

Speak Up

Have you ever had the experience to read something that made an impact on you and then a short time later read something else totally randomly on the first subject that affirmed what you read? And, then once again a little later? When that happens to me, I believe that God is trying to tell me something and I better listen close. In this particular instance it was three unrelated statements that reinforced an idea. And, you know the importance of the number three; it is the biblical number reflecting perfection.

In the middle of January, we celebrated the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. My wife and I attended a special Mass and celebration honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. On the program cover page, there was a quote from Mr. King that read: *“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”* That statement has stayed with me since then. I have shared the thought with friends and co-workers.

Then recently I read a quote from Frederic Ozanam. It was from the book *Life in Letters*. It read: *“When, finally, rampaging pauperism comes, raging and desperate, face to face with a financial aristocracy whose bowels are shut, it is good to have mediators who can prevent a collision whose horrible disasters cannot be imagined, who can make the two camps listen, and who can bring to the one, words of resignation, and to the other, counsels of mercy, and to all the word of order, that loving reconciler. There is what we will accomplish if we are worthy of it.”*

And then, not long after that, St. Vincent de Paul inspired me as I read an excerpt from one of his talks: *“Everyone is a part of the mystical body. We belong to each other. Not even in the animal kingdom, do we hear of one animal being insensitive to the sufferings of another. It is impossible that one part of a person’s body is injured, hurt, or attacked without the other parts being painfully aware of this. It is inconceivable! All of our members are so united and interconnected that damage done to one part is damage done to all. A fortiori, Christians who are members of the Body and of each other should share the sufferings of each other. It is impossible for anyone to be a Christian and not see the afflictions of our brothers and sisters. Nor is it possible for a Christian not to weep with them, nor to suffer with them. Whoever does not respond to the cries of the poor is lacking love. This person is a “Christian” in name only since they lack even the most basic of human qualities. To live like this is to be less than an animal.”*

So, what does all of this have to say to us as Vincentians? Very simply: “Speak up!” When it comes to things that are important, say something. When it comes to the lives of those we are serving, let it be known. When it will affect God’s poor, children, and vulnerable adults, make sure people know. Vincentians are not simply grocery delivery clerks. More is asked of us; more is expected of us.

As Vincent told us, we are all part of Christ's body. What affects one part, what impacts one part, impacts us all. We are all one in the eyes of God. He loves each one of us equally. He expects us to help each other when the need is there. Frederic urges us to be the mediator between the haves and the have-nots. We need to use our words to bring order to the world. This cannot happen unless we speak up when it is important. Our alternative is to slowly die when our words – words that can cause change – remain unspoken. We can be the catalysts of positive change in this world. Or, we can remain silent, and let the bad grow worse. The more we remain silent when words should be spoken, the more we become paralyzed through acceptance of what is. Speak up!