Transformed in a perfected humanity
Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflection Guides. The liturgical cycle for 2017 follows in general the Gospel of Matthew with some highlights from the Gospel of John (Year A).

Over these weeks we will journey from post-Easter time through to the celebration of the Ascension of Jesus, and to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Following this special time we remember the foundations of our faith in the feast of the Holy Trinity and the celebration of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known to many as Corpus Christi. From this space we move into Ordinary Time to the 22nd Sunday.

Due to the fact that the 6th August falls on a Sunday we actually hear the narrative of the Transfiguration twice in 2017, as it was the reading for the 2nd Week in Lent. The reflection for this day is similar although a slightly different tack.

Recently I attended a symposium on the life and work of Jean Vanier, the founder of the L’Arche Community. The symposium was titled A Witness to God’s Peace: A Jean Vanier Symposium. It was organised by the Broken Bay Institute and was well attended by about 150 people across Catholic ministries.

L’Arche aims to make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities revealed through mutually transforming relationships. For Vanier, those relationships, or friendships, are at the heart of Jesus’ teaching, especially as presented through the Gospel of John and the story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. He told us, via a pre-recorded video, that: “The Gospel of John is really a Gospel leading us to friendship with Jesus,” he said.

“We see it in the 15th chapter: ‘I don’t call you my servants, I call you my friends’. And you see it in the sixth chapter on the Eucharist: ‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him’.

“So, everything is about growth to friendship. Entry into relationship. This is the heart of life.” He said the story of the woman at the well emphasises Jesus’ reaching out in friendship to the Samaritan woman, who has been humiliated, is despised, has had family problems and is fragile. “And Jesus meets her in her fragility asking: ’Will you give me a drink?’. And then what happens is that there is a relationship and she is transformed,” he said. And then what happens is that there is a relationship and she is transformed,” he said.

“And so maybe the whole message of Jesus is to meet those who have been humiliated.”

These reflections of Vanier touch into the Vincentian heart as we are drawn into a companionship with those we assist. Blessed Frederic reminds us too that the “chief work of the Society is the saving of souls”. Both reflect this entry into relationship.

May these guides be a companion to you in your faith journey together.

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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FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14, 36-41
1Pet 2:20-25
Jn 10:1-10

During the Year of Mercy in 2016 I was invited by a few Regional and Central Councils to lead a reflection day for members, volunteers and staff. The reflection days were based on the document from Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus and reflected aspects of pilgrimage, the parable of the Prodigal Son, Corporal works of Mercy and Spiritual works of Mercy. We shared thoughts and reflections regarding this document and the importance of this Year for our good works in the St Vincent de Paul Society.

I was reminded of these days in the reading from St Peter this week in that Peter recounts that Jesus endured all suffering without insult or retaliation. One of the Corporal works of Mercy is to “to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked” and although a difficult challenge to us all, we reflected that those who provide food and drink, clothing and shelter for our own families, and those who cook and clean at home, are already practicing these works, at least outwardly. The deeper challenge is to follow in Jesus’ actions by practicing them inwardly as well, from the heart, not grudgingly or merely out of routine, but with compassion and love for family, doing all to the glory of God and giving thanks to God the Father for providing for all our needs. In this way, as St. Paul wrote, the simplest daily chore becomes “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,” a true “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

Why should we do this? Why should we follow this way of life?
The gospel from John this week moves us in this response, in that Jesus taught; “I am the gate of the sheepfold…” “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full”. In this way Jesus, the standard by which we pass, invites us to journey and share in the hope of life in its fullness, eternal life.

In this way as Vincentians, who are called to see Christ in the faces of the marginalised and the vulnerable, may we continue to be motivated inwardly with love listening to our shepherd who goes ahead inviting us to experience life; life in all fullness.

Pope Francis has asked us to take on the smell of the sheep.
What does that mean personally to you?

THE SMELL OF THE SHEEP:

Prayer

Eternal Father, lead us always in the light of your joy.
Amen
In early 2014 I was asked to develop a spiritual framework for the Society. After much thought and reflection I shared a theme which I developed for my home parish as they were celebrating 175 years of parish life. The theme is *Grounded in faith, Living in hope, Growing in love* and I have used these words often throughout many spiritual reflections since.

**Grounded in faith:** this understands that the Society comes from and continues in a faith tradition which is that of the Catholic faith tradition. I like to say that the Catholic faith tradition is our spiritual home. That is faithful to Jesus of the Gospels in the context of the contemporary world; faithful to the evolving tradition of the Society as a Catholic lay organisation and faithful to a spirituality that is radically inclusive of all people.

**Living in hope:** Pope Francis explained the true meaning of hope in saying that “it’s much more than simple optimism for Christians, it is constant expectation, it’s a gift from the Holy Spirit, it’s a miracle of renewal that never lets us down”. In many ways the critical objective of our care in the Society is to share and give people a reason to hope.

**Growing in love:** Blessed Frederic continually inspired his companions in growing in love and responding in love; “Christianity is not about ideas but about deeds inspired by love”. Pope Francis again inspires this growing in love, “The Christian vocation, rooted in the contemplation of the Father’s heart, thus inspires us to solidarity in bringing liberation to our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest. A disciple of Jesus has a heart open to their unlimited horizons, and friendship with the Lord never means flight from this life or from the world. On the contrary, it involves a profound interplay between communion and mission (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 23).”

John’s gospel this week invites us into a deeper relationship and engagement with these aspects of our framework. May we be open to a faith grounded in sharing living hope with all we meet, always responding in the compassionate love of Christ, who offers us a gift of peace which reassures the words of our gospel; “Do not let your hearts be troubled”.

**How do you understand Grounded in faith, Living in hope, Growing in love in your Conference or Council?**
SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17
1Pet 3:15-18
Jn 14:15-21

The reading from the letter of Peter opens my thoughts to the first act of charity by Blessed Frederic and his companion. As many of you recall, Frederic was caught out one evening by a debating opponent who simply challenged him to action: “And you, who pride yourself on your Catholicity, what are you doing now for the poor? Show us your works!”

Frederic took these words to heart. He gathered his friends and they decided to do a good work for a poor person. And so, filled with passion, they gather sticks to fuel a fire for a poor person in a garret during the cold nights of Paris, but being unprepared, inexperienced and uncomfortable with the personal encounter with Christ, they ran up the stairs knocked on the door, dropped the bundle and ran off.

It was a disaster. Frederic’s action reminds us that true acts of charity are challenging and at times uncomfortable (even for the best of us!) and secondly a true act of charity is relational, engaging and a response in love.

This act of love, we are reminded by Peter, comes from a wonderment of Christ in our hearts. In this way the fledging Society sought the practical wisdom, experience and spiritual direction of Sr Rosalie Rendu. Blessed Rosalie greatly influenced Frederic’s thoughts, actions and writings. Rosalie nurtured Frederic’s spiritual centre or spiritual love as she expressed a love that was practical and relational. She reminds us to “be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor”.

Blessed Rosalie reminds us that the true purpose of our Charity is not simply based in a humanistic love for others but in the purpose of hope that comes from God’s grace working in our hearts. Understanding the charisms of Blessed Frederic Ozanam and Blessed Rosalie Rendu are crucial in deepening our personal faith, depth for love of those we care for and in being a voice for those not heard.

PRAYER

Father, fill our hearts with your love as we come to assist one of your people in need.

Amen

How often do we pray before a visitation or welfare assistance?
THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Acts 1:1-11
Eph 1:17-23
Mt 28:16-20

This Sunday we celebrate the feast of the Ascension. Sadly this feast sometimes loses out as an “in-between” event, bookended by the “greater” feasts of Easter and next week Pentecost. However the significance of this feast is important to reflect on as it provides the foundation of our new relationship as a people with our God.

Forty days ago Jesus rose from the dead and over this time appeared to many people including his apostles. These appearances were not in some spiritual or “ghostly” sense but importantly in a gloried, human, physical sense. This physical appearance was attested to a doubting Thomas and on numerous occasions when Jesus ate with his apostles. So when time came for Jesus to be “carried up to heaven”, into the spiritual realm of the Trinity, Jesus comes to his Father transformed in a perfected human body. In this way the realms of the spiritual and the physical converged and a new covenant or relationship begins.

This new covenant, drawn into the life and bonding love of the Trinity, offers us a place at the same table. This is beautifully reflected in the icon of the Trinity painted by Andrei Rublev around 1410 where the icon presents the Trinity openly facing the beholder and drawing the beholder to the table. This place of esteemed dignity was not of our own creation or volition but could only be gained through the life, death and resurrection of the Word incarnate.

Jesus’ legacy of the Ascension is not absence but new life. Pope Francis points this out in that the Ascension “does not point to Jesus’ absence, but tells us that he is alive in our midst in a new way”. Jesus’ legacy to us is a new relationship, and for Pope Francis this legacy is the heart of the Joy of the Gospel.

What does Ascension mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit
Lk 23:46

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, as we commemorate your return to the Father on Ascension Day, we ask that in our following of your way, we may welcome all whom we meet, and that our service to you and to others be always in hope and joy.
Amen
Spiritual Reflection Guide  May – August 2017

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Acts 2:1-11
1Cor 12:3-7, 12-13
Jn 20:19-23

The Mass of Holy Chrism which is celebrated in Holy Week has always held for me a sense of profound mystery. During the Mass the three sacrament oils are carried and offered to the local bishop. The bishop then in turns blesses and prays over the Oil of Catechumen and the Oil of the Sick, however with the Oil of Chrism he actually breathes over the oil symbolising the coming down of the Holy Spirit. In this way the Oils of Catechumen and Sick are solemnly blessed however the Oil of Chrism is consecrated.

The call of the Holy Spirit is also experienced during every Mass celebrated. It is part of our Eucharistic Prayer and is known as the epiklesis. Epiklesis is the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine, implicitly or explicitly. However in the Roman rite this is expressed through a laying of hands over the gifts.

Our reading accounts of the Pentecost event this week in Acts and in John’s gospel expresses similar pathways of the coming of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Luke, in Acts, recounts that the Spirit lay on the heads of the apostles whereas John in the gospel speaks of Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. This act of Jesus giving up his spirit is by the same token found in John’s account of Jesus’ death on the Cross on Calvary where “he bowed his head and gave up his spirit”.

Either way Pentecost signifies the birth of the Church of Christianity. For the Holy Spirit baptises the Church, transforming the new covenant which was broken open and shared for us in the Paschal mystery of Christ.

The Pentecost event calls Christians to be inspired and passionate in the mission of the good news. This fire of passion carries on in each of us as we are called to respond in love to those we serve in our communities and importantly as we serve one another.

The Holy Spirit continues to be present in Pentecost moments changing the ordinary into extraordinary. May we continue to be open to that same Spirit, responding in love to those we serve, living in hope of providing ordinary things of life extraordinarily well!

Have you ever been moved by the Holy Spirit?
The gospel of John this week and the reading from Paul’s letter to his community in Corinth presents the bonding love and engaging relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit; this deeply held faith of three persons in one God. This faith is reflected in all aspects of our prayers, readings and liturgies in the Church. In Celtic spirituality the Threeness of God is evident in many signs, symbols and story-telling expressing unity of nature. In more recent times we tend not to speculate about the nature of God, but rather, following the example of the mystics, to be alert to the sacred in all aspects of life, particularly in people. For Blessed Frederic this sacred gift was always recognised in the dignity of those experiencing deep poverty for he knew them as people formed in the image and likeness of this Trinitarian God.

Understanding the mystery of the Trinity has vexed theologians throughout time. From simplistic models like the three leaf clover to parts of Aquinas’ expansive work the Summa Theologica, the understanding has and will continue to be a mystery known only through the eyes of faith. Even to speak of the three “persons” of the one God we have a need to use the language of “persons” because we speak of the bond of love of persons and the concepts of love needs to be engaged with a being or person to be understood as actual love.

At the end of the day what I do know with all my heart is that God’s “self-communicating” love abides with us always, transcendently and immanently.

In the Society most of our meetings begin with the prayer of the Holy Trinity in the sign of the Cross. May our lives together continue to be blessed in this profound mystery of God, opening us always to God’s “self-communicating” love enabling us to respond compassionately to all we meet.

Take a moment to reflect and share when the presence of God touched us deeply.
Corpus Christi

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

Deut 8:2-3, 14-16
1Cor 10:16-17
Jn 6:51-58

This feast brings two memories to me. One is the Corpus Christi processions which I duly attended with my parents and brothers as a child behind the St Vincent’s Boys Home in Westmead; the other memory is that my children, Madeleine and Ben, attended Corpus Christi Primary School and so at the tender age of five could fluently speak two words of Latin! Some of my College confreres would laugh at this and remind me that that was two more words than their father!! Latin was not my strongest suit!

Either way the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ celebrates solemnly that which is the source and summit of our Christian lives. Sadly for many years this great gift has become in some forms sterile and clinical and even approved by some ordinary ministers of the Eucharist as reception is only for those in a state of Grace.

Pope Francis stressed that the Eucharist “is not a private prayer or a beautiful spiritual experience, it’s not simply a commemoration of what Jesus did in the Last Supper”. Rather, it is a “memorial, namely, a gesture that actualizes and makes present the event of the death and resurrection of Jesus: the bread is truly his Body given, the wine is truly is Blood poured out”. Although a sacred gift the Pope also encourages us in that “the Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (Evangelii Gaudium para.47).

The sacrament of the body and blood of Christ is in many ways a sacrament of community. Pope Francis defines this well as we approach this gift of God as individuals in communion with all people. We become one, just as the Father and Son are one in the Holy Spirit. This oneness also draws us into a deeper relationship with God through our communion with those who have gone before us in faith, which is the communion of saints in light.

Fundamentally Christians have simply viewed the Eucharist as one dimensional, in the extraordinary realm, which in many ways is completely understandable but this then makes it affordable only to those always in a state of grace or perfect. Humanity, by our very nature, needs to be touched by the ordinary and it is in this ordinariness of simple gifts of bread and wine, that the Eucharist becomes a profound nourishment for the weak.

What are your memories, stories, of the feast of Corpus Christi?

THIS WEEK...

“Come as you are, that’s how I want you. Come as you are, feel quite at home. Close to my heart, loved and forgiven; Come as you are, why stand alone?”

PRAYER

Father, nourish us with the gift of life. Amen
12TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Jer 20:10-13  
Rom 5:12-15  
Mt 10:26-33

Have you ever had a conversation with a friend which challenged your beliefs or life choices? I recollect a few years ago having one such conversation. On this occasion my friend asked “how was work going?” My reply was “busy and very tiring”. At this time in my career I was managing one of our drug, alcohol and gambling rehabilitation centres in Campbelltown, part of the Wollongong Central Diocesan Council. Then my friend said the strangest thing. He said, “Have you ever thought of applying for another job? I don't know why you are wasting your time, life and God given talents on a bunch of people who will never change. They sadly are no hopers and will only ever bring sadness and dissatisfaction to your life trying to change their life!”

At first my Catholic Social Justice arm raised a shaky finger in contempt and my heart yearned to change his perspective of our good works in this place but then sadly the partisan statement seemed to make a fair bit of pragmatic sense.

Statistically the service may have only have changed the lives of a few people. Addictions are a darkness in people’s lives or souls which never easily leave and are triggered in many complicated forms. So although there were a number who “graduated” from the program, there were many times later stories of the tragedies of relapses.

This week’s readings reflect signs of hope and purpose in facing partisan statements with courage. Our vocation is not a numbers game. Jesus tells us that the Father knows “every hair on your head” which simply means that each person is precious in the eyes and the heart of God. So it is for this very reason that we continue our good works, meeting the face of Christ in all we encounter, no matter to the sometimes hopelessness of situations. This may be to change but one life and if that is possible then we have achieved all our outcomes. Not always an easy challenge to meet or sometimes understand.

Have you had a similar experience in your Vincentian work and how did you respond?

THIS WEEK...
Nothing is so proper to the intellect, nor so present and near as God.  
Meister Eckhart

PRAYER
Lord, open my heart and mind to the needs of all that ask of me.  
Amen
13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

2Kg 4:8-11, 14-16
Rom 6:3-4, 8-11
Mt 10:37-42

In January this year I attended the funeral of my wife’s great aunt. It was actually a beautiful celebration of a very long life; she rested just two runs short of a century! Aunty Fran was a good Christian woman. I make this statement not because of her attendance at church each week but by her dedicated love of hospitality.

Her hospitality was insatiable with Madeira cake, cut sandwiches, sometimes fruit cake or apple cake or even scones with cream and jam and always a packet of sweet biscuits laid out when we arrived and all the while we only asked for a cup of tea! But for this strict diabetic most of the takings laid out on the kitchen table were outside of her much disciplined dietary intake. In this way she served far more often than she ate. It must be said that her sense of hospitality began with her opening the front door with a loving smile and a hug, then we sat around the kitchen table with the feast laid out and the kettle on the boil and from then the conversations flowed.

The Hospitaller Order of St John of God shares a vow of hospitality. To this they understand hospitality as “a heart that sees where love is needed and act accordingly”. This is a strikingly beautiful and simple way of perceiving the value and act of hospitality. For in this way hospitality is more than just a free feed or even a night’s lodging. It is the very act of opening our hearts and welcoming the person of Christ in those we meet. In this way our hospitality echoes the words of Jesus to his disciples in this week’s gospel, “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me”.

Is hospitality an avenue of your spirituality?
My heart is restless until it rests in you

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Zech 9:9-10
Rom 8:9, 11-13
Mt 11:25-30

The letter from Paul to his community in Rome invites us to set not just our thinking but our whole lives in the securities of the spiritual. Now I don’t believe that St Paul is teaching a dualist concept of life, that is, one of the flesh against one of the spirit, but on reflection he is inviting us to answer questions of our faithfulness; where does our heart lie, what is the motivation of our passions? Personally as I read these lines over again I know my heart’s yearnings in the spiritual but the demands and distractions of the world around set a difficult path in this journey.

To this I am reminded of the deeply longing words penned by St Augustine of Hippo in his well-known works of the Confessions. Augustine openly struggled with the path of the spirit and the paths of the unspiritual as St Paul expresses. In fact Augustine coined this prayer; “Lord, make me pure and chaste but not quite yet!”. Augustine knows what is needed but the joy, experiences, distractions of the world around still have some real merit to him. Although he later acknowledges that “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and my heart is restless until it rests in you”.

The gospel from Matthew establishes a place to find rest for our longing souls. Jesus experienced and understood the distractions of the created world. He used the symbols of the created world in which to engage and teach his disciples of the spiritual. In this way Jesus, who is one with God and reveals God to us in a new covenantal experience, calls us to unburden our lives and to be restored in peace through our relationship with him.

Are you easily distracted in your thoughts and prayers?

THIS WEEK...

All this, my God, you are, and it is to you that I sigh by night and day
St Augustine of Hippo

PRAYER

Lord, inspire in my heart a longing to be drawn closer to you.
Amen
Matthew’s gospel this week has much to reflect upon. Jesus not only teaches the crowd the parable of the sower but is then later accounted to deconstruct it for the close disciples. In this way the disciples are invited into a glimpse of the thinking of Jesus; truly a more profound moment than a hundred healing miracles!

How often do we hear an initiative or a suggestion by someone or even a project team without hearing the thinking or discernment around the concept? At a meeting recently I heard someone suggest a “Spirituality Hub in our Centres”. I was immediately was negative about the prospect, as through past experiences in Centres, I understand that any space is a premium and I could hear the cries of Centre Managers about this thought. However it was not until the concept and the thinking behind it was teased out and discussed that I grew to a far deeper understanding of the proposal. Put simply it may be a space for people to simply begin an interaction with those we assist or provided a space to simply talk through everyday issues and challenges providing the opportunity for small graced moments. Not an impossible suggestion and in some ways practical in its operation.

This is similar to the processes of discernment. Prayerful discernment calls each of us to search deeper, listening always to the call of God in our deliberations and intentions. This is always difficult in a world of so many distractions and the need for immediate response times. How much lesser would the disciples have been if they too only heard the message without the sharing of the deeper thinking of Jesus. In walking with Jesus the disciples made space for the Word to deepen in their hearts. In this way the Word of God transforms when it is heard not only in the intellect but also in the heart!

Do we deliberately make space in our lives for this listening?

PRAYER

Loving Father, open our minds and hearts to your Word being sown in us. You sent your Son to plant in our hearts the seeds of imperishable life. May we labour to sow his word and reap a harvest of joy.

Amen
16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wis 12:13, 16-19
Rom 8:26-27
Mt 13:24-43

The gospel from Matthew this week continues the teachings of Jesus through the beauty of parables. There really is not just one meaning to be found through these words but many, depending on where we are in our lives at the time of hearing.

“The kingdom of heaven like the yeast the woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through”, is possibly the shortest parable that Jesus spoke.

Mercy is a bit like the leaven in bread. Leaven is the life of bread, it is what makes it rise, makes it look like bread, taste and feel like bread. Leaven is its life source, when you cut a piece of bread you can’t say, please take the leaven out or leave it on the side.

Our mercy is a cohesive and integral part of us. It is the life force that enables us, as a lay Catholic organisation, purpose; it is the heart of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Vincent de Paul began by encouraging others to change their lives from within, as well as to reach out to the people around them, who had material needs. In this way he highlighted that spirituality is the leaven in all our charitable works. It is through this realisation that he experienced his own personal conversion, dedicating himself totally to the spiritually and materially poor.

He left a legacy of collaboration over the years for so many, especially our founders like Frederic Ozanam, Rosalie Rendu and Charles O’Neill, who followed in these footsteps, making the Gospel parable a reality.

What is the “leaven” in your spiritual life?

THIS WEEK...

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time
T.S.Eliot: Four quartets

PRAYER

O Lord you are good and forgiving,
full of love to all who call.
Give heed to our prayer.
Amen
17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1Kg 3:5, 7-12
Rom 8:28-30
Mt 13:44-52

The ethereal saying of the wisdom of Solomon is given life and meaning in the context of this week’s first reading narrative. Solomon, the son of King David, is given a wish like a genie found in a rubbed bottle. However, the writer of the Book of Kings perceives this wish not as a gift but as a test of Solomon’s priorities and faithfulness. The young king is asked: “What would you like me to give you?” Solomon’s response is truly wise!

When my wife was near the end of her life, a palliative care doctor at Westmead Hospital asked what sustains our family through times like this. My answer was our prayers, not of a pious encounter but in very practical terms, especially of friends and family. She quickly replied with: “Not all that we pray for comes to be”. I agreed with her but then suggested simply “That depends on what you pray for!”.

I feel that there are many times each day that God asks us these questions, “What would you like me to be for you?”; “What would you like of me?”; What is it that you need?”. These questions are similar to Solomon’s but I know our responses generally are not as wise!

In our Vincentian work we have at times the opportunity to share a God who truly answers prayers. They are prayers that ask for food, shelter, compassion and love. May we share the gifts of Solomon not for our own sake but for those we assist and in this we find wisdom; rich and deep.

**What sustains you in difficult times in your life?**

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THIS WEEK...

Patience gains all things.
Who has God wants nothing.
God alone suffices.
St Teresa of Avila

**PRAYER**

O God protector of those who hope in you, hear our prayers and the prayers of those we assist.
Amen
THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Dan 7:9-10, 13-14
2Pet 1:16-19
Mt 17:1-9

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”.

In many ways the gospel today is our reminder that it is easy to come to the presence of God in prayer and reflection with eyes and hearts heavy with sleep. We can go through our Society prayers with hearts believing we know the person of Jesus without understanding the profound meaning of 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 use the term “client-centred-care” or “trauma-informed-care” but what is this in terms of our mission or our Vincentian spirituality? Blessed Frederic Ozanam near the end of his life stated that “the Society’s chief work is the saving of souls”. How do we see this relationship in today’s Society?

Building a relationship with people is I believe central to offering those we care for a “hand up”. Empathically 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.

What does Blessed Frederic’s words mean for you?

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

Prayer
Father,
As we continue our Lenten journey may our faith, hope and love be instruments of compassion and peace in our world today.
Amen

6 Aug 2017

Chief work of the Society
Courage; Do not be afraid

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1Kg 19:9, 11-13
Rom 9:1-5
Mt 14:22-33

What was Jesus up to in this “walking on water” scene? Was he just showing off? Or was he showing his disciples that they too could “walk on water”? The phrase is used for someone who can do extraordinary things – or think they can. The second most remarkable event in the story is that Peter set out to follow Jesus – and succeeded! It was only that he lost faith in his ability to follow Jesus that, literally, let him down.

I guess we have all had periods of success or achievements beyond what we normally expect of ourselves. Quite often we go beyond our normal capacities under the influence of a charismatic or inspiring leader. Someone who shows great faith in us can inspire us to step out into the deep. Jesus is continually calling us to go beyond our comfort zone, to trust in him and move towards what he would do in a challenging situation. He relied on his heavenly Father, and so can we.

Sometimes we see a need, but don’t want to step forward in case we may seem to be overestimating our ability. I think Catholics of the old school are particularly susceptible to downplaying their skills; we were taught to put ourselves last and not be overinflated in our self-estimation.

But, despite my lack of self-confidence or faith – God has faith in me! Considering this surprising, awkward truth, I have to step up and do the work that Jesus and Peter started.

Which do you experience more: over-confidence or lack of confidence? Can you recall a time when you stepped out and “walked on water”?

THIS WEEK...

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.”
Nelson Mandela

PRAYER

“Truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will do the works that I do, and in fact, will do greater works than these. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”
John’s Gospel

St Vincent de Paul Society
good works
20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 56:1, 6-7
Rom 11:13-15, 29-32
Mt 14:22-33

The words in Matthew’s gospel this week are difficult to hear and even understand. Jesus’ actions toward the Canaanite woman are abrupt. She is calling to him for help and he seemingly rejects her. Even the disciples walking with Jesus beg for his hearing of the woman.

The woman was not someone blinded by faith. She was persistent, wise and courageous in her faith. Jesus answered her through a brief parable which the woman understood immediately but was not defeated. In some ways she bravely presented Jesus with a returning parable which Jesus heard through the depths of her faith.

Our Catholic faith tradition presents us with many challenges. For some this faith is heard in blind obedience. Through such blindness fundamentalism is expressed, no other voices are heard, Christ is served not so much in the poor but in the law.

This is why the Canaanite woman in this Gospel is so important for us all. Her response to Jesus reminds us that our faith journey deepens through our continual reflections, our continual prayer and our persistent striving and yearning to find the God of great compassion and love. In this way our good works founded in grounded faith, providing living hope and responding in love are our needed response to Jesus but we, like the Canaanite woman, express faith which is a journey towards holiness. This is when Jesus responds through our prayers accepted through our great faith.

What was your reaction to Jesus in this narrative?

THIS WEEK...

“Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them”
Pope Francis

PRAYER

O God, be gracious and bless us And let your face shed its light upon us.
Amen
The keys of faith

21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 22:19-23
Rom 11:33-36
Mt 16:13-20

The readings this week are beautifully crafted. The first reading speaks of the elevation of the Lord's servant Eliakim. He is given the vestments and the authority of the past master Shebna who supported the works of the Egyptians opposing Isaiah’s policy of non-violence. Most significantly he receives the key of the “House of David” which is the authority to grant or deny admittance to the royal presence and was worn over the shoulder, signifying the master of the royal palace.

The gospel echoes another elevation of the Lord’s servant, Simon Peter, whom Jesus bestows the name Peter, the rock on which he build his Church. Peter is given not keys of an earthly authority but the keys of the kingdom of heaven for “whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loose in heaven”. Peter is called to be the master of the palace in the ekklesia. In this way Peter was called to be more than just the Chief Rabbi in the Church for his decisions are accepted in heaven.

These two readings surround the striking Hymn of the merciful God in the letter to the community in Rome by St Paul. These words, possibly influenced by Greek philosophies, express the overall providential action of God. St Paul’s words are in great admiration and gratitude rather than in awe and fear and in this way express a boundless wonder in God as the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles.

Finally today is the feast of St Monica, the mother of St Augustine, who profoundly understood the richness and the depths of God and to this she responded in love; love of God and love of her son. In the Vision in Ostia, described in the Confessions, Augustine shares with Monica an experience of the divine far greater than an earlier experience in Milan. Both are experiences just prior to a death, first the death of his son and other later the death of his mother. The profound difference is that Monica shares with him the kingdom of heaven; no misery and through pain only joy. In this he experiences a bond which goes beyond the door of just the “House of David” but into the realms of the Kingdom of heaven. Through the experience and prayers of St Monica, Augustine knew life eternal.

What do the keys of the kingdom mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

In the providence of God
All things work for good.

PRAYER

God of Love and Beauty
Everything made by you is good.
Teach us compassion and justice
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other.
Amen
Spiritual Reflection Guide