

St Vincent and the Pirates Myth



There's a popular story about St Vincent de Paul being kidnapped by pirates and held as a slave for two years in Tunis, North Africa, before escaping and sailing home to France. It is said that he was on a boat which was boarded by pirates as he was returning from an overseas trip.

The pirates took him to Tunis on the north coast of Africa where he remained for two years as a slave. Vincent apparently promised to God that if he was saved and able to go home, he would dedicate the rest of his life to the care of the poor.

Slaves were bought and sold between masters and he came to be owned by a master who had been a French Christian but had abandoned his faith. Vincent convinced this man to become Christian again and they planned a way to escape back to France together.

However, historians have no proof of this; except for two letters which St Vincent himself sent to his lawyer. Aside from these letters, St Vincent never mentioned it again to anyone.

This makes it a myth. We have no proof one way or the other whether it was true or not. Did St Vincent make it up to account for his disappearance for two years. And if so, where could he have gone and for what reason? Or was it true and he simply did not want to remember this difficult time in his life?

- Do you think St Vincent really was kidnapped by pirates? Why?
- What is the meaning of the word myth? What other myths have you heard of?
- What other explanation could there be for his disappearance?
- If the story is true, what do you think St Vincent might have said to the French master to help him find his faith again?
- Imagine you have been captured by pirates. Write a prayer asking God to rescue you. What would you offer to do as St Vincent offered to help the poor? Perhaps spend less time on your Xbox, tidy your room without being nagged, be nicer to your brother/sister. It does not need to rhyme and can be humorous if you wish.