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Recollections of Father Slattery

The Years of His Generalate

1947-1968

John F. Zimmerman, C.M.

The Very Reverend William M. Slattery, C.M., Superior General from 1947 to 1968, the nineteenth successor to St. Vincent de Paul, was called to Paris shortly after he had finished his term as Provincial Superior of the Eastern Province of the United States.

Providentially, Father Edward Robert, C.M., Vicar General of the Congregation of the Mission since the death of Father Charles Leon Souvay, C.M., who had died on December 19, 1939, shortly after the commencement of World War II, had decided with his Council to call Father Slattery to Paris to be Substitute-Assistant until the next General Assembly of the Congregation could be held.

In May of 1946, after the liberation of Paris, Father Robert requested Father Slattery to come to the Motherhouse in Paris. He was able to complete all the necessary formalities and arrived in September, 1946. Paris was still suffering from many shortages as a result of the long war and of the German occupation.

Father Slattery minimized the hardships that the Community at the Motherhouse of St. Lazare suffered in those days. I remember Father Marshall F. Winne, C.M., then Provincial Superior of the Western Province of the United States, telling me that he and Father Daniel Leary,

C.M., Provincial Superior of the Eastern Province of the United States, regularly sent "Care" packages to the Motherhouse to help provide food and other necessities.

According to the Constitutions then in force, Father Slattery, as Substitute-Assistant, had to be invited to attend each session of the General Council. During the following year, 1947, when the Provinces of the Congregation were electing provincial delegates to attend the General Assembly of 1947, Father Slattery learned that, unless the Provincial Assembly of the Eastern Province elected him as one of their delegates, he would not be able to assist at the General Assembly as a Substitute-Assistant. This information was sent to the Eastern Province; as a result, in the Assembly of the Province, Father Slattery was elected the first of the two delegates who would represent that Province in the General Assembly.

The Thirty-first General Assembly met at the Motherhouse in Paris in June, 1947. In that Assembly, on July 5, 1947, Father Slattery was elected the new Superior General, the nineteenth successor of St. Vincent de Paul. His characteristic humility and self-effacement was well indicated by his statement that he accepted his election "in a spirit of humility and obedience," accepting the vote of the General Assembly as a clear indication of the Will of God in his regard.

The Assembly finished its business in July, and most of the members of the Assembly then went to Rome to assist at the canonization of St. Catherine Labouré on July 27, 1947. Knowing Father Slattery's love and devotion towards Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, we can appreciate with what joy and exaltation he assisted at these solemn ceremonies wherein the humble and simple Sister Catherine Labouré was declared to be a Saint of the Church.

There exists a photograph of Father Slattery kneeling before Pope Pius XII during these ceremonies. The usual explanation of the picture is that the Holy Father was congratulating the newly elected Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Daughters of Charity on his new position and dignity. Actually, at that moment, as I was later told, the Holy Father was asking Father Slattery what he and the General Council in Paris knew about the affair later to be called "the Bossarelli case."

After several days of interrogation by the special Commission established by Pope Pius XII, Father Slattery and his Assistants General, present in Rome, were able to prove that the General Administration of the Congregation of the Mission in Paris was totally ignorant of the transactions on the "black market" carried on by Father Bossarelli and his associates. Unfortunately, the provincial authorities of the Province of Rome were aware of these transactions; as a result, the Provincial Superior of the Province of Rome and the local Superior of the provincial house, the Collegio Leoniano, were removed from their offices by the Holy See.

Originally, the special Commission had ordered the immediate sale of all property owned throughout the world by the Congregation of the Mission in order to pay off the creditors. Because the Congregation, through its General Administration, was found not responsible for this debacle, the special Commission then insisted merely that there must be a payment of the debt incurred.

Eventually, it was arranged that the two American Provinces, Eastern and Western, would lend the necessary amount of money to the General Curia to pay off the creditors, through the agency of the special Commission. In order to pay back the loan made by the two American Provinces, the Superior General and the General Council

requested each confrere in each Province throughout the world to celebrate once a month a Mass "ad intentionem Superioris Generalis" until the debt was paid. Each confrere of the Roman Province was asked to celebrate twenty Masses each month for this same intention. A difficulty then arose as to how these Mass intentions could be gathered as most of the world was suffering financially and otherwise from the effects of the recent World War. Once again the two American Provinces were asked to gather Mass intentions which could be sent to the Motherhouse in Paris to be used for this purpose.

I would say that this aspect of the "Bossarelli case" was the greatest cross of Father Slattery's generalate. Repeatedly, while I was one of his Assistants, we Assistants requested Father Slattery to permit us to help him in this difficult task of keeping track of all these many Mass intentions and of their fulfillment. Always his answer would be that this was his obligation. He personally checked the reports received from the Provinces of the Masses that had been celebrated and then rechecked them on his lists. This bookkeeping was an enormous and heroic task, but it was further complicated in the 1960's. At the General Assembly of 1963, held at the Collegio Leoniano, Rome, it was discovered that several Provincial Superiors had thought that this obligation of celebrating a Mass each month had been fulfilled; for several years (two or three) the confreres of these Provinces had not celebrated the prescribed Masses. As a result, Father Slattery's record had to be completely revised. I remember very vividly the plaintive appeal that he made to all the Provincial Superiors present at the Assembly to continue the celebration of the prescribed Masses until he personally had informed them that it was no longer necessary to celebrate these Masses.⁵

Finally, on September 6, 1966, Father Slattery was

able to inform the Provinces that this debt had been satisfied and that therefore the confreres no longer were obligated to celebrate these Masses. I would say that this affair of "the Bossarelli case" was a veritable crucifixion for Father Slattery; once it was satisfied and concluded, he felt that he could then recite his "Nunc dimittis."

A previous attempt to update the Common Rules given to the Community by St. Vincent having been rejected by the Holy See, Father Slattery and his Council were faced with the problem of providing a revision that would meet the requirements of the Holy See. To accomplish this, the Superior General and his Council set up a commission of canonists of the Congregation, headed by Father Felix Contassot, C.M., Superior of the Diocesan Seminary of Perigeux, and consisting of canonists chosen from the Provinces of continental Europe, principally to ease the problem of travel for the various necessary meetings. This Commission, following the directives of the Holy See that revised Constitutions should not include spiritual exhortations and should be primarily statements of law, drew up the revised Constitutions of 1953, approved by Pope Pius XII by his Apostolic Letters of July 19, 1953, stating that he not only approved them but "We add to them the force of Apostolic Sanction." These Constitutions were then promulgated by Father Slattery by his letter of promulgation, dated January 25, 1954, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. In over three hundred years, this was the first revision of the Common Rules of the Congregation of the Mission given to the Congregation by St. Vincent. Later, the objection was raised in the Congregation that these Constitutions were "too legalistic." Those raising these objections apparently were

unaware that the Holy See, through the Sacred Congregation of Religious, had given very precise and detailed instructions and directives as to the manner in which Rules and Constitutions were to be revised. The Commission had merely fulfilled faithfully the directives of the Holy See and the authorization given it by the Superior General and his Council.

One of the important consequences of this revision was that the then existing French Provinces, which were merely nominal, were suppressed and two canonical Provinces were constituted — the Province of Paris and the Province of Toulouse. The Motherhouse in Paris, where previously Father Slattery had lived and had been actually not only Superior General but also local Superior and, for all practical purposes, Provincial Superior of all the French Provinces in regard to the placement of confreres in their various duties, now became the Provincial House of the new canonical Province of Paris. Father Slattery and his General Council now became the General Curia, resident in the Motherhouse and paying room and board to the Province of Paris.

The new Provincial Superior of the Province of Paris was Father Hubert Houfflain; the Provincial Superior of the Province of Toulouse was Father Felix Contassot, Superior of the Seminary of Perigeux, where he was to reside for a year until he was able to obtain a provincial residence in Toulouse through the good offices of Cardinal Saliege, Archbishop of Toulouse and nephew of a confrere who labored for many years in the Province of the Near East. All these details were related to me by Father Contassot himself.

These new Constitutions of 1953 required Father Slattery and his General Councillors to make many adjustments in their manner of living and acting. All this was one more example of Father Slattery's acceptance of

the Will of Divine Providence as indicated by the directives given by Holy Mother Church.

There was one other cross which came to Father Slattery in the early days of his generalate which he bore with patience and resignation. As he related it to me, shortly after his return to Paris after the General Assembly and the canonization of St. Catherine Labouré, Father Narquet, Procurator General, came to his office one day. On his knees, he asked Father Slattery to save the Congregation. Father asked him what he meant by this. He was told that, since the time of Louis XIV and of Napoleon Bonaparte, according to French law, it was necessary that the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, as a French Congregation, had to be a French citizen. Father Slattery asked why this had not been made known during the General Assembly. He was told that it would have created too much misunderstanding.

Father Slattery told me this story one Sunday morning as we were walking to the Church of St. Rosalie in Paris where the confreres had invited us to dinner with them. It was a national election day and Father Slattery had voted earlier that morning. He told me that he had to request information from the French confreres of the Mother-house since he was completely uninformed on local political questions and candidates.

Then he told me that his first reaction, when he had been told that he would be obliged to become a French citizen, was to offer his resignation as Superior General. He said that he had no one whom he could consult. He went to the American Embassy in Paris for information and advice and was told, correctly or not, that he could not hold dual citizenship. (I state this since once, when I was

renewing my American passport at the American Embassy, I was asked what I was doing in Paris. I explained my situation and then spoke about Father Slattery's case. At that time, the person preparing my new passport stated very positively that Father Slattery could have had dual citizenship. However, perhaps the French government would not have been satisfied with such a dual citizenship.) Then he began to consider the consequences of such a resignation. Every house of the Congregation would be obliged to hold a Domestic Assembly to elect a delegate to a Provincial Assembly. Every Province would be forced to hold a Provincial Assembly to elect delegates to a General Assembly. These delegates would be forced to come to Paris for a special General Assembly to elect a new Superior General. When he considered all the expense and trouble involved, he decided that he ought to make this sacrifice. When he was elected, according to the Rules and Constitutions, he had been elected for life. He told me that this was one of the greatest sacrifices that he had ever been called upon to make — to go to the American Embassy in Paris and there to formally renounce his American citizenship. Fortunately, after Father Slattery's return to the United States in November, 1968, the Congress of the United States restored his American citizenship at the request of the United States Representative from the Philadelphia district.

The Constitutions of 1953 (C, 38, No. 1) state that it is not necessary to be present at the General Assembly to be elected to the office of Assistant General. So it was that I received a cable from Father Slattery on the morning of July 3, 1955, informing me that on the preceding day, July 2, the General Assembly had elected me an Assistant General of the Congregation. He asked me to cable my acceptance since the Assembly would be obliged to suspend operations until my acceptance had arrived. I

cabled that I accepted the decision of the General Assembly "in a spirit of humility and obedience." Later Father Slattery wrote that I could take the necessary time to obtain my passport and transportation to come to Paris. This I did and arrived at the Motherhouse on September 14, 1955.

At this same General Assembly of 1955, a decree had been passed directing that the General Curia should be moved to Rome as soon as it could be arranged. This, as can be imagined, required many and long negotiations with the French Government and with the Holy See. It involved obtaining from the French Government the legal recognition of a French Province instead of the recognition of the whole Congregation as a French Congregation legally approved by the French Government, first by a Decree of Louis XIV and then, after the Revolution, by a Decree of the Emperor Napoleon.

Because of all the legal complications involved, Father Slattery, with the approval of his Council, appointed Father Franck d'Aussac, Superior of the Seminary of Beauvais of the Province of Paris, as his special agent, or procurator, to deal with the French Government in these matters. The sequel involved three or four years of negotiation and the resulting accord then needed the approval of the French National Assembly, the approval of the Council of State (consisting of fourteen members), and finally the personal approval of General Charles de Gaulle, Chief of State. The final result was that the French Government legally recognized the Province of Paris of the Congregation of the Mission; it also recognized the Provincial Superior of the Province of Paris and his Provincial Council (all of whose members must be French citizens) as head of the Congregation of the Mission in France and in the French colonies. Furthermore, the relics of St. Vincent de Paul must remain in Paris. If any attempt

were made to move these relics elsewhere, the authorities of the Congregation would be prosecuted according to the French law forbidding the transport of dead bodies. All legal documents of buying and selling, of accepting legacies and bequests, etc., must be signed by the legal Provincial Superior of the Province of Paris. This prescription applied even for the Province of Toulouse and for the French Missions in French colonies or territories. All these requirements were accepted by the Congregation, and for the first time, due to Father Slattery and to the prudent negotiations of his agent, Father d'Aussac, each of his successors as Superior General would no longer be obligated to become French citizens in order to protect and safeguard the works and the properties of the French confreres and the French Daughters of Charity.

During the early months of 1963, Father Slattery requested Father Guiseppe Lapalorcia, Assistant General, to go to Rome and to supervise the remodeling and furnishing of a portion of the Collegio Leoniano, which was to be rented from the Roman Province as a temporary residence for the General Curia. Father Lapalorcia spent two or three months in this work of preparation. Beginning with the first of August, 1963, the various members of the General Curia began to travel Romewards and by August 6, 1963, all members of the Curia were resident in their new quarters so graciously placed at our use by the Roman Province.

CELEBRATIONS DURING THE TERCENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL AND SAINT LOUISE DE MARILLAC

In Paris

The Tercentenary Year was opened with a Pontifical

Mass celebrated in the Chapel of the Motherhouse of St. Lazare by the Most Reverend Bishop Julien Le Couedic, Bishop of Troyes, with Father Slattery and his Council, Mother Lepicard and her Council, and many other dignitaries assisting in the choir. Solemn Vespers were celebrated in the afternoon, with the same Bishop presiding. In the evening, a special vigil service took place. So it was, on the day of December 20, 1959, then the feast of the Patronage of St. Vincent de Paul, that there was opened the whole series of manifestations by which Paris, France, and the whole world honored the three hundredth anniversary of the deaths of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac.

On February 10, 1960, Pope John XXIII designated His Eminence, Maurice Cardinal Feltin, Archbishop of Paris, to be Papal Legate to the Tercentenary Celebrations in Paris. This announcement was received with much joy and pleasure by all the members of the Family of St. Vincent and St. Louise.

In Paris, the Tercentenary Celebrations were held at Notre Dame Cathedral from March 14 to 18. During the Parisian celebration, the ancient Cathedral Church was magnificently adorned. On one side of the sanctuary was placed the splendid silver reliquary containing the sacred relics of St. Vincent de Paul and on the other side was placed the equally splendid bronze reliquary containing the sacred relics of St. Louise de Marillac.

In the early afternoon of March 14, the solemn reception of the Cardinal Legate was held. Upon the Legate's arrival at the Cathedral, he was officially welcomed in the name of the President of the Republic of France by the Chancellor of the Republic and the Keeper of the Seals, M. Michelet, and by a military guard of honor.

Within the Cathedral, Father Slattery, Superior

General, was seated next to the reliquary of St. Vincent whose nineteenth successor he was. The Bull of the Holy Father appointing as his Legate, Cardinal Feltin, was read in Latin and in French. The Cardinal Legate then preached a magnificent tribute to St. Vincent and to St. Louise. The ceremony concluded with the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament with Father Slattery as celebrant.

On March 15, the actual anniversary day of the death of St. Louise, the Cardinal Legate was the celebrant of the Pontifical Mass. Present in the choir were the Cardinal Archbishop of Bordeaux, his Beatitude, Stephanos Sidarouss, C.M., the Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, and many Bishops. In the congregation were many public officials, national, regional and local, together with many Ladies of Charity. After the reading of the Last Gospel, there took place a happy and unexpected event. The Cardinal Legate, turning towards the congregation, read in French the Apostolic Letter of Pope John XXIII in which the Holy Father proclaimed Louise de Marillac heavenly Patroness of all Christian Social Workers. Thus after three centuries, another honor was added to the glory of this holy widow, mother and foundress.

The Mass on March 16 honored St. Vincent as Former of the Clergy. Besides the Cardinal Legate, six French Cardinals were present, as were the Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, thirteen Archbishops, five Bishops, many seminarians of St. Sulpice, of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, of the Congregation of the Mission, and many Daughters of Charity, together with many government officials, national, regional and local. In his homily, Archbishop Garonne, Archbishop of Toulouse, compared St. Vincent de Paul and St. John Marie Vianney, the Curé of Ars, as exemplars of the priesthood.

On the closing day, the Pontifical Mass of the Cardinal Legate was signalized by the presence of the seminarians of

the Diocese of Beauvais, for it was at Beauvais where St. Vincent preached the first retreat to ordinands. At the end of the Mass, the Cardinal Legate, Cardinal Feltin, thanked Father Slattery and Mother Lepicard, Mother General, together with all who had worked to prepare this beautiful tribute to St. Vincent and St. Louise.

In Rome

The Roman celebration of the Tercentenary had been preceded by many local celebrations throughout Italy, especially in those places where there were found Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, Ladies of Charity, and Members of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. However, worthy of special remembrance were the celebrations held in Rome at the beginning of May.

In Rome, the Tercentenary Celebrations were held from May 6 to 8 in the Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella. The various ceremonies took place in the presence of the relic of the Heart of St. Vincent, specially brought from Paris by the Mother General of the Daughters of Charity, Mother Lepicard. The Superior General, Father Slattery, and the Mother General had given permission to transfer the precious relic, the Heart of St. Vincent, to Rome for these celebrations so that not only the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity but also those devoted to St. Vincent could venerate this notable relic during the three days of celebration in the Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella, the mother Church of the Oratorians, where through the past four centuries have rested the remains of St. Philip Neri.

The ceremonies of the Triduum were arranged so that the clergy, the religious, and the various charitable societies might each have a distinct day on which to honor and venerate these two Saints. On the first day Father Slattery began the ceremonies by celebrating the early

Mass of the Community; he was followed by Cardinal Giobbe, Datary of the Holy See, while the Pontifical Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Diego Venini, Private Almoner of His Holiness.

On the second day, Valerio Cardinal Valeri, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, celebrated Mass, followed by the Pontifical Mass celebrated by Bishop Gaetano Mignani, C.M., exiled from China. On Sunday, May 8, the Pontifical Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Baldelli, President of the Pontifical Works of Charity. The Mass for members of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, founded by Frederick Ozanam, was celebrated by Father Slattery, Superior General, and the Mass for the Children of Mary of Rome and the environs was celebrated by Father Giuseppe Lapalorcia, Assistant General.

On this last day, May 8, the Holy Father, Pope John XXIII, granted the privilege of a special Audience in the Basilica of St. Peter to all who had participated in the celebrations, and personally received both Father Slattery, Superior General, and Mother Lepicard, Mother General. The following morning, Father Slattery celebrated Mass in the presence of the Relic of the Heart of St. Vincent in the Chapel of the Collegio Leoniano for the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity. At the end, Father Luigi Betta, C.M., Provincial Superior of the Province of Rome, thanked the Superior General in the name of the confreres and the Sisters, and then in filial homage, presented Father Slattery with a photograph of the Holy Father, Pope John XXIII, personally autographed by him, as a souvenir of these memorable celebrations.

SOME NOTABLE EVENTS DURING THE GENERALATE OF FR. SLATTERY

Golden Jubilee of Vocation

On June 10, 1913, the Superior of St. Joseph's Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey, received into the Internal Seminary of the Congregation of the Mission a number of young men, among whom was William M. Slattery from our parish of the Immaculate Conception in Baltimore. With thanksgiving, the whole Congregation joined with Father Slattery, our Superior General, in thanking Almighty God for this Fiftieth Anniversary of his vocation as a son of St. Vincent, and prayerfully requested that the good Lord would preserve him for many years. On June 8, 1963, Father Slattery celebrated this his Golden Jubilee with the confreres at St. Lazare. On the actual day of Jubilee, June 10, Father Slattery celebrated his Jubilee Mass of Thanksgiving with the Daughters of Charity in the Chapel of the Apparitions of Mary Immaculate at their Motherhouse on the Rue du Bac. This Jubilee Mass was one more indication of the Superior General's devotion to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. I remember hearing that shortly after he had been appointed Visitor, Provincial Superior, of the Eastern Province of the United States, a malady developed in his eyes which threatened total loss of sight. The doctors offered him very little hope, so Father Slattery had recourse to Mary Immaculate, asking her intercession. My recollection is that he always attributed his recovery, without loss of sight, was due to the intercession of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal.

Vatican Council

When the Vatican Council opened on October 11, 1962, among the Fathers of the Council was the Superior

General of the Congregation of the Mission, Father William M. Slattery, C.M. Moreover, besides His Beatitude, Stephanos Sidarouss, C.M., Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, twenty-one Archbishops and Bishops of the Congregation of the Mission were also present as Fathers of the Council. Father Annibale Bugini, C.M., was Secretary of the Commission on Liturgy.

On November 27, 1962, the Superior General, Father Slattery, invited to a special dinner at the Collegio Leoniano all the Vincentian Archbishops and Bishops present at the Council. Confreres who also attended were Father John Young, C.M., Rector of the Seminary of St. John Vianney, Miami, Florida, invited to accompany the Bishop of Miami, the Most Reverend Coleman Carroll, as his theologian, and Father Nicholas Persich, C.M., Rector of Kenrick Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, who was invited to accompany His Eminence, Joseph Cardinal Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis, as his theologian, and who shortly afterwards was designated as a "peritus" of the Council.

Beatification of Mother Seton

March 17, 1963 was another notable date for Father Slattery. On this day, many Americans, Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Charity and others were present in the Basilica of St. Peter when the decree of beatification of Elizabeth Ann Seton was read before the Pontifical Mass. Father Slattery assisted at this ceremony since Mother Seton began her work in Baltimore (his natal city) and as numbers increased, moved her new community of Sisters to Emmitsburg, Maryland, to St. Joseph's Valley. There she established in 1809 the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's Valley, the first American Congregation of Sisters. Their rules were based on the rules of the

Daughters of Charity. This original foundation of Mother Seton, after her death, sought union with Paris, to become in 1850 the American Province of the Daughters of Charity, since 1969 now divided into five Provinces at Emmitsburg, Maryland; Albany, New York; Evansville, Indiana; St. Louis, Missouri; and Los Altos Hills, California. The various branches of the Emmitsburg Foundation now count five other independent Congregations of Sisters of Charity, all of whom honor Mother Seton (now St. Elizabeth Ann Seton) as their Foundress.

In the afternoon, Pope John XXIII descended into the Basilica of St. Peter to assist at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Afterwards, in his homily, he spoke of Mother Seton as the first flower of sanctity in the United States. Afterwards, he congratulated and spoke with Father Slattery.

GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

The Thirty-third General Assembly

On December 13, 1962, Father Slattery announced that the opening of the Thirty-third General Assembly of the Congregation, originally convoked for September 12, 1963, in Rome, must be anticipated because of the opening of the Second Session of Vatican Council II, which had been set for September 8, 1963, in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. The date for the opening of our General Assembly, then, was transferred to August 20, 1963, at 9:00 a.m. in the Collegio Leoniano, Rome.

The Thirty-third General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission opened in the Collegio Leoniano, Rome, the morning of August 20 and closed on September 1, 1963. This was the first time in the history of the Congregation that a General Assembly was held outside of the Motherhouse in Paris.

In all, one hundred twenty confreres participated as delegates in this General Assembly. In fourteen sessions, the delegates first elected the officials of the Assembly and then the six Assistants General: Father Felix Contassot, Father Toribio Marijuan, Father Guiseppe Lapalorcia, Father John Zimmerman, Father Gerard Domogala and Father Alejandro Rigazio. The following day, Father John Zimmerman was elected Admonitor to the Superior General. He was the last since, in the revision of the Constitutions, this office was no longer continued. The General Commission was constituted by the Assembly's delegates to examine the postulata presented by the various Provinces. The members of the Minor Commissions were chosen by the Superior General and his Council.

In following sessions, the liturgical life of the confreres and their works and ministries were considered. Decrees were passed on the discipline of the Congregation. The Ordinances of the Superior General, issued since the last General Assembly, were approved and added as an appendix to the Decrees. On August 30, the decree on government was approved and the session was shortened to enable the delegates to go to Castel Gandolpho for the Audience with Pope Paul VI. Then followed the approval of further decrees on government and on the formation of our younger confreres. Finally, in the fourteenth session, the Decrees were approved and the Assembly declared to be dissolved and the delegates departed for their houses and Provinces.

Extraordinary General Assembly

Throughout 1967, a considerable part of the activity of the Curia was involved in preparing and planning for the Extraordinary General Assembly of 1968-1969. On February 28, 1967, Father Slattery wrote to all the

Visitors that, in preparation of the Extraordinary General Assembly, he was announcing the formation of Commissions and Sub-Commissions which were to plan the procedure of adapting the Congregation of the Mission, its Rules and Constitutions and practices in accordance with the directives of Vatican Council II. He requested that, within fifteen days after the reception of his letter, names of confreres qualified and nominated to be members of these Commissions be sent to the Curia.

On April 25, 1967, a further communication listed the members of the various Commissions and Sub-Commissions, and announced that the sessions would be held in the Collegio Leoniano. Meanwhile, on July 5, the members of the Doctrinal Commission and of the Theological-Juridic Commission, consisting in all of some 20 members, began their labors at the Collegio Leoniano, Rome; to be followed on July 22, by the other Commissions and Sub-Commissions.

On November 15, the letter of Convocation of the General Assembly was sent to all the Provinces and Vice-Provinces of the Congregation, convoking this Extraordinary General Assembly and the XXXIV General Assembly in the history of the Congregation to meet in Rome at the Casa Maria Immaculata (Via Ezio, 28) on August 22, 1968, at 9:00 a.m. Later, on January 6, 1968, a letter was sent out announcing the concession by the Holy See of a special faculty in the manner of choosing deputies for this General Assembly, for this instance only.

The XXXIV General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, the First Extraordinary Assembly, began its labors on August 22, 1968, opening with Mass in the Chapel of the Collegio Leoniano, with Father Slattery as principal celebrant, and all the delegates as concelebrants. This first Session was to continue its labors until October 5, 1968.

"The most important Assembly ever held" was the epithet given this Extraordinary General Assembly by Father Slattery in his inaugural address. "The decree 'Perfectae caritatis'," he said, "assigns a wider field to your work, but at the same time, it tells you how far this enterprise of renewal and adaptation can go, and what spirit can animate it." Finally, he made clear the provisional nature of the decisions to be taken: "they will have to be subjected for a time to the control and judgement of experience, and above all to the verdict of the Church."

The General Assembly had a membership of 155. Among them were: the Superior General with his five Assistants General, the Secretary General, the Econome General, 39 Provincials, 10 Vice-Provincials, 98 Deputies or Representatives, and 2 Substitute Representatives. It is noteworthy that Father William Rudsik and Father Augustine Mikula were in the Assembly by a special Indult of the Holy See as Representatives of the Provinces of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, since these Provinces were hindered from sending delegates to the Assembly.

In the fall of 1967, at an ordinary meeting of the General Council, Father Slattery had told the Assistants General, in confidence, that he was planning on offering his resignation but that he had not yet decided on the time or the manner of announcing this resignation. He felt that a younger confrere was indicated to lead the Congregation in its renewal and adaptation in accord with the Council of Vatican II.

On September 18, 1968, the 15th general meeting of the Assembly was about to adjourn for its mid-morning refreshment break at 10:30 a.m. when the Moderator, Father Rigazio, addressed the Assembly to announce that the Superior General wished to speak. Father Slattery spoke in English slowly and calmly:

“MY DEAR CONFRERES,

PERMIT ME TO ASK YOUR ADVICE WITH REGARD TO A MATTER TO WHICH I HAVE GIVEN MUCH PRAYER AND CONSIDERATION. IT IS A QUESTION WHICH, IN MY HUMBLE OPINION, CONCERNS THE INTEREST OF HOLY MOTHER CHURCH, OF SOULS, ESPECIALLY THE POOR, AND OUR OWN BELOVED CONGREGATION.

THE QUESTION IS THIS: SHOULD I PRESENT MY RESIGNATION FROM THE OFFICE OF SUPERIOR GENERAL AT THIS FIRST SESSION, OR AT THE SECOND SESSION OR NOT AT ALL?

THIS STAGE OF OUR GENERAL ASSEMBLY, WHEN WE ARE DISCUSSING THE THEME “De REGIMINE,” SEEMS AN OPPORTUNE TIME TO CONSIDER THIS QUESTION HENCE IT IS THAT I ASK YOU, FOR MY PEACE OF CONSCIENCE, TO GIVE ME YOUR ADVICE AS TO WHETHER OR NOT I SHOULD RESIGN IN THIS FIRST SESSION, OR IN THE SECOND SESSION, OR NOT AT ALL. . . . SINCE YOU HAVE PROBABLY ALREADY CONSIDERED THIS MATTER OF THE RESIGNATION OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL, I WOULD BE GRATEFUL IF YOU WOULD GIVE ME YOUR ADVICE THIS MORNING UPON YOUR RETURN HERE AFTER THE BRIEF INTERRUPTION FOR REFRESHMENTS.

I COMMEND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, TO OUR BLESSED MOTHER, MARY IMMACULATE, AND TO ST. VINCENT YOUR JUDGMENT IN THIS MATTER.

I SHALL SEE IN THE ADVICE OF THE MAJORITY THE EXPRESSION OF THE WILL OF GOD. LIKE YOURSELVES, I WISH TO DO ALWAYS THE WILL OF GOD. I THANK YOU!”

After the results of the secret voting had been checked and the result announced, Father Rigazio left the hall to tell Father Slattery of the Assembly’s opinion and to invite him in again.

Father Slattery entered the hall with great composure and even a smile on his face. He took the presidential chair and with great simplicity spoke as follows:

"I THANK THE ASSEMBLY FOR ITS ADVICE IN WHICH I SEE AN EXPRESSION OF THE WILL OF GOD.

I WISH TO TAKE THIS OCCASION TO THANK YOU HERE PRESENT AND TO THANK ALL THE CONGREGATION FOR YOUR COOPERATION DURING MY GENERALATE. IN PARTICULAR, I WISH TO THANK OUR ASSISTANTS GENERAL, PAST AND PRESENT, OUR SECRETARY GENERAL, OUR ECONOME GENERAL, AND EVERY MEMBER OF THE CURIA GENERALIZIA FOR THEIR TIRELESS AND PRECIOUS COOPERATION. MUCH OF THE GOOD ACCOMPLISHED IS DUE TO THEIR DEVOTED HELP.

IF DURING MY GENERALATE I HAVE GIVEN OFFENSE TO ANYONE, I ASK PARDON.

I THANK THE CONGREGATION FOR ITS PATIENCE WITH ME DURING MY GENERALATE.

I WOULD LIKE TO APPLY TO MYSELF THE WORDS WHICH ST. VINCENT PLACED AT THE END OF OUR RULES:

"Finally, we must be firmly convinced that when, according to the words of Christ, we have done everything that was commanded us, we ought to say: 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do; and, indeed, that without Him we could have done nothing'."

When the Superior General had ended his moving speech, Father James Richardson spoke on behalf of the Assembly at the request of the other Moderators:

"I speak in my own name, but I am completely assured that at least some of the things I say are an echo of what is in the minds and hearts of the confreres of this Assembly.

Most Honored Father, you have asked us to answer a question which is of immense signification to the entire Congregation, and you have made this the greatest moment in your personal life.

Many times during the twenty-one years you have been the Father of the Congregation and of each confrere, you have responded to problems, questions, and difficulties

that have been sent to you for your judgment. Speaking from my own experience of the opportunities I had of speaking to you face to face, I know that every answer was given with simplicity, humility, kindness and with a superabundance of Christian charity. All of us know what you have done for the Congregation during these years when you led us into the fourth century of the Congregation's existence since St. Vincent's death.

I think it is futile for me to enumerate here all your accomplishments during this period. What is much more important and significant to me is the personal example of your life and your works. These were and are a pure reflection of St. Vincent de Paul in person. You have reflected and you have spoken to us, and we have recognized your person in St. Vincent. You have spoken in a spirit of faith, with great confidence that God, in all circumstances, will protect the Congregation and its members, urging us to love God, to have compassion for the children of God, our neighbors. We know the reputation you enjoy, Most Honored Father, not only in the Congregation but throughout the whole Church, especially here in Rome. I would embarrass you if I repeated here those things which I personally have heard. I speak this not in idle praise, but in a poor attempt to express the reverence and affection that I myself have for your person, for your office, and I think everyone feels the same.

I was especially touched and moved by the concluding words you have spoken to us on your return to this Assembly, in which you asked us to pardon you for any offense you might have given us. It is rather I who am aware of the offenses I might have given you, and I ask you to pardon me, and I am certain that all the members of the Congregation do the same, for any manifestation of disrespect, lack of delicacy or reverence we might have shown you.

I address these words to you, Most Honored Father, in my name and I address them to you so that I may convey to you what I feel. I know that other confreres could say better what I have tried to say, if only they had the opportunity, but no one could mean it more."

Then Father James Collins, the Provincial of the Eastern Province of the United States, speaking directly to Father Slattery, expressed the desire of himself and his Province, to welcome him home to his own Province.

To quote the Chronicler of the Assembly: "At this moment, the emotionally charged atmosphere of the Assembly on this historic occasion was obvious to all present. Father Slattery's speech and whole bearing brought tears to the eyes of many of those present as evidence of a living example of sanctity."

The work of the General Assembly continued slowly but effectively until October 1, 1968; then the General Assembly was to elect a new Superior General. At 7:15 a.m., the members of the Assembly concelebrated or attended the Mass "pro electione Superioris Generalis" with 41 concelebrants, each representing a Province or Vice-Province, with Father William Slattery as principal celebrant; he also gave the homily — the prescribed "exhortation:"

THE DAY HAS ARRIVED FOR YOU TO ELECT A NEW SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION. YOU ARE CERTAINLY AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF WHAT YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO DO, AND OF THE STRICT ACCOUNT YOU WILL HAVE TO GIVE TO GOD. ALTHOUGH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAS NARROWED DOWN THE POWERS OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL IN ORDER TO ENABLE THE SUBJECTS TO HAVE A GREATER SHARE IN AUTHORITY, THERE IS STILL MUCH DEMANDED OF HIM. IN FUTURE YOU WILL BE ASKING MORE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL THAN OF HIS PREDECESSORS AS

REGARDS HIS VITALIZING ROLE THROUGHOUT THE CONGREGATION. . . .

YOU WILL ALSO ASK ST. VINCENT FOR THE SUCCESS OF TODAY'S ELECTION. WE ARE DEALING WITH HIS SUCCESSOR, IN WHOSE HANDS YOU WILL CONFIDE THE WORK NEAREST TO THE SAINT'S HEART. IT IS SAID OF FOUNDERS OF RELIGIOUS FAMILIES THAT THE WELL-BEING OF THEIR INSTITUTES IS TO THEM A SOURCE OF JOY. WHENEVER WE KEEP A FEAST OF ST. VINCENT, WE HYMN HIS VIRTUES AND MERITS, BUT WE ALSO REMEMBER WHAT GREAT GLORY IS GIVEN TO GOD AND WHAT GREAT GRACES ARE LAVISHED UPON SOULS BY THE WORKS OF ST. VINCENT'S CHILDREN. MAY THE RENEWAL AND ADAPTATION ENTRUSTED TO THE SUPERIOR GENERAL REDOUND TO THE GLORY OF OUR HOLY FOUNDER. AND SINCE THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN HAS BESTOWED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE HISTORY OF OUR RELIGIOUS FAMILY HER MOTHERLY PROTECTION, LET US ASK HER TO BE PLEASED TO PRESIDE OVER THE ELECTION TODAY AS SHE WAS PRESENT IN THE UPPER ROOM AT THE ELECTION OF ST. MATTHIAS.

If the Word of God found a deep echo in the hearts of the delegates when it was proclaimed by Father Slattery in his last address as head of the Company, the text of the Mass, sung with fervor, seemed to leap from its setting and to come alive with unwonted youthfulness:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he sends me to preach the Gospel to the poor."

at the beginning, and then:

"Send forth your Spirit, and they will be created and renew the face of the earth."

at the Offertory; while at the Communion was sung:

"The Love of God poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us."

And at the end was sung the hymn of brotherly love:

“Ubi caritas et amor, ibi Deus est.”

At 12:15 on October 1, 1968, the pent-up suspense of all the members of the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission gathered in Rome in the conference hall of the Casa Maria Immaculata broke. Father James W. Richardson, C.M., until then in charge of the Vice-Province of Los Angeles, had just been proclaimed Superior General after a favorable vote of nearly all of those present.

In the midst of thunderous, jubilant and prolonged applause, Father James Richardson approached the nearest microphone and addressed the Assembly:

“I have the intention to accept, but first I must have a word with the present Superior General, Father Slattery.

Father Slattery, I speak to you now from a different position from the one I spoke to you the day you presented your resignation. I do so to ask for your help. I’m sure everyone is ready to help me in my weakness and insufficiency. But it is specially for your personal help I ask. I ask you to be near me during the next few days or weeks, as long as you can, as long as necessary for a person in my predicament to find his bearings and to become aware of the real situation, because at present all this for me has an air of unreality about it.

I ask you, Father, whether you are willing to come to my aid?”

Father Slattery grasped the microphone and said: “Very gladly.”

Father Richardson then stated, “*I announce to the Assembly, considering this in the presence of God as a command of obedience coming from the highest authority, I accept, though with a great reluctance, the office you*

have conferred upon me by your voting."

All the Assembly members stood and loudly applauded the new Superior General the moment that he signified his acceptance.

"This is truly for me a manifestation of the Will of God. St. Vincent, when speaking about obedience, told us to ask for nothing and to refuse nothing. God is my witness that in no way have I, whether by what I have said or left unsaid, ever moved a finger to seek this office."

"I accept the burden that goes with this office and I know that the burden is a heavy one. The experience of this Assembly teaches one to see the present-day problems confronting our Community within the Church. And one of two things, either we carry out a real renewal or without any shadow of doubt, we shall lose our place in the Church."

"I implore you to pray for the Community. The Community is what matters. And pray also for me, so that at least I do not impede or handicap the work of all the members of the Congregation, all of them anxious to renew it in the full spirit of St. Vincent."

The applause was warmer still when the new Superior General left his place as a simple member of the Assembly and went up to occupy the chair of the President. Meanwhile, the Secretary of the Assembly was busy writing out the decree of election and acceptance, which was signed forthwith, first by Father Slattery, and then by the Secretary, Father Carlo Braga. Finally, after the new Superior General had taken the prescribed oath on the Book of the Four Gospels, all those present, at a sign from the Moderator, intoned the "Te Deum" and the hymn "Maria, Mater Gratiae" in thanksgiving.

Thus ended a ⁵meeting of paramount importance for the Assembly. As the delegates left the conference hall,

they filed past the presidential chair to shake hands with the new Superior General and to wish him well. There was no stiffness or formality about it, and later, when the new Superior General reached the corridor, he found the Daughters of Charity of the Casa Maria Immaculata waiting to greet him; they were well aware how privileged they were at that moment, and the envy of all their Sisters throughout the world.

Father Slattery, in accord with his promise to Father Richardson, remained at the Collegio Leoniano for the next few weeks, to serve as a resource person to the new Superior General. On November 12, 1968, he left Rome for the last time to return "home;" to return to his beloved St. Vincent's Seminary, Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he had spent the greater portion of his life in the Congregation. Here he devoted himself tirelessly to the ministry of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, until his final illness and death called him to St. Vincent's Mission of Heaven.

An Estimate of Father Slattery

To one who met Father Slattery for the first time, Father gave the impression of a gracious and affable person, interested in others, truly a southern gentleman. He was considerate of others and at times would inconvenience himself greatly to assist them.

He was humble and somewhat diffident in his own abilities. For example, the various Circular Letters that he sent to the Provinces were the composition of his Secretary General, Father Pierre Dulau, who was a Doctor of Theology and a Doctor of Sacred Scripture from the Biblical Commission, and who spoke several languages fluently. Even when Father Slattery traveled with Father Dulau, all his major talks were written by Father Dulau.

When I accompanied Father Slattery to Australia, to the Philippines, and to Lebanon, he would say a few words to his audience and then would turn to me, asking me to speak in his name, saying with a smile: "Father can explain better than I." He habitually chose *not* to be in the limelight.

In our Council meetings, Father Slattery sat at the head of the table, with Father Contassot at his left, followed by Father Campo, and Father Lapalorcía. At the foot of the table was myself. On my left, in order, were seated Father Knapik, Father Godinho, and at Father Slattery's right, Father Dulau, Secretary General, who had no right to speak in meetings unless the Superior General asked his opinion. Father Slattery would present a particular matter for discussion, beginning with Father Contassot, First Assistant, and passing along to each of the other five Assistants. Ordinarily, if all were in agreement, without stating his own opinion, Father would normally accept the opinion of the six Assistants. If no unanimity had been reached, Father would prolong the discussion and then only occasionally would he express his opinion or propose some particular aspect of the matter under consideration.

During the General Assembly of 1963, at which he presided as the sole moderator, he was asked why he did not express his opinion on matters being discussed. To this question, Father Slattery's answer always was that he did not wish to restrict the liberty of the delegates as he feared that many would accept his opinion merely because it was offered or proposed by the Superior General.

In 1964 and 1965, for the first time in the Congregation, a Directory for the Provincial Directors of the Daughters of Charity was being drawn up. A draft of a possible text was drawn up, principally by Father Contassot, and sent to all the Provincial Superiors and to

all the Provincial Directors of the Sisters for their suggestions, corrections and additions. They were to send to the General Curia their responses by a fixed date. At that time, Father Slattery designated the six Assistants General as a Special Commission to collate these responses and to adapt the text of the Directory as they judged best. Several months were involved in this labor with the members of the Commission meeting two or three mornings a week during this time.

At one point there was mentioned almost universally that the previous legislation regarding the length of time that the Provincial Director would remain in office, namely, that the Provincial Director would remain in office 'ad nutum Superioris Generalis' (according to the will of the Superior General) be changed to a definite period of time, with six years designated for a term of office, with the possibility of a second term of six years, with no further reappointment, unless extraordinary circumstances justified the Superior General to extend the appointment to a third term or even to a fourth term. The Commission unanimously agreed with this proposed change and so recommended this change in the revised text of the Directory. When the Commission's work was finished, the revised text of this Directory was presented to Father Slattery for his approval and promulgation.

To our surprise, he asked that we consider and discuss with him each article of the text. This work continued on for several months more of meetings. A few minor changes, mostly in wording, were made until we arrived at the article stating the term of office of the Provincial Director. Father Slattery asked each of us to express our opinion on the matter, and we all agreed to the specified term of office. This was the sole instance where Father disagreed with our thinking, insisting that the text be left in its original form (ad nutum Superioris Generalis)

because he did not wish to restrict the right and the freedom of any future Superior General in this matter. Each of us offered examples of Directors who by reason of age, or of length of time in office, deserved to be replaced, but who had been not so removed "because there was no designated term of office, and therefore any replacement would reflect on the confrere holding the office." In vain were our efforts. In this one instance, Father insisted that he would not change this article of the text because it would restrict the liberty of action of some future Superior General. After some further discussion, we all yielded to his opinion, and the text remained and was promulgated in 1965 as Father Slattery wished.

A sequel to this is interesting. In the first General Assembly of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, held in Rome in 1969, to revise the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity, the General Assembly, when treating the articles dealing with the Provincial Director of the Daughters of Charity, voted a definite term of six years for the Provincial Director, with the possibility of a second term of six years, with no further extension, except in extraordinary circumstances. In such a case, the Superior General could grant a further extension. In the next General Assembly of the Daughters of Charity, the text was further amended to a first term of six years, with a possible second term of three years, with no extension.

After the General Curia moved to Rome in August, 1963, for the first time the Curia had distinct quarters of its own. Most of the second floor of the Collegio Leoniano was rented from the Province of Rome. As a result, the Curia had its own chapel, its own community room and its own refectory. It was here, at recreations, that Father Slattery's affability and sense of humor became much more apparent. He spoke much more freely with us then

when he lived in Paris where we all recreated together as a group with the confreres of the house. Often he would recount incidents that had occurred while he was Provincial Superior of the Eastern Province of the United States.

One such occasion occurred after he had spent the whole day testifying in the Diocesan Tribunal of Rome which was investigating the reputation of sanctity of the Servant of God, Father Thomas Judge, C.M., who had founded the Missionary Servants of the Holy Trinity (priests and brothers) and the Missionary Servants of the Blessed Trinity (sisters) especially to labor in the "no priest" sections of the United States and then elsewhere.

Towards the end of his life, Father Judge was a patient in Providence Hospital, Washington, D.C., operated by the Daughters of Charity. At the time, Father Judge was in critical condition and shortly afterwards died. Until then, Father Judge had received an indult to remain a Vincentian while being the Founder and Superior General of the Missionary Servants of the Holy Trinity. The Sacred Congregation of Religious sent word to the Apostolic Delegation in Washington that Father Judge must make a choice of remaining a Vincentian and of leaving the Congregation that he had founded, or of leaving the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians) and of remaining in the Congregation of the Missionary Servants of the Holy Trinity. A secretary of the Apostolic Delegation came to Father Judge's room in the hospital, saw his dying condition, and therefore decided that he should not be obliged to make such a choice on his deathbed. He returned to the Delegation without presenting the document to Father Judge, who died a day or two afterwards.

Father Slattery remarked how providentially this matter had turned out; that Father Judge had not been

obliged to make a choice and so died as he had lived for so many years, a member of both Congregations. To me, this relation of the incident was one more indication of the charity, the compassion and the understanding of Father Slattery towards others, especially towards Vincentians and Daughters of Charity.

On the 18th of August, 1982, a memorial Mass was celebrated for Father Slattery at the Chapel of the Motherhouse, presided over by Father Richard McCullen, Superior General, assisted by 15 confreres. Many Daughters of Charity also assisted, including the Mother General, Mother Rog  , and her Council. Father Leon Lauwerier, Visitor of the Province of Paris, gave the following homily at this Mass:

“This period of the year is not hardly favorable for great gatherings. Many confreres and Sisters who would have loved to be with us at this time are absent from Paris, but it has seemed opportune not to delay the celebration of this Mass for Father Slattery.

First, because he had lived here from 1946 to 1963. From his election as Superior General until 1963, he was the immediate Superior of the confreres of the Province of Paris;

Next, the presence of Father McCullen, our present Superior General, and of Mother Rog  , who have returned from his funeral, permits us to offer to God our prayer, in union with the whole family of St. Vincent, for the repose of the soul of him who during 21 years had been our Superior General and who has left us the very beautiful example of his life.

Born in Baltimore on May 7, 1895, William Michael Slattery was received into the Internal Seminary on June 10, 1913, was ordained priest on June 8, 1919 at

Philadelphia. After his graduate studies in Rome, he was successively Director of the Internal Seminary, Superior, and Visitor of his Province.

Named Substitute-Assistant in General Council, he arrived in Paris at the Motherhouse in May, 1946. Father Edouard Robert, Vicar General, in presenting this confrere to the Community, did not hide his admiration for him.

If the seminarians of this epoch were somewhat a little surprised not to perceive in him the dazzling style of the American military chiefs nor the pride of the soldiers of that country (who had contributed so much to the Liberation of France), the rumors of the corridors let them understand that this Priest of the Mission, so discrete, of a recollection and of a piety quickly noted, could very well be the future Superior General of the Congregation.

Indeed, the 31st General Assembly called him to this great responsibility on July 5, 1947. He himself made known the sentiments which animated him at this moment, when, that very evening he spoke to the Daughters of Charity at the Rue de Bac:

'God has chosen today your humble servant as the new Superior General of the double family of St. Vincent de Paul. May His Holy Will be done!

I am indeed convinced of my incapacity but I have much confidence because I know that God sometimes employs very humble and very feeble instruments for His glory and for the salvation of souls. I know also that the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Vincent, St. Louise and Blessed Catherine Labouré and all those who are now in Heaven will aid us.

I have also great confidence in your prayers. . . . I do not know what else to do than to ask the assistance of your prayers that you and the many others will say for me and for the office that I exercise.'

It was the same sentiments of abandonment to the Will

of God that Father Slattery expressed in his first letter of January 1, 1948, to the Priests of the Mission:

‘Above all things, I thank you for all the prayers that you have said for my poor person. I must bow, not without fear and fright, before the decision clearly indicated by the Assembly and take the place of St. Vincent before you. It is again, then, your prayers which will sustain me in the heavy task which weights down on my feeble shoulders.’

These words reveal well the personality of Father Slattery who always manifested a very great humility, rooted in a profound faith and in an intense life of prayer. How many hours did he not pass in this chapel near Our Lord and the precious relics of St. Vincent. Many of us have been witnesses of this.

In each of his letters at the beginning of the year, Father Slattery called upon his confreres to intensify their interior life in order to progress to sanctity:

‘We know,’ he wrote in January, 1948, ‘that without sanctity, it is impossible to be true imitators of St. Vincent and to walk faithfully in the footsteps of Our Lord.’

Putting into practice what he recommended to others, he knew how to meet or to receive each person with great respect, great deference, and he also knew how to face the most diverse events: unexpected, surprising, disconcerted, joyful or sorrowful, with a serenity which surprised more than one.

Several days after his election, during the night of July 14 and 15, a tremendous fire ravaged a great part of the buildings at the Berceau, including the Chapel, but leaving unharmed all the personnel and leaving intact the house of Ranguines and the 700 year old oak tree.

July 27 of that same year brought him without doubt one of the sweetest joys of his office: at Rome, Catherine Labouré was canonized. How he loved that celebration and

confided himself to that Daughter of Charity of whom Pius XII said:

'She distinguished herself by her application to Christian humility and by the simplicity of her life . . . she loved to live unknown, in shadow and in silence, content to spread about her the breath of her interior life. . . . She did not seek the poor glories of this world but she loved rather to be ignored and counted as nothing.' (Homily at the Canonization.)

How often did Father Slattery ask her to aid him in his task, particularly in the very painful affair which arose amongst the sons of St. Vincent and which was a most heavy Cross for him during many years!

Most attentive to each of the different and varied Missions of the Congregation, with what delicacy did he know how to receive, during the years of the 1950's, the numerous Missionaries and Daughters of Charity expelled from China and to be close to all his confreres in difficulty.

When the General Assembly of 1955 decided to transfer to Rome the General Curia, he had recourse, as foreseen, to the Holy See:

'When the response comes to us, we all will see in it the expression of the Will of God, at least for the present time.'

'What means more than the place where the Superior General resides,' he wrote in January, 1956, 'is the conservation of the spirit of our state, the sanctification of each of the members of the Company and the prosperity of its works.'

The answer was delayed and the transfer was made in 1963. He was then able to be in Paris for the feasts of the Tercentenary of the death of St. Vincent and of St. Louise in the grandiose setting of Notre Dame of Paris. But his heart turned towards the whole world:

'It is for us a duty of filial piety to celebrate this Tercentenary. At the feasts which will mark it, we have a right to expect at the same time a new glory for St. Vincent, new graces for his children and for the entire Church.

Our hopes have been greatly exceeded. The whole universe has offered to our Father homages as moving as varied.'

This was as a beautiful smile of St. Vincent upon his successor, who would very soon familiarize himself with Rome during the Council, before establishing himself there with the General Council.

We know that his office of Superior General finished September 18, 1968, during the General Assembly. This was truly an unforgettable day for all those who were present, but especially so for him. What vivid emotions seized hold of all the confreres when Father Slattery presented his request:

'Permit me to ask your advice. Should I present my resignation during this first session, should I present it in the second session, or should I not present it?

I ask you, for the peace of my conscience, to give me advice . . . I will see in the decision of the majority the expression of the Will of God.'

With the results of the voting, Father Slattery thanked the Assembly, and continued:

'I hope to apply to myself the words that St. Vincent wrote at the end of his Rules:

We must be firmly convinced that when, according to the words of Christ, we have done everything that was commanded us, we ought to say: We are unprofitable servants; we have done what it was our duty to do; and indeed, without Him we could have done nothing.

■

As all of you, I hope only to do, in all circumstances,

only the Will of God.'

Shortly after this event, a French confrere who knew him well, wrote:

'From St. Vincent, Father Slattery had learned humility and simplicity. He wished to be more a father than a superior; to act more by example than by command. He wished not to distinguish himself from others, only by a greater demand upon himself, not to be a burden to anyone in order to be of service to all.'

We know that during these past years, Father Slattery pursued his mission as a Son of St. Vincent in prayer, in availability for administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and in suffering which was particularly keen during this last period of his life.

For all the services rendered to the family of St. Vincent and to the Church, for the witness of sanctity of life that Father Slattery offered us, we thank God during the course of this Eucharistic celebration."



May it please His Divine Goodness to grant that all of you form but one heart and one soul! Charity is the cement that unites Communities to God and individuals to each other, so that he who contributes to the union of hearts in a Community binds it indissolubly to God. For this, may His infinite Goodness animate you with His Love.

St. Vincent de Paul