



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Spiritual Reflection Guide

September – December 2022

 Vinnies

***Be Kind and
Give of Yourself***



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome again to the Spiritual Reflection Guides. I hope that these Guides provides you with much food for thought as we express our vocations in service of those experiencing hardship and poverty, not simply through material challenges, but also of the heart and the spirit.

These Guides move through the last weeks of Ordinary Time in the Church's calendar, ending with the feast of Christ the King. From this celebration, the focus begins our journey through the Advent Season and preparations to the Season of the Incarnation, that is, Christmas.

Advent for the Society is also a preparation time for Appeals, Hampers and Christmas gifts for children. It is a time of a lot of hard and dedicated work. It can also be a time of frustrations and tensions between Members, Volunteers and Staff, especially as the summer sun pushes temperatures higher!

During this time, let us find some space to breathe and reflect on the true reason for this work of gathering hampers. One group of members would gather in the parish hall and before they began the task of wrapping, separating, and allocating hampers and Christmas gifts, they would pause and offer a prayer for energy and strength, for those we are doing this for and their families. Like our Society logo, we are hands offering, we hold in our hearts the hands in need and it is God that offers blessings on all that we do.

Our Guides are composed by the recently formed Mission Team. Many of you know and have met myself over the years and I continue this valuable work. So, to assist you I include this photo below...

May these Guides open our hearts to the profound Joy of the Gospels and the gift of peace of Christmas.

Leo Tucker

Executive Director, Mission and Spirituality
NSW State Council

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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*From left to right; Joy Bowen,
Corinne Lindsell, Leo Tucker
& Greg Ryan*

Struck in awe and wonder

4 Sept
2022

23RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Wis 9:13-18

Phil 9-10, 12-17

Lk 14:25-33

A few years ago, I was in Armidale journeying with the Central Council on a day of reflection. The weather was warm, and I struggled to sleep on one of the nights. So, I walked out of my room and was astonished in a sense of awe of the wonders of the night sky above me.

Moments like this remind me of, not just the vastness of the universes above, but also and possibly stronger is the reminder of the vastness and the wonders of the mystery of God as Creator.

I feel the author of the book of Wisdom in this week's readings is struggling with the same thoughts. To take these thoughts even a step further a question needs to be asked, "why does a Creator God who built the wonders of the heaven, of which I am but a grain of sand, loves me beyond any human imaginings?"

I was in a conversation with one of our bishops recently on the depth of the love of God and as I mentioned this moment to him, he simply mused "could it be possible that all the beauty of the universes above us in the night sky are only placed there not for other life forms but for our wonder and amazement as that is the depth of God's love for us?" Well, I am not sure if this thought would convince an astrophysicist, but it is certainly a metaphysical considered admiration.

Finally, Jesus' words in Luke's Gospel this week are far-reaching. It counts the cost of true discipleship as far more than just an emotional response to a great speech or moment. It is a response, which lets go of all that we may hold dear to us, even life itself.

Humility is one of the five missionary virtues of St Vincent de Paul. This is what Jesus asks of us as disciples in this Gospel and always. Humility to risk it all in radical love. Is this a discipleship that we can embrace especially when the going gets tough?

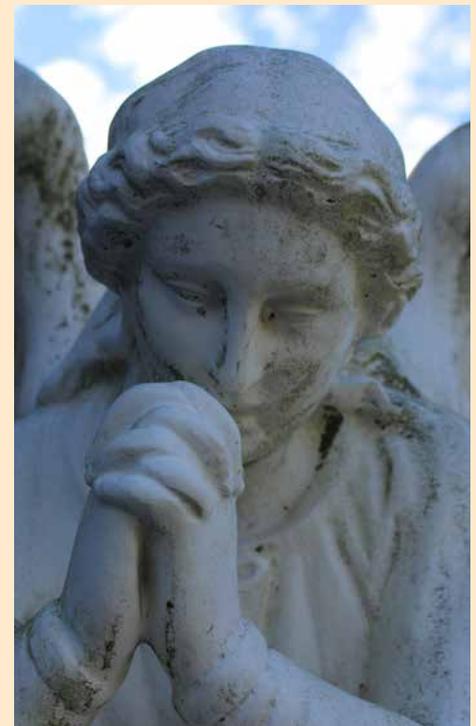
What does the virtue of humility mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

*"He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!"
(Philippians 2.8)*

PRAYER

Lord, guide us to be humble in heart, words and actions. Amen



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What would the Merciful Father do?

11 Sept
2022

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ex 32:7-11, 13-14

1 Tim 1:12-17

Lk 15:1-32

It is interesting that the story of the “Merciful Father” falls on the anniversary of one of the greatest tragedies in human history. Who would ever forget those scenes of devastation 21 years ago. Two of the tallest buildings in New York City were struck by two commercial airlines causing unprecedented damage and the fall of these massive concrete structures, taking the lives of nearly 3000 people in only a few hours. Two other planes took lives near the US Pentagon and in a field in Pennsylvania.

My wife, Anne, lived in New York in the early 1990’s and knew these streets and places well. I remember waking her to the news simply saying, “Something really bad has happened!” She was pregnant with Ben, our second child, and we wondered that morning what sort of world were we bringing him into?

At the heart of this desolation were 19 members of a fanatical interpretation of one of the world’s faith traditions. They “gave” their lives to something that they truly believed was just and right but that which all faiths, including the Islamic faith tradition, abhor.

So my question is, what would the Merciful Father do?

I think it is a very tough reflection because if we are truly led by the parable story of unconditional love and forgiveness, and not simply our emotions, the answer may surprise even ourselves.

This Gospel parable always provides hope for Pope Francis; “Here is the entire Gospel! Here! The whole Gospel, all of Christianity is here! The parable of the merciful father...impresses me because it always gives me great hope” And so may it always give each of us in our lives and ministry great hope too.

What is your reflection on mercy?

THIS WEEK...

*“If you wish to receive mercy, show mercy to your neighbour”
(St John Chrysostom)*

PRAYER

*Eternal Father,
open our hearts of limitations to
Your divine and very embracing love.
Amen*



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“Who trample on the needy...”

18 Sept
2022

25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Amos 8:4-7

1 Tim 2:1-8

Lk 16:1-13

The prophet Amos in the first reading this week speak to each of us in our ministry to the vulnerable. There is no doubt that we give much time and life to those we walk with who are doing it tough, but the prophet is warning us of complacency in our ministry.

St Vincent de Paul once told his people that, “Charity is greater than any rule. Moreover, all rules must lead to charity”. This is not a charity of transactions, that is, of simply providing food, vouchers, clothes, blankets. Charity is listening, conversations, companionship, empathy, and opening our hearts to their stories without judgement.

This nature of charity is not simply what we Vincentian strive to do each time we meet with our companions in need or even as Vincentians, but it needs to be in our very DNA.

Amos speaks to those who “suppress the poor of the country”. It may be harsh, but I have seen this in our Vincentian work where our frustrations, personal biases, judgements and assumptions come to the fore.

I remember a Conference member telling me of an elderly woman they would see each week for many years. They said the visit was not long as we knew what she needed. Sadly, the woman died and her son, while cleaning her unit, discovered a hundred vouches for food, electricity and gas. All the lady needed was pure charity of the heart, someone to listen and keep her company.

It is so easy to do this and to miss the true nature of our sometimes-exhausting ministry.

May we listen to the words of the ancient prophet and be reminded that Charity must be the lead in the dance!

Have we sometime missed the mark of our true Vincentian charity?

THIS WEEK...

*Embrace the whole world in a network of love
(Blessed Frederic Ozanam)*

PRAYER

Father, strengthen my faith; call me to true charity. Amen



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“I am not so sure that I believe”

25 Sept
2022

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Amos 6:1, 4-7

1 Tim 6:11-16

Lk 16:19-31

Have you ever had a conversation with someone about issues of your faith and no matter what you say to them they always have answers founded in what they call reason?

Not long ago I fell into just a similar conversation with a good friend. Interestingly this person is a nurse in a large Sydney hospital who experiences all aspects of life every day. Our conversation that day began with the simple sentence, “I am not so sure that I believe in same way you do”. As much as I revealed aspects of God in her world and the experiences of her every day, she would refute existence with science-based facts, conspiracy theories and vaguely held scepticism. For this person death is the final frontier and prayer is just a security blanket for the ignorant.

Luke’s Gospel presents the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man was not a bad person per se but one blinded by what he could or would not see. For him, life was presented only through his senses, a transcended reality was not his reality.

There are times when I think we all fall into this fault. Belief beyond our sensory reality is difficult. I think that even if God eliminated the Covid virus overnight from the world and messaged everyone through social media, we would still struggle to believe. St John of the Cross spoke of the Dark Night of the Soul, St Augustine struggles through his Confessions, St Teresa of Calcutta spoke many times of her unbelief, and St Thomas needed the assurance of placing his fingers into the wounds of Jesus. All these experiences of faith journeys give us a great sense of hope in our humble journeys.

Have you had times of “doubt” in your faith journey?

THIS WEEK...

“When the disciple saw Jesus they worshipped him; but some doubted” (Matthew 28.17)

PRAYER

Holy Father, I believe but help my unbelief! Amen



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“Fan into a flame”

2 Oct
2022

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Hab 1:2-3, 2:2-4

2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14

Lk 17:5-19

We have a wonderful practice in our Catholic faith tradition of commissioning those who take up the call of leadership. I am sure too that this is an aspect of most faiths as it is a way of acknowledging a personal vocational calling and the good works of God among us.

St Paul in his letter to Timothy reminds Timothy and the faith community to “fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you”. For Paul commissioned Timothy in his leadership not as a congratulations for stepping up but as a gift of the Spirit for the greater good of the community and beyond.

In the Vincentian tradition we commission Conference and Council Presidents, and sometime new members with a call of the candidate and the gifting of four symbols of faith and action. First, the priest or bishop will ask if the candidate is present in the Church. This call is like the calling of the candidate for baptism, confirmation, and ordination. It comes to us from the ancient Judaic rites of Presentation and Bar Mitzvah where the initiated is called from the people.

The second movement in the ceremony is the presentation of gifts of scripture to guide leadership through the ministry of Jesus of inclusivity, accompaniment and restoration, a candle representing the light and presence of Christ of whom you are called to be his presence in the world, a loaf of bread and glass of water which is fundamental of service and hospitality and the gift of the Rule of the Society. This final gift reminds the candidate that the role is one of responsibility in the spirit and traditions of the Society.

Commissioning is both being called from the people and for the people in service. And to this the last line in the reading of St Paul expresses, “You have been trusted to look after somethings precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us”.

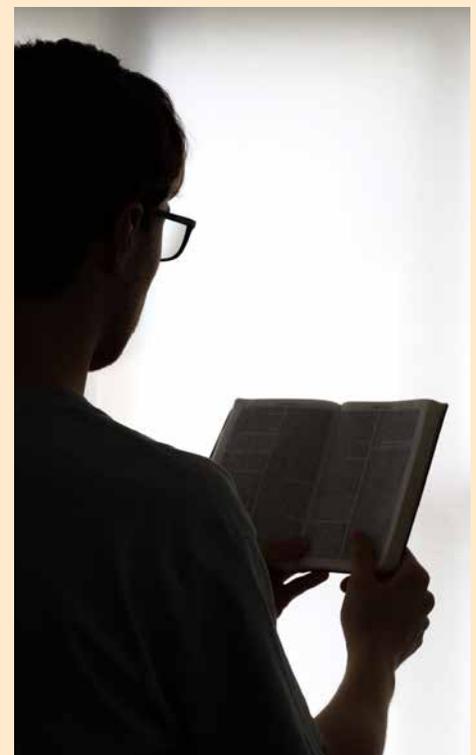
Are Commissioning Masses part of your Central Council traditions? If not, why?

THIS WEEK...

I called on your name, you are mine.. (Isaiah 43)

PRAYER

Hold me close to you O Lord and let me feel the warmth of your presence.



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The Ten Lepers

9 Oct
2022

28TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

2 Kg 5:14-17

2 Tim 2:8-13

Lk 17:11-19

The account of the ten lepers in Luke's Gospel this week expresses lessons in thankfulness and appreciation.

As we know, to be a leper, in ancient times, was a sentence of exclusion from society, being "unclean", a public sinner, and to live a life as a beggar. In the early stages of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and even the recent Covid pandemic, such scenes were very similar!

Luke tells us that the lepers "stood some way off" from Jesus expressing their exclusion. It is an interesting healing miracle account in that there was no touching, washing, or anointing. In this way, Jesus met God in the suffering and through that moment, healing occurred. Jesus just gave them a simple instruction to present themselves to the priests.

Sr Patricia Stevenson rsj tells us the "Naaman's story (from the Book of Kings) and the story of the ten lepers are given to us so that we might reflect on the virtue of gratitude". She goes on to say that, grace and gratitude hold common threads; both are about "freedom and wholeness".

This passage always makes me question how I pray and what is my prayerful relationship with God? I guess I want to say that my prayer is of dialogue or conversation in a close loving relationship with God, I guess I would hope to say that my prayer life is one of thankfulness and gratitude, interconnected to my everyday life experiences. I guess that I would like to tell you that my prayers are strong, undistracted and constant...but sadly, they are not! In fact, the truth is possibly the opposite. Sometimes it is just the continual petitions prayers, another is the bargaining prayers and the other times is prayer which rambles on without life or focus...not a voice of deepening my relationship.

The story of the ten lepers offers us good insights into gratitude, thankfulness and appreciation for all that we have in life. To thank others is a very simple act.

How do you prayer?

THIS WEEK...

The one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (St Paul to the Corinthians)

PRAYER

*Lord, renew me and fill me up, to give away some more. Amen
(Adapted prayer from the Iona Community)*



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Will God find faith on earth?

16 Oct
2022

29TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Ex 17:8-13

2 Tim 3:14-4:2

Lk 18:1-8

In my perhaps cynical view, much old-fashioned religion was about getting the right verdict from the Judge at the end of our lives. This is unfortunately still somewhat common today. Scripture has many references to the judgment of God, and even of Jesus, the Righteous Judge at the end-time. But God is certainly not the model for the judge in this story; He is, in fact, contrary of this figure.

But I think we can see life, in some respects, as a series of tests of faith. The tests even seem to get harder as we grow closer to God. Personally, the judgment I constantly make of myself is: how close am I to God right now? We know we are infinitely less than God, but we are also invited by our faith to be one with God, in fact God's adopted children. The more we cry out to God, the more God will come to our aid, as any loving parent would.

Jesus calls us to pray continually which I strongly encourage. However, this is only possible if we understand our lives in prayer and as prayer. I read a while ago that when we do need come to prayer we answer God's call within us to pray. God's call is continual through all aspect of our day and in each moment.

At the end of this reading, Jesus shares a question we need to continually ask ourselves as the holders of the spirituality of the Society, "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" That certainly is a very broad question but possibly a locally asked question could be "if Frederic Ozanam were alive would he join the Society today and recognise its spirit?"

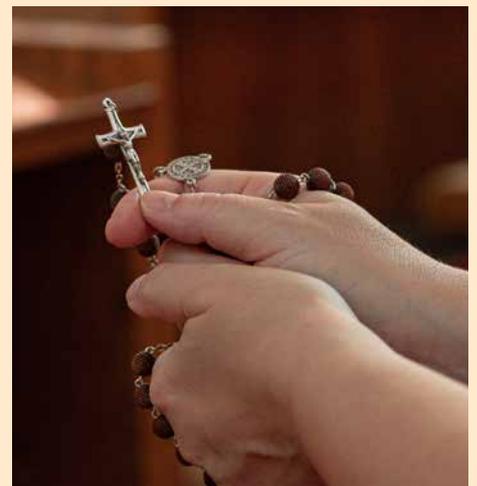
What is your response?

THIS WEEK...

*We are compelled by Love to step aside when too much of us is not alive in the present way we live.
The late Noel Davis*

PRAYER

*The Word of the Lord is faithfulness and trust;
His love can never be measured.
His mercy is like nothing we have ever seen.
So let us place our trust in God.
Kevin Bates S.M.*



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The hardest virtue to acquire

23 Oct
2022

30TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-19

2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18

Lk 18:9-14

Jesus gives us an example of extreme lack of humility in the Pharisee in this story. Pharisees were seen as the holiest of the holy. So, it was easy for this man to see himself as better than the tax collector, who was a Jewish man working for the Romans against his own people. We are looking into his soul, as only God can do – and we don't like what we see. I might look into my own soul and make the same judgment.

How often are my prayers for my own needs rather than in thanks to God for God's blessings and for all who have asked my prayers.

This is another of Jesus' reversal stories, but because the Pharisees have such bad press through this and other of Jesus' stories, we don't get the same jolt out of it as would the original audience. We do not see that it is us, the good guys, who are being held in retrospection. How do I feel when I visit people who are unlovely, perhaps irresponsible, even ungrateful for my help? Do I say to myself, I would never be like one of these?

It is said that the great saints always see themselves as most unworthy and sinful. Humility is perhaps the hardest virtue to acquire; it eludes us as we see ourselves attaining it. I guess it is about forgetting myself and thinking of others. The encouraging thing is that God does not expect perfect humility, as long as we try not to judge others.

Where are you found in this story? Pharisee or Tax collector?

THIS WEEK...

Prayer is the song of the heart that makes its way to the throne of God, even when entangled in the wailing of thousands of souls.
Kahlil Gibran

PRAYER

*The Lord is close to the broken-hearted;
Those whose spirit is crushed he will save.
The Lord ransoms the souls of his servants.
Those who hide in him shall not be condemned.*
Psalm 32



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But wait, there's more...

30 Oct
2022



31ST SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Wis 11:22-12:2

2 Thess 1:11-2:2

Lk 19:1-10

The story of Zacchaeus is one of those familiar tales that when we hear it over the years, we could think there is nothing more to learn from it.

For me there are questions: why was it so important for Zacchaeus to find out about Jesus? What was it about Jesus that drew unlikely people to him? For Zacchaeus to go to such lengths, by climbing the tree – surely not a common occurrence for a wealthy man in Jericho – he must have been very eager to go to those lengths, while only expecting to catch a glimpse of Jesus. I wonder if his lifestyle had begun to worry him, hence his instant willingness to pay back those he had cheated and give half of his property to the poor. A very generous response!

Writer Fr Peter Varengo concludes, “*The encounter with Jesus engendered in Zacchaeus a totally new self-image, as well as a new image of God. Zacchaeus re-imagined both himself and God, and this new perception led him inevitably to that radical turn-around in his life that we call precisely conversion. If we are to undergo real conversion, we too, like Zacchaeus, must have the courage to convert our own self-imagining and re-imagine our relationship with our God, a relationship realised and lived in the reality of each day.*”

(Varengo.P, *We Want to See Jesus*, 2018)

Who is Zacchaeus today?

THIS WEEK...

*I will praise your name for ever,
my king and my God.
Book of Psalms*

PRAYER

*May God whose providence
enfolds us, give the increase
and make our work profitable
for the building of
God's Kingdom in our world.
Madeline Duckett, R.S.M.*



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Remembrance

6 Nov
2022

32ND SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

2 Macc 7:1-2, 9-14

2 Thess 2:16

Lk 20:27-38

Since ancient times the aromatic herb, Rosemary, has been believed to have properties to improve the memory. Perhaps because of this, it became an emblem of both fidelity and remembrance in literature and folklore. Rosemary has particular significance for Australians too, as it is found growing wild on the Gallipoli peninsula.

November 11, Armistice Day of World War I, became a focus to commemorate the victims of War, to decry the loss, wastage and cruelty of humanity to its own kind; to ask that we not forget those who were near and dear to us. But awful as it was, World War I did not prove to be “the war to end all wars”, as any scrutiny of the years since amply shows. Therefore, we continue to need, and to pray for, peace as a theme of this week.

At this time, we also commemorate the life of Charles Gordon O'Neill, Australian co-founder of the Society. He presents to us a life of compassion and perseverance. His legacy too, we are grateful.

There is much that is positive in remembrance; our memories remind us of all that has been good in our lives, keep us linked to the love and care that has formed us and sustained us in all the events. How often we are surprised and uplifted by our own items of ‘memorabilia’ and the joy that old photos or even videos bring. In our spiritual life, the celebration of Eucharist is memorial of the teachings and the presence of Jesus who said, ‘Do this in memorial of me’. It is also a regular reminder that being thankful is of the essence of the way of Jesus.

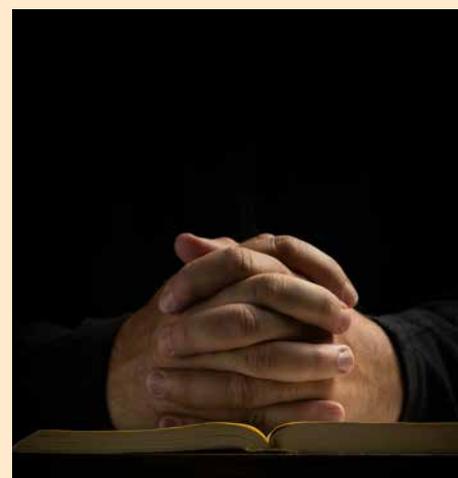
What will be your legacy?

THIS WEEK...

All things change; we remember and give thanks

PRAYER

*We thank you for food;
we remember the hungry.
We thank you for health;
we remember the sick.
We thank you for loved ones;
we remember the friendless.
May these remembrances
prompt us to service,
that your gifts to us be of
help to others. Amen.*



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Your endurance will gain your lives

13 Nov
2022

33RD SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Mal 3:19-20

2 Thess 3:7-12

Lk 21:5-19

The words in Luke's Gospel this week echoes loudly in our ears today. For the Catholic Church in Australia, we know of the serious issues of abuse, betrayal, loss of trust, disillusionment, misplaced power and lack of transparency, all of which were addressed through the Royal Commission. The Church is in difficult times. Bishop Vincent Long expresses this time in the Church as "critical times".

Sometime ago I attended an address by Cardinal John Dew of Wellington NZ on *Servant Leadership in the spirit of Pope Francis*. Through his address he expressed the very difference Pope Francis is making to the Church of "fine stoneware". From Francis' name to his simple greeting on that first evening to all gathered in at St Peter's. Even the gesture of accepting the cope for the blessing, then took it off and handed it back.

"He rode in the bus rather than a limousine. The next day he chose to wear a simple mitre and vestments."

Dew asked; "What is it about Francis that allows him to be so easy, open, clear and almost counter cultural to Church and society?" "He leads out of his own inner authority, sure of who he is before God and content to be who he is. He is content to be a flawed human being, flawed but still chosen because of the goodness of God's mercy and grace."

For Pope Francis, authentic power is service. This is the heart of the difference. In 2015, Pope Francis reflected, "Let us never forget this! For the disciples of Jesus, yesterday, today and always, the only authority is the authority of service, the only power is the power of the cross. As the Master tells us: "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Mt 20:25-27). In these words, we touch the heart of the mystery of the Church, and we receive the enlightenment necessary to understand our hierarchical service." May we continue to prayer for our Pope Francis!!

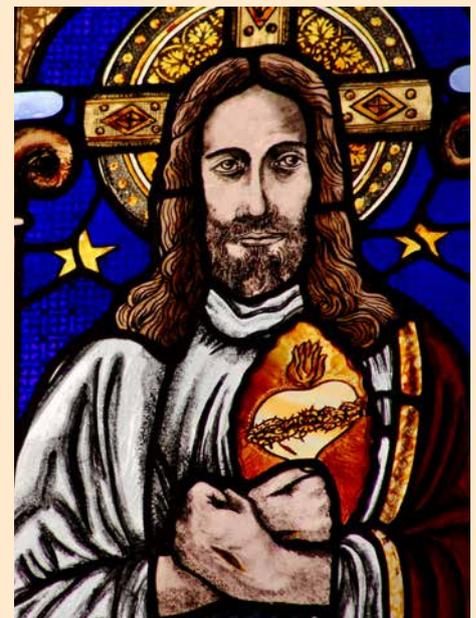
Where have you learned to draw strength through the difficult times?

THIS WEEK...

*I am with you always
...to the end of time*

PRAYER

*Loving Father,
For those who are grieving,
For those who seek forgiveness,
for those who are wounded,
we pray for new ways to journey on
in hope. AMEN*



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Difficulty of acceptance

20 Nov
2022

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

2 Sam 5:1-3

Col 1:12-20

Lk 23:35-43

Today we come to the end of the liturgical year, Year C in the cycle of readings, and as always at the end of each year, we celebrate the feast of, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe." And the image of Kingdom that Jesus portrays for us is not one identified with any earthly image of royalty. Rather, it is more than quite the opposite.

The Christian image of Kingdom portrayed in today's reading is the cross, with the crucified Jesus hanging on it, seemingly alone, broken and defeated. But in that brokenness, we find the true nature of his Kingdom and what his reign proclaims. The first reading today from Samuel also projects a royal theme as David is anointed as King of Israel and charged with shepherding the people of Israel. And that image of shepherd was used many times by Jesus to teach us that God's Kingdom was not about traditional leadership and rule, but rather it was about a leadership of service, of care and concern. It was about good shepherding.

In the verse preceding today's Gospel from Luke, Jesus, as he is nailed to the cross says, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." At what must have been a time of immense fear, pain and uncertainty for him, Jesus was other centred and forgiving of others, including those who were persecuting him. This compassion was also shown to another crucified with him. A criminal who had broken the law, suffering the same fate as Jesus, and recognising Jesus as Lord in that moment. And with his repentance and acceptance of Jesus, he is welcomed into the Kingdom of God.

So, is there a message, a challenge in this for Vincentians? Yes, I think there is. To follow Jesus and share in his ministry we need to be accepting of others and not be judgemental. We need to take them where they are at in life, accept them and shepherd them with what they need when you meet them. Some will challenge you, so forgive. Some will abuse you, so forgive. Some will try to fool you, so forgive. Be the Good Shepherd in Jesus' place and care for those who you assist.

(Reflection by Greg Ryan)

How difficult is it for me to be non-judgemental?

THIS WEEK...

Remember the people you assist that challenge you and pray for them.

PRAYER

Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen



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Unexpected Hour

27 Nov
2022

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 2:1-5

Rom 13:11-14

Mt 24:37-44

Today we hear- “Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour”.

As in our daily life, there are some challenging images here, frightening life-changing events – floods, capture, thieving. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we have one life, and it is precious and fragile, best lived in tune with Jesus constantly, ready for whatever comes our way, not sleepwalking through life.

This exhortation clearly is not to literally stay awake all night, but to live in the present, carefully observing life, so that we can recognise the Lord when he appears in our lives. Sometimes it is in those unrehearsed moments, the interruptions, and accidents, (that throw me off balance), where he shows himself. Staying awake means noticing and being alert, how easy it is to fall into automatic pilot mode!

As I take time to pray, I might allow the things I have been too busy to see come to my notice.

Anthony de Mello, the Indian Jesuit writes: “Spirituality means waking up. Most people, even though they don’t know it, are asleep. They’re born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up. You know, all mystics – Catholic, Christian, non-Christian, no matter what their theology, no matter what their religion – are unanimous on one thing: that all is well, all is well. Though everything is a mess, all is well. Strange paradox, to be sure. But tragically, most people never get to see that all is well because they are asleep. They are having a nightmare. They never understand the loveliness and the beauty of this thing that we call human existence. Waking up is unpleasant, you know. You are nice and comfortable in bed. It’s irritating to be woken up”.

(Reflection by Joy Bowen)

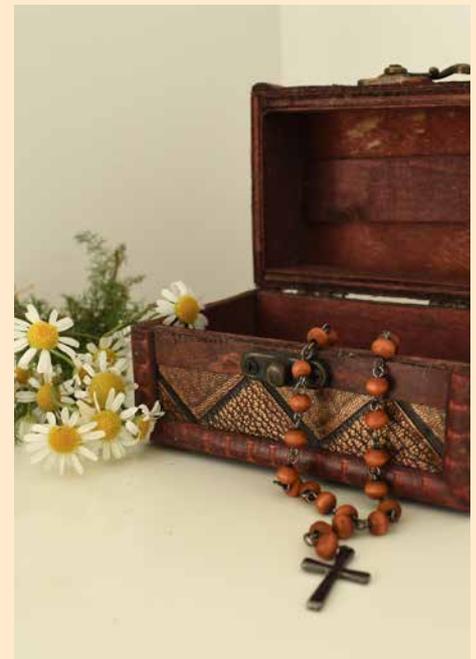
Can I remember, every day this week what might help me to remain alert and awake to the presence of God? .

THIS WEEK...

*‘He comes, comes, ever comes.’
Lord do not let me miss you, even in
my ordinary routine.
Rabindranath Tagore*

PRAYER

*God of all, make me present to your
daily appearances in my life. In
Jesus name, I pray.*



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Prepare a Way

4 Dec
2022

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 11:1-10

Rom 15:4-9

Mt 3:1-12

When we hear the word repentance, what other words does it bring up within us? Forgiveness, confession, sin, contrition? The Gospel reading is one that asks us to repent, for the Lord is near. We may connect repentance with turning away from sin, while this may be true, our readings this week ask us to do so much more than to simply stop sinning. John the Baptist asks us to produce good fruit, in order to prepare for the Lord.

How do we know if we are producing good fruit? By looking into the areas of our lives, our work, our families, our relationships, our contribution to the community and see if the fruits of the Spirit are present: is there Love, Peace, Patience? Is there Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness? Is there Gentleness and Self-Control? These are our markers of fruitful lives.

When we are living our lives in this way, we are not only nourishing our minds and our hearts, but we are also grasping more deeply the ability to be attentive to those who are suffering. It is in being others-focused that we will see good fruits in action, being of service to the other, welcoming the other and holding hope for the other.

Did you notice in the Gospel reading John the Baptist reminds us that the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed “A voice of one will cry out in the desert prepare a way for the Lord..” A voice of one? does this mean one single voice? Or is this a united voice? One of unity and harmony? Where in the desert, when things are at its hardest, where there is little fruit and life – it is here that we are there for others and speak in a unified voice – a voice of one to bring nourishing life, producing good fruit into the lives of others. Let’s not stop our repentance at simply turning away from sin – let us actively work to being outward focused to see hardships ease, hardness soften and where peace and justice can meet.

(Reflection by Corinne Lindsell)

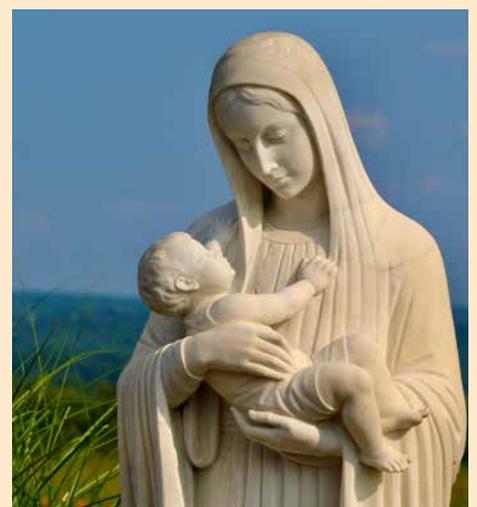
Can you recognise the fruits of the Spirit in all the areas of your life?

THIS WEEK...

*“Let us do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hands”
Frederic Ozanam*

PRAYER

Lord, we ask that you show us where we can speak as a voice of one, unified, to bring hope and kindness into the lives of those struggling, that we can be outward focused to share blessings with one another and that we recognise this as the hope we find in you. Amen.



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Messiah?

11 Dec
2022

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 35:1-6, 10

James 5:7-10

Mt 11:2-11

Advent is always a time of waiting, preparing for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. In today's Gospel we also have two additional themes. Doubt, and reassurance and redemption. Firstly, we find John the Baptist still waiting for the Messiah's coming. Early in Chapter 3 of Matthew, we have John preparing a way for the Lord in the wilderness. When approached by Jesus to be baptised, John says that it should be Jesus baptising him. But now John is in prison and full of doubt. Is Jesus really the Messiah? John along with many others obviously believed in another version of what the Messiah would do, would achieve. So, John sends his disciples out to ask Jesus whether he is the One or do we have to wait for another.

Instead of giving a straight answer, he asks John's followers to make up their own mind by looking and listening to all that Jesus was doing. The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor. It is in his actions that the truth of his mission is revealed. These actions are the signs of the Kingdom.

I find it intriguing that Jesus doesn't go to visit and reassure John. They were cousins, family, after all. His simple message to him is, "happy is the man who does not lose faith in me." He trusts John to believe in him, trust him and to keep his faith.

The Gospel concludes with Jesus saying, "... greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is." How reassuring to know that Jesus loves us and has already accepted us for who we are, whether we are in times of doubt or in times of faith.

So, how aware are we of the Kingdom today? What do we see happening in our local communities that display the actions of Jesus today? I'd like to think that Vincentians are just some of the disciples who look after the poor, the vulnerable, the people who live on the fringes and need to be accepted with compassion and respect.

(Reflection by Greg Ryan)

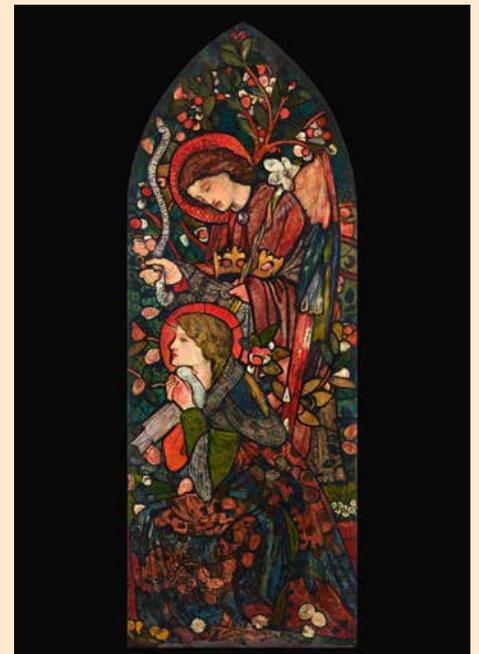
What are the signs of the Kingdom in your daily life?

THIS WEEK...

Be aware of God's presence with you as you live each day and offer any doubts to him in prayer.

PRAYER

*When Jesus later appeared to Thomas he said "Peace be with you. Do not doubt but believe."
(John 21:24)*



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To Listen Within

18 Dec
2022

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 7:10-14

Rom 1:1-7

Mt 1:18-24

How difficult is it to make wise decisions, especially in important domains? In today's Gospel reading, this story of Joseph's utterly unique vocation, as foster-father of the Son of God, offering us all a model for making decisions and dealing with doubts. Sounds to me like there are a few clear steps: pray about it, carry it as a question, pester God about it.

Did you know that Jean Paul Sartre, philosopher and atheist once wrote a Christmas play "Barjona"? In it he tries to imagine Joseph in Bethlehem: "He (Joseph) feels himself slightly out of it. He suffers because he sees how much this woman whom he loves resembles God; how she is already at the side of God. For God has burst like a bomb into the intimacy of this family. Joseph and Mary are separated for ever by this explosion of light. And I imagine that all through his life Joseph will be learning to accept this." A provocative statement: food for thought, not only separated but intertwined forever!

How often in scripture does the quiet prompting of the Spirit come from within, in the form of a dream. How sensitive must the dreamers have been, (including us today), to recognise the Spirit in their (our) hearts. Do I invite the Spirit to prompt me? Remember when God breaks into human affairs it causes surprises and not a little initial upset!

(Reflection by Joy Bowen)

How ready am I to hear what the Spirit might suggest?

THIS WEEK...

"When the vastness of God meets the restriction of our own humanity, words can't hold it. The best we can do is find the moments that rhyme with this expansive heart of God". Fr Gregory Boyle, Homeboy Industries

PRAYER

God of Creation, show us how to be courageous, living a surprising abundant life so we may spread your Kingdom to all. Amen



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And unto us a child is born!

25 Dec
2022

CHRISTMAS DAY

Is 52:7-10

Heb 1:1-6

Jn 1:1-18

Christmas Blessings.

Christmas Day is one that we focus on our family and loved ones and significantly the reason for the season, Jesus. We have been singing carols and Christmas songs for weeks, we have heard them in supermarkets and on television and it is today that we, as Church, as the faithful, celebrate the birth of Christ, the newborn King that we have been singing about.

It is very easy to get caught up in the material and commercial side of Christmas, which isn't necessarily a bad thing; after all this season, whether it be the commercial or the faith aspect encourages others to be generous, charitable, and kind. But if we left it there, we would bypass the sacredness of this day. The day that we remember when "The Word became Flesh". Where God humbled himself and became one of us.

Our God joins us in our humanity, a King, the creator of all, the One who even the Angels worship comes to us to dwell with us. If you have ever experienced or witnessed the birth of a child, you would know the sense of anticipation before the birth and the deep breath and exhilaration when the child enters the world. The child is indeed a miracle, new life, capable of all the things waiting for their human experience – and here is our God, coming to us in the same way, and on Christmas Day we get to reflect on the fact that Jesus, our Lord, full of majesty was born into the world with the same anticipation and was able to also cultivate all of what the human experience will offer.

Today we can be in awe of the Lord who is both fully divine and fully human.

(Reflection by Corinne Lindsell)

How does the Lord sharing in our humanity connect us more deeply to our Vincentian mission?

THIS WEEK...

*"For us and for our salvation
He came down from heaven; by
the power of the Holy Spirit, He
became incarnate of the Virgin
Mary, and was made man."*

Nicene Creed

PRAYER

*Lord, direct our ways that we may
walk in your ways and abound in
good works; through your beloved
Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who
lives and reigns with you and the
Holy Spirit, one God forever and
ever Amen.*



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Spiritual Reflection Guide

