

## **Homily for the Solemnity of Saint Vincent, Deacon and Martyr**

Dear brothers and sisters,

On this Sunday, the Diocese of the Algarve celebrates its patron saint: Saint Vincent, deacon and martyr. This celebration takes place on this last Sunday of the month of January, the Sunday of the Word of God. Let us therefore take these two aspects into account in our homily.

First of all, let us reflect a little on the meaning of a saint being chosen as patron:

In the Christian tradition, especially in the Catholic Church, a saint being the patron of a Church means creating a deep spiritual, pastoral, and symbolic relationship between the Christian community and the chosen saint. Here are some aspects connected with this theme:

### **1. Intercessor before God**

The patron is recognized as an intercessor of the local Church. The faithful, believing in the communion of saints, a truth that we profess in our “Creed,” look to their patron, already united with God in heavenly glory, as an intercessor before God, presenting to him their prayers, needs, and struggles so that he may bring them before the Lord. Thus, the patron is seen as a spiritual companion who walks with the Church.

### **2. Model of Christian life**

The patron saint is also a concrete example of living the Gospel. His life, marked by virtues such as faith, charity, courage, humility, and service, becomes a reference for the faithful. The community is called to imitate his values and attitudes, seeking to live in a similar way in daily life.

### **3. Identity and mission of the community**

The patron helps to define the spiritual identity of the Church. Specifically, by celebrating Saint Vincent, deacon and martyr, as our patron, we are called to give a martyrial identity to our Church: a Church persevering in faith, capable of facing the obstacles of daily life, strengthened by the example of Saint Vincent.

To be the patron of a Church therefore means to be an intercessor, model, inspirer, and sign of communion. The patron saint helps the community to look to Christ, for all authentic devotion to the saints ultimately leads to the following of Jesus and the glorification of God.

At the same time, his memory is not merely a look to the past, but a living challenge for today's Church, called to bear witness to the Gospel with courage, fidelity, and love, even in contexts of trial.

The readings we have just heard help us grasp these points more fully:

The first reading, from the book of Sirach, speaks to us of a righteous man who, in the midst of his trials, places his trust in the Lord. "When I was completely surrounded, I called upon the Lord". It is the cry of one who knows anguish, but also profound trust in a God who does not abandon. Saint Vincent could make these words his own. Faced with persecution and violence, he did not trust in himself, nor did he seek to save his own life at any cost; he trusted in the Lord, certain that fidelity to God is worth more than any passing suffering.

With Saint Vincent, we too are invited to pray like the psalmist: You have been a refuge, Lord, in the day of my distress.

Saint Paul, in the second reading, helps us understand this mystery: God is "the merciful Father and the God who gives every possible encouragement." He is not a God who automatically spares us from pain, but the One who consoles us in the midst of tribulations, so that we too may be able to console others. In Saint Vincent we see this clearly: his strength did not come from the absence of fear, but from the certainty that Christ had suffered first and that, united with Him, suffering became a path to life. Vincent's martyrdom was not defeat, but full participation in the Passover of Christ.

The Gospel is perhaps the most demanding text. Jesus does not deceive His disciples: "You will be universally hated on account of my name." He speaks of persecutions, tribunals, betrayals, even within one's own family. But He also makes a decisive promise: "The one who endures to the end will be saved." Saint Vincent is a witness to this perseverance. As a deacon, he served the Word and the poor; as a martyr, he sealed with his blood what he had proclaimed with his life. In him we see that

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fidelity to the Gospel is not merely a beautiful idea, but a concrete choice, at times painful, but always fruitful.

In this context, it is very significant that today we also celebrate the Sunday of the Word of God. The Word that Saint Vincent listened to, proclaimed, and lived is the same that is entrusted to us today. The Word of God is not a distant text: it is living, it challenges us, consoles us, and gives us strength to face the difficulties of our time. A Church that listens to the Word is a Church capable of bearing witness to its faith and charity, even when this implies misunderstanding or rejection.

Let us ask, brothers and sisters, that the example of Saint Vincent may encourage us to trust in the Lord in difficult hours, to welcome the Word of God into our hearts, and to persevere to the end, certain that “as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also through Christ our consolation abounds”

AMEN.