I am the good shepherd
Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflection Guides. The liturgical cycle for 2018 follows generally the Gospel of Mark. The coverage of these Guides is interesting as they begin on the fringe of Christmastide and heads toward our Lenten and Easter Season.

Biblical scholar, Fr Francis Moloney SDB, provides us the some important insights into the Gospel of Mark.

Moloney expresses that; “A reading of the Gospel of Mark can be at the same time fascinating and perplexing. It has been often said that the Gospel of Mark is an enigma, full of contradictions and contrasts. It is precisely in the appreciation of these contradictions and contrasts that we will discover the originality of this Gospel.”

He goes on to say that a reading and reflection of this “enigmatic gospel challenges us all to a great hope. As we read the Gospel of Mark our own failures can be given sense and purpose. Jesus “is going before us to Galilee;” there we will see him, summoning us towards our experience of resurrection, as we continually meet him, touch him and are inspired by his living presence in our “Galilees.”

His never-failing presence to the failed and failing disciples always has and always will make sense out of our nonsense. A careful and contemporary reading of this “story of Jesus” can teach us that no matter how fragile the Christian response to the challenge of Jesus may be, the Easter proclamation of the Exultet has rightly interpreted the message of the Gospel of Mark: “Christ has conquered, and darkness has vanished forever” (Moloney, Francis J. The Living Voice of the Gospel © 1986)

May you enjoy many reflections and insights from this “enigmatic gospel” nourishing your journey toward the joy of Easter morn.

All Spiritual Reflection Guides can be accessed on the 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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Meeting the stranger

EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

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

In August last year, during a special week set aside to remember our companions that do not have the comforts of a home, about thirty people gathered in Rookwood Catholic Cemetery to inter the ashes of four people. To many of us these people were strangers. They were from the communities of the Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo and David’s Place in Surry Hills.

Each person was spoken of fondly by those who knew them. There were no judgements, blame, criticisms or accusations on their lives only prayers and words of blessing, hope and love. These four people, unbeknown to them, left our lives marked with the epiphany of the presence of God.

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?

THIS WEEK.

“We have seen his star in the East; and have come to adore the Lord.”
Matthew 2:2

PRAYER

Father, continue to open our lives to new possibilities and greater depth in our relationship with you. Amen
SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1 Sam 3: 3-10, 19
1 Cor 6: 13-15, 17-20
John 1: 35-42

Not long after the passing of my wife, Anne, our son Ben talked to me of his great fear at night of his mother coming to talk to him, of course, in some spirit form. His faith that Anne’s spirit still profoundly lives reflects this fear of a nightly ghostly visit. I simply reminded him that of all people his own Mum knew and loved him deeply and would never want to frighten him and so would only call him in his dreams.

In many ways these words are reflected in the calling of the boy Samuel in the Book of Samuel. It is a beautiful encounter of the revelation that the God of all creation quietly calls Samuel in his sleep. Although not stated I feel Samuel “knew” this voice but assumed it was Eli calling him. Eventually Eli understood it was the Lord calling and offer the boy a wonderful response; “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”.

There are two aspects to this encounter with the Lord. First is the simplicity of the call but secondly is the close companionship of God for as Samuel grew up, “the Lord was with him and let no word of his fall to the ground”. The path of companionship opens us as Vincentians to a radical relationship with God and with those we engage with. In 2016 an important paper from the International Council addressed “a fraternal relationship where, eventually, there is no beneficiary nor caregiver, but rather a relationship of friendship”.

May we continue to be mindful of our companions on the journey, listening to their call not as phantoms in the night but as a response in love reflecting always the joy of the gospels.

What does companionship mean to you?

PRAYER

“Here I am Lord; Speak your servant is listening”
Book of Samuel

Lord, may we hear your call strong in faith and love.
Amen
The story of Jonah speaks volumes of the compassion of God towards the people of Nineveh when they ‘renounce their evil behaviour’. What precedes these verses in the Bible is the compassion also shown to Jonah after he refuses God’s first call to deliver the message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. Even after saying ‘No’ to God, God has compassion and offers forgiveness.

There is much freedom and beauty in God’s forgiveness and compassion. God’s forgiveness for us at those times we have said no to God or haven’t quite done our best reflects for us the forgiveness and compassion that we are asked to have for others at those times when they haven’t lived up to our expectations. And not only forgiveness for others, but forgiveness towards ourselves when we have failed to do what is right in the eyes of God.

Most evenings I try, although most times fail, to spend some time reflecting on my day. These reflections generally end with the penitential prayer of the “I confess...”, which opens us to the intimate and profound love and mercy of God; a God who understand those things that we “have done and for those things that we fail to do”.

Through compassion and forgiveness we have a chance to let go of the past and move on into the future – whether we are forgiving ourselves or forgiving others. Such beauty in that feeling of freedom! And such beauty in knowing that God is always there waiting to forgive.

Have you ever said No to God? Particularly in your work as Vincentians there may be times when we have wanted to say ‘No’. Recall those moments and share with the group what helped you move through those times.

**THIS WEEK.**

When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future.

Bernard Meltzer

**PRAYER**

Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
“The beauty that had crept unnoticed...”

4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Deut 18:15-20
1 Cor 7: 32-35
Mk 1: 21-28

Early last year I shared this wonderful story from the Washington Post who conducted an experience with renowned violin virtuoso Joshua Bell. Bell, who commands at least $100 for the cheap seats at concerts in the great halls of the world, was asked to play in a busy Metro railway station.

The pieces he played were some of the most exquisite and beautiful music ever composed for the violin as well as the most complicated. In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected $32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition. In the presence of such sublime beauty only a few children wanted to stop, but they were hurried along by preoccupied parents.

No one even recognised that the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars.

St Paul’s words this week remind us of the distractions of the “world’s affairs” and how we may lose our sense of appreciation or thankfulness for the beauty around us. Not that we mean to, but we can get so caught up that we forget the important things. As Sue and Leo Kane reflected in “The Little Brown Book”; which are a collection of reflections from St Mary McKillop, stated; “...the beauty that had crept, unnoticed, into their day.”

Blessed Frederic stated near the end of his life that the “chief work of the Society is the saving of souls”. These are profound words which we need to reflect upon for our contemporary Society today. In simple terms I believe Blessed Frederic is reminding us that our “being” with people is just, if not more, important than the “doing” for people.

This is a continual challenge for each of us in the busyness of our lives and I guess for each of us to search and find the place of “happy medium” in this tension will also be the yearning search for which we will notice the beauty that creeps quietly into our day.
5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7
1 Cor 9: 16-19, 22-23
Mk 1: 29-29

I came across the expression naturale desiderium Dei several years ago. This term was considered by St Thomas Aquinas and is related to other concepts of Aristotle, Plotinus, and Augustine. It is an expression which inspires a deep faith journey which is of the nature of our soul’s desires. In simple terms it means that our souls innately have a natural desire or longing to return to God. In this Aquinas would express that at the point of our dying our souls are “released” to naturally and passionately yearn to be with God. This natural desire I believe gives much life and expression to our faith.

These thoughts are similar to the ancient philosopher Plotinus, 204 AD. In his philosophy there are three principles: the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. The One is the creator and source of all things and all things come from the One and all innately return to the One. St Augustine also spoke for this strong natural yearning for the One, or in his faith world God, in “my heart is restless until it rests in you”. In this Job in our readings this week reflects, “restless I fret till twilight falls”.

Through this brief journey we can also look toward the theology of the beatific vision in that we only attain perfect happiness when we are standing in God’s presence, face to face, at the end of our time. Perfect happiness cannot be attained in this life as we will always yearn, desire, long to return to our very source of being, i.e. God.

What do these musings have for us in our Vincentian journey? On reflection it is firstly companionship, for we are companions in this faith journey assisting each other in our thoughts, kindness and prayer. Secondly Frederic Ozanam tasked us as a spiritual Society, for the “chief work of the Society is the saving of souls”, to support, to encourage with compassion and to be empathic advocates for each other and for those voices crying in the wilderness. Our spirituality opens us to the call of God in our lives. We are attuned to this call through the scriptures, reflections and prayers, our Christian faith tradition, all as part of the creedal response to our faith journey within the communion of saints.

Does naturale desiderium Dei express your personal faith?

4 Feb 2018

4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7
1 Cor 9: 16-19, 22-23
Mk 1: 29-29

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Does naturale desiderium Dei express your personal faith?
We’re having a baby...!

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Lev 13: 1-2, 44-46
1 Cor 10: 31 – 11:1
Mk 1: 40-45

Our first child didn’t come easy for Anne and me. We had made the decision to have children from the very beginning of our married life and were really looking forward to such a precious gift of starting a family. As time passed and our dreams were not being fulfilled we both consulted our doctor and went through the usual tests and all was in perfect “running order”! I guess it just wasn’t God’s time! Then one morning Anne, beaming with joy, showed me that test kit which glowed the positive result.

Of course it was only very early days and most couples would wait to tell friends and family later to avoid any complications or risk. So during a dinner that night with some close friends I, in the moment of excitement, asked “What would you like to drink” and then finished the sentence with “and Anne and I are having a baby...!” My excuse was that “it just came out!!”

Our gospel reading this week from Mark I think expresses that same reaction. Imagine the joy of such a healing for someone condemned to a life of unbearable terminal disease, abject poverty, ostracised from family, friends and community. Such joy would have been impossible to contain!

I understand Jesus’ request too. This would open the flood gates for many to come to him and such overwhelming popularity was going to awaken opposition, risks and complications. And yet this was the mission for which Jesus was called.

In our Vincentian lives we too have asked for anonymity from complications and fuss in the past. In some cases we were known as a “secret catholic society”. But like Jesus our mission calls us out of the shadows; we cannot shape a more just and compassionate society aspired by the joy of the Gospel message quietly and without risk! We are witnesses to the joy of lives transformed through our good works, hands up and advocacy. God calls each of us through this important vocation to which we respond like Jesus; “Of course I want to help you!”

When have you failed to contain a sense of joy?

THIS WEEK.

“God expect but one thing of you…. let God be God in you.”
Meister Eckhart

PRAYER

Lord, may the joy of the gospels be a lamp unto my feet. Amen.
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 9: 8-15
1 Peter 3: 18-22
Mk 1: 12-15

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 Jesus’ 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 who walk in the wilderness. 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.

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 origins “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?

THIS WEEK.

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
Hebrews 4:16

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
Faith filled conversations...

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 22: 1–2, 9-13, 15-18
Rom 8: 31-34
Mk 9: 2-10

The account of the Transfiguration throughout the gospels is very familiar to us. However in reading through this account from Mark, I was struck by two statements; that Elijah and Moses “were talking with Jesus” and the other is the Father’s command to “Listen to him”.

Author Margaret Wheatley views the act of a conversation in terms of the gift of courage. In her writing Simple Conversations to restore Hope to the Future she expresses that; “It takes courage to start a conversation. But if we don’t start talking to one another, nothing will change. Conversation is the way we discover how to transform our world, together.”

The other side of a conversation is listening. She states, “I love the biblical passage: “Whenever two or more are gathered, I am there.” It describes for me the holiness of moments of real listening in conversation...You don’t have to like the story, or even the person telling you their story. But listening creates a relationship and we move closer to one another.”

The conversation between the great prophets and Jesus seems easy and familiar. Yet hearing these reflections of Wheatley I sense that their words may have been of love, hope, support and encouragement in the unconditional love and mercy mission of the Father. Jesus’ mission was in the conversations of life with all he met and so the very source of that mission, God, calls each of us today to “Listen to him”.

Through our conversations with each other and with those we assist we find acts and moments of transfiguration to “transform the world together” building relationships which “we move closer to another”.

Has a conversation changed your life? What do you think Jesus, Elijah and Moses spoke about?

THIS WEEK.

“Our rushed and thoughtless behaviours fade away and we sit quietly in the gift of being together, just as we have always done.”
Margaret Wheatley

PRAYER

Father you asked us to listen; help us to hear. Amen.
“Zeal...devoured me.”

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Exodus 20: 1-17  
1 Cor 1: 22-25  
John 2: 13-25

The account of Jesus upturning the tables and scattering the coins of the money changers in the Temple had always expressed to me that even Jesus got angry! Yet there is so much more to this account.

Firstly, this was the first time throughout Jesus’ ministry that took on a “violent” outburst which brought attention to Jesus not only by the Temple police but also by the Roman authorities. The one thing Rome did not want is unrest in Jerusalem. In these ancient times Jesus was not the only one claiming Messiahship and the saving of Israel from the oppressors. Many others were leading violent revolts against the oppression of the Roman rule and they were swiftly cut down by the Roman soldiers. Jesus Messiahship was different. It spoke of a kingdom not of these physical surroundings. It was not a Messiahship which took up the sword or at least Jesus' sword was of healing, peace and love. To this he was not a direct threat to the authorities, well, not until now! Sadly Jesus had begun his journey to Calvary through this action.

Secondly, Jesus’ anger was not expressed in raw blind rage but as the disciples describe from the words of the Psalms; “Zeal for your house will devour me”. This was not a rage of destruction but a zeal of cleansing of the Temple and such an action had been predicted of this messianic age by the prophet Zechariah.

What does all this mean to us today especially in this time of Lenten reflections. For committed Christians today, the time of Lent is an opportunity to review the whole basis of what it is to be followers of Jesus, as individuals and as Church. Pope Francis wisely reminds us in Evangelii Gaudium: “...the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to a revolution of tenderness.”

These days offer the possibility of renewal and of urgency in working for God’s kingdom of justice and peace. They also challenge us to authentic representing of the Lord in all that we do.

Can you think of a time when “zeal” for a cause “devoured” you?

THIS WEEK.

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son”  
John 3:16

PRAYER

Father into your hand I commend my spirit. Amen
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Chron 36: 14-16, 19-23
Eph 2: 4-10
Jn 3: 14-21

I shared this experience last year and feel it has much meaning for our readings again this year.

About six years ago we moved into our new and present home. It was a day full of excitement, joy and of course frustrations. At one stage we had all of our furniture sitting on the front lawn while we waited for a key to be delivered! By the end of the day we were extremely tired. I remember Anne ordered Thai takeaway for she and I and Maddie and Ben had one of the classic takeaway meals from either Maccas or KFC! There were boxes everywhere but we were in the new home.

We were just starting to relax when a thunder storm hit and in a very short time all the lights went out in the house. Our world was in complete darkness and worse of all is that we were in unfamiliar surroundings. We didn’t know where a torch was packed and I had no clue where a meter box was hiding. Maddie and Ben were frightened 7 and 8 year olds and the wet dog was whimpering at the back door.

All was in chaos until Anne found a single candle and a matchbox in a box in the kitchen. She lit the candle and within moments our world found a new life. It was quite amazing how that one small candle with its small fragment of light sitting on the kitchen table could penetrate the fear, insecurity, anxieties and uncertainties of the darkness. Our sight was restored.

The Gospel of John suggests that following God is a journey in the light. Within this relationship we are drawn out of the darkness but through the brokenness of humanity we tend to return. As we continue to prepare for the coming of the light of Easter may we deepen our relationship with the God of light through our “prayer, fasting and alms giving” not just for our own sight but that we may shine out for others struggling in the dark.

What are some of the occasions when the Church uses the symbol of light to remind us of Christ Our Light?

THIS WEEK.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God, made visible in Christ Jesus, Our Lord
(Rom 8: 38-39)

PRAYER

Divine Master,

As we trust in your words, may we also have faith in ourselves as your children of light. Amen
What do I say?

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Jer 31: 31-34
Heb 5: 7-9
Jn 12: 20-33

What do you say to someone who has lost someone very close to them? I remember when I lost my mother about ten years ago and the number of kind and thoughtful things people said and did.

Firstly some said that I needed to be strong especially for my Dad and the family. I am not sure what “being strong” means as I know my family think I am a sook at the best of times! Another comment was “God is really testing your faith!” Unfortunately my faith believes in a with-me God who walks the pain with me and cried as many tears but also consoles and gives me a depth of peace which is beyond mere words especially in the dark hours.

I was consoled by the many people who simply said that they had no words that could make sense or comprehend our pain. I thanked them for their depth of understanding and courage. One Pastoral Care staff, who I worked with at the time, offered me a small book of sayings and told me these will help. I admit that I didn't even open the book for a few months as I wasn't sure how a few saying would help ease the pain. However one day I just simply opened the book randomly and my gaze fell upon the words from our gospel this week; “unless and grain of wheat shall fall upon the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain with no life.”

These words of Jesus, through the writings of John, offers each of us an understanding that life is greater than what we see, hear and feel in this physical world. Death and life are intertwined and in many ways once we fully understand this then the promises of the Easter event will bear much fruit in us. However with the distractions of the physical world this is difficult and even challenging.

As we move closer to Holy Week may we be open to God’s grace through our prayers and good works.

THIS WEEK.

“Unless and grain of wheat shall fall upon the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain with no life”
John 12.20-30

PRAYER

Father
Through your grace open our hearts and minds to your promises of eternal life. Amen

St Vincent de Paul Society
good works
PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Is 50: 4-7
Phil 2: 6-11
Mk 14: 1 – 15: 47

If we look at the readings that the Church proposes to us for each week of the liturgical calendar, we can have a sense of fragmentation, of small passages of scripture given to us to think about. Many of the Sunday gospels relate individual parables of Jesus or particular incidents of the preaching and public mission. But when we come to Passion Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, there is a much more coherent, detailed and confronting account of the events leading to Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

This year, the formal reading is ‘the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark”, and then the “Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to John” on Good Friday.

One person who appears only in in the account of Mark is a woman; she anoints the head of Jesus with precious nard. Jesus says of her, ‘She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial'.

How important to simply read quietly and at our own pace the sequence of events that lead to Calvary. In fact I think that a personal reading of Mark’s account in the New Testament is almost as important as being part of the public proclamation at Mass on Palm Sunday. Some of the details are unique to this gospel, such as; “They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and of Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross.”

As we reflect on the suffering and death of the Jesus, we remember the deaths too of all the innocent victims of violence and disaster and we continue to pray for peace in our volatile world.

Choose one section of the passion narrative from Mark's gospel and make your own comment on it.

THIS WEEK.

“Try to deepen your understanding of these two words, “I Thirst””
St Teresa of Calcutta

PRAYER

Father I put my life in your hands.
Amen
I remember going fishing with my Uncle one Easter morning on the Central Coast near Budgewoi. We arrived at his special place about an hour before sunrise and I was ready to fish! We set up our lines and with a small piece of bait we cast them into the darkness of the lake. Then as we sat there in the quiet our Uncle reminded us to watch the sunrise as the sun, on this special morning, dances on the horizon. I vividly can see the look on my brother’s face which said, without saying, “Uncle Joe is crackers!”

However as the sun rose so did the look of anticipation in my Uncle’s eyes and in fact to a young boy that sun that morning did shimmer and danced gently on the far horizon. The miracle of Easter! That morning we caught no fish but we witnessed an extraordinary event.

What a great opportunity it is to witness something extraordinary. It may be baby’s first steps, a great advancement in science or even the experience of a spectacular sunrise. At those moments, we often find ourselves thinking how lucky we are to witness such an amazing sight.

For Jesus’ apostles, it was a bit like that. Despite the three years they spent with Jesus in his public ministry, we see on many occasions in the gospels, that at times the apostle’s just didn’t get it. They knew they were with someone extraordinary, but not until the resurrection did things make sense.

In Peter’s address to Cornelius in the first reading, he shares the story of the ministry of Jesus, and proudly proclaims that he was witness to all that Jesus did and now was the time to proclaim Jesus’ message to his people. As children of God, we also are called to be those witnesses with the responsibility to share the message of Jesus to all his people. As witnesses of Christ, we will experience many spectacular moments of grace with those whom we encounter. Like the apostles we might not recognise those moments immediately, but hopefully, with the light of the risen Christ guiding us, we will come to realise such moments as an encounter with God.

Share a time in your life that simply amazed you.

**EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION**

Acts 10: 34, 37-43  
Colossians 3:1-4  
John 20:1-9

**THIS WEEK.**

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light...light has dawned.”  
Matthew 4:16

**PRAYER**

*Christ our Light, thanks be to God.*
SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4: 32-35
1 Jn 5: 1-6
Jn 20: 19-31

A few months ago I was sitting up in bed watching the ABC iview on my iPad when I came across an Australian series called “Glitch”. Simply set in a small country town the local police were called to a disturbance at the town cemetery. When he arrived there were several people roaming aimlessly around covered in dirt and looking as if the “party” had got out of hand. He assisted them with a local doctor back to the medical centre where they were cleaned up and in many cases dressed. Then while they were trying to identify the gathered crowd the police officer was gobsmacked and astonished to realise that one of the crowd was actually his wife who had died two years previously! It was a twist and turn in the show which I really didn’t see coming!

In a similar way I could not imagine the astonished emotions of the disciples. Jesus they saw die a torturous death a few days before on the wood of a cross. They knew where he was tombed. They witnessed, at least from afar, a severely smashed body laid to rest. To the ancient world, death is forever, no one walks the earth, in reality, again thereafter!
And yet here before them stood, not a resuscitated body of Jesus’ smashed remains, but the resurrected glorified body of Christ. Jesus’ presence before his disciples and the very incarnate meeting with Thomas offers us today the greatest foundation of faith, hope and love.
To this Liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez shares; “...because of one’s hope in the resurrected Christ, one is liberated from the narrow limits of the present and can think and act completely in terms of what is to come.”
And to this Thomas’ response echoes throughout the centuries; “My Lord and my God!”

How do we offer the gift of Christ’s hope to our Confrere’s and those we meet?

THIS WEEK.

“His love endures forever” (Ps 117:2); eternal is his mercy.”
Pope Francis

PRAYER

Increase in our minds and hearts the risen life we share with Christ. Amen
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
1 Jn 2: 1-5
Lk 24: 35-48

The gospel account in Luke this week is similar to the account of the incarnate presence of the resurrected Jesus in last week’s gospel of John. Last week we had the doubting Thomas place his hands into the wounds of Jesus and yet this week we have the astonished disciples sharing a meal of grilled fish.

A consistent feature of the post resurrection stories is that the risen Jesus was different and even at times initially unrecognizable. Resurrection is not resuscitation. Jesus is in a “new” space and the doubting and fear struck disciples were not. In their fear they return to the safety of the “old” space as in some way fishers of fish and not fishers of humanity which Jesus called them to be. Resuscitation and resurrection are not the same. Resuscitation restores someone to the same life, the old state from which they were. Resurrection changes and transforms the old way of life and the old way of being.

The words of the Apostle’s Creed finishes with “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” If this is our future journey, as life everlasting, then the resurrection of Jesus is crucially important to our eternal life. People may ask you what the meaning of life is. Well to my mind it is not found in the number “42” as Douglas Adams once suggested but it is profoundly discovered in the mystery of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Fr Ron Rolheiser finally reminds us...“Was Jesus’ resurrection a faith event or a physical event? It was both. I believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, literally. I believe too that this event was, as the rich insights within contemporary theology point out, highly spiritual: an event of faith, of changed consciousness, of new hope empowering a new charity and a new forgiveness. But it was also an event of changed atoms and of a changed dead body. It was radically physical, just as are all events that are part of the incarnation wherein God takes on real flesh.”

How have you understood the resurrection of Jesus?

St Vincent de Paul Society
15 April 2018
The Good Shepherd; Lest we forget!

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4: 8-12
1 Jn 3: 1-2
Jn 10: 11-18

The Gospel for today begins with the words, “Jesus said; I am the good shepherd.” The notion of a real life shepherd may be foreign to a lot of us today in a post-modern world but the vocation of shepherd in the time of Jesus meant much more than someone just looking after sheep. To be a good shepherd meant that one had qualities of diligence and dependability, courage and bravery, integrity and a nurturing heart. A good shepherd had no hesitation in risking his own life against that of wolves and other wild animals for the safety of his flock.

This week there are two events which strongly connect to the message of the good shepherd; the birth of Frederic Ozanam and the commemoration of ANZAC Day.

In the eyes of faith, Easter symbolism permeates all the interwoven themes of Anzac Day, beginning with the Dawn Service. It is deeply moving to recognise that at the heart of the Australian soul rests the mystery of the death and resurrection.

A solemn service welcomes the dawn. Families brave the weather to pay their respects. Some pray, some call forth memories. In doing so, they bring to the present the experiences of our country’s past so that they can carry them into the future. They recognise the good shepherd who laid down their lives for so many. ANZAC Day is a powerful and worthy ritual and the mystery of the Easter events expresses the assurance of a transcending hope, faith and love for all standing in the silence of the dawn.

Blessed Frederic Ozanam was the image of the good shepherd to all how called on him for assistance. Frederic was a shepherd of faith. He understood the importance of his work within the guidance and nurturing of prayer and spiritual advice. Frederic was a shepherd of love. His love for God and Church was strengthened because of his relationships with the poor, his confreres and his family. Frederic was a shepherd of hope. He saw the importance of a legacy of justice and advocacy for the poor inspired by Gospel imperatives and a model of unconditional compassion and love for the poor.

As Australian Vincentians may our week be fulfilled within the hearts of the good shepherds that have travelled the paths before us.
The fruitful vine

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 9: 26-31
1Jn 3:18-24
Jn 15:1-8

The gospel reading last week was Jesus expressing to his disciples the model for life as the good shepherd and this week’s reading begins with the statement “I am the true vines and my Father is the vinedresser.”

The fruitful vine offers true life; life which this gospel tells us in the earlier chapter is “life abundant”. How does this vine become fruitful? This does depend on the vinegrower who must carefully prune the vine enabling it to bear good fruit. Vines naturally have two kinds of branches -- those which bear fruit and those which don’t. The non-bearing branches must be carefully pruned back in order for the vine to conserve its energy for bearing good fruit. There is a clear and profound message here: We are either fruit-bearing or non-fruit-bearing. There is no fuzzy in-between. For true grow the dead bits must be pruned.

So it is with us I believe. Jesus promises that we will bear much fruit if we abide in him and allow him to abide in us. Abiding in the work of God in our life requires careful reflection each day. My son learnt at school a very simple end of day reflection which I share here. It asks two questions; What was I grateful for today and What was I ungrateful for? The answers need not be complicated or deeply perplexing but simply from the heart. It is in this way that the Spirit will bear much fruit within each of us.

How does Jesus speak to you in this “bearing of fruit” metaphor?
How do we “abide” or “remain” connected to the vine?

THIS WEEK.

The branches of a vine will bear fruit only if they are attached to the vine Jn15.4

PRAYER

Father, continue to challenge us in your profound love that we may respond to love of others. Amen
Spiritual Reflection Guide

The Light of Christ has come into the world