SPIRITUAL REFLECTION GUIDE

January - April 2016

Faith, Hope & Love
Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Much of the year 2016 will be part of the celebration within the Church of the Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis. The liturgical cycle for 2016 follows in general the Gospel of Luke (Year C) and, since Easter falls quite early, this issue of the Guides takes us through most of the Sundays in Easter time. Parishes have received quite an amount of materials relating to the Year of Mercy and there is a specific Year of Mercy website which can be readily accessed at http://www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va/content/gdm.html

The front cover of this issue displays the famous painting of Rembrandt’s Return of the Prodigal Son and the back cover is the official logo of the Year of Mercy. Both images capture the compassionate and unconditional love of the Father a theme central to the Year of Mercy and close to the heart of Pope Francis.

Later in the year will be the celebration of World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland. This celebration begins in July and will certainly be a time to celebrate with the Pope Francis the true joy of the Gospels.

Many of you would also know that during the writing of these Guides my wife was suddenly diagnosed with acute Leukemia. I personally thanks the Vincentian family for the many prayers and well wishes and ask for your continued kindness and support.

All Spiritual Reflection Guides can be accessed on the national website, www.vinnies.org.au, and follow the Publications link. For any mailing enquiries, contact lewisham.reception@vinnies.org.au. A helpful weblink for the full Sunday readings is the Liturgical Commission in Brisbane, www.litcom.net.au.

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THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Is: 60; 1 – 6  
Eph: 3; 2-3, 5-6  
Mt: 2; 1-12

The feast of the Epiphany opens us up to the possibilities offered through engagement with strangers. Last year our son needed surgery to reset his broken leg. As I was leaving the surgical theatre, saying a goodbye to him, the two surgeons came to me and said “Don’t worry Dad we will take very good care of him”. These words from the mouths of strangers were very comforting, encouraging and reassuring. Even though I had just left them with someone very precious to me, I knew that these “strangers” would give their all for the best possible outcomes.

The visit of the strangers from the east in the gospel this week reminds us of the influence of strangers in our lives. As we were growing up our parents would always warn us to stay away from strangers however when we are alone and in difficulty it needs to be a stranger that we turn to for assistance.

Reflecting on God as friend and stranger creates an interesting paradox. However that is the very nature of God. As friend, God knows us intimately and love and accepts us in all ways and yet as stranger God opens us to new possibilities and leads us on roads less travelled. Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI shares that, “with the stranger lies surprise, new possibility, contact with that part of God and reality that we have never experienced before.”

The Epiphany, the visit of the magi strangers from foreign lands to the Christ child, reveals the divine nature of Jesus to humanity. The visit and presence of the stranger in our life may also reveal a different perception of God in our lives. May we always be open to the difference the stranger offers us, their different perspectives, their different ways of understanding, their different reflections of our God. Such new possibilities in our life are the heart of our epiphany experience.

When has a stranger made a difference in your life?

PRAYER

Father, continue to open our lives to new possibilities and greater depth in our relationship with you.  
Amen
THIS WEEK...

Baptism; “is not a formality! It is an act that touches the depths of our experience” Pope Francis 2014.

PRAYER

Father,

May the Grace of our Baptism ground us in our faith, open us to hope and guide us in love.

Amen

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Is 40: 1-5,9-11
Tit 2: 11-14, 3: 4-7
Lk 3: 15-16, 21-22

The Baptism of Jesus is a significant moment in the mission of John the Baptist and the mission of Jesus. For John, in many ways, it is the end times of his prophetic ministry and for Jesus; baptism is the call to his mission and beginning of his ministry.

Poet John Shea wrote an evocative poem about John the Baptist. He has the Baptist thinking:

I can denounce a king, but I cannot enthrone one.
I can strip an idol of its power, but I cannot reveal the true God.
I can wash the soul in sand, but I cannot dress it in white.
I can devour the word of the Lord like wild honey, but I cannot lace his sandal.
I can condemn sin, but I cannot bear it away.

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

This poem highlights for us the importance of John's ministry to the ministry of Jesus. John became the architect of the mission which Jesus was divinely accepting. John is the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant. In this way John's ministry was difficult for he was not going to see it come to completion, as Jesus was to take it further and to continue it.

As Vincentians we too are “baptised” to a prophetic and action oriented ministry. There are times where our initiatives or our beginnings are not seen through to completion. This is frustrating and can even distract us from the heart of our motivations. However, like John the Baptist, we need to be the voice which cries in the wilderness not for our own personal gain and satisfaction but for the many people on the fringes of society, for those we serve.

In a General Audience in 2014, Pope Francis asked those gathered to find out and remember the date of their Baptism, to know it, to remember it and to celebrate it as a feast day. For this day was not a formality but a life enriching and changing experience.

What was the date of your Baptism?
2ND SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Is 62: 1-5 
Cor: 12: 4-11 
Jn 2: 1-11

The account of the wedding feast at Cana in the gospel of John holds deep reflections for us today. St Pope John Paul II highlighted this event in the life of Jesus through the additional Mysteries of Light prayed through the rosary.

I was participating in a retreat a few years ago where the retreat director opened for us some contextual aspects of the account. Jesus was invited to a wedding, possibly a cousin or close relative. Arriving with him were some of his disciples. It is thought that Jesus was a couple of days late for the feast as it was the custom that wedding feasts gathered for some days. When he arrived he was told of the dilemma; “They have no wine”, by his mother. This situation was embarrassing not only for the bride and groom but also for the family for such a situation would culturally mark their relationship for many years to come.

Jesus deeply understood this dilemma. However to my mind, as the guide for moral decision making, Jesus could have said to the gathering that it was time to clean up and allow friends and family to return home to possibly sober up. For the bride’s father who provides the wine would have provided many jars for the feast as it was custom that the father begins to produce and store wine for this occasion from the birth of the child! Jesus listens to the need and understood the humanity of the situation. In this way he transcended the common moral decision to offer a truly pastoral assistance which expressed his love and profound empathy to the situation.

To understand the gospels from a contextual point of view offers us always new and intense insights into the heart of Jesus. For Vincentians this account is important in the way we view the people we walk with each day, each week. Their life stories may be very different to our own but heard in the context of their world opens us to be compassionate and understanding.

When have you been faced with a dilemma that questions your first judgment of things?

Share with your conference times of good decisions and times that were not the best.

PRAYER

Loving Father,
May we listen to the lives of those we assist understanding the poverty of our humanity.
Amen
3RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Neh: 8: 2-6, 8-10
Cor: 12: 12-30
Lk 1:1-4, 4: 14-21

The celebration of Australia Day falls this week. Australia Day acknowledges the arrival of a European civilization in 1788. Those with a keen sense, historically, of why the colony was established may not be as enthusiastic about the simple words of Governor Arthur Philip marking the occasion:

We have come here today to this fifth great continental division of the earth and have founded here a state which we hope will become the beneficial patron of all the nations of the Southern Hemisphere. How grand is the prospect which lies before this youthful nation. (Governor Arthur Philip 1788)

Over all the years since, people issues have been foremost in the nation’s development; convicts, soldiers and free settlers; dispossession of the first Australians, a history of new arrivers seeking refuge or asylum, drastic social and cultural change, a gradual and ongoing appreciation of diversity, the remarkable prosperity of our population by comparison with other parts of the world, including many neighbouring peoples in Oceania.

St Paul’s words this week highlight for us as this “new nation” that even though we are a nation of great diversity we are still but one nation; “because all these parts, though many, make one body”. St Paul also reminds us that, “it is the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to different people…”

This Day holds different meaning for so many different people. May it be a day of celebration and thanksgiving for the diversity of contributions to this great southern land and may we continue to be profoundly thankful for the blessings of our elders of yesterday and the elders of the future.

For what aspect of Australian life are you personally most thankful?

THIS WEEK...

For those who’ve come across the seas
We’ve boundless plains to share;
With courage let us all combine
To Advance Australia Fair.

PRAYER

Loving Father,
May we listen to the lives of those we assist understanding the poverty of our humanity.
Amen
4TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

**Jer: 1: 4-5, 17-19**  
**Cor: 12: 31 – 13:13**  
**Lk 4: 21-30**

In probably the most quoted passage of his letters to the various communities of the early Church, St. Paul writes a hymn that is central to the very nature of true Christian love. This passage is so often chosen by couples as a reading for their wedding ceremony, it is close to my heart also as it was the reading for my own wedding celebration with Anne.

However as I read these words today after 18 years of marriage I reflect on the ever changing nature of the beauty of love. When I was first struck with love it was a passionate love, one which needed to be in constant companionship every minute, of every hour, of every day. As love grows it doesn’t so much get bigger in size but pierces deeper within the heart. This movement transcends each of us paradoxically to a place of vulnerability and yet to a place of great completeness.

Love challenges us each day. It is the greatest of the things that will last as St Paul reminds us but it can also be so easily lost. To nurture love is to be awake to love each day, to speak in words that reflect love and to offer love where faith and hope run dry.

I, like many of you, have had times of laughter and joy as well as times of tears and deep sadness. But as I reflect on the enduring nature of love these things fall into their own perspective.

Early last year I presented a framework for spirituality embracing the qualities of faith, hope and love. This trinity of virtues offer us as Vincentians a guide in our reflections and actions. May we continue to find meaning in our faith, provide living hope for those experiencing hopelessness and may we continue to grow in our love for each other and those we serve in love.

**What is your experience of love?**

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**THIS WEEK...**

Loving can hurt, loving can hurt sometimes  
But it’s the only thing that I know.  
When it gets hard, you know it can get hard sometimes  
It is the only thing that makes us feel alive.  
Ed Sheeran

**PRAYER**

Loving Father,  
May we listen to the lives of those we assist understanding the poverty of our humanity.  
Amen
5TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 6: 1-8
Cor: 15: 1-11
Lk 5: 1-11

“Then bringing their boats back to land, they left everything and followed him”. These words at the end of this week’s Gospel reading of Luke simply astound me. It reminds me of the insightful influence of Jesus on those who were open to hear. In many ways Peter and his partners James and John simply and powerfully fell into the net of this amazing person, Jesus.

I once thought that God’s call to follow happened only once in our life and if you missed the call, well, you simply missed your call! However as life opens and reveals more and more you realise that the call of God is constant and changing all in one. It is constant because God fully and wholly understands the fragility of our human nature; we need to be constantly called to life as we get distracted so easily. And it is changing just as our life is changing; “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often”. (John Henry Newman)

In many ways if we truly hear the call to follow we actually do leave everything behind. A vocational call to priesthood and religious life seems an obvious aspect of the call, although along the way there are many other calls to leave everything behind. However not so obvious is the call to married or single life. Both too have many aspects of leaving everything behind to answer the call. For marriage calls us to selflessness through profound love and single life calls us express Christ’s love without bounds to many. Both vocations are called to this every day and every hour.

A Vincentian call is also a profound call to service responding in love. This is a call we need to hear each time we gather around a conference table or gather in a Centre or before we meet with people in need. This call is expressed in our prayerfulness, our time in reflection and our conversations. In this way the words of the Gospel bring life and hope to our actions in love.

What stops us from “leaving everything behind” to follow Jesus?

**PRAYER**

Loving Father,

May we listen to the lives of those we assist understanding the poverty of our humanity.

Amen
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Deut 26: 4-10
Rom 10: 8-13
Lk 4: 1-13

In the weeks between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, Christians reflect on the inner meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, it is a time to take in the full context of the Lord’s short life; his relationship with his Father, with all those whom he encountered, with the apostles and disciples who tried to follow his way; to be aware of the humiliation, shame, sense of abandonment and betrayal that preceded his death on the cross as an outcast.

Lent calls on us also to consider and respond to such realities of sadness and suffering as they occur in our own lives and the lives of those around us. It challenges us, as followers of Jesus, to renew our efforts to walk with the wounded, the weak, the despised and those without any voice. We have the opportunity to realise more deeply that the God of all comes to us often in the down side of life, and that human suffering and distress can place us close to the heart of God.

At the end of last year many would know of the very sudden diagnosis of my wife with an acute leukaemia. Apart from the shock and devastation of this very painful and emotional journey there have been many glimmers of profound light. These are seen through the overwhelming response of love and support and the palpable presence of prayer. As Vincentians we frequently speak of creating a “just and compassionate society”, which embraces not just notions of fairness, kindness and generosity, but in its Latin derivation compassion speaks of “suffering with”.

In that sense Lent is a time for the Christian to meet others with particular concern to show them the compassion of Jesus, walking that journey side by side.

Describe an instance of genuine compassion you have witnessed. How do you think compassion differs from kindness?

PRAYER

The Father of mercies has given us a model of unselfish love in the sufferings of his only Son.

Through our service of God and neighbour may we receive his countless blessings.

AMEN
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 15: 5-12, 17-18
Phil 3: 17 - 4: 1
Lk 9: 28-36

The account of the transfiguration offers us an important message of relationship. I feel for Peter, James and John although extremely privileged to be present to such a sacred and awe-filled moment in Jesus’ life they were also found lacking in their knowledge of who Jesus really is. For if they, who were closest to the Lord, knew him wholly and fully the event on the mountain would have simply been a wonderful and prayerful moment not one founded “heavy with sleep”.

Our Lenten journey is only in the early couple of weeks and we still have a journey ahead but one that we know and have done before. The gospel today is our reminder that it is easy to come to the presence of Easter each year with eyes heavy with sleep. We can go through this Lenten journey believing we know the person of Jesus without understanding the profound meaning of the Easter event, the Pascal Mystery, and person behind the face of Jesus. Here is where the rubber meets the road for the astounded apostles and I believe for each of us.

Understanding each other in a relationship beyond just the face to face is challenging, time consuming and selfless giving. We have countless reasons for not attending more than to the face value of people in conversations. “It is their privacy!”, “it is uncomfortable!”, and “if I open the conversation further I don’t have the time to give to their responses!” – our excuses are unlimited! Building a relationship with people is I believe central to offering those we care for a “hand up”. Emphatically listening not just to problems but to life stories opens us to a deeper understanding. In this way Vincentians offer another voice to the conversations, the voice of the transfigured Jesus.

How do we respond to people?
How would we like to respond?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
May the image of your transfiguration guide our relationships and deepen our responses to all we serve. We pray in Jesus name.

AMEN
THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Ex 3: 1-8, 13-15 
Cor 10: 1-6, 10-12 
Lk 13: 1-9

The liturgy of today speaks of our God as one who notices, cares for and is present to his people, without our need to ask. That is how he speaks to Moses in the reading from Exodus; that is how he pleads for the preservation of the fig tree in the Gospel parable. Two of the most beautiful of the Psalms are worth rereading today. As well as the responsorial psalm, 102, there is the Psalm that follows; as today’s reflection, we suggest that this extract from Psalm 103 be slowly and carefully read;

The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to become angry and full of constant love.

He does not keep on rebuking; he is not angry forever.

He does not punish us as we deserve or repay us according to our sins and wrongs.

As high as the sky is above the earth, so great is his love for those who honour him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins from us.

As a father is kind to his children, so the Lord is kind to those who honour him.

He knows what we are made of; he remembers that we are dust.

As for us, our life is like grass. We grow and flourish like a wild flower;

then the wind blows on it, and it is gone - no one sees it again.

But for those who honour the Lord, his love lasts forever, and his goodness endures for all generations, to those who are true to his covenant and who faithfully obey his commands.

Choose a sentence from this psalm which speaks to you about the love of God. Do you have your own special image for the love of God?

PRAYER

Loving Father,

When our weakness discourages us, when our trust in you falters,

Let your compassion fill us with hope.

We make this prayer in Jesus name. AMEN
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Josh: 5: 9-12
Cor: 5: 17-21
Lk 15: 1-3, 11-32

A few years ago I was chatting with a Scripture scholar about this parable. He highlighted for me the clever genius of the story-teller, Jesus. He said to me imagine the scene, Jesus standing in the middle of a gathering of “saints and sinners” and he begins “A man had two sons.” Already he has the crowd intrigued as to where he was going to go with this story. The crowd may have jeered at the son for demanding his estate earlier than intended and some may have scoffed at the father’s gentle and overly generous nature. They may have been pleased that the son finished his day in the pig swill but may have shaken their heads to think the son would dream of returning. But the one moment which would have surprised them was that moment that the father “ran to meet his son”. To us this was a moment of profound compassion and love but to the hearers of the day they more than likely roared with raucous laughter for it was an absurd notion that an elder of a Jewish family would pick up his heels and run anywhere!

The image of the prodigal son depicted by the famous artist Rembrandt highlights many aspects of the story. From a loving embrace to a son kneeling at his father’s feet for forgiveness as well as the judging stance of the elder son, dark and very tall – this painting retells a significant story. One image which is much harder to see is the hands of the loving father. One hand is the hand of a strong male while the other hand is softer and gentler liken to that of a female. In this Rembrandt reminds us that the Father is not only an all-powerful Father but is a Father full of compassion and love.

Rembrandt, like Jesus, continues to offer insights to us across the ages. Jesus is telling the same story to the gathered crowd as he is telling us today. Responses are different but the message is clear we must find forgiveness for one another beyond all human measure – the nature of unconditional love.

How has Rembrandt depicted the elder son?
How would you feel of you were this sibling?

THIS WEEK...

If community reaches its height in celebration, its heart is forgiveness.
Jean Vanier

PRAYER

Father,
In the Year of Mercy may our faith, hope and love be instruments of compassion and peace in our world today.
AMEN
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Is 43:16-21
Phil 3: 8-14
Jn 8: 1-11

The gospel reading chosen for this Sunday shows the calm strength of Jesus when he confronts those accusing the woman found guilty of adultery. I feel that Jesus would have really frustrated the accusers especially as he answered them with doodling in the sand. And while he is so commanding in dealing with the accusers, that contrasts with his gentleness towards the woman’s shame and embarrassment. Always the question today calls to accuse the other adulterer – the man - not a question of the ancient world!

When we read the passion narrative next Sunday, taken from the gospel of Luke, Jesus, during his supper with the twelve, reminds them: “...the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. (Lk 22: 26)

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, gave expression to this call of Lent when he prayed:

“Teach me good Master to be generous; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not to seek for any reward save that of doing your blessed will”.

This is how Australian figure, Weary Dunlop was described as a leader:

“He led his men by example and he served them. He often intervened on behalf of those in his care and regularly put their safety and wellbeing before his own. His leadership saved many lives and kept spirits up in times of adversity.”

Describe a leader you have known who was able to truly serve others by putting them first.

THIS WEEK...

Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry, always to put others first

PRAYER

Prayer

Let us mourn till others are comforted,
Weep till others laugh...
Let us be frugal till all are filled
Let us give till all have received.
AMEN

John Harriott
PASSION SUNDAY (PALM SUNDAY)

Is 50: 4-7
Phil 2: 6-11
Lk 22: 14 - 23: 56

There is a huge irony in how Jesus’ trial is described. Jesus is on trial, but the story is written in such a way that, in effect, everyone is on trial, except Jesus. The Jewish authorities who orchestrated his arrest are on trial for their jealousy and dishonesty. The Roman authorities who wield the final power on the matter are on trial for their religious blindness. Jesus’ friends and contemporaries are on trial for their weakness and betrayal. Those who challenge Jesus to invoke divine power and come off the cross are on trial for their superficial faith. And, not least, each of us is on trial for our own weaknesses, jealousies, religious blindness, and superficial faith. The transcript of the trial of Jesus reads like a record of our own betrayals.

All too frequently, we mimic the words of the crowds who challenged Jesus as he was hanging on the cross with these words: “If you are the Son of God, come off the cross, save us, and save yourself.” We do this every time we let our prayers become a test of God’s existence and goodness; if we get a positive answer, God loves us, if not, we begin to doubt.

Generally, on reading the account of Jesus’ Passion and Death, our spontaneous inclination is to judge very harshly those who surrounded Jesus at his arrest, trial, and sentencing: How could they not see what they were doing? A murderer over the Messiah? How could his followers so easily abandon him?

Not much has changed in 2000 years. The choices that those around Jesus were making during his trial and sentencing are identical to the choices we are still making today. And most days we are not doing any better than they did because, still, far too often, given blindness and self-interest, we are saying: Away with him! Crucify him!

(Excerpt from Fr Ronald Rolheiser OMI)

Do you get what you pray for?

THIS WEEK...

Jesus, “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross”
(Philippians 2:8)

PRAYER

That which is Christ-like within us shall be crucified. It shall suffer and be broken.
And that which is Christ-like within us shall rise up. It shall love and create. (Michael Leunig)

Jesus, Son of God, give us peace.
How do we recognise Jesus?

EASTER SUNDAY

Acts 10: 34, 37-43
Col 3: 1-4
Jn 20: 1-9
Lk 24: 13-35  Mk 16: 1-13  Mt 28: 1-10

Much of the world’s great literature, in fables, theatre, opera, has
to do with people not recognising the true identity of those they
meet up with. In the accounts of Easter as they are given in the
four gospels, we have four different short episodes, two of them
involving an initial failure to recognise the person of Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark briefly states “he appeared first to Mary of
Magdala from whom he had cast out seven devils”.

In Matthew an angel tells the two Marys that Jesus has risen
and will go before them to Galilee;

The Gospel of John gives a detailed account of how Mary
Magdalene mistakes the Lord for a gardener and does not
recognise him until he calls her by name.

And Luke adds to these accounts the unique narration
interpretation of the meeting on the way to Emmaus. Cleopas
and his companion reveal all the disappointment and sense
of loss of the disciples, as they describe the events of Good
Friday and Easter morning in Jerusalem. The unrecognised
stranger’s response is to them for their failure to believe the
message of the prophets concerning the Messiah. When they
have recognised Jesus as he breaks bread with them at table,
he disappears and they hurry to have their news confirmed by
the apostles.

Which account speaks most to you of the joy of
the Resurrection?

THIS WEEK...

While he was with them at table,
he took the bread and said the
blessing...

Their eyes were opened and they
recognised him. (Lk 24: 30-31)

PRAYER

Today is the day on which the Lord
appeared to men
who had begun to lose hope, and
opened their eyes to what the
scriptures foretold.

Breathe on our minds and open
our eyes
That we too may know him in the
breaking of bread.

AMEN

St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5: 12-16
Apoc 1: 9-13, 17-19
Jn 20:19-31

For many of us taught by the good Sisters in primary school these words of St Thomas would easily come to our lips, especially at the elevation during the consecration at Mass. I smiled many years later in the Pro Cathedral in Dublin when these same words were used for the Proclamation of Faith during the Eucharistic Prayer! I have to say that this little prayer could very easily return to me in a gentle reminder and confirmation of my personal faith in the Eucharistic presence of Jesus.

This says a lot about my relationships with people. Not a day goes by that I do not call or message my wife saying simply that “I love you” and in fact I may do this more than once in the day. These simple words mean more to me today than they did when I finally got the courage to say them the first time. I believe they will continue to mean even more the older we both get.

Pope Francis believes there are three phrases that each marriage needs to use often; “May I”, “Thank you”, and Sorry”. He states the three magic phrases. May I: so as not to be intrusive. May I, but how does it seem to you? May I, please allow me. Thank you: to thank one’s spouse; thank you for what you did for me, thank you for this. That beauty of giving thanks! And since we all make mistakes, that other word which is a bit hard to say but which needs to be said: Sorry”

In many ways each of these beautiful phases reflect the love, faith and hope of the God of surprises in our life. May we be reminded to pray these prayers each day in our relationships with each other and with the risen Christ.

What is your faith filled phrase?

THIS WEEK...

The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord and he said to them, “Peace be with you” (Jn 20: 19-31)

PRAYER

As the hand is made for holding and the eye for seeing, you have fashioned me for joy. Share with me the vision that finds that joy everywhere, in all things and at all times. AMEN

(Celtic Prayer)
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5: 27-32, 40-41
Apoc 5: 11-14
Jn 21: 1-19

The Gospel for today is taken from the conclusion of the Gospel of John and is carefully constructed by the evangelist to underline the role which Peter is to have in the Church. Three times Jesus asks: ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ to the point where Peter shows he is upset by the questioning.

Often, in both the Church and the Society, it is as though there is a kind of mistrust in the capacity of the next generation to live up to what has been given them. And yet it is from the young that there comes idealism, energy and initiative.

We live in a time when the human aspects of Church are seen to be all too human, when Mass attendance has dropped quite drastically, particularly among young and middle-aged adults, when membership in organisations like the Society is ageing and diminishing, when the sense of Church triumphant has all but disappeared. If we believe in Jesus words, ‘I am with you, always, even to the end of time’, how does it happen that we seem to assess things differently that happen from day to day?

How good are we at trusting in God’s providence for the future of the Society and the Church?

PRAYER

Lord,
We believe that the Spirit of God is always with his people, and yet we sometimes doubt your presence in ourselves, your presence in the world.

Our deepest desire, amidst all that happens,
Is to believe and to trust you.

AMEN
This week we approach the 203rd anniversary of the birth of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, April 23, 1813.

Frederic’s legacy...

- Frederic was a man of faith. He understood the importance of prayer and spiritual advice.
- Frederic was a man of love. His love for God and Church was strengthened because of his relationships with those experiencing deep poverty, his confreres and his family.
- Frederic was a man of hope. He saw the importance of a legacy of justice and advocacy for the disadvantaged in society.

Understanding the charism of Blessed Frederic Ozanam is part of deepening our personal faith, depth for love of those we care for and in being a voice for those not heard. These charisms are expressed in our experiences which need to be practical, relational, engaging and responding in love.

In 1997 Pope John Paul II celebrated the beatification of Frederic Ozanam. At this time the pope stated; “Frédéric Ozanam believed in love, the love of God for every individual. He felt himself called to love, giving the example of a great love for God and others. He went to all those who needed to be loved more than others, those to whom the love of God could not be revealed effectively except through the love of another person. There Ozanam discovered his vocation, the path to which Christ called him. He found his road to sanctity. And he followed it with determination.”

May we as Vincentians pause and remember the life, love and legacy of Frederic Ozanam and in this pray that the love of God sustain and enrich us and may the visions of Frederic Ozanam continue to inspire and faithfully guide us in our pilgrim journey in doing the “good works” of God.

Would Frederic Ozanam be a Vincentian today?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

Blessed Frederic Ozanam was for our times a faithful witness to your justice and your love.

May we as his followers, in the same spirit, live in the service of our brothers and sisters.

Through Christ, Our Lord, AMEN
THIS WEEK...

Goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate
Light is stronger than darkness, life is stronger than death
Victory is ours through, Him who loves us.
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

FIFTH SUNDAY EASTER

Acts 14: 21-27
Apoc 21: 1-5
Jn 13: 31-35

Even in the enthusiastic world of the early Church, the apostles recognised the need, as today’s first reading reminds us, to ‘put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith’.

And the same is also true for all who try to live out their faith in the way that Jesus left us, through personal and practical concern for the wellbeing of others. The life and work of conferences of the Society is based on spiritual, not just material, realities. An essential quality of that spirituality has to be to give fresh heart and hope to each other, and to those who are experiencing difficult times and circumstances. That is very much what Rosalie Rendu advocated when she said: A Daughter of Charity must be like a milestone on the street corner where all those who pass by can rest and lay down their heavy burdens.

And this is also the pattern of advice she gave to Frederic and his companions in the early days of their commitment to the Society in 1833: ‘Always remember, that if we had been through the hardships they have had to meet – if our childhood had been one of constant want - perhaps, we too, would have given way to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor in this quarter’.

What are some ways that society members can give reassurance and hope to those for whom they work?

And how do members put ‘fresh heart’ into their fellow Vincentians?

PRAYER

Prayer

Father of all,
Bless and strengthen those who work throughout the world
To bring relief to the oppressed, the hungry, those without hope.
Give them courage. Keep them safe
We ask this in Jesus’ name. AMEN

St Vincent de Paul Society
good works