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Memorial of St Vincent de Paul, priest

Date: Saturday, September 27, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Zechariah 2:5–9, 14–15a
Responsorial Psalm: Jeremiah 31:10–12b, 13 | **Response:** Jeremiah 31:10d
Gospel Acclamation: 2 Timothy 1:10
Gospel Reading: Luke 9:43b–45
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

The readings today are about the quiet courage to build again, not with stone or sword, but with trust in a God who gathers the scattered, comforts the broken, and walks willingly toward the Cross.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Zechariah speaks to a people whose dreams lay buried under the rubble of Babylon's ruin. The temple had not been rebuilt. The land still wore the scars of conquest. The people were waiting, half-hearted and half-hoping. Into this silence steps the prophet, his mouth full of visions and his heart full of fire. He sees a man measuring the city, ready to mark out borders, lay foundations, raise walls. But another voice intervenes. *No walls*, says the angel. *Jerusalem will be a city without borders, a city so wide with wonder and filled with people that no stone could hold it. And I myself will be its wall—of fire.*

This is not just urban planning; this is divine reimagining. It is a blueprint of grace, not granite. A city of welcome, not exclusion. It is the first echo of a Gospel yet to be spoken: that the God of Israel will become the light to the nations, drawing not just the scattered tribes, but the strangers, the outsiders, the other. Zechariah is already preaching the good news that God's people are not a fortress, but a family; not a walled city, but a wide table.

In Zimbabwe today, this vision speaks urgently. In our cities, fenced with fear and shadowed by economic hardship, we often measure our lives by scarcity—scarcity of jobs, of dignity, of food, of hope. We begin to build walls in our minds, around our hearts, separating *us* from *them*, the safe from the suffering. But God interrupts this measuring. He invites us to imagine a nation where no

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child is turned away from education, where no family is locked out of justice, where no poor man dies unheard. God does not dwell behind borders. He lives in the fire at the edge of the camp, always with the vulnerable, always among the exiles.

Jeremiah echoes this promise in the Psalm, singing not of vengeance, but of gathering. *He who scattered Israel will gather them again, and guard them as a shepherd does his flock.* This is the heart of God: not a tyrant, but a tender shepherd. He does not command from afar; He kneels to comfort. He does not dominate; He dances with the daughter of Zion, turns her mourning into joy. He does not blame the broken; He binds their wounds.

Can we imagine that joy in our streets today? Can we see, even for a moment? The Lord does not forget. He gathers. He guards. He gives joy again.

But then comes the Gospel. And what a moment it is. Jesus, having just healed a child, is surrounded by awe. The crowd is amazed. The miracles have worked. The acclaim is rising. The disciples are hopeful. And just then, precisely *then*, Jesus whispers something devastating: *The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the hands of men.* The crowd misses it. The disciples don't understand it. But it is the second time Jesus has said it, and He means for them to hear.

This is the Gospel's paradox. The glory they want—the healing, the miracles, the applause—will only come through the horror they fear: betrayal, suffering, death. The city without walls, the joy without end, the Kingdom without borders—it all comes at a cost. And that cost is the Cross.

In Ignatian contemplation, we are invited to place ourselves in this moment. To hear Jesus' voice crack as He says those words. To feel the chill that must have crept through the disciples' bones. To wonder: would we have followed still, knowing the way would be so hard?

Saint Vincent de Paul did. Born into poverty, he became a priest in search of comfort and status. But grace interrupted his measuring line. In the prisons of war, in the hovels of the sick, in the silence of the poor, he found the fire of God. He reimagined priesthood not as power, but as presence. Not as walls, but as bridges. His Vincentian mission reminds us that holiness is not reserved for those at the altar, but for those on the margins. And it is *there*, always there, that Christ walks ahead of us.

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Vincent's legacy is a challenge to our conscience in Zimbabwe today. What is the purpose of the Church if it is not to become a city without walls? What is the meaning of our Eucharist if it does not send us out to gather the scattered, guard the vulnerable, and carry joy where mourning has been the only music?

We are not called to admire Christ from a distance. We are called to follow Him through the crowd and towards the Cross. Like Saint Vincent, like Zechariah, like Jeremiah, we are called to speak of a joy that the world cannot steal and to live out a love that builds not with bricks, but with justice and mercy.

And so, we return to the blueprint. Jerusalem without walls. Joy without fear. Glory through the Cross. This is the Kingdom of God.

May we, in prayer and in practice, rebuild our cities—our lives—not with gates and guards, but with the fire of faith and the courage of compassion. May we, like Vincent, measure our success not by safety, but by how deeply we have loved.

Let me leave you with three questions to carry into your prayer today:

- Where am I still trying to build walls instead of trusting God's fire to protect and guide me?
- Who are the scattered ones in my life—those left out, left behind, or unheard—and how is God calling me to gather them?
- How is the Cross showing up in my life today, and do I have the courage to stay with Christ through it?

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.

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