

Dr. James Walters
Talk, Day 2, (Oct 15,16, 2022)
Talk #1

(Directions: Talk will follow slide show. The talk is broken up by slide #)

Slide 1

My name is Dr. Jimmy Walters. It is my honor to join you for this very special Assembly. I am, like you, a member of the Vincentian family, and I have a great devotion to the Miraculous Medal. It is quite wonderful to be a part of this global community and to offer my reflections which I pray inspires and empowers you and your Association.

I would like to begin with a story.

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In 2013, I brought a group of St. John's University students to Paris and Rome to gain a greater appreciation of our Catholic and Vincentian identity. I served as a Director of Campus Ministry at the University and this experience was certainly a perk of the job. One highlight was lunch with the Daughters of Charity and Fr. Greg Gay, who at the time, was serving as the Superior General for the Congregation of the Mission.

During the lunch, Fr. Gay introduced all of the students to the most hospitable Daughter who was preparing and serving the food.

As Fr. Gay attempted to explain who I was, he struggled to translate my responsibilities at the University. I was a Campus Minister, and I accompanied students on their faith journey. I invite them to serve, to advocate for justice and to come to build their relationship with Jesus Christ. I also invite them to love Mary and the Miraculous Medal, and our larger Vincentian charism. Not easy to translate, unfortunately.

Fr. Gay, in my introduction to the Daughter, spoke some words in Italian and the Daughter smiled, gently patted my shoulder, and walked away. I turned to Fr. Gay and asked what he said. After sipping his drink, he looked at me and said, "I told her that you know God."

What better words could ever be said of a person. While I am humbled by his description, I think a more accurate translation would be, "he tries to know God and he helps others do the same."

And as a result, I try to help all I encounter, from my students, to my children, to my colleagues, and to you today, to better come to know God's love and call for you. I seek each day to do this, and at the same time, discover God's love in my life.

That is what this first session attempts to do. To invite you into a focused reflection on God's call for you to fall greater in love with Him, His son, and Mary, the Blessed Mother.

I pray this time invites you to better answer God's unique call for you and the collaborative call for your community.

In my second talk, I will invite you to reflect on the dreams God has planted on your heart. We will explore the impact of these dreams and how they can transform the impact you have on others. When our time together comes to a close, I pray you are recommitted to your work, closer to our Lady and our Lord, and strengthened by this shared devotion to the Miraculous Medal so we can collectively serve those in our midst.

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Let's begin. And let's talk about vocation.

Vocations are callings from God. Provided with unique gifts and talents, we are, as scripture reminds us, not meant to not hide them under a bushel, but to shine like a city on a hill. Our vocations invite us to claim identities that allow us to use our gifts to love.

I have many callings or vocations, but there are four specific callings that I have claimed.

They are: 1. Husband, 2. Father, 3. Minister, 4. Writer.

As I stand here today, I am married with two daughters, active in supporting others and advocating for justice in our Vincentian charism, and as a published author, I am grateful and at times humbled in being called to do such important work. I use my gifts and talents in all various ways, and when I do so, it brings me great joy and peace.

I must also recognize that the journey to these vocations is not easy. I have been challenged by self-doubt, fear, and many more questions than answers. I often wondered if the path I was on was God's path, or just a path to feed my own needs and desires. Perhaps, you have asked yourself the same question.

I often find clarity in a quote from Frederic Buechner, "vocation is the place where our deepest gladness meets the world's deep need."

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During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, wrote a book titled, "Let Us Dream, the Path to a Better Future." Here, he invites us to dream of a new reality where we can change our world for the better.

One of my favorite quotes from the book is, “From this crisis we can come out better or worse. We can slide backward, or we can create something new.”

I ask you, what is stirring inside you- ready to be born? How is God calling you to use your gifts and talents to serve and to love? How will you create something new?

You will have time following this presentation to reflect on how you and your community can create something new. For now, let us seek inspiration from three familiar figures and stories.

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We are all familiar with the story of the Wedding at Cana in John’s Gospel. The first miracle of Jesus, where he turns water into wine. Jesus first resists the request from his mother to help the newlywed couple but then, moved by Mary’s intercession, Jesus tells the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” This story has been dissected and reflected on for generations. Today, I draw your attention to the servants. They filled the six jars, a great task of labor. It wasn’t their place to ask why or how. They simply had to cooperate with God’s instructions.

Scripture is filled with stories of God and his prophets, and of course Jesus, directing people into action. From Noah to Abraham, Peter to Paul, clear directives are offered and most of the time, those charged to act simply had to trust.

Is this not the same for us?

What are the jars that you are called to fill?

Remember, it is not you or I who turn the water into wine. We simply cooperate.

Allow me to share an example from my own life.

I am not sure anyone chooses to be a writer. It is a painful task at times, with no guarantee that anyone will ever read what you wrote. Even worse, if you are one of the lucky ones to get published, will people even read it?

As an author of two published books and many more articles, I claim writing as a vocation from God. It is when I write that I feel closest to God- maybe it is a close second after being with my wife and kids.

But writing is hard, and it can be exhausting. Yet, I know that I have a gift and something to say. I trust that what I write is inspired by the divine spark that lives with me and within you. And I pray, that what I write touches another heart.

Like the servants carrying the jars at Cana, I simply try to cooperate.

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Let's turn to another story and person-Fr. James Hardon. Fr. Hardon was a Jesuit priest in the United States in the mid-1900s. He was encouraged by a Vincentian priest to distribute the Miraculous Medal and to enroll them in the Confraternity of the Miraculous Medal, but he didn't get one for himself.

In 1948, when Fr. Hardon encountered a ten-year-old boy who was in a coma after a sledding accident, he decided to see if it would help. A sister who worked at the hospital found a medal and a ribbon that the priest could use to hang it around the boy's neck. Even though the boy had been diagnosed with inoperable permanent brain damage, the priest read the prayer that enrolled the boy in the Confraternity of the Miraculous Medal. As soon as he finished the prayer, the boy opened his eyes and asked his mother for ice cream. It was the first time he had spoken in nearly two weeks. New x-rays showed the brain damage had disappeared, and the boy was released from the hospital after about three days. Like the boy and his family, the priest's life and his belief in the medal were forever changed.

We all have a great devotion to the Blessed Mother and the Miraculous Medal. We wear the medal around our neck but how often do we, in our day-to-day, seek the miraculous?

German-born theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein, said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

How do you live your life?

In addition, how often do we truly turn to our Mother for guidance and support?

Allow me to share an example from my own life.

My mother, who was sick when I was a child, modeled for me how to pray to Mary and the saints. We would often go to Mass on Wednesday mornings in the summer and recite the Miraculous Medal novena at the Mass's conclusion.

One night as a teenager, I was quite sad. It was a difficult time as my hopes and desires for connection and community was lacking, and I felt quite

alone. I prayed the Miraculous Medal Novena and recited my rosary before heading to sleep. 25 years later, it is hard to recall all of what transpired, but I remember feeling a deep sense of peace. I calmed down and felt Mary's love. Words do not capture that night, but I knew then what I know now, and it is that Mary accompanies us as mothers do for their young.

I asked you to reflect in advance of the Assembly on how this devotion to the Miraculous Medal impacts your life. I pray you continue to reflect on this relationship and recognize that this medal goes beyond you and Mary. It must move us into action to bring hope and love to those in need.

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We revisited the Wedding at Cana, as well as one of the miracles attributed to the medal. Let's explore briefly one more inspiring figure, our beloved St. Catherine Laboure who was blessed to receive apparitions of the Blessed Mother and to communicate the medal's design to be created. I was always struck by how she never told anyone other than her confessor until she told her superior before her death. She remained anonymous as she lived out her daily duties of caring for the sick and elderly.

If we were honest with ourselves, would we do the same.

How often do we look for affirmation, credit, praise for the good work that we do?

How often do we want to be the "special one," chosen by God to make a difference in this life?

Catholic priest and author, Henri Nouwen, reminds us, that we are all God's beloved. He writes, "For me, God is the one who calls me the Beloved, and I have a desire to express to others how I try to become more fully who I already am."

Like Catherine, Vincent, Louise, and the generations of holy and unholy men and women, we are God's beloved- equally special on this journey home. As we live our vocations, we can turn to Catherine to be reminded of humility while owning our place as God's beloved.

Catherine leaves us with these simple words to gain direction in life:

"Whenever I go to the chapel, I put myself in the presence of our good Lord, and I say to Him, Lord, here I am. Tell me what You would have me do.' If He gives me some talk, I am content and I thank Him. If He gives me nothing, I still thank Him since I do not deserve to receive anything more than that. And then, I tell God everything that is in my heart. I tell Him

about my pains and my joys, and then I listen. If you listen, God will also speak to you, for with the good Lord, you must both speak and listen. God always speaks to you when you approach Him plainly and simply.”

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So, let us approach God, plainly and simply. With Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal at our side, we seek to love. We seek to be God’s instruments. We seek Christ in all we serve.

I started this talk with the story of how I was described as knowing God. All of us seek to understand our Creator, and the divine spark that shines within us. While we will never fully experience the mystery of God in this life, we are invited to allow that divine spark to shine brighter. As Vincentians, we do this not only in the silence of the chapel, but in the streets. We seek God everywhere, especially those most in need.

The medal that we claim as our own strengthens us, but it must lead us into action. Our second part of our reflection today will invite us to better claim what God is asking of us in our work in the Association.

Slide 9

I would like to give you a few minutes to prayerfully reflect on your vocations and the impact you already had on others. To provide the backdrop to our reflection, I invite our friends from Gen Verde, an International performing arts group who works closely with our Vincentian family. I invite you to hear a recent song titled “Holy Ground.” You will hear some of the themes that emerged this day reflected in the lyrics. Let us pray...

Lyrics:

From the moment I first heard your call Lord,
I left the rest behind me
You alone became my all
Grant that I may keep my eyes on you
May I learn to look within and see beyond
And I will walk on holy ground
I'll hear your voice, I'll see your face
I will find you in the crowd Lord,
I will go where you will lead me
I will walk on holy ground
Lord, you came to set the captives free
And to heal the broken-hearted
Reaching out to those in need
Servant of the poor,
now you send me
As your sign of love for all humanity

And I will walk on holy ground
I'll hear your voice,
I'll see your face
I will find you in the crowd Lord,
I will go where you will lead me
I will walk on holy ground
You are near, you are here,
Here beside me Lord
In the cries of all the hungry and the homeless
You are there
In the eyes of the forsaken and forgotten
You are there
In my fears and in my failures,
In the silent depths of my own poverty
You are there

Et avec toi,
j'irai Seigneur,
J'entends ta voix,
et je te vois dans les pauvres autour de moi
Je te suivrai où tu me conduis
Je te vois auprès de moi
Y junto a ti caminaré
Te seguiré,
me guiarás Oh Señor te encontraré
Entre la gente codo a codo
Tu amor yo llevaré
Je te vois près de moi

You are here on holy ground