St Vincent De Paul

Vincent De Paul was born in 1581 in France. At the exceptionally young age of 19 he was ordained a priest in 1600, subsequently attending the University of Toulouse.

In 1605 while travelling by sea he was captured by Turkish Mahomaden pirates and taken into slavery. He spent two and half years as a slave, finally escaping in 1607 with the help of his owner whom he had converted to Christianity.

Vincent decided to devote his life to charitable work and was appointed a Parish priest of Clichy, a suburb of Paris. After only two years there he was asked to be chaplain and teacher to the household of the Count of Gondi. Since the count was in charge of ships Vincent got an opportunity to see the plight of the galley slaves. He sought to relieve their terrible conditions by offering them not just material assistance but spiritual as well. He ransomed over 1,200 galley slaves from North Africa.

Back in Paris after the leaving the Gondi family, he established confraternities of men and women working to bring charity to the poor and to care for the vast numbers of sick in the city. His chief source of charitable donations and concerns came from wealthy noblewomen who provided funds for the creation of hospitals and homes for orphaned and foundling children. These became known as the Ladies of Charity. A practical man, Vincent's work went practically unnoticed by the wealthy who chose to ignore the problems of the time, and even the poor themselves who didn't appreciate what he was doing for them.

To advance his efforts even further, Vincent founded in Paris in 1625 the Congregation of the Missions, called the Lazarists or Vincentians, a society of priests with the express task of missionary labour and training of clergy. He was zealous in conducting retreats for clergy at a time when there was great laxity, abuse and ignorance among them.

St Vincent's, Sheffield the parish you are in now, was the first

English foundation. They came here from Ireland in 1853. In 1633, with the remarkable St Louise de Marrillac he also established the <mark>Daughters or Sisters of Charity,</mark> the first congregation of women caring for the sick and poor outside the confines of the convent. He said that their "convent is the sickroom, their chapel is the parish church, their cloister is the streets of the city." Vincent also organized relief efforts for the many unfortunate victims injured and wounded in wars which France was involved in around the middle of the 17th century.

Vincent was a bitter opponent of the <mark>heresy called Jansenism</mark> which was rampant in France at the time. Jansenism was Calvinist in tone which taught that only certain people could be saved.

Vincent <mark>died in Paris on September 27th 1660</mark> at the age of 80 and he was canonised a saint by Pope Clement X111 in 1737. Most remarkably, Vincent was by <mark>temperament</mark> a very short-tempered person—even his friends admitted it. He said that except for the grace of God he would have been "hard and repulsive, rough and cross." But he became a tender and affectionate man, very sensitive to the needs of others.

Pope Leo XIII made him the <mark>patron of all charitable societies.</mark> Outstanding among these, of course, is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, founded in 1833 by his admirer Blessed Frédéric Ozanam.

St Vincent De Paul, pray for us.