

Homily based on the readings from September 27, 2025 (Zechariah 2.5-9, 14-15a; Luke 9.43b-45)

As you probably noticed at the beginning of Mass, today we are celebrating the Memorial of Saint Vincent de Paul – a French priest who lived during the 16th and 17th centuries. Even if you do not know much about him, you have almost certainly heard his name before – in the context of St. Vincent de Paul Place and similar ministries.

I am sure many of you have dropped off food at Saint Vincent de Paul Place in Norwich, and some of you may even work there regularly as volunteers. What they are able to accomplish up there is truly amazing. In a given year, they serve over 120,000 hot meals to people who are hungry and provide groceries to over 3000 households. Members of the community put in almost 47,000 hours of service there every year – and that is not even counting the work done off site by schools, parishes, and other local groups. In addition to this incredible *human* effort, St.

Vincent de Paul Place requires over 650 *tons* of food per year in order to operate.

While Saint Vincent himself performed all the regular ministries of a priest, the *overwhelming* focus of his life was service to the poor. As he once wrote:

It is our duty to prefer the service of the poor to everything else and to offer such service as quickly as possible. If a needy person requires medicine or other help during prayer time, do whatever has to be done with peace of mind. Offer the deed to God as your prayer.

It is no accident that, throughout the world, the name *Saint Vincent de Paul* is closely linked with the corporal works of mercy – namely:

1. Feeding the hungry.
2. Giving drink to the thirsty.
3. Clothing the naked.
4. Sheltering the homeless.

5. Visiting the sick.
6. Visiting the imprisoned.
7. Burying the dead.

When I was in college, I had the good fortune to meet several members of the *Society of St. Vincent de Paul*, who were volunteering at a homeless shelter in Atlanta. That was probably my first direct experience with the Catholic Church's commitment to the corporal works of mercy – which certainly played a part in my eventual conversion to Catholicism.

The corporal works of mercy, however, do not represent everything Saint Vincent did or everything he believed in. Even though it is necessary to take care of a person's *body*, Saint Vincent recognized that it is just as important to take care of his *soul*. That is why, as Catholics, we also emphasize the *spiritual* works of mercy. Once again, there are seven of them:

1. Instructing the ignorant.
2. Counseling the doubtful.

3. Admonishing sinners.
4. Bearing wrongs patiently.
5. Forgiving offences willingly.
6. Comforting the afflicted.
7. Praying for the living and the dead.

As Christians, we do not get to select one list or the other – we have to live out both. It is *vital*ly important that we care for the hungry, the thirsty, and the homeless; but it is also *essential* that we teach people about our faith and that we pray for them. The mission of a parish community, in particular, is to embody *both* types of mercy.

And so, as we go about our business this weekend, remember that we are not just called to be good citizens or good neighbors or good employees – but to be *beacons* of mercy to the world. Whenever we encounter hunger or thirst or ignorance or doubt, it is our duty to respond as Saint Vincent de Paul would have done – as Jesus Christ *continues* to do – with generosity, with patience, and with love.