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THE EUCHARIST AND CHARITY

- Introduction
 - One of the greatest novels ever written, depicted both on Broadway as well as on the Big Screen, is Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Within that drama, for me the most moving scene was the main character Jean Valjean's interaction with the Bishop of Digne, Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel, called Msgr. Bienvenu — "Monsignor Welcome" — in the novel. Bienvenu is based on the real life Bishop of Digne, Bishop Bienvenu de Miollis (1753-1843). While a little-known priest, he had a chance encounter with Napoleon and praised him, as a result of which he was made a bishop. He continued to act like a common, compassionate, country priest, welcoming everyone. He moved into the small town hospital, so that the episcopal palace could be used as a hospital. He kept only a tenth of his salary for himself, spending the rest on alms. He once accompanied a condemned man to the scaffold, after the village priest refused to do so. Hugo's narrator summarizes the bishop's philosophy: "There are men who toil at extracting gold; he toiled at the extraction of pity. Universal misery was his mine. The sadness that reigned everywhere was but an excuse for unfailing kindness. Love each other; he declared this to be complete, desired nothing further, and that was the whole of his doctrine."
 - One evening, as we see in the novel, Jean Valjean shows up at his door, asking a place to stay the night. Bienvenu graciously accepts him, feeds him, and gives him a bed. Valjean takes most of Bienvenu's silver and runs off in the night. The police capture Valjean and take him back to face Bienvenu. When the police inform Bienvenu they have found the silver in Valjean's knapsack, Bienvenu tells the police that he had given them to Valjean as a gift. He chastises Valjean for not taking the silver candlesticks as well. After the police leave, Bienvenu tells Valjean to use the silver to become an honest man: "Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man.... Jean Valjean, my brother: you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God!" In the Musical, the point is made just as powerfully. "But remember this, my brother / See in this some higher plan / You must use this precious silver / To become an honest man / By the witness of the martyrs / By the Passion and the Blood / God has raised you out of darkness / I have bought your soul for God!"
 - It's important for us to know that Victor Hugo was rabidly anticlerical. He had a great anger against the Church. He could have easily based the bishop on a heartless ecclesiast, or one who lived a double life, or in some other way negative or even ordinary. He chose a bishop from his own lifetime, one whom he himself regarded with a reputation for sanctity and charity, and he did so intentionally. His son, who likewise resented the Church, tried to get him to make the figure who brought Valjean to conversion a doctor or a teacher. But Hugo kept the bishop, because he wanted through showing his charity the standard to which his readers ought to hold their own bishops. He thought most would fall short and the lack of charity in the episcopate would be sufficient justification for people to recognize that the Gospel didn't have the power to change us for the better if it wouldn't change even the leaders of the Church.
 - I think it's a challenge in every age for us to become, for the sake of the Lord's name, Father Bienvenu, Deacon Caritas, Bishop Misericordia.
- The Eucharist and Charity
 - This last conference is meant to help us focus on the connection between the Eucharist and Charity.
 - As we seek to live the mystery placed in a priest's hands, to model our life on the mystery of the Lord's cross, our heart is changed. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta, whose feast we celebrated yesterday, used to remark, once we get good at recognizing Jesus under the appearances of Bread and Wine,

we can more easily recognize him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor, as he comes to us hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, a stranger, imprisoned, and otherwise in need.

- PDV stresses:
 - PDV 23: Pastoral charity, which has its specific source in the sacrament of holy orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the Eucharist. ... Precisely because of this, the priest's pastoral charity not only flows from the Eucharist but finds in the celebration of the Eucharist its highest realization - just as it is from the Eucharist that he receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a "sacrificial" dimension.
 - PDV 24: "Live the mystery that has been placed in your hands!" ... The "mystery" of which the priest is a "steward" (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1) is definitively Jesus Christ himself, who in the Spirit is the source of holiness and the call to sanctification. This "mystery" seeks expression in the priestly life.
- This is buttressed by other Church documents:
 - SC 82. By sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ's self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds" (228). In a word, "'worship' itself, eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented" (229).
 - DLMP 66. In fact, there is an intimate connection among the centrality of the Eucharist, pastoral charity and the unity of the life of the priest, who therein finds decisive indications for the way to holiness to which he has been specifically called. If the priest lends to Christ, the Most Eternal High Priest, his intelligence, his will, his voice and his hands so through his ministry he may offer to the Father the sacramental sacrifice of redemption, he is to embrace the dispositions of the Master and, like him, live as a gift for his brothers. He is therefore to learn to unite himself intimately to the offering, placing on the altar of the sacrifice his whole life as a revealing sign of God's gratuitous and prevenient love.
 - 67. The priest is called to celebrate the Holy Eucharistic Sacrifice, to meditate constantly on what it means and transform his life into a Eucharist, which becomes manifest in love for daily sacrifice, especially in fulfilling the duties and offices proper to his state. ... In the Eucharist the priest learns to give himself each day, not only in moments of great difficulty, but also in minor daily setbacks.
- This connection is reinforced by St. John Chrysostom in one of the most powerful readings of the year in the Breviary (21st Saturday).
 - Do you want to honor Christ's body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: *This is my body*, and made it so by his words, also said: *You saw me hungry and did not feed me, and inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did not do it for me.* What we do here in the church requires a pure heart, not special garments; what we do outside requires great dedication.
 - ... Give him the honor prescribed in his law by giving your riches to the poor. For God does not want golden vessels but golden hearts. Now, in saying this I am not forbidding you to make such gifts; I am only demanding that along with such gifts and before them you give alms. He accepts the former, but he is much more pleased with the latter. In the former, only the giver profits; in the latter, the recipient does too. A gift to the Church may be taken as a form of ostentation, but alms is pure kindness.
 - Of what use is it to weigh down Christ's table with golden cups, when he himself is dying of hunger? First, fill him when he is hungry; then use the means you have left to adorn his table. Will you have a golden cup made but not give a cup of water? What is the use of providing the table with cloths woven of gold thread, and not providing Christ himself with the clothes he needs? What profit is there in that? Tell me: If you were to see him lacking the necessary food but were to leave him in that state and merely surround his table with gold, would he be grateful to you or rather would he not be angry? What if you were to see him clad in worn-out rags and stiff from the cold, and were to forget about clothing him and

instead were to set up golden columns for him, saying that you were doing it in his honor? Would he not think he was being mocked and greatly insulted?

- Apply this also to Christ when he comes along the roads as a pilgrim, looking for shelter. You do not take him in as your guest, but you decorate floor and walls and the capitals of the pillars. You provide silver chains for the lamps, but you cannot bear even to look at him as he lies chained in prison. Once again, I am not forbidding you to supply these adornments; I am urging you to provide these other things as well, and indeed to provide them first. No one has ever been accused for not providing ornaments, but for those who neglect their neighbor a hell awaits with an inextinguishable fire and torment in the company of the demons. Do not, therefore, adorn the church and ignore your afflicted brother, for he is the most precious temple of all.
- Response to the indifference today
 - Pope Francis
 - (Spadaro interview, Sept 19) How are we treating the people of God? I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. **The church's ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel.** God is greater than sin. The structural and organizational reforms are secondary — that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials. The bishops, particularly, must be able to support the movements of God among their people with patience, so that no one is left behind.
 - This type of service comes from a new form of hearing. If we're truly listening to the voice of the Lord, then, with him, we'll hear the cry of the poor, the cry of our brothers and sisters in need — and cry with them.
 - (Lampedusa, July 8, 2013) God's two questions echo even today, as forcefully as ever! How many of us, myself included, have lost our bearings; we are no longer attentive to the world in which we live; we don't care; we don't protect what God created for everyone, and we end up unable even to care for one another! And when humanity as a whole loses its bearings, it results in tragedies like the one we have witnessed.
 - "Where is your brother?" His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity. And their cry rises up to God! Once again I thank you, the people of Lampedusa, for your solidarity. I recently listened to one of these brothers of ours. Before arriving here, he and the others were at the mercy of traffickers, people who exploit the poverty of others, people who live off the misery of others. How much these people have suffered! Some of them never made it here.
 - "Where is your brother?" Who is responsible for this blood? In Spanish literature we have a comedy of Lope de Vega that tells how the people of the town of Fuente Ovejuna kill their governor because he is a tyrant. They do it in such a way that no one knows who the actual killer is. So when the royal judge asks: "Who killed the governor?", they all reply: "Fuente Ovejuna, sir". Everybody and nobody! Today too, the question has to be asked: Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters of ours? Nobody! That is our answer: It isn't me; I don't have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me. Yet God is asking each of us: "Where is the blood of your brother which cries out to me?" Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the

side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: "poor soul...!", and then go on our way. It's not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business

- "Adam, where are you?" "Where is your brother?" These are the two questions which God asks at the dawn of human history, and which he also asks each man and woman in our own day, which he also asks us. But I would like us to ask a third question: "Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it?" Has any one of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters? Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society that has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – "suffering with" others: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! In the Gospel we have heard the crying, the wailing, the great lamentation: "Rachel weeps for her children... because they are no more". Herod sowed death to protect his own comfort, his own soap bubble. And so it continues... Let us ask the Lord to remove the part of Herod that lurks in our hearts; let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this. "Has any one wept?" Today has anyone wept in our world?
- God's world is one in which we take responsibility for others
 - (Syria Vigil, Sept 7) **God's world is a world where everyone feels responsible for the other, for the good of the other.** This evening, in reflection, fasting and prayer, each of us deep down should ask ourselves: Is this really the world that I desire? Is this really the world that we all carry in our hearts? But then we wonder: Is this the world in which we are living?... When man thinks only of himself, of his own interests and places himself in the center, when he permits himself to be captivated by the idols of dominion and power, when he puts himself in God's place, then all relationships are broken and everything is ruined; then the door opens to violence, indifference, and conflict. ... We too are asked this question, it would be good for us to ask ourselves as well: Am I really my brother's keeper? Yes, you are your brother's keeper! To be human means to care for one another!
- Put into Practice
 - Story of Vinicio Riva with neurofibromatotic tumors This man, 53, is from the Italian town of Vicenza and he's suffered a lifetime of hurt and misunderstanding because of his being covered from head to toe with growths, swellings and itchy sores that bleed into his clothes each day.
 - In early November, he traveled with his aunt and others from Vicenza to the Vatican. He was in a wheelchair and the Swiss guard kept ushering him forward.
 - His Aunt, Caterina Lotto, said, "When we came close to us, I thought he would give me his hand. Instead he went straight to Vinicio and embraced him tightly. I thought he wouldn't give him back to me he held him so tightly. We didn't speak. We said nothing but he looked at me as if he was digging deep inside, a beautiful look that I would never have expected."
 - Vinicio said, "He didn't have any fear of my illness. ... I'm not contagious, but [the pope] didn't know that. But he did it, period. He caressed my whole face and while he was doing it, I felt only love. ... It lasted a little longer than a minute, but it felt as if it were eternity. ... I quivered. I felt great warmth." It brought about a great change in him. "I feel stronger and happier. I feel I can move ahead because the Lord is protecting me."
- Call to Charity in Sacred Scripture
 - The call to charity cannot be made more emphatically in Sacred Scripture.

- The early apostolic writings, basing themselves on what Christ himself said and did in the Gospel — calling us to love our neighbor just as he has loved us, illustrating the call to love with the unforgettable image of the Good Samaritan whom Jesus himself enfleshed, washing the apostles' feet and instructing them to do the same, coming not to be served but to serve and give his whole life as the charitable ransom for the many, reminding us that we will be judged on how we respond with love to the hungry, thirsty, naked, infirm, imprisoned, and stranger — reminded the early Christians and us today of the indispensable connection between real faith and charity.
 - St. James
 - James 2:14-18: “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, “You have faith and I have works.” Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.”
 - St. John
 - 1 John 3: 16-18: The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.
 - 1 John 4:20-21: If anyone says, “I love God,” but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.
 - St. Paul
 - 1 Cor 12:31, 13:1-3: Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.
- Charity is the fruit of true faith, the flourishing of the Christian life. This is a message for every Christian.
- Priestly Formation and St. Vincent de Paul
 - Someone who demonstrates for us the connection between the priesthood and charity is St. Vincent de Paul, whose image is on the beautiful mural here in this Chapel.
 - St. Vincent de Paul (1580-1660) was the son of poor farmers in southwestern France, the third of six children. His parents struggled simply to make ends meet, but when Vincent's father recognized how precociously intelligent his son was, he and the family sacrificed many of their animals to provide him an education through the Franciscan Recollects and later the University of Toulouse. Vincent wasn't particularly grateful, though. One day when his father made a long journey on foot to visit him in his tattered peasant clothing, Vincent didn't even go out to greet him because he was so embarrassed by his father's poverty. Vincent's ambition at the time was to become a priest, not fundamentally because he thought it was his vocation, but because he thought vainly that it might bring him fame and notoriety. He knew that if he played his cards right, he might receive benefices for rich Churches and abbeys that would provide him enough income to permanently get his family out of the poverty that embarrassed him so. Because of his genius and motivation, he raced through university and was ordained a priest at the shockingly young age of 19, even though canon law required one to be 25. He wasted no time vainly trying to climb the ecclesiastical ladder. He became a chaplain to Queen Margaret of Valois and moved to Paris. As a brilliant “baby priest,” he quickly

earned the reputation as a talented preacher, which gained him further entrée into French high society.

- But the Lord gave him two experiences that helped him to convert from his vanity and his rejection of Christ to serve his own ego. The first happened in 1605, six years into his priesthood. After having gone to Marseilles to acquire an inheritance — another sign of where he was placing his treasure — he boarded a ship to Narbonne that was captured by African pirates who brought him to Tunis, where he was a slave for two years. God eventually arranged for his escape when he was able to persuade the wife of an ex-priest who had converted to Islam to preserve his own life to convert her husband, give up their illicit arrangement and head back to France. And her conversion was an occasion of his. After his release, Vincent never forgot the misery these slaves were experiencing. He resolved to help them somehow, someday in the future. He would. There were about 25,000 poor slaves on the Barbary Coast, mostly Christian. He would send many priests and brothers to attend to their spiritual needs and never ceased to raise money to ransom them; by the time of his death, he had purchased the freedom of over 1,200. The second experience was a further crucifixion of his ego and pursuit of the esteem of others. After he had returned to Paris, his roommate was robbed of 400 crowns. Convinced Vincent was the thief, he maliciously accused him to the police and to everyone else. Whereas earlier Vincent may have trusted in his own abilities to defend his reputation, now he trusted only in divine Providence, who had just freed him from slavery. “God knows the truth,” he said calmly, as he bore the calumny for six months until the true thief confessed. It cured him of the vanity of placing his treasure in human respect.
- From that point forward, he was free to seek God’s interests in everything, and even though he would continue to walk in and out of French high society, his heart was set firmly on what the Lord wanted, on God’s glory, rather than the vanity of worldly success. He began from that period to welcome Christ in his poverty fully into his life and to help others to make the same exodus from rejection to welcoming. He was recruited by the powerful Count of Joigny, Philip de Gondi, to become chaplain to his family and tutor to his children. This was the assignment of the former Vincent’s dreams, but it was now an assignment that he twice laid down in order to become a pastor in rural areas in great need of conversion. Both times, however, Count de Gondi — who with his family loved Vincent — prevailed upon him to return. The latter time they enticed him by promising him that one of his tasks would be to teach the Gospel to the peasants throughout their expansive territory who were in ignorance and moral disarray. Count de Gondi, who was prefect of the French penal system, also arranged for Vincent to be named almoner and chaplain to the convicts in the galleys, which allowed Vincent to bring not just spiritual but material comfort to these prisoners across France. The more work he did among the poor and the outcasts, the more he became aware of how much work needed still to be done. He knew that organization was crucial. He began to recruit priests to help him in the work of preaching the Gospel to the poor; these clerics, drawn by Vincent’s example, became the first members of the Congregation of the Mission. With the help of St. Louise de Marillac, he established the Daughters of Charity, to work in the many hospitals he was founding to care for the sick, incurable, orphaned, aged and abandoned. To help in the relief of the indigent, he instituted the Ladies of Charity, a group of wealthy women who would use their social connections to raise the funds needed not merely for the immediate care of the poor, but for their long-term education and training. In Paris these Ladies helped to run a soup kitchen that fed a staggering 16,000 hungry people a day.
- Vincent saw how much the Church’s urgent charitable mission in France had been frustrated by incompetent and often immoral priests and bishops, clergy who were scandals to people and led them often to reject what God was wanting them to accept through the Church Christ founded. At that time, it was still not required for candidates to the priesthood to go to seminary. So he began to work with the Archbishop of Paris, Count de Gondi’s brother, to ensure that before a man was ordained, he would need to participate in spiritual exercises with Vincent and the priests of his Congregation. At first these retreat courses took two weeks; they eventually extended to two years. Through them Vincent began to form most of the young priests of France. Later, the Vincentians established full-scale seminaries all over France to ensure both that priests knew the Catholic faith well enough to fight against Jansenism and other heresies, but lived it enough to care for the poor

and the needy. His work with priests made him ever more aware of the difference between holy, competent bishops and ecclesiastical disasters. In these years after the Protestant Reformation, it was clear that great bishops were needed and bad appointees with inadequate spiritual qualifications could not be tolerated. He therefore used his considerable influence with the king, who at the time wielded enormous power in the appointment of bishops, to set up a Council of Conscience to ensure that those nominated for the episcopacy were worthy of the office. The king made Vincent the head of the Committee and so Vincent had as big an impact on the formation of the French episcopacy as he did the French priesthood. The fuel for all this activity was the same that powered his prayer: deep love for the Lord and, with the Lord, for those for whom the Lord died. He had gone from vanity to sanctity. He had set his face on Christ and he found him in the faces of so many poor and needy. His work was to help others find Christ, too, and embrace him and choose Christ's form of Risen life. His work continues from heaven and that's the grace he's praying for us today.

- St. John Vianney
 - Another who shows us the connection between the priesthood and charity is the patron of priests, St. John Vianney. Charity is at the heart of the Christian vocation and at the foundation for the priestly vocation. Our charity will take different forms. It should influence the heroism in the way we pray for people in need. It should influence our preaching and teaching the faith, not just with regard to what we say, but how hard we work to spread faith, hope and love in the Lord, like the time we dedicate to teaching catechesis, preparing converts, and much more. It should influence the way we hear confessions, celebrate Mass, baptisms, weddings, funerals.
 - As a priest, it is always helpful for us to ponder the example of St. John Vianney's charity, which should be a beacon for our own. He showed his immense love for God and his people in everything he did, he heroism in the confessional, his hour long homilies which were so arduous for him to prepare, his personal sacrifices for the school. But we should focus, too, on his charity proper.
- St. John Vianney always taught principally by his example.
 - Charity began at a very young age.
 - During the French Revolution, there were thousands of poor and displaced families. Even though the future saint's family was not particularly well off, they did have a farm. On any given night, the Vianneys took in over 20 mendicant families, with the women and girls sleeping in the house and the men and boys sleeping in the barn. The young John Vianney would often share the little food he had with the boys his age who often had gone for quite some time with no food at all.
 - As a priest, his greatest alms was making God's mercy available, but he was accustomed to sacrifice everything, his time, money and possessions as well.
 - On many occasions, he would exchange clothes with the poor.
 - In 1823, his fellow priests gave him a pair of velvet trousers, to keep him warm and last. On his return to his own parish one Saturday, he found a poor man who was shaking in the cold. "Wait a moment, my friend," he said and went behind the shrubs and brought him his pants. When his brother priests asked about the pants a short time later, he thanked them for them. "I put them to fairly good use; a poor man has borrowed them for an unlimited period."
 - One day, on the way to the school, he met a barefooted poor man. He gave him his shoes and went to la Providence trying to hide that he only had socks on. When people gave him a new pair of fur-lined shoes, he gave them away.
 - He would keep only a few shirts in his wardrobe. Whenever he was given new ones, he would give them away. "Put in more," he would tell Catherine.
 - He would exchange his bread with the poor, giving the food prepared for him to the poor and used to buy from them the crusts they carried in the recesses of their wallets.
 - This was a means by which he sought to remove from the poor the shame of begging.
 - It was also a way that the poor wouldn't feel inferior to him.

- “Let’s be happy my friend to eat the bread of the poor: they are friends of Jesus Christ. It seems to me that I’m at the Lord’s table!”
 - He used tact to not offend. To a family that he advanced the funds needed to open a small business, he said, “I do not lend. I give. Has not the good God been the first to give to me?”
 - He sacrificed his entire familial inheritance in order to build a school for orphan girls.
 - When people would give him money, it wouldn’t last long.
 - He called his cassock pocket *la poche à la navette* (the shuttle pocket) because whatever money was put in there was soon shuttled out.
 - Br. Athanasius recounted, “He confided to me that often, before daybreak, he had already given away in charity over a hundred francs. He laughingly called the pocket of his cassock, in which he carried the money destined for the poor, *la poche à la navette* (the shuttle pocket) because money was continually going in and coming out of it. At night he reckoned up what he called his profits — that is, the few coins that he might still possess. When he found himself penniless he borrowed, for he would not send the destitute away with an alms.”
 - At times, he received considerable sums; they were expended in good works and in relieving the poor. “Such money seemed to burn his fingers,” Br. Athanasius said.
 - The mayor of Ars said, “His heart pitied all miseries. He had a tender love for the victims of misfortune. For them, he stripped himself of everything; he was forever giving, giving. To enable him to bestow alms, he sold all his personal property: his furniture, his linen, any trifle that belonged to him.”
 - We’ve been talking so far about his material or monetary charity, which is something that religious with a vow of poverty are not able to imitate to the letter. But SJV’s material poverty was just one aspect of his deep compassion and love for those in need, his total pouring himself out for them out of love, which each of us is called to imitate.
 - He himself taught, from his own life, that charity takes many forms: “Charity is not entirely done with money.”
 - His greatest almsgiving was through the sacrament of confession.
 - Whatever the Lord put at his disposal, he tried to use for others.
- He readily admitted that his one experience of begging helped to convince him of how difficult it was to beg.
 - Pilgrimage to St. Francis Regis praying for help with this studies. 60 miles each way. He had made a vow not to buy anything on the journey, but to beg for his food. Most people refused him, such that he was eating grass and plants. It was so difficult to be rejected and to be hungry that he asked the priest at the sanctuary to commute his vow on the way home so that he could buy some provisions as needed. He always remembered this difficulty and so treated those who came to him as he would have wanted to be treated.
 - “I begged only one time in my life, and it was awful. It’s then that I know that it’s better to give than to ask.”
- He wasn’t afraid of being exploited.
 - Fr. Raymond was sent by the bishop because he had developed a reputation of being too easily taken advantage of, but it didn’t bother St. John Vianney.
 - The imposters or “casual poor” were treated well too. Fr. Toccanier said, “There are impostors. It must happen that you are frequently taken in if you give to all comers.” “We are never taken in if we give to God,” he replied.
 - “I prefer to be deceived than to deceive myself.”
 - If he allowed himself to be exploited — and that is the lot of all who practice charity — he placed alms with discrimination. He displayed a larger liberality toward those whose need was the more urgent.
 - “If it’s for the world that you give alms, you are right to complain [about being taken]. But if it’s for the good God, whether one thanks you or not, what does it matter?”

- He would defend the poor
 - “Some say to the poor haughtily, ‘You are a parasite! You should get a job. You are young, you have strong arms.’ You don’t know if it pleases the good God to have this poor beg for his bread. You are exposing yourself to grumbling against God’s will.”
 - “Some say, “Oh, he makes bad use of it.’ The poor man will be judged on whatever use he makes of your alms, but you will be judged on the alms itself that you could have done but didn’t.”
- He was in fact happy when the poor came to him.
 - He always addressed the poor as “my friends” with great tenderness. “How happy we are,” he said, “that the poor should thus come to us; if they did not come we should have to look for them; and for that there is not the time.”
- He was kind even to those whom the world would have not expected him to treat well.
 - One woman stole linen from the orphanage and money from the sacristy. She was arrested and imprisoned, despite Fr. Vianney’s pleas for leniency. When she was released, she appealed to him again and he gave her clothes and money.
- He sought whenever possible to give alms anonymously
 - He used to love to tell the story of how St. Nicholas provided the dowry secretly to the three young women at risk for being sold into prostitution on account of their father’s poverty. He used to refer to it as a model for charity.
 - He loved a blind woman, Mrs. Bichet, who lived near the Church. He could give her alms without her knowing who had done it.
- The extent of his charity
 - Toward the end of his life, he was paying the rent of at least 30 families, either at Ars or in the surrounding district. He became “miserly.” Every year, at the beginning of November, he began to save, “I must pay for my farms,” he used to say. Many households received fuel and flour from him. Every week, the mother of a family came to him from a distance to beg bread for her children
 - One of the Ars residents said she was sent as far as Lyons to give money to a family in need. When he couldn’t give enough, he often found out where they lived to be able to send more.
 - “My secret is simple: give everything and retain nothing.”
 - “The dentists ask five franc per tooth. If someone would give me five francs for each of the dozen teeth that remain, I would freely take them out for the poor.”
 - “I would even sell my cadaver in order to have money for my poor.”
- People often complained that he was “too” charitable, but he would always reply that we could never love God or others enough.
 - Ars became a center where the indigent converged. Some of the townspeople complained. When the mayor confronted the pastor about it, he said, “Did not our Lord say, the poor you shall always have with you?” He insisted that none be driven away.
 - St. John Vianney didn’t know how not to love. He would often quote St. Augustine, who taught that “love doesn’t know how to remain without action.”
 - “You’ll never be able to find a true love that doesn’t show itself in deeds.”
 - “I’ve never seen someone ruined by doing good works!”
- In his preaching,
 - He would preach about the fact that when we give to the poor we give to Christ.
 - He focused on the Lord’s words about our judgment, that when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and welcome strangers, we do each of these things for the Lord.
 - He very much saw the Lord in the poor. He openly repeated in his catecheses how often Jesus often appeared as a beggar.
 - He told the story of St. Martin of Tours, after he had given half his great Roman cape to a shivering beggar at the gate of Amiens, saw the Lord in a dream covered in that Cape.

- He told the story of St. John of God who saw a beggar with stigmata in his feet.
 - “Often we think we’re giving to a poor man but we find it’s the Lord.”
- He would openly say, “When we give alms, we should think that it’s to the Lord and not to the poor that we’re giving.”
- He would discuss how much care for the poor pleases God
 - “The poor are friends of God and the friends of the poor are friends of God.”
 - “You desire to pray to God and pass your day in the Church, but you dream that it would be better to work for some poor people you know and who are in great need: that’s more pleasing to God than a day passed in front of the holy tabernacle.”
- He said that the poor were God’s gift to us to train us in holiness
 - “The poor man is only an instrument that God uses to make us to good. Nothing else.”
 - When we give a small bodily alms to the poor, they give us a great spiritual alms. “A small bodily alms gives way to a spiritual alms.”
 - “Never lose sight that alms erase our sins and preserve us from committing others.”
- He tried to help them learn how to give with a cheerful and generous heart and not to pretend that they had nothing to give:
 - “You say you don’t have money to give alms, but you have enough money to buy another field!”
 - “If you have much, give much; if you have little, give little; but give with all your heart and with joy.”
- He catechized that we have a duty to take care of the poor:
 - “Those who have more than they need must give it to the poor: it doesn’t belong to them.”
 - **“Your well-being is nothing other than a depository that God has put in your hands; after taking what is necessary for you and your family, the rest is owed to the poor.”**
- Our salvation depends on it.
 - Basing himself on St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians that even if we have the faith to move mountains, and even if we understand all mysteries and hand over our bodies to be tortured for the faith, if we don’t have love, we are and gain nothing (1 Cor 13:1ff), he said:
 - “Dear Lord, how many Christians are damned through lack of charity! No, no, my dear brethren, even if you could perform miracles, you will never be saved if you do not have love. Not to have charity is not to know your religion; it is to have a religion of whim, mood and inclination. ... Without charity, you will never see God, you will never go to heaven!”
 - On the other hand, “Whoever possesses charity is sure that Heaven is for him!”
- Almsgiving, he added, is a great means to pray to the Lord.
 - “We should never reject the poor. If we don’t give to them, we are asking God to inspire others to do the same to us.”
 - “To receive much, we need to give much.”
- He would teach clearly that we are simply not good Christians unless we sacrificed heroically for others.
 - “All of our religion is but a false religion and all our virtues are mere illusions and we ourselves are only hypocrites in the sight of God if we have not that universal charity for everyone, for the good and for the bad, for the poor people as well as for the rich, for all those who do us harm as much as those who do us good.”
 - “The obligation we have to love our neighbor is so important that Jesus Christ put it into a Commandment that he placed immediately after that by which he commands us to love Him with all our hearts. He tells us that all the law and the prophets are included in this commandment to love our neighbor. Yes, my dear brethren, we must regard this

obligation as the most universal, the most necessary and the most essential to religion and to our salvation. In fulfilling this Commandment, we are fulfilling all the others.”

- Conclusion

- Lauda Sion: **“Quantum potes, tantum aude: quia maior omni laude nec laudare sufficis!”**
“Dare to do all you can” in praising God for this gift, because all of it will fall short
- This applies not just to the Eucharist but to the fruit of the Eucharist, charity.
- This is the way we model our lives on the mystery of the Cross of Christ we celebrate. This is the way we live the mystery placed in a priest’s hands!