden to apply to the Pope for confirmation.

Pope Pius VI refused to acknowledge the Constitution, which was a direct usurpation of the spiritual powers of the Papacy, and would compel the hierarchy and clergy to disavow allegiance to the Pope as Supreme head of the Church. Thankfully, with only a few exceptions, Bishops and priests supported the Pope. The French government retaliated by imprisoning and deporting all non-conforming ecclesiastics. One hundred Bishops and over 30,000 priests were sent into exile, many of them to the U.S.

Napoleon Bonaparte, an Italian native, and a Catholic at the time, was Commander in Chief of the French army that had defeated the Austrians and Italians, and placed the Papal States at his mercy. The people were extremely bitter when Napoleon invaded the Papal States, and were preparing an uprising, one they stood no chance of winning. Who else but Fr. Vincent was asked by the Pope to address the people in the Public Square of the city in order to stop the uprising, and to prevent any bloodshed. His eloquence succeeded in controlling the people.

When the French troops entered Rome, they tried desperately to stir up a rebellion of the people against the Papal government by going through the streets spreading anti-clerical propaganda. To avert this rebellion and to instill a spirit of patience, courage and trust in Divine Providence, Pope Pius VI called upon Fr. Vincent to give a mission in the center of Rome. The crowds were so

immense the square was unable to hold the number of people. Forced to talk so loudly during one of his long talks, his voice became hoarse. He told the people he could not carry on. He held up his crucifix, and said; ***"My people, I cannot continue, but this crucifix will speak for me"***. Their hearts were touched, and the people were inspired to go home, determined to carry their cross of military oppression with resignation.

On February 15, 1798 the French took over all the functions of government and proclaimed the Roman Republic. August 29, 1799, five months after he was exiled to France, the Pope died from all the stress. He refused to submit to the forceful usurpation of his sovereign power.

Other events of interest:

1. February 20, 1798-Fr. Vincent fled Rome and went to Mt. Argentario
2. June 24, 1798-Police closed the Novitiate at Mt Argentario and expelled the Novices.
3. May 1, 1799-Fr. Vincent was taken prisoner by French, and the religious were driven from Mt. Argentario.
4. Nov, 1799-Fr. Vincent returned to Rome

Election of a new Pope

Before Pope Pius VI died, he prepared for the election process of the new Pope to take place in Venice. Although only a priest, Fr. Vincent was nominated by his friend Cardinal Antonelli, and received a few votes to become the new Pope.

March 14, 1800 Pope Pius VII was elected, and following some peaceful overtures by Napoleon, took up residence in Rome on July 3, 1800.

CHAPTER 7

Appointed Bishop

July 5, 1801, Fr. Vincent was informed by the Holy See that he had been named Bishop of Macerata and Tolentino. This deeply disturbed Fr. Vincent because this meant that he would be required to leave his beloved Passionists, and his preferred life as a missionary. Vincent had now been in the cloister of the Passionist Monastery for thirty-two years. He went to the Chapel and prayed that he would not have to accept the appointment. In his humility, he didn't think he was qualified; he thought he was incompetent to hold such a high position, one he r respected so highly.

He asked his friend Cardinal Antonelli to intercede for him, but the Cardinal refused. He tried everything, even talking to the Pope. Pope Pius VII informed him that it was he alone who nominated him, through personal knowledge, and Divine Inspiration. *"I have chosen you of my own accord. Nobody pointed you out to me"*. Therefore, *"I wish you to accept"*. Forever obedient, Fr. Vincent accepted. Cardinals, Bishops, all were joyful at Fr Vincent's appointment. He retained his position of Consultor General until April 23, 1802.

Now he is Bishop Vincent Strambi. July 26, 1801, Fr. Vincent was consecrated Bishop at Sts John and Paul, among a vast crowd of people, including the sister of the Emperor of Austria. Fr. Vincent was uncomfortable with all the accolades and attention, and just wanted to "get out of town" as soon as possible.

Before he proceeded on to his dioceses, he spent six days at St. Michael's at Vetralla, and then three more days at another Passionist monastery, always living and dressing as a Passionist. Finally, he assumed his duties at Macerata on August 14, 1801, and the Diocese of Tolentino on October 4, 1801.

Due to the life of poverty he vowed as a Passionist, he was unable to afford the Episcopal vestments and other supplies that were required for a Bishop. So the Pope provided him with his vestments, and some Cardinals provided the other necessary items.

He may have been a Bishop and taken away from his former environment, but he continued to live his life as closely as he could to the

Passionist way. He set up his new room just as his was in the monastery. In the evenings, he dressed in his Passionist habit, and then slept fully clothed on a bed of straw. He awoke in the middle of the night for an hour of prayer. His room adjoined the Chapel. He wanted to be in the presence of the Lord at all times, so he simply had a hole cut in the wall between his room and the Chapel. But when his day began, he was a man of action, taking time for everyone, no matter his rank, status or poverty.

Spiritual uplifting in the Dioceses

Those were very troubling times, and the Dioceses were in need of much spiritual uplifting. He undertook this task with the same vigor and energy as he did in everything else. Shortly after he arrived, he arranged for missions to be conducted in his Dioceses by the Passionists. Who else? First, he gave a mission for his clergy. He preached many of the sermons during the missions for the people. When this occurred, the Cathedral could not accommodate the number who attended. He then heard Confessions for long periods at a time.

Vincent made the needs of the poor his primary concern. He considered himself the servant of the poor, and he served them extremely well. He came to serve, not to be served. Love for the poor was love for Christ Our Lord. Any money or gifts he received while on his journeys found their way to the poor, so as to have nothing for himself, as he told his father. One of his greatest satisfactions was bringing relief to the poor, and everyone received his kind and loving attention. He became a beggar for the poor, knocking on the doors of the wealthy, appealing to everyone for help.

WHAT HUMILITY!

Once someone remarked that it would be more becoming the Episcopal rank if he covered the bare walls with tapestries and paintings. He replied; ***"The walls do not feel the cold, but my poor people do."*** Another person remarked; ***"Sometimes God Himself consoled His servant by revealing to him the needs of the poor."*** There are innumerable cases of Vincent helping the poor. We can just say that his charity touched everything, everywhere, and all the poor.

It was extremely important to Vincent to have learned, pious and zealous priests. When he was a seminarian Rector, he made certain that the seminarians were well prepared. But now, as Bishop, he could more forcefully dictate the best training for candidates to the priesthood, and was able to play a greater role in their welfare. Bishop Vincent conducted the retreats for the

seminarians prior to their ordination. He visited his parishes regularly, and watched over those who sought the religious life.

A couple of stories to show his astuteness is worth noting: He advised one seminarian to quit because his mother was the only one who wanted him to become a priest. Speaking to him, he said; ***"It is not from God, but from your mother"***. Another seminarian wanted to quit, but Vincent told him no. Vincent said that God had confided to him that He wanted the boy in the seminary. He told the young man that he would be a Bishop someday. Not only did he become a Bishop, but a Cardinal as well.

He took great interest in the youth of his Dioceses, also. To make certain that children were prepared for Confirmation, he urged the teaching of Catechism. Humbly, he went through the streets, ringing a bell to gather the children, and then he taught them Catechism. He was far ahead of his time, when he organized groups of laity to teach catechism to the children. Pope Pius XI made this world wide in what we know today as The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD).

Other Works He Performed

He visited and watched over the convents in his dioceses, comforting, encouraging and counseling the nuns.

He comforted the sick by visiting them in their homes, or in the hospital.

He founded orphan asylums for abandoned children.

He founded a home for the aged preventing them from spending the nights on the streets.

He visited the prisons.

Bishop Vincent touched the lives of everyone; no one escaped his attention. He worked tirelessly, and seemed inexhaustible. What motivated him? His burning desire for the salvation of souls.

CHAPTER 8

Excommunication of Napoleon

In 1804, Napoleon designated himself Emperor of France and his pride of power was at its peak by 1809. He issued two controversial decrees. Several Pontifical Provinces, including Macerata, would be annexed to the French Empire. A "Council Extraordinary" would be set up to administer them. He also declared that Rome was to be incorporated into his French Empire. Pope Pius VII repudiated these decrees, and excommunicated him. When Napoleon heard about this he was infuriated, ridiculing the Pope and calling him a "raving lunatic".

July, 1809, the Pope was arrested, and with only two hours preparation, he was taken to Savona, Italy. Three years later, the Pope was exiled to France.

In the process they confiscated the Pope's signet ring, but not before he broke it in two pieces.

Bishop Vincent's Exile

Brave defender of the rights of the Church

Meanwhile, the French military General demanded that the decrees and regulations of the French occupation of Macerata be read in the Churches of the Dioceses. Bishop Vincent forbade the priests to do this. He told them that this was not a function of the priestly ministry. Furthermore, the French had their own people who could do this. Next, the General demanded that Bishop Vincent turn over a list of young men in his Dioceses for conscription into the Army of occupation. ***"I will never do that"***, Vincent answered. Vincent would have been the scorn of all his people. That may have been the General's intention in order to turn the people against Bishop Vincent.

In September, 1808 Bishop Vincent was given orders to give his oath of loyalty to his majesty, Napoleon, Emperor of France and King of Italy, the new sovereign, and, in a Pastoral letter to the people, declare his submission to Napoleon. Bishop Vincent refused to comply, saying, ***"I'll not be a traitor to my sacred duty"***. He was well aware of the consequences of this refusal, but he was willing to suffer, even death, in defense of the rights of the Church.

WHAT GREAT COURAGE!

The invaders understood that Bishop Vincent was the most influential prelate east of Rome, and if he didn't take the prescribed oath, he must be removed. September 28, 1808 Bishop Vincent was placed under house arrest, awaiting deportation. His spirit of prayer and charity did not cease. He gave all he had to uphold the spirit of enthusiasm in others, especially the poor, who were afraid they might never see him again. While he was leaving, they knelt and asked him for his blessing. He tried to calm them by telling them; ***"In five years it will be over, and I shall return to Macerata"***. He was taken to Milan, about 400 miles away, and then banished to Mantua for four years.

Bishop Vincent Returns From Exile

Work begins anew

Napoleon was defeated in 1814. Bishop Vincent's exile ended May 4, 1814. Large crowds lined the roads for miles accompanying him in a triumphant return to Macerata; fireworks and all. Bishop Vincent's prediction came true; he was in exile for five and one-half years. Pope Pius VII was also released from exile, and on his way back to Rome, stopped at Macerata, and then at Tolentino to visit Bishop Vincent, and to express his appreciation to the people for their loyalty. The Pope was so overcome with delight when he saw Bishop Vincent that he shed tears. ***"This holy man overwhelms me"***.

The anti-religious spirit sown by the anti-clerics of the occupying French army caused tremendous moral laxness among the people, especially the young. Bishop Vincent's skills and energies were tested once again. He invited the Passionists to his Dioceses to conduct a series of missions with the objective of restoring morality and returning to normalcy. He began by re-training the clergy, many of whom were in occupations not suitable for priests. Some had even abandoned the priesthood.

Much havoc was brought to the properties in his Dioceses. Churches were destroyed and had to be rebuilt. Convents and monasteries required much attention. Seminaries had to be restored. His own home had been converted into a barracks, and practically destroyed. Instead of restoring his home, he took up residence in two small rooms in the Seminary. He said he would leave the restoration of his home to the next Bishop.

The poor were left in a very radical situation, so he devoted himself to their needs. He went everywhere, begging money from his friends. All the money he received was used to help the poor. The repair of buildings,

Churches, etc could be done anytime, but the needs of the poor were the most imminent.

And, as if Bishop Vincent wasn't busy enough with his own Dioceses, Pope Pius VII asked Vincent to give a retreat to the College of Cardinals, and to the clergy in Rome in order:

1. to restore the spirit of the ecclesiastics,
- 2.to revive their souls to new virtue, and
- 3.to impart fresh vigor to their zeal.
- 4.He heard the confessions of Cardinals,
priests, etc.
- 5.He touched the lives of nearly everyone,
and all were extremely pleased and uplifted.

Madman of Europe

To finish up on Napoleon, this Madman of Europe

In February, 1815 Napoleon escaped from Elba and proclaimed the Empire restored. But he was defeated again, this time in the battle of Waterloo. He asked the Pope, whom he had ridiculed, and referred to as a raving lunatic, and then banished from Rome, to assign a priest to be with him in exile so that he could have the consolations of religion. In his last days he said of himself, *"I became a madman"*. He died in exile at St. Helena.

CHAPTER 9

The Madonna's Victory

In 1817 during one last attempt to re-conquer the Papal States by Napoleon's brother in law, Murat, the French declared war on Austria and marched to Macerata, where they set up headquarters. The French army far outnumbered the Austrians. The people of Macerata were afraid of what might happen to them if the French army should win this war. The leading citizens, along with the priests, went to Bishop Vincent to seek his advice on how to act and what to do if this should happen. He called the seminarians into the Chapel to pray to Our Lord and to ask the intercession of the Blessed Mother, so that this calamity would not occur. After one half hour of kneeling in prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament, he stood up, and turning to the seminarians, said, *"My sons, Macerata is saved. Give thanks to the giver of all blessings, and to the loving Mother of Mercy"*. He called his Vicar General and said, *"The Madonna has obtained the grace"*. He went to the streets, and, over and over, shouted: *"God is with us". "Do not fear. Return to your homes. Our Lady has obtained the grace"*. The French army had been defeated.

But, the danger now was what kind of revenge the retreating French soldiers might inflict on the people of Macerata. Bishop Vincent prayed, got up, and with total disregard for his own safety, put himself in the middle of the field of battle and proceeded toward the French army. He pleaded with the Marshall, Murat, not to enter the town, and not harm the people. He agreed, and they detoured around the town. But it wasn't over yet; once more he went to the Chapel to pray. After praying, he went into the battle lines of the Austrian Army and pleaded with the General to use Christian charity, and not let his men slaughter the fleeing French soldiers. The General agreed.

Predictably, Bishop Vincent went directly to the Chapel to give thanks to God and to the Madonna for the safety of the people. (And, I'm certain for the safety of all the soldiers.)

The people received a miracle from God through Bishop Vincent, and the town was spared. Bishop Vincent was called the defending angel of his Diocese.

Retirement

It was believed that Pope Pius VII was going to name Bishop Vincent a Cardinal, and transfer him to a more important Diocese. However, for some time Vincent had expressed his desire to retire and return to his first love, that of being a Passionist; to live a life of silence and solitude, of prayer and penance, as prescribed by the holy Rule. After all, his Apostolic ministry had spanned fifty work-filled years, with little, or no rest. On August 20, 1823 Pope Pius VII died. September 28, 1823 Cardinal Della Genga, a friend of Bishop Vincent, was elected Pope and took the name Pope Leo XII. Years before, he had written to Vincent asking prayers for the recovery of his health. Vincent foretold that he would recover and govern the Church. (**NOTE:** First of two times he would foretell this Pope's recovery. The second foretelling is yet to come.)

Bishop Vincent was approaching eighty years of age, when he asked Pope Leo XII for permission to retire. November 1, 1823 Pope Leo XII granted him permission to retire. There was a stipulation though: one final appointment. He was appointed the Pope's confidential advisor and directed to take up residence at the Papal Palace (Quirinal). Thus, he would confer with the Pope each evening regarding the solution of Church problems. Through obedience, he accepted. (Another very important appointment in his life.) Of course, this wasn't what Bishop Vincent had in mind; he wanted to retire to a small cell at Sts John and Paul.

The departure from his Diocese and his people was very difficult. He told his seminarians first. But he could not finish because the grief and weeping was so strong. Most of all he dreaded leaving the poor, who were so very dear to him. ***"I have nothing left to give"***, he told one priest. But then he thought of his Episcopal ring. He took it off and gave it to the priest saying, ***"Take it and sell it. Give the money to the poor."*** This was his farewell message to Macerata and Tolentino.

TYPICAL VINCENT!

He had been Bishop of Macerata for twenty-three years. November 30, 1823 he arrived in Rome to take up his new assignment at the Papal Palace. Someone once asked Vincent when he was coming to visit and he replied, ***"Forty days at the Quirinal, and then to Sts John and Paul. St. Sylvester will see to that."*** If he could not live with his Passionists, at least he was going to live like them. Except for his approximately one hour to one and a half hour daily conference with the Pope, he occupied his time in prayer, silence,

meditation, spiritual reading, mortification, and daily visits to his brethren at Sts John and Paul. Bishops, Prelates, Nobles, dignitaries were among those who sought spiritual direction from him.

Notable Conversion

Napoleon had a sister, Pauline, a very clever and scheming person, who lived a notoriously sinful life. She was responsible for much of his notoriety. She asked for and received asylum in Rome. She wrote to Bishop Vincent and requested to see him and he agreed. She wanted to return to the Church. After much prayer, and convinced she was truly repentant, he received her back into the Church, and she died a Christian death. Many people, even a Cardinal, asked Vincent how he could have done this. His reply was, ***"It was due to an interior voice I heard."***

CHAPTER 10

Death

One of the most moving stories of his most interesting life occurred at the very end of his life. Shortly after Pope Leo XII's coronation on September 28, 1823, he became ill. December 23, 1823 a few month later, he became critically ill, and his recovery was said to be hopeless, and death imminent. Bishop Vincent was notified and went to his own room to pray. During the night Vincent was told that the Pope wished to see him. After praying with the Pope, Vincent assured him that God was not going to deprive the Church of its head in these anxious times. The Pope was extremely intelligent and the Church needed him now. After the last Sacraments were imparted, Vincent again prayed with the Pontiff. He told the Pope; ***"Have courage, Holy Father, there is somebody who will offer his life for your Holiness."***

During the middle of the night on Christmas eve, Bishop Vincent asked the Pope for permission to celebrate Mass immediately in the Pope's private Chapel. It was granted. It took longer than usual. But a twofold sacrifice was being offered at the altar. That of Calvary for the eternal life of men, and that of Bishop Vincent for the temporal life of the Pope. He asked God that if it was acceptable to Him, ***"I offer my life for that of the Holy Father"***.

WHAT A HEROIC SACRIFICE!

During his thanksgiving after Mass, he asked how the Pope was feeling. He was told that the Pope had taken a sudden turn for the better, and seemed like another man. Bishop Vincent's face lighted up with happiness, and said, ***"Thanks be to God. He has accepted the sacrifice"***.

Vincent visited the Pontiff. ***"Bishop, stay with me for your words are a great comfort to me"***. During this visit, Bishop Vincent revealed a secret to the Holy Father, a secret God had made known to Vincent. He told the Pope that his Pontificate would continue for five more years and a short time longer.

December 28, 1823 Bishop Vincent suffered an apoplectic stroke which paralyzed his entire body, but his mind remained clear. He made hand gestures indicating that he was aware of things being said and done. Vincent's confessor came from Sts John and Paul to hear his confession. Immediately thereafter, he lost his power of speech. His jaws were locked tight and he

could not receive Holy Communion. December 29th he received Extreme Unction. December 30th a priest mentioned Vincent's critical condition to one of his saintly penitents, Blessed Anna Maria Taighi. She said to the priest, ***"Tell those who assist the Bishop to have Mass said for him at dawn tomorrow. He will be able to receive Holy Communion and enjoy one-half hour of Thanksgiving. Then he will lapse into his former condition and die."***

December 31st was the Feast of St. Sylvester. (Remember him?) Bishop Vincent recovered his speech, and his first words were to inquire about the Pope's health. Vincent received Holy Communion, and then spent one-half hour in profound recollection, just as foretold. He kissed the crucifix three times, slowly, and then sank back into a coma. Bishop Vincent Strambi died January 1, 1824. He was seventy-nine years old to the day. (NOTE: He had said, ***"Forty days at the Quirinal and then to Sts John & Paul"***. He also said, ***"St Sylvester would take care of everything."***) Both prophecies came true. And why not; this was St. Vincent.

Body lay in state

His body lay in state at the Quirinal Papal Palace for two and one-half days, clothed in his Episcopal vestments. His body was then transferred to the Basilica of Sts John and Paul, where he wished to be buried alongside St Paul of the Cross. Why not; two saints for two centuries. (1700 & 1800)

Because of the multitude of people, he lay in state there for eight more days. His robe was carried away piece by piece and had to be renewed three times. Bishop Vincent's body was in a remarkable state of flexibility. The future Pope Gregory XVI took Vincent's hand, and without difficulty, made the sign of the Cross. A Passionist lay brother did the same and was cured of a tertian fever, caused by a form of malaria. January 11, 1824 he was buried at Sts John and Paul.

Prediction comes true

Pope Leo XII was deeply moved and troubled that the Bishop's self-immolation extended his tenure of life. Believing what Vincent foretold for him, Pope Leo XII prepared himself for death. He died February 10, 1829, five years one month and seventeen days after Bishop Vincent's prediction.