

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

“Love One Another”

As I have loved you, so you also should love one another,” Jesus says. It is a beautiful message—but daunting. Think of what it means. Here is a love ready to embrace everyone—a love that can open its arms wide enough to be nailed to a cross. Here is a love that bleeds and that suffers—yet keeps giving anyway. Here is a love without strings.

Encountering this Gospel, we may find ourselves humbled—and even ashamed. Are we doing enough? Do I love so deeply, so fully, so selflessly that others will know that I am one of Christ’s disciples? Do I give to those who can give nothing back?

In 1849, four women set out to live the answer to that question—and made history. They were four Sisters of Charity, who were sent to a small brick house on West 13th Street in Manhattan. There, they established a hospital with just a handful of beds, but with a fervent and faith-filled mission: to care for the poor, the outcast, the immigrants, the ones nobody else would help. Their new hospital would be named for the man who founded the Daughters of Charity: St. Vincent de Paul.

St. Vincent’s Hospital became legendary. It was where they took survivors of the Titanic in 1912. When word reached New York that the ship had gone down, the sisters wired the *RMS Carpathia*, which had rescued the survivors, and said that ambulances would be waiting at the dock—but only to care for the people who were in steerage. The sisters knew the rich would somehow be taken care of. They wanted to look after those who had no one. That was their mission.

Over the decades, the hospital’s impact was remarkable. It became home to one of the first health care centers for people with AIDS. Seeking to help immigrants from Asia, it set up a clinic in Chinatown, with free shuttle service to

the hospital, where they had a small staff fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese. St. Vincent’s was also unashamedly pro-life. It developed a unique Perinatal Hospice Unit for pregnant women. If a woman discovered that her fetus would not be viable, instead of having an abortion, she could carry her baby to term and have a natural delivery.

St. Vincent’s did things nobody else would do—what nobody else could do—guided by the Gospel: “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The story of this remarkable hospital came to an end in 2010, when after 160 years, St. Vincent’s, the last Catholic hospital in New York City, had to close its doors. At that time Archbishop Timothy Dolan said something beautiful about it. The work of St. Vincent’s goes on, he explained, in the people who worked there—their values, their faith, their compassion, their love.

And in a similar way, I think, the Gospel goes on in each of us. It goes on when we hear Christ’s call to love and strive to live that love in the world. It goes on in those who work tirelessly for the poor, the disenfranchised, the neglected, the abused. All those in the world today in “steerage.”

That is our way as Catholic Christians. And it was the way of those four Sisters of Charity nearly 170 years ago. We honor them and their legacy, if we care as they did, love as they did. Maybe the story of St. Vincent’s isn’t really over, as long as compassion and love guide the choices we make. The world might yet see new missionaries arrive to continue their work—and, perhaps, transform the world.

“Behold,” the scripture tells us “I make all things new.”

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