

Spiritual Reflection Guide



St Vincent de Paul Society
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***Travelling the
Synodal Path***

January – April 2022



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflections Guides.

The liturgical cycle for 2022 follows in general the Gospel of Luke (Year C) with Easter falling a little later in April. Much voice throughout this year will be given of our Australian Church heading toward our Second Session of the Plenary Council but also the universal Church in answering the invitation by Pope Francis to a Synod of Bishops, themed on synodality.

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. The last Plenary Council in Australia was in 1937. 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, former 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.

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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Moments of sudden revelation

2 January
2022

THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Is: 60:1 – 6

Eph: 3:2-3, 5-6

Mt: 2:1-12

The account of the birth of Jesus is a little different in Matthew. There is no stable or worldwide registration of families as mentioned in Luke. Interestingly Mark does not even mention an infancy narrative at all! In fact, Matthew is the only gospel that accounts for the visit of the “wise men from the East” which precludes the family’s escape into Egypt and the genocide of infants across Bethlehem by an infuriated Herod.

It is interesting how our traditions and stories can slightly move away from what is actually recorded. Many would see the wise men’s visit in the stable, along with the shepherds, moments after the Christ-child was born. For some even the story of the little drummer boy is part of the same narrative.

Reading the actual words of gospel reveal some aspects, which need to be considered and reflected. Firstly, the wise men inquire as to where the child “who has been born” could be found because they have observed his star “at its rising” and at the visit the wise men they “entered the house” and saw “the child with Mary his mother”. In this reading it would be assumed that this wonderous visit occur sometime after Jesus’ actual birth and in fact the wise men observed the incarnation at the rising of his star in their foreign lands. This alone expresses that the God-with-us was not just an Israel event but one that embraces all people, the whole of creation.

The celebration of the Epiphany, the visit of the magi strangers from foreign lands to the Christ child, reveals the divine nature of a God-with-us 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 and gifts 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?

THIS WEEK...

Anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Mark.10.15

PRAYER

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



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Open to Mission

9 January
2022

BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Is 40:1-5,9-11

Tit 2:11-14, 3: 4-7

Lk 3:15-16, 21-22

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

The account of the baptism of Jesus is shared through all three of the synoptic gospels and in some ways referenced in the gospel of John. It is a significant moment in all accounts beginning Jesus' journey and mission. An aspect of all account is the heavenly commissioning of the Father for the Beloved of which the Father is "well pleased". This is somewhat echoed later in Jesus' journey at the Transfiguration where the Father again speaks of the beloved but this time we are called to "listen to him".

As Vincentians, we too are "baptised" to a prophetic and action oriented ministry. It is to this that I have always encouraged Commissioning Masses as a rite of passage not just for our leaders but also a possible initiative for all new Vincentians. At our Commissioning Mass we are presented with the Scriptures, the candle, bread and sometimes a glass of water and the Rule. Each have a significant mark in the journey of a Vincentian. The Scriptures are an expression of our faith and the candle is a profound symbol of the light of Christ inspiring and guiding us. The glass of water and bread reminds us of the Society logo of the hands offering assistance and the Rule connects us to the Vincentian traditions of faith in action. It is through these signs and symbols that we stand in awe listening to Jesus in faith, hope and compassionate love.

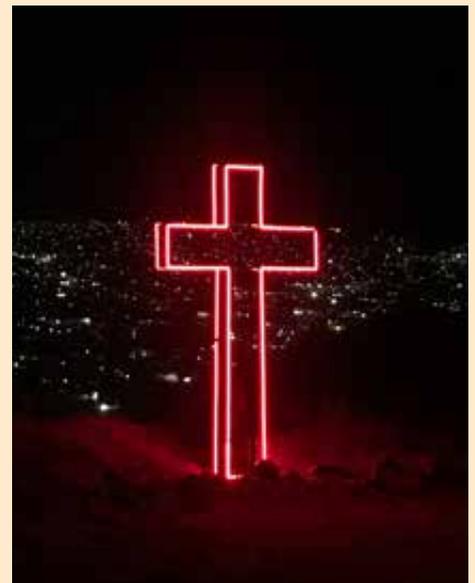
What do you know of your Baptism?

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*



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One in the Spirit

16 January
2022

2ND SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Is 62:1-5

1 Cor:12: 4-11

Jn 2: 1-11

Despite their obvious flaws, many erroneous views, Paul loved the church at Corinth and urged them to be of one belief. How difficult is that request? In his section on spiritual gifts, he aims to help us to come to a true understanding of the Holy Spirit and the purpose of the spiritual gifts.

Important for us standing twenty centuries removed is the way Paul begins with the Holy Spirit as the greatest gift in 12:1–3, followed by an understanding of the triune God in vv. 4–6. When questions about spiritual gifts come up, it is good to begin there: the greatest gift is the Holy Spirit himself. He is the one by whom we might know the triune God.

Only after nailing down this truth can we move to understand the purpose. For me, I so appreciate the mandate that – “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” The common good, this is not a competition, nor it is an ego thing... the gifts of the Spirit are for all of us together... discernment must be a community affair otherwise how do we know if we can trust our own judgement, so often affected by our own conscious or unconscious personal agendas.

I am also taken by – “All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as the Spirit wills.” Here I see that we are reminded to trust the gifts given and who gives them and the purpose of such gifts, again for the benefit of the community. How blessed are we when we come together with humility and trust to discern decisions in the presence of such inspiring gifts!

(Reflection by Joy Bowen)

Can you think of an experience in your life you were able to use your gift from the Spirit?

THIS WEEK...

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

PRAYER

Father, I thank you for the Holy Spirit. Please help me to understand how to flow in the gifts of the Spirit so that the name of Jesus is lifted through me. Amen.



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Together as the Body

23 January
2022

3RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Neh: 8: 2-6, 8-10

1Cor: 12: 12-30

Lk 1:1-4, 4: 14-21

Paul again addresses the Corinthians misuse of gifts by giving teaching about the church as the 'body' of Christ. He has already indicated, previously, that the gifts are 'for the common good' and are from the one source. Now he stresses the profound unity and inter-dependence of believers with a metaphor we can all understand.

In the community of Corinth, the "weak" were in fact being despised and shamed by some of the others. Paul calls the church to a better way of life together. Differences within the church are, astonishingly, something that God has gifted us with. So, the diversity within our church community, (and the Society) is not something to be tolerated, or regretted, or manipulated for one's own advantage, but something to be received as the gift that it is.

I remember when I began my ministry at the Talbot, I was so "uncomfortable" with the broad diversity which challenged me daily. Now I am so pleased that I was encouraged to step outside of my comfort zone and embrace diversity. As Fr Greg Boyle SJ says; "we are kin!" Paul's argument implies that not only diversity, but, unity in that diversity, is a reality without which the church cannot live.

It is the same spiritual truth that is elsewhere similarly described: "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" [Galatians 3:26-28]. 'Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.' [Colossians 3:11]

Paul mentions all of this to stress the essential unity and interdependence of believers. Rather than Holy Spirit being a point of division between believers – the haves and the have nots – it is, that which binds all believers together into one body in a relationship of mutual support and dependence. In the context of the not only our church, but our Society, Paul's reminder is pertinent.

(Reflection by Joy Bowen)

Can you think of a time you were able to encourage inclusion instead of division?

THIS WEEK...

We must love our neighbour as being made in the image of God and as an object of His love".

PRAYER

Father help us to see that often our judgements come from fear. Fill our hearts with your love so we may be for all others. Amen



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Love never fails

30 January
2022

4TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Jer: 1: 4-5, 17-19

1Cor: 12: 31 – 13:13

Lk 4: 21-30

Paul says some pretty extraordinary things in his letter to the Corinthians. Let's look at some of his points carefully. *"If I speak with the tongues of people and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."* NOTHING! Faith without love, love enacted, is just not enough.

"And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing". It seems to me that intent here is critical.... If I do "good works" to look good, to feel good, oh dear!

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous, or boastful, or arrogant, or rude. It does not seek its own [advantage], is not provoked, [Love] does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth; [Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." So, all those times I felt jealous, bragged and was arrogant, took offence (how many times a day?) I was not in love?

Richard Rohr says- "Paul is touching upon something that's infinite; it can therefore include all and has an endless ability to pour itself out. When you're in love, you're operating from this foundational sense of abundance, not from scarcity or fear. There is an inherent generosity of spirit, of smile, of gesture, of readiness, of initial acceptance that you immediately sense from any person who is standing inside this Flow. Honestly, you can tell the difference between someone "in love" and someone "not in love" in the first five seconds of almost any encounter."

(Reflection by Joy Bowen)

Were you able to share a generosity of spirit, a smile, a surrender to God's love this week?

THIS WEEK...

"Let us not tire of preaching love: it is the force that will overcome the world". St. Oscar Romero

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, help us to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things, in love. Amen.



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Prayer for the marginalised

6 February
2022

5TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 6: 1-8

1Cor: 15: 1-11

Luke 5:1-11

When Jesus called four of the disciples, they had just returned from a fruitless night's fishing. Jesus invited them to go back out and put the net over the side once more. This time the fish were so plentiful their net broke. It was at this moment that Simon Peter saw and believed, and Jesus said to the disciples: 'Do not be afraid.'

The disciples learnt that if they looked just at what was in front of them, they would see only part of the story. It is easy to look just at what is in front of us; Jesus is constantly inviting us to see the big picture, to see all of humanity.

When we think of Afghanistan, we see people separated from their families and a country in devastation. We see the innocent being killed or otherwise afflicted. We can still picture those desperately clinging to a lifting plane at Kabul airport and those tragically falling to their deaths. Fear and bewilderment and a sense of overwhelming hopelessness may be overtaking the people. We can also see the face of Jesus in every person who is suffering. This is a profoundly sad story in our history of humanity. We may feel there is nothing we can do as we are so far away.

I wonder if we can stop as Vincentians and pray for all the people of Afghanistan. We know we are all the people of God. How do we show that we value all human beings? One way is to help the small number of Afghanistan people who are coming to Australia. We can help them by including them in our community.

(Reflection by Peter Gormly)

In what way can I provide healing and peace to the people of Afghanistan?

THIS WEEK...

*It is not how much we do, but how much love we put into the doing.
It is not how much we give, but how much love we put into the giving.
(Mother Theresa)*

PRAYER

Lord, give us the strength to be open to the spirit and to see and feel the impact that violence is having in the world.



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Who enters God's kingdom?

13 February
2022

6TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Jer 17:5-8

1Cor: 15: 12.16-20

Lk 6: 17.20-26

Jesus is strongly saying that if you are poor, hungry, weeping, the kingdom of God is yours. Is this really possible? What does it mean? God is inviting us to express love to the marginalised in our communities. We may need to think about who the marginalised are. As I reflect on this, I realise anyone who feels excluded from society because they lack the power, resources or skills to advocate for themselves is voiceless and so marginalised.

In thinking about how much God loves the marginalised and those who are grieving and suffering, I am reminded of the story of a young woman who was diagnosed with MS. Her relationship with her partner had broken down, and she needed to go into the hospital for ongoing treatment. Her grief at her body not functioning as before, which made her unable to look after herself and her children, was profound. This woman's identity was so strongly connected to the idea of being a mother that she felt her role in life had been taken away from her.

Anyone who is marginalised in any way has to work extra hard to be able to find a fulfilling life financially, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. As this woman learned to accept the progressive changes in her condition and the dynamics of her family, she found the courage to connect with others, including people with disabilities. By humbly asking for assistance, she was able to rebuild a life of independence.

(Reflection by Peter Gormly)

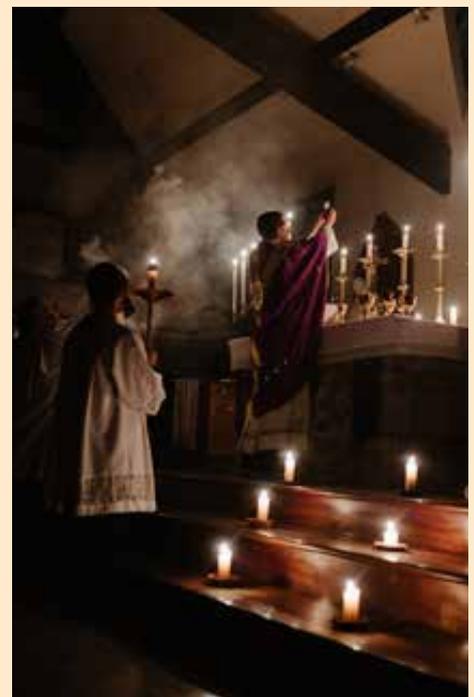
In what ways do I use the power in the people I meet? Do I find ways to share my power with marginalised people?

THIS WEEK...

It is not how much we do, but how much we put into the doing.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, give me the strength and courage to be committed in everything I do, and is done from a place of love and integrity.



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For love alone

20 February
2022

7TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

1 Sam 26: 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

1Cor: 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. They demonstrate being instruments of peace, they express the compassion love of God without show or boast, it is just part of their DNA!

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 have always enjoy gathering with Vincentians for festival Masses and other celebrations, certainly a challenge in the recent COVID times. These times are gatherings expressing companionship, fellowship and love conveyed. I can recognise the words of Frederic Ozanam a few months before his premature death in "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 those in need 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



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Not to judge

27 February
2022

8TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Eccles.27:4-7

1Cor 15:54-58

Lk 6: 39-45

Today's Gospel passage is rich in messages for us as Christians and especially as Vincentians. The parables in this section both comfort and challenge us to live our lives more fully. The theme that permeates these sayings from Jesus, is awareness. Firstly, we need to be self-aware. We need our eyes open, looking ahead to see life and others as they really are, not blind to the realities around us, or to be led by the blind, without reflection and insight. We need to be like our teachers, the people who have mentored, inspired and formed us as individuals and also collectively, in the footsteps of the founders.

Part of this self-awareness, I believe for myself, is also to recognise our faults; the planks we have in our eyes that obstruct what we see, hear and do in life. None of us are perfect. We are all sinful. And so Jesus asks us to deal with our own sinfulness first and foremost. In being honest about who we are, we become more human, and a bit more like Jesus. In society today, the tendency to focus on the *splinter in another person's eye* is quite widespread. Correcting, judging and being critical of others is so common especially in both social media and in mainstream media. It is almost like a form of self-defence, attacking the other so that the focus isn't on us.

As Vincentians, we are called to be non-judgemental, to see Christ in the poor. To be able to do this requires us to firstly to examine our own planks, whatever they might be. Acknowledge them, offer them to God and then, be present to others and to the people we assist, without the barriers of our own ego and sense of righteousness.

The passage ends with a simple statement. *"For a person's words flow out of what fills their heart."* And as we are told in today's First Reading, "Do not praise a person before they have spoken, since this is the test of all."

(Reflection by Greg Ryan)

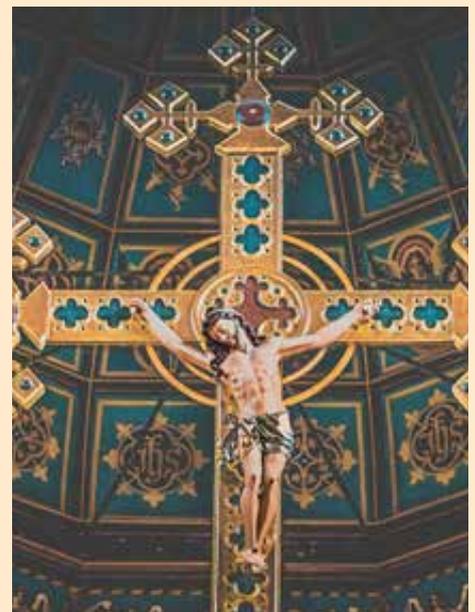
What is my greatest challenge in being non-judgemental?

THIS WEEK...

Reflect on the times in life that I have been aware of the planks in my own eyes and how it might have affected my view or opinion of others.

PRAYER

*Open my eyes Lord
Help me to see your face
Open my eyes Lord
Help me to see*



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6 March
2022

Trusting the leader

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Deut 26: 4-10

Rom 10: 8-13

Lk 4: 1-13

Each year as we come to the first Sunday of Lent, we hear a different version of the same story. The story of Jesus being led into the wilderness where he is tempted for forty days and nights. In this cycle of Year C readings we hear Luke's version, which is substantially the same as those from Matthew and Mark, though Luke fills in some more detail. Last year, Mark told us that the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. But, Luke tells us that He was filled with the Holy Spirit and was led there.

Being led takes great trust and faith. I remember being involved in cooperation games and activities in the past. Trust activities where you had to close your eyes, relax and fall backwards, to be caught and supported by your partner. For me, it always felt uncomfortable and I never quite relaxed. Obviously, my faith level was not high in that situation.

Nevertheless, Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit and he did have total faith and trust in his Father. And this is what sustained him as he faced temptation in the desert. But, these were not the everyday temptations that you and I are presented with. No, the devil here is tempting Jesus to betray or deny his faith in His Father. Temptations that were resisted because of faith and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the second reading for this week, St Paul reminds us: "The Word, that is the faith we proclaim, is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart. If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord...then you will be saved."

So, as we begin our Lenten journey, may we allow the Holy Spirit to be near, to be with us as we take some time away in prayer, to acknowledge our temptations, our demons, and offer them to God.

(Reflection by Greg Ryan)

How can I be more open to the Spirit during my Lenten journey?

THIS WEEK...

"God can do everything and I can do nothing. But if I offer this nothing in prayer to God, everything becomes possible in me." – Carlo Carretto – Letters from the Desert

PRAYER

O God, bless us during this season of spiritual renewal. Fill our hearts and minds with love, that we may be a sign of Jesus to those living in our midst. Amen.



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Listen to him...

13 March
2022

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 15: 5-12, 17-18

Phil 3: 17 - 4: 1

Lk 9: 28-36

In last week's readings, Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit. Led into the wilderness for a time of prayer and reflection. There he was tempted by the devil prior to commencing His public ministry. This week he once again retreats, but only for a short time, taking Peter, James and John with him to a high mountain. In ancient times, mountains were sacred places, places of encounter with God, and it is here that the disciples literally see Jesus in a new light.

In their presence, he was transfigured. They saw Jesus with Elijah and Moses, surrounded by dazzling light. Elijah representing the prophets and Moses, the Jewish Law, with Jesus now fulfilling that Law. The divine Jesus in all his glory was revealed to the disciples in that moment, and Peter's response was, "Master, it is wonderful for us to be here." As wonderful as it was, I imagine they also experienced fear and uncertainty in that moment, wondering at what it all meant. Jesus was talking of his passing which he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.

By journeying with Jesus up that mountain and spending time with him in prayer, their eyes were opened to his glory, opened to the real Jesus. And when they listened, they heard God speak to them saying, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him." Jesus was now being seen by the disciples as someone much more than just a Rabbi.

Being with Jesus in prayer can be a challenge, in much the same way the disciples were challenged to climb the mountain with Jesus and listen to the voice of God. It can also be a fearful and uncertain time as we wait, watch and listen for those moments of revelation. When we truly hear God speaking to us, and see his radiance in the people and world around us, we experience our own moments of transfiguration. We too can reveal the glory of God to others and be a shining light of hope in our world.

(Reflection by Greg Ryan)

When and how has God revealed himself to me?

THIS WEEK...

*Rest a while in prayer and say,
it is good to be here!"*

PRAYER

*"I will walk in the presence of the
Lord, in the land of the living."*



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God Who Sees Us and Care for Us

20 March
2022

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

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", "enfolding" 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 spirituality growing 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! Understanding our reason for membership in this way opens our hearts and minds to diversity and inclusion and possibly asking the questions around our tables; Who is here? Who is not here?

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 we see only our world
and not your world,
let compassion fill us with hope.
AMEN*



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Message of Mercy

27 March
2022

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Josh: 5: 9-12

Cor: 5: 17-21

Lk 15: 1-3, 11-32

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 pigswill but may have shaken their heads to think the son would dream of returning. Nevertheless, 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 of a God not only all-powerful but of a God all forgiving and unconditional in 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.

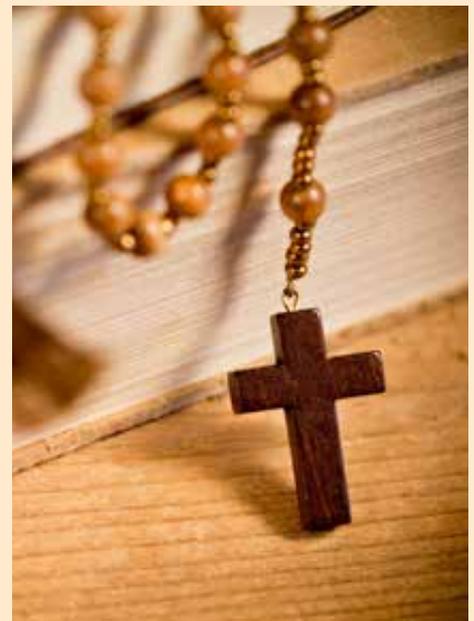
Are we unconditional in our relationships with each other and those we serve?

THIS WEEK...

Light is not so much what you directly see as that by which you see everything else. (Richard Rohr OFM)

PRAYER

*Father,
May faith, hope and love be instruments of compassion and peace in our world today. AMEN*



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True Leadership – Putting Others First

3 April
2022

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Is 43:16-21

Phil 3: 8-14

Jn 8: 1-11

The lament of St Paul in his letter to the faith community in Philippi is prayer-like and profound. We must remember that Paul was not always a loving person and follower of Christ. We first learn of the ancient figure of Saul who was a Zealot “hell-bent” in eradicating any thought of this new rising faith in the falsely claim resurrected messiah even to condemning many Jews and ordering their executions.

Paul lived the letter of the Law until his profound conversion in which he reminds his reader; “for him I have accepted the loss of everything...”

The gospel reading chosen for this Sunday shows the calm strength of Jesus when he confronts the law and 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.

I would always hold that laws and rules are needed to guide a society in behaviours and attitudes although these same laws are as vulnerable as those conferring them. Pope Francis is continually calling us to listen to the signs of the times as does the Rule (1.6). As we continue our journey with Jesus to Jerusalem may we be open to the new spaces of poverty in our world offering a presence of encounter, listening and discernment. We too may count the cost of this like St Paul of “loss of everything” but we do this for a Jesus who gave so much more.

Saint 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”.

How often do we ever share and count our personal costs in our good works?

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*



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Humility

10 April
2022

PASSION SUNDAY (PALM SUNDAY)

Is 50: 4-7

Phil 2; 6-11

Lk 22: 14 - 23: 56

“Let what was seen in Christ Jesus be seen in you.”

Here is the “rub” as they say where the rubber hits the road. He “emptied himself”.... “He humbled himself by being obedient unto death”. He empties himself of all claims to divine glory and honour to become a human being — not a human of high status and honour, but a lowly slave serving other human beings. He humbles himself even to the point of dying a slave’s death, for the shameful and tortuous form of execution by crucifixion was reserved for slaves and rebels against Roman rule.

Jesus is not a passive victim rather he enters fully and willingly into his mission. On this Sunday marking Jesus’ passion, we might ask ourselves does our life together reflect “the same mind that was in Christ Jesus”? Are we looking to the interests of others rather than our own interests?

Jesus emptied himself and took on a human; incarnate, he was not just wearing a human mask but entering into our humanity in all its fullness and sometimes bitterness.

Fr Ronald Rolheiser puts it beautifully; “To “self-empty” in the way Jesus is described as doing means being present without demanding that your presence be recognized and its importance acknowledged; it means giving without demanding that your generosity be reciprocated; it means being invitational rather than threatening, healthily solicitous rather than nagging or coercive; it means being vulnerable and helpless, unable to protect yourself against the pain of being taken for granted or rejected; it means living in a great patience that doesn’t demand intervention, divine or human, when things don’t unfold according to your will; it means letting God be God and others be themselves without either having to submit to your wishes or your timetable....that’s the invitation”.

(Reflection by Joy Bowen)

Can you think of a time you were able to be present in the way described above?

THIS WEEK...

“We must make the choices that enable us to fulfill the deepest capacities of our real selves”.
Thomas Merton

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, help us: to be present without demanding our presence be recognised; to give without demanding; to be invitational rather than threatening, to be vulnerable; living in a great patience that doesn’t demand intervention, divine or human, when things don’t unfold according to my will. Amen.



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How do we recognise Jesus?

17 April
2022

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.

Moreover, Luke adds to these accounts the unique narration interpretation of the meeting on the way to Emmaus. Cleopas and his companion reveal all the disappointment and sense of grief and loss of the disciples, as they describe the events of Good Friday and Easter morning in Jerusalem. The unrecognised stranger's response is to them for their failure to believe the message of the prophets concerning the Messiah. When they have recognised Jesus as he breaks bread with them at table, he disappears and they hurry not only to have their news confirmed by the apostles but to spread the news and begin deep faith in the light of Christ.

(Reflection by Jack de Groot)

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

THIS WEEK...

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

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

PRAYER

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

Breathe on our minds and open our eyes

that we too may know him in the breaking of bread. AMEN



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Where is the proof?

24 April
2022

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 5: 12-16

Apoc 1: 9-13, 17-19

Jn 20:19-31

We live in a world where we always want proof or evidence. Faith goes beyond proof and evidence.

If we reflect on the story of Thomas, we hear Jesus saying, "Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed." We do not see Jesus physically walking the land as the disciples did, and sometimes our fear gets in the way of seeing, feeling, and noticing what is around us. How often are we told something and then check it out to see if it is correct?

Many years ago, I worked with a woman I shall call Mary, who was legally blind. Her bank account held a reasonable investment. Such was her trust in humanity that she would hand over her bank book to another to withdraw money for her. Mary was often viewed as less because she was a woman in a dominant male culture. Even her family believed her blindness meant she lacked intelligence.

But Mary had innate strength. She was a woman of love, integrity, grace and trust. Though unable to see anyone clearly, she never demanded evidence or proof. Yes, sadly, at times her trust was betrayed, but she continued to believe that people were mostly good, and she held complete trust in God.

When taken advantage of, resentment never arose. She would say: "They needed the money more than I did."

(Reflection by Peter Gormly)

How and where did I encounter God in my life this week?

THIS WEEK...

*If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.
(Henry Newman)*

PRAYER

Dear Lord, I pray for all the people who have taken advantage of me. Help them to encounter love, integrity, and acceptance.



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Synod
2021
2023

For a synodal Church
communion | participation | mission

Spiritual
Reflection
Guide



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