Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflection Guides.

The liturgical cycle for 2019 follows in general the Gospel of Luke (Year C), with Easter falling a little later in April. Much voice will be given throughout this year from our Australian Church as we head toward the Plenary Council in 2020.

The last plenary council in Australia was in 1937. A plenary council is the highest form of gathering that a church in a particular country can have. It is a process by which lay Catholics and clergy can be heard. A plenary, in Canon Law, is an assembly with legislative power, which means that final decisions become law and have binding power.

The responsibility of making these decisions falls on the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) who do so only after discerning the will of the Holy Spirit with the people (sensus fidelium). Pope Francis expresses his hope “that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they are presently.” I share with you thoughts and reflections on Plenary from Richard Mahon, Director of Pastoral Planning in the Diocese of Parramatta:

We accompany Jesus on this plenary journey, and are invited into Gospel encounters. Who do we meet at the heart of the Gospel? Our family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. The Gospel people are today’s people, experiencing the same hopes and joys, griefs and sorrows as those from centuries earlier. We are invited in these plenary days to sit with a drink in the midday Australian sun, conversing with a woman from outside the religious tradition, and outside her own social circle (John 4). We listen attentively to two travellers, downcast on their way home on a dusty outback track after witnessing everything they believed about their faith being torn away (Luke 24:13-35). We experience the elation of those coming back from mission to the growth areas of our urban centres, fresh with stories of new life (Luke 10:17). We share in the grief of friends heartbroken at the loss of their beloved friend or family member (John 11).

In this time of privileged encounter, our bishops invite us to honour the stories we hold in our hearts and those we hear, by sharing the wisdom gleaned and questions raised. We are encouraged to raise our voices, to become a cloud of witnesses, sharing in the question of “what do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?”

There can be no more important question. And we are a pilgrim people. We recognise that we need one another, and by listening to the truth of one another, we step more deeply into the Divine Truth, connected as we are in the One Spirit. By prayerfully listening to one another, and avoiding the temptation to race to the nearest answer, we may open our eyes and ears to what the Spirit is saying in our midst.

I hope and pray that, when it comes time to submit my response to Plenary, my mind and heart will have been changed by many fruitful conversations, particularly with those who hold views and beliefs different to my own.

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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Acknowledgements The Spiritual Reflection Guides of the St. Vincent de Paul Society are produced by Leo Tucker
Text: Leo Tucker  Design: Anjali Belan
Moments of sudden revelation

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD
Is 60: 1-6
Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6
Mt 2: 1-12

What is an epiphany and what does this mean for us today? When I Googled this term I was encouraged when the first entry mentioned the manifestation of the Christ-child to the Gentiles. But the second entry intrigued me, as it stated: “a moment of sudden and great revelation or realisation”.

In 1990 the Hubble Space Telescope was launched. I am in awe of the wonders that each image returned to Earth exposes of the great universe around us. I am sure too that, for the researchers and scientists, each image is a revelation and realisation of the wonders beyond and of how unlimited the universe is.

In fact, there is something eternal and forever discovered through this telescope. Fr. Richard Rohr expresses in his book Divine Dance that God is not only reflected in the wonder and beauty of this infinite universe, but also God is greater than this eternal universe! For many that is an epiphany alone!

Moments of sudden revelation occur every day. They may be found in the wider knowledge of our society through discoveries of great importance, and yet may be found in the simplicity of a smile in gratitude of a stranger. Moments of sudden revelation leave us in wonder and awe, and remind us of life beyond our own single being.

The celebration of the Epiphany, the visit of the magi strangers from foreign lands to the Christ child, reveals the divine nature of Jesus to humanity. To “serve Christ in the poor” is being open to moments of revelation of the visit and presence of the stranger in our life, which may also reveal a different perception of God in our lives.

May we always be open to the epiphanies of the everyday: the difference the stranger offers us, the different perspectives, the different ways of understanding and seeing our world, the different reflections of our God.

Such new possibilities in our life are the heart of our epiphany experience.

Can you recall a profound moment of revelation in your life?

PRAYER

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

6 Jan 2019

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Witnessing an incomplete mission

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 time 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.

Frederic Ozanam was similar in this as he only witnessed to the Mission for 20 short years.

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?

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
At present I am hooked on a Netflix show called ‘The Good Place’. In a nutshell, without too many spoilers, it is about four people who die and go to the Good Place. However, each of them have their foibles. One in particular is a moral philosopher and ethicist who struggled throughout life with making decisions, no matter how simple they seemed. His moral obligation to the moral consequences were excruciating for him.

In some ways Jesus is faced with a moral dilemma. When he arrived at the wedding at Cana, he was told “they have no wine” by his mother. On the one hand, such a situation was embarrassing not only for the bride and groom, but also for the family as this would culturally mark them and their families for many years to come as wine is a symbol of happiness, fruitfulness and life. On the other hand, much wine would have already been drunk and many of the guests would be well imbibed with the spirit! I guess Jesus could have taken the moral ‘high ground’ but that would not have recognised the whole of the situation. Jesus listened 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.

Sometimes we are placed in these situations. Do we offer another EAPA voucher to someone we know will only return for more? Do we go out of our way to assist with budget counselling when we know they won’t listen or even attend a session? For Vincentians, these and other dilemmas occur every day. How we answer is our challenge. I guess we could ask in this: how would the Jesus of the wedding feast answer?

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

Share with your confreres 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
Diversity of contributions

3RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

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

The celebration of Australia Day falls this week. Australia Day acknowledges the arrival of a European civilization in 1788. Those with a keen sense 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._

Over all the years since, people issues have been foremost in the nation’s development. The dispossession of the first Australians; convicts, soldiers and free settlers; a history of new arrivals seeking refuge or asylum; drastic social and cultural change; a gradual and ongoing appreciation of diversity; and 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 united: “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 meanings 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 the elders of yesterday and the elders of the future.

_For what aspect of Australian life are you personally most thankful?_
4TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2019

Jer 1: 4-5, 17-19
1Cor: 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 too as it was the reading for my own wedding celebration with Anne. However, as I read these words today after nearly 22 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. Fr. Richard Rohr says that to truly love is to truly suffer.

Since the death of my wife, Anne, in 2016, some have asked if I will ever re-marry. I truly struggle with this question and although for some this is a real option, for me it is not so. For me I still am deeply in love with Anne. I talk of her and think of her as if she is still very close, and even though she is not physically with us, our love grows deeper. St. Paul reminds us that love is the greatest of all things that will last. 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.

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?

PRAYER

Loving Father, may we listen to the lives of those we assist understanding the poverty of our humanity. Amen
“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 this, if we truly hear the call to follow, we actually do leave everything behind. There are times of wonder and doubt. I have seen many a nervous bride or groom moments before they marry, but also profound joy and hope.

The late Fr. Pedro Arrupe SJ expresses beautifully a total response to God’s call:

_Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything._

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?**
Trusting in God

6TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Jer 17: 5-8
1Cor: 15: 12.16-20
Lk 6: 17.20-26

The words of the prophet Jeremiah are more pertinent than ever as our Australian landscape continues to suffer in drought. Jeremiah calls us to what I believe is a heroic act of trust in God. Can you imagine families having ‘no worries in a year of drought’?

Throughout 2018, together with a number of other organisations, the Society raised much-needed funds to assist farmers on the drought-affected lands of New South Wales. The stories are difficult to hear. Members met with a farmer who had to shoot 1,200 sheep because he couldn’t afford to feed them any longer. They have talked to families who have had to walk off their farms, even though that won’t stop overdue bills piling up.

However, in the stories of devastation there are stories of resilience and hope, as seen in people overcoming incredible odds to keep their farms and their livelihoods going. And sometimes a hand-up has made all the difference.

In the reading from Jeremiah, thankfully he is not so much giving advice on living through droughts physically but in droughts of the spirit and the essence of hope. Such hope, expressed through the trust in God, opens our hearts to a deeper well-spring of meaning and purpose even in the most challenging and difficult times in life. For Jeremiah this is not human-made hope with all its faults and uncertainties, but an unconditional hope expressed only in God.

St. Vincent de Paul expresses this too in stating: “Have great trust in God. Ask Him to be always in your heart, in your words and in your actions and may everyone recognize that you are His.”

What does hope mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

How happy are you who are poor; yours in the kingdom of God.
Luke 6: 22

PRAYER

Loving Father, may we find hope for the hopeless in our service to all we meet. Amen
7TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

1 Sam 26: 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
1 Cor: 15: 45-49
Lk 6: 27-38

The Gospel account in Luke this week is a continuation of the teaching of the beatitudes in the Lukan style. They echo strongly the teaching of the beatitudes in Matthew. However, one is taught from a hillside and the other on level ground!

I guess I am fortunate in my life to have met many people whose lives are echoed in this Gospel. They view life differently, openly, and respond to life with little judgement but in a deep and robust sense of love. They live life this way without any sense of personal benefit or gain.

The Rule expresses this too. It states that the Vincentian’s ideal is “to help relieve suffering for love alone, without thinking of any reward for themselves.” Sadly, many good Vincentians have come unstuck in this understanding and as always this Gospel is a timely reminder to us all.

I was recently at a gathering of Vincentians in the Wollongong Diocese for their annual festival Mass, and I greatly enjoyed reflecting on the companionship, fellowship and love conveyed. I can recognise the words of Frederic Ozanam a few months before his untimely death: “This dear Society is also my family, it is, after God, what kept me in faith, when I had lost my good and pious parents. I love it, and hold it in the deepest part of my heart”.

Jesus’ words this week are simple. He asks that we always carry love in the deepest part of our hearts; a love that is beyond ourselves. It is in this thinking that we serve Christ in the poor and in all we meet throughout our life.

What do you hear in Luke’s beatitudes?

THIS WEEK...

I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. John 13: 34

PRAYER

Loving Father, may we love with a love that transforms lives. Amen
The last gift

8TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Eccles 27: 4-7
1Cor 15: 54-58
Lk 6: 39-45

For my many ‘sins’ in life, I once held the position of a funeral director. I never saw this role as a position of simply burying the dead, but as a ministry of compassionate service to families and friends in grief. Sometimes this role was relatively straightforward. An elderly person would peacefully die in the care of their family and I saw, with a tinge of sadness, a blessing and celebration of their life. Other times it was very different.

I remember one spring morning when a man in his late twenties arrived at our office. He was a quiet, unassuming fellow who had just come from the hospital where he had sat most of the night with his only sibling who was dying. Sadly, his brother’s death left him as the sole survivor of his family as both his parents had died a few years before in a car accident.

He told me that he had very little money and needed just a brief service: and, if it was okay with me, he would like to build his brother a coffin to rest in. In all my time in funerals never have I had a request of this nature but there was something deeply genuine and meaningful in his request.

He built the coffin for his brother to rest in and it was truly beautiful. The service was attended by five people at a graveside in Rookwood; the minister, the young man, myself and an assistant, and two friends. It was possibly the most beautiful funeral that I attended. The simplicity was sacred and profound.

I was reminded of this experience when I read today’s Gospel: “For words flow out of what fills the heart.” These words of Jesus teach us that how we respond to others is an expression of what fills our hearts. The young man’s response was not in getting a booklet together, or a slide show, or the right music, or deciding where to have the wake. His response was to be present for his brother and to offer him for his last resting a gift of profound love.

As Vincentians, what fills our hearts? Is it assumptions and generalisations of the ‘business’ of charity? Or it the always a heart to serve Christ in the vulnerable and disadvantaged?

How do we respond with our heart?

THIS WEEK...

The good person draws what is good from the store of goodness in their heart.
Luke 6: 45

PRAYER

The Father of unconditional compassion, fill our hearts with the grace of profound love. Amen

St Vincent de Paul Society
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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 downside of life, and that human suffering and distress can place us close to the heart of God.

Over the past year many of us have carried difficult crosses for ourselves and with others. It may be a poor diagnosis, the loss of someone close, a divorce or separation, loss of job and income, the impact of abuse. Apart from the shock and devastation of this very painful and emotional journey, glimmers of profound hope arise. These are seen through the overwhelming response of love and support and the palpable presence of prayer.

In these situations, the world is a very lonely place. 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?

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
SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

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

As a Catholic of Irish descent, this Sunday has mixed reflections. Do we celebrate the feast of St. Patrick, patron of Ireland, or do we somberly remember our Lenten observances? I was torn as I sat here in my office writing to you, until I noticed the first line in this week’s second reading which is St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians. St. Paul calls his followers to “be united in following my rule of life.” For Paul, that rule is the cross of Christ; but similarly, St. Patrick shared a rule of life which was founded in the spirituality of the Celts.

Apart from the shenanigans of the ‘rule’ of wearing the green to hide from leprechauns, an American addition in the 1700s, St. Patrick’s ‘rule’ is expressed through the Prayer of St. Patrick which, like St. Paul is Christ-centric and represents a total transformation of the self with complete trust and faith in God.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me.

In some ways the cross of Christ is reflected throughout all our being and is present to us in all aspects of our life; in our person and in our relationships. Throughout our Lenten journey, as we draw closer to Christ, may this prayer of St. Patrick accompany us especially as a morning prayer or offering.

Joyfully, Happy St. Patrick’s Day!

THIS WEEK...

I arise today, through the strength of heaven...

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, may the image of your transfiguration guide our relationships and deepen our responses to all we serve. Amen
Third Sunday of Lent

GOD WHO SEES US AND CARES FOR US

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

The small parable which Jesus offers in today's Gospel about the fig tree has much to offer us in this Lenten season. A fruitless vine is only given so much time before it is pulled up and new seeds are planted. This is the way the vineyard works. Compassion is not the way of the vineyard in most cases - except this one.

This is the vineyard of a God who understands that life is not always easy and straightforward. A God that understands our foibles and our vulnerability.

I have been reading and reflecting on Fr. Richard Rohr's book The Divine Dance. In this, Richard expresses the eternal truths of the Trinity. For him this God is:

God for us, we call you Father. God alongside us, we call you Jesus. God within us, we call you Holy Spirit. You are the eternal mystery that enables, enfolds and enlivens all things, Even us and even me.

To be enabled, enfolded and enlivened by the God of the vineyard is, I believe, God's response of love to us throughout this Lenten season; especially when we approach this time searching and deepening our faith, our hope, and our love in this relationship.

For Vincentians, the fruit of this nurtured relationship is expressed in our relationship with those we companion and with each other. We must remember that to be a member, the Rule asks three things: that a member continues to develop their faith and grow closer to God; that Members serve the vulnerable; and that Members remain in close social communion with each other. All three as aspects of membership, not just one!

May our vineyard continue to bear much fruit!

Do you have your own special image for the love of God?

THIS WEEK...

Goodness and kindness shall follow us all the days of our lives.

PRAYER

Loving Father,
When our weakness discourages us, when our trust in you falters,
Let your compassion fill us with hope. 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 storyteller, Jesus. He told me to 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.

THIS WEEK...

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

PRAYER

Father,  
May faith, hope and love be instruments of compassion and peace in our world today. Amen
True leadership – putting others first

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 “the very act of committing 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, during his supper with the twelve Jesus 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)

St. Ignatius of Loyola 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
James 1:19

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

St Vincent de Paul Society
good work
Who really was on trial?

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)

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.

St Vincent de Paul Society
good works
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 narrative 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 rebuke 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?

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
“My Lord and My God”

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 would go by that I did not call or message my wife, saying simply that “I love you”, and in fact I may did 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. Although I know Anne is not tangibly with us to respond, I know that love continues to grow deeper in us beyond the physical.

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.

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
What do you think God is asking of us at this time?