



# Spiritual Reflection Guide



IOANNES PAVLVS II P.M. ITERVM PORTAM SANCTAM APERVIT ET CLAVSIT ANNO MAGNI IVBILAEI AB INCARNATIONE DOMINI MM - MMI	FRANCISCVS PP PORTAM SANCTAM ANNO MAGNI IVB. MM. MMI A IOANNE PAVLO PP. II RESESTATAM ET CLAVSAM APERVIT ET CLAVSIT ANNO IVB. MISERICORDIAE MMXV. MMXXVI
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***Starting Anew in Christ***

# The God-bearer

1 Jan  
2023

## THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Num 6:22-27

Gal 4:4-7

Lk 2:16-21

The gospel from Luke for today's Solemnity holds a wonderful phrase; "she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart". These words are as important for us today as they were for the Lucan communities of the ancient world. Today, we express this differently with sentiments of prayer, reflection, discernment, all core to the nature of our Rule and Catholic Social Teachings.

Author and scholar, Debie Thomas, wrote of Mary in her book, *Into The Mess & Other Jesus Stories* as the God-bearer and spoke of Mary's courage in her "yes" response to the Messenger of God. Thomas shares, "I know that Mary is often described as docile, but I see something remarkably bold in her willingness to receive and to rest in the delight of her Creator. Imagine the audacity of this young peasant girl, scandalously pregnant, peddling an angel story that no one will believe, living on the unremarkable outskirts of the empire, to declare without shame or apology that she is highly favoured of God. This is not the song of a spiritually timid human being. This is the song of a young woman who is passionately in love with a God who is passionately in love with her."<sup>1</sup>

Mary, Mother of God holds much for us to ponder as her life, from what we understand through scripture and Tradition, is complex and deeply layered. I think it is this depth that the early Society, especially Frédéric, called to nurture a deeper relationship with Mary and in 1834 deemed Mary the Mother of God as protector of the Society.

Thomas concludes this chapter on the God-bearer in these wonderful words, "Mary's story is a story about what happens when a human being encounters the divine and decides of her own volition to lean in and say yes to the God who has said yes to us. As we do so, may the courage, faith, and joy of Mary be ours, and may the Holy Spirit who hovered over Mary to quicken the life of her Son, quicken us to new life as well."<sup>2</sup>

**What is your relationship with Mary the God-bearer?**

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p.10

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, D, *Into The Mess & Other Jesus Stories*, © 2022 Wipf and Stock Publishers, p.5

## THIS WEEK...

*Her answer,  
between breath and breath,  
Wrings from  
her innocence our Sacrament!  
In her white body  
God becomes our Bread.  
Thomas Merton*

## PRAYER

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us. Amen*



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# Life changing moments

8 Jan  
2023

## THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Is 60: 1-6

Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6

Mt 2: 1-12

In the gospel today, the narrative begins after the birth of Jesus, which gives the sense that the visit was some time after the manger scene and that once they were led to Bethlehem the wise men were greeted at the house by the child with his mother. For some this alone is an epiphany!

Matthew's gospel presents two responses to revelation. One of the wise men, the other, of Herod. For the wise ones it is a response of "delight" and "homage"; for Herod, it is a response in fear and distress, for when he "heard this he was perturbed". The wise men acknowledge the transcendent moment before them whereas Herod can only accept the threat to his world, his power and his authority. If I am honest both responses resonate personally!

Epiphany moments are life changing. St (Mother) Teresa of Kolkata spoke often of her epiphany moment on the train to Darjeeling. Her response changed her life and, in many ways, changed the world. Thomas Merton spoke often of his epiphany on the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Walnut. His perspective changed profoundly towards the world of no longer condemnation and flight from it but of compassion. This experience in Louisville had so transformed his vision that he began to see all persons in the light of God. His solitude was not his own but it 'belongs to the world and to God. St Vincent de Paul had a profound epiphany for the voice of the voiceless in celebrating Mass with the servants of the de Gondi Family, "the poor have much to teach you". Even Frédéric is touched by the divine when after responding harshly to the Italian man after his frustrations of assisting him on numerous occasions throw him from his house but later caught up with him in the Luxemburg gardens with a changed heart.

We all experience epiphany moments throughout our lives, the difference is recognising them as the experience of God.

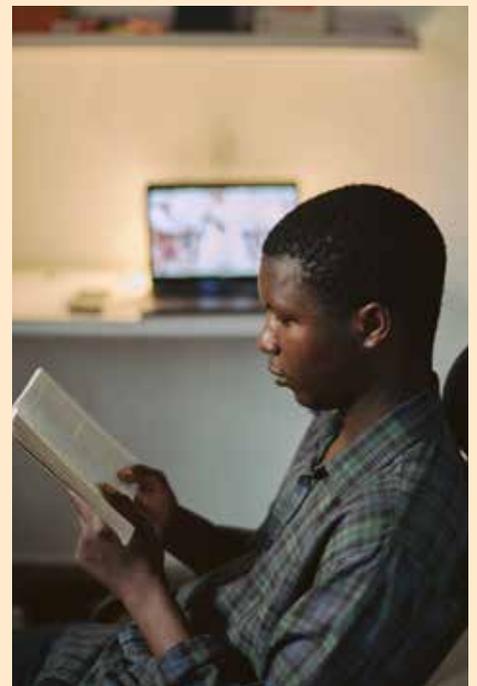
**Are you able to share an Epiphany moment?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"God does not give divine joy to us for ourselves alone"*  
Thomas Merton

## PRAYER

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



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# The Man from Nazareth

15 Jan  
2023

## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Is 49: 3, 5-6

1Cor 1: 1-3

Jn 1: 29-34

Have you seen the portrait of John the Baptist by Leonardo da Vinci? The facial expression is so deeply content, satisfied, so sure of his life's purpose as he points upward to the heavens, to God. Artists frequently depict John the Baptist with one arm outstretched pointing to Jesus. John the Baptist's specific role was to point to the Son of God and baptise him. We hear in the gospel-

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The phrase "Lamb of God" for the Jews certainly stirs biblical overtones of the Passover lamb, and of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, led like a lamb to the slaughter, bearing our sins.

We remember that Mary and Elizabeth, John's mother were cousins and John was about six months older than Jesus. The weak and tender child in Mary's arms stands, grown in the waters of the Jordan with John who continues –

"This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I, did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

Jesus, in his gentle forgiving way, breaks down the hardness of our hearts. In the touch of his Spirit in baptism he heals us and makes us free. Perhaps if we can "point to God", to those around us, we too can also feel deeply content, satisfied, and sure of our life's purpose. As Vincentian's that is our call.

*(Reflection from Joy Bowen)*

**What are the ways I can "point to God" to share the good news of the gospel like John?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"With Jesus we find again the courage to carry on and the strength to remain firm. The encounter with the Lord is the source."*

*Pope Francis*

## PRAYER

*Loving God, you cut through the mesh of self-interest that entangles us and open us up to the life you want for us so that we can reach out to others and help to free them from their burdens.*



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# Point to God

22 Jan  
2023

## 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Is 8:23-9:3

1Cor: 1;10-13,17

Mt 4:12-23

Who would ever forget the inspiring words of Dr Martin Luther King... his “I have a dream” speech still echoes despite the years! The inaugural speech of a new national leader is a pivotal moment. We listen with keen ears. We long for authentic words of vision and hope to raise our wearied spirits. Jesus’ inaugural speech, with its message of good news, holds his audience captive. He offers truth, healing, hope, compassion, and peace to the hopeless, the same goals as Vincentians!

As I read this passage, I remembered living in Cowra for a few years and I recalled how people would commonly introduce someone. It was not only the complicated history of the relationship to each other it was exactly where they had lived, something like... “Hi, this is Mary, she’s married to the first son of the Smiths from Young, who used to be in Canowindra, before they moved!!! It always made me smile; I was not used to it. The numerous geographical details to emphasises that Jesus was a particular person who lived out his short life in a particular place and in a particular moment of history. It situates him. He is “that man from Nazareth”-- totally human, just like us. As the gospels gradually reveal, he is truly the Son of God, the full self-disclosure of God to an unsuspecting world.

According to Matthew, when Jesus settles in Galilee, he becomes a ‘light’ for the people of those regions through his teaching and healing. He calls his disciples who, despite the suddenness of the invite, despite the immediacy of the call, drop everything to join him. ... “at once”, “immediately”. What an impression Jesus must have made on them!

Jesus is willing and able to heal. I pray for those in need. I acknowledge my own neediness and humbly ask for healing.

*(Reflection from Joy Bowen)*

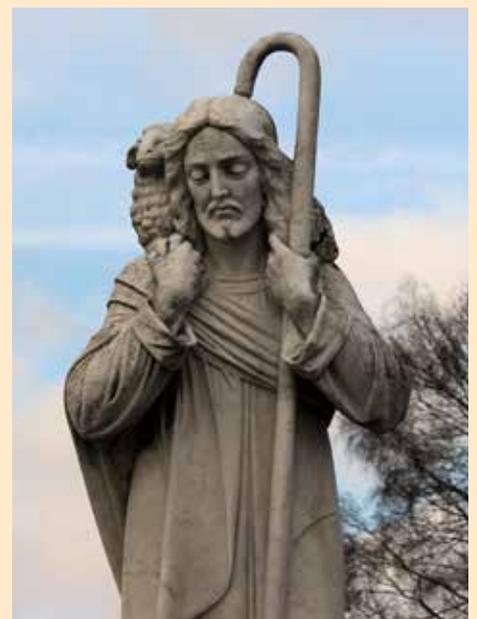
**Is Jesus the light enlightening my daily living? If so, how do I know?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“Embrace the whole world in a network of love”  
(Blessed Frédéric Ozanam)*

## PRAYER

*Lord, you call on me to reform my life and place my faith in this good news. Deepen my belief. May I take trust in the God of love you came to reveal.*



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# In our suffering

29 Jan  
2023

## 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13

1Cor. 1:26-31

Mt 5:1-12

Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, says it this way: “the way down is the way up.” Or he says, you can say it the other way, “the way up is the down.” Descent is certainly not a process that is taken up by modern Western society, there is no money to exchange, nor does anyone want to descend and sit in their suffering.

He continues, “There is a cruciform shape to reality it seems, and loss precedes all renewal, emptiness makes way for every new infilling, every transformation in the universe requires the surrendering of a previous “form.” Nothing in the human psyche likes this pattern.” No wonder we try so hard to avoid it!

In our suffering we are flung off the path of our regular “Ho hum” life, challenged anew to let some old worn-out beliefs die and grow some that are perhaps more mature. Our suffering has us like Job, sitting and shaking our fist at God and demanding, ‘why!’ In time, with support and hard work we can transform.

Jesus embodies an all-encompassing love and expresses his wisdom so beautifully in the Beatitudes to show us his interior landscape, a source of your joy. This is not a set of regulations, but a vision of where transformation can grow, eventually.

We can’t and don’t get to peace, contentment, or blessedness without grappling with whatever form of suffering life gives us. And that is the way of the cross. The way to new life and resurrection is through suffering. Resurrection means that love and life win in the end, no matter what! Richard Rohr continues with, “Love is the energy driving the universe forward.”

What most of the world sees as tragic or empty, Jesus sees as blessed: humility, mourning, gentleness, peacefulness, and other virtues. I see the blessedness each time I walk alongside the men at the Talbot, their suffering so palpable. The Beatitudes are the vision statement of Jesus. He lived what he said – that all of life is blessed, even the experiences we would never ask for, all of it.

*(Reflection from Joy Bowen)*

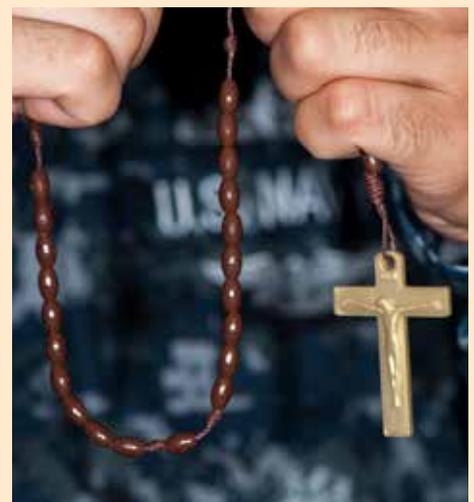
**When I am in spaces that cause me suffering, do I remember that I am explicitly blessed?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“You are the servant of the poor, always smiling and good-humoured. They are your masters, terribly sensitive and exacting master you will see. Embrace the whole world in a network of love.” (Blessed Frédéric Ozanam)*

## PRAYER

*Lord, remind me, when suffering comes that it can be a source of deeper union with you and a process where I dig deeper int. Give me strength.*



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# Shine a light into the darkness

5 Feb  
2023

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 58:7-10

1 Cor 2:1-5

Mt 5:13-16

Let's break this open, because of the many Vincentians I know it is a very common practice to shy away from promoting boldly all the good works they do in the Society... however what if we were to look at this shining a light as part of the gift of humility?

When we look at the word 'light', it can be simply defined as "the brightness that lets you see things" (Collins Dictionary). The BRIGHTNESS that lets you SEE things. It is a way to reveal much. The good, the bad and the indifferent.

The reading from Isaiah highlights for us something that is essentially Vincentian, to share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless... Whilst we may do this so naturally in our day-to-day core work, we might be challenged when we read in Matthew that our light is to shine before others that they may see the good deeds. There is likely already a sense of not wanting to boast. However, our good works are for restoration, inclusivity, and accompaniment. If we understand this, then what we are shining a light on is celebrating a transformation of the lives of those we serve.

Therefore, this ability to shine the light into the darkness is accessing humility, as what it leads us to be is that we are no longer needed. That the people we serve do not need to rely on us or our services, that they may no longer be hungry, no longer be oppressed, no longer in need.

*(Reflection from Corinne Lindsell)*

**Can you recall a moment that you have seen restoration and transformation within the lives of those we assist?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"Let us do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hands"*  
Frédéric Ozanam

## PRAYER

*Lord, may we celebrate all the ways we are able to share a hopeful future with those we assist and may we be filled with gratitude for your providence. Amen.*



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# Let your Yes be yes and your No be no

12 Feb  
2023

## SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sir 15:15-20

1 Cor 2:6-10

Mt 5:17-37

As Vincentians we have a deep calling on our lives. One that is committed to serving the most vulnerable, through faith in action.

This is not an easy commitment, it is one that draws from us compassion and empathy and requires us to advocate and challenge systems that add to oppression and marginalisation. One that we are to be generous with our time and our fellowship. One that requires us to strongly discern our actions, decisions and positions.

In the first reading we read that “no one does he command to act unjustly, to none does he give license to sin” and yet we serve those who have endured the harshness of the world and circumstance and we are in a position to offer hope and to work towards a more just and compassionate society. This is a position of trust, a position of power. We must be true to our Yes.

We must live out our lives as authentic human beings offering this hope to others who have potentially lost hope in humanity, no matter their circumstances, as The Rule stipulates “no act of charity is foreign to the Society”.

Therefore, we are asked at every act of service to re-commit to our vocation; let your Yes be yes and your No be no.

*(Reflection from Corinne Lindsell)*

**Can you recognise a time in your Vincentian journey that you have struggled with your commitment?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“Visiting and dedicating themselves to the poor, whose faith and courage often teach Vincentians how to live. Vincentians assume the needs of the poor as their own”  
The Rule 2.2*

## PRAYER

*Lord, may we always know what is in your heart for those we assist. May the work of our hands be for your glory, Amen.*



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# In Dwelling of the Holy Spirit

19 Feb  
2023

## SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Lev 19:1-2, 17-18

1 Cor 3:16-23

Mt 5:38-48

“Do you know that you are the temple of God, and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you?” I often think about this when I see how we reverence the tabernacle, the altar, the scriptures, but do we show that same reverence for one another? If the Holy Spirit dwells in us, should we not be showing great reverence for each person we meet?

With this perspective in mind, we hear in the rest of the readings a moral code not to keep a record of wrongdoings of those we meet and to not turn our backs on those who need us.

I sit on a management committee for charity that is dear to my heart, as part of this charity they raise funds by running market stalls and I can recall a story from the committee; A young man was lurking around the stall and the volunteers running the stall knew that he was pocketing various items, but they felt powerless to confront him. At this meeting, there was a robust discussion around strategies to deal with theft and ways to reduce it, when the Director of the charity simply said “at the end of the day he must have needed it more than us”.

What this did was disarm any tension and any judgment and allowed everyone to sit and just reflect on what this man might have been bearing at the time. As mentioned in our gospel reading “he makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust”, so what the Lord sees is beyond what we can see... sometimes we may catch ourselves saying ‘why do bad things happen to good people?’ – this is often the great mystery of the human experience, but who are we to sit in judgement of who is good? Do we show reverence to all those we come across, knowing that the Holy Spirit dwells in them also?

*(Reflection from Corinne Lindsell)*

**Has there been a time where you have judged someone in need based on their circumstances and actions?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Reverence: A feeling of great respect or admiration for something or someone.  
(Oxford Dictionary)*

## PRAYER

*Lord, create in us a pure heart,  
that we may not sit in judgement,  
but that we seek to understand  
others in need, Amen.*



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# Beginning the path to Easter

26 Feb  
2023

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 2: 7-9, 3:1-7

Rom 5: 12-19

Mt 4: 1-11

So, we come to the season of Lent once more; the traditional time of reflection and penance as we make ourselves ready to celebrate Easter. Pope Francis also calls it a time of renewal. "The path to Easter demands that we renew our faces and hearts as Christians through repentance, conversion and forgiveness so as to live fully the abundant grace of the paschal mystery."

To begin that process we must first of all be honest with ourselves about the areas of our life that we need to renew. Oscar Wilde once famously said, "I can resist everything except temptation." Temptation is just such a big part of our human condition and I think Oscar is just reminding us how hard it can be at times for us mere mortals to stay on the straight and narrow. Jesus, too, in his humanity, was also open to temptation, though unlike Oscar and us, was able to resist.

Both our first reading and gospel share that common theme of temptation today. Adam and Eve tempted by the *snake* to eat the fruit from the one tree in the garden that was forbidden, the tree of knowledge. And Jesus, commencing his public ministry, with a 40-day retreat into the desert, to be challenged multiple times by the devil. So, Adam and Eve were tempted by knowledge, knowing all things and being like God. So, what was Jesus tempted with? After suffering hunger in the desert, he was tempted to turn stones into bread, a convenient biblical version of fast food. Then, taken to the temple parapets and challenged to leap and be saved by angels followed by the offer of ownership of all the kingdoms of the world, if only he would bow down and worship the devil.

Jesus was not about taking the easy path or misusing his power to attain the things valued by this world, such as instant gratification, power, popularity, wealth, and prestige. His mission was to bring God into the world and show us how to be in relationship with God. So, as we begin Lent, let us take some time to take stock and begin our renewal process.

*(Reflection from Greg Ryan)*

**In what areas of my life do I sense the need to change – to renew?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"Put God first and then all other things will fall into their proper place."*

## PRAYER

*Our Father who art in heaven, lead us not into temptation. Amen.*



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# Being transfigured

5 March  
2023

## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 12: 1-4

2Tim 1: 8-10

Mt 17: 1-9

Today in Matthew's gospel we hear and read about Jesus' Transfiguration. In the verses just prior to this scripture, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the coming journey to Jerusalem and the events that would lead him to Calvary. And so, following these disclosures, Jesus takes Peter, James and John away. Up a mountain, to be alone in prayer.

In that prayerful moment between Jesus and his Father, he is transfigured. The disciples briefly see Jesus as the Son of God and are embraced in that experience of relationship, love, and peace. They see a vision of Jesus with Moses and Elijah and hear God's voice confirming for them that Jesus is the chosen one, his Son, the new covenant. Peter wants to camp and stay in this space and place of revelation, but Jesus directs them down the mountain because he knows that the journey is not finished, and he still has his Father's work to complete.

The Transfiguration illustrates for us two essential elements of discipleship. The need to have time away in prayer, reflection, stillness and quiet. And the need to return to the world in which we live. "We often wish the rest of the world would just go away, but the truth is, we can't love God and ignore the world around us. We can't love God unless we love our neighbour; and so, like the disciples we must follow Christ down the mountain again and become involved in human suffering and confront it with compassion." (Fr. Jim Reilly)

And for Vincentians, this is where the Transfiguration experience continues. It is when we gather prayerfully together as members and reflect not only on the scriptures but on the work, we do in God's name. It is in the daily contact with the people we assist, especially those who are marginalised and in need. Being open to see the face of Christ revealed in the person we are visiting and being the face of God for them.

*(Reflection from Greg Ryan)*

**Where have I encountered Christ this week?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Take some time out to see God in the world and people around you. And reflect on what God is asking of you at this time in your life.*

## PRAYER

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*



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# Home truths...

12 March  
2023

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Ex17: 3-7

Rom 5: 1-2, 5-8

Jn 4: 5-42

Have you ever had the experience of being told some home truths? Something you know but don't want to really admit to yourself and own as a truth. I have, as have most of you too I suspect. Spouses, parents, and good friends are often the bearers of these messages and as a rule have good intentions based out of a loving concern for us. They are usually hard and challenging moments but if reflected on honestly, can be life changing. In today's gospel, the Samaritan woman at the well has such an experience when she meets Jesus.

Many times, in the gospels we see Jesus' challenge not only people, but the norms, traditions and customs of life in the Jewish world. He wasn't afraid to challenge conventions and in today's gospel we hear again the story of the Samaritan woman at the well and how Jesus dared to be counter cultural.

Jews and Samaritans despised each other and didn't interact, making every effort to avoid each other. The Jews believed that Samaritans were part pagan, not pure and therefore unclean. Jews generally didn't even travel through Samaria. They would often take a longer route around to avoid contact. But not Jesus. He travels with his disciples into Samaria. He goes alone to Jacob's well where he meets a Samaritan woman, which was also against convention. And to complete the story, she was a sinner and an outcast. Women would usually travel to the well together and in the morning, not the middle of the day. This woman however wasn't accepted by her own community due to her lifestyle.

During their conversation at the Well, Jesus revealed himself to her as the Christ that she and others had been waiting for. He challenged her to believe, telling the story of her life and multiple husbands, which she accepted in a life changing moment. Jesus accepted her and loved her as she was, and this offered her hope. She then returned to her town to evangelise others leading many to seek out Jesus.

*(Reflection from Greg Ryan)*

**How do I share Jesus, the Christ, with others?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Be aware of the hidden truths in my life. Reflect on them and offer them to God in prayer*

## PRAYER

*Lord, may we also be like the Samaritan woman: willing to examine our lives in Jesus' presence  
Amen*



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# Feast of St Joseph

19 March  
2023

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

1Sam 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

Eph 5: 8-14

Jn 9: 1-41

In an Apostolic Letter entitled *Patris Corde* (“With a Father’s Heart”), Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father; a father who is creatively courageous, a working father, a father in the shadows.

The Pope begins this letter by highlighting Joseph’s ordinariness. He was an ordinary man, living in an ordinary time and in an ordinary place. Yet, he rose to the occasion by taking Mary as his wife and raising Jesus as his own. The Pope says, against the backdrop of a global pandemic, it’s important to underscore the importance of ordinary people who have risen to the occasion with love and courage to be of help to others, especially in our Vincentian services. St. Joseph, like so many people of our own day who go “unnoticed” and are “a daily, discreet and hidden presence” in our world, people who are helping to make this world a better place.

Pope Francis reminds us that St. Joseph is the patron to a variety of different kinds of people. He is the patron of husbands and fathers, the special patron of those who have been forced to leave their homeland due to war, persecution, or poverty and, importantly, Joseph teaches us the value and dignity of work, core to our Catholic Social teachings.

Throughout the scripture narratives, Jesus expresses a profound and intimate image of God as Father, *Abba*. Like many of his teachings and parables they come from life in the ancient world, his own personal experiences. To this it is only right to assume that this central metaphor for God is his expression of the love of Joseph in his life. Pope Francis reflects, “Joseph was the earth shadow of the heavenly father.”

Pope Francis includes a prayer to St. Joseph in his Apostolic Letter. That prayer ends with these words: “Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen.”

**Does St Joseph play a part in your spiritual life?**

## THIS WEEK...

*For my eyes have seen your salvation which you promise to the nations (Luke 2:30)*

## PRAYER

*Divine Master,  
We ask for faith like that of St Joseph, a man of profound love, compassion and faith. As we trust in your words, may we also have faith in ourselves as your children of light. Amen*



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# Jesus wept...

26 March  
2023

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Ezek 37: 12-14

Rom 8: 8-11

**Jn 11: 1-45**

It is said that the shortest sentence in the scriptures is “Jesus wept.”

I remember the morning my father died. Anne and I had visited him in hospital the evening before, but he was sleeping soundly so we decided to leave him, and I would visit him early the next day and catch up with the doctors. When I arrived in his room the following day, I noticed that the lights were off and that the television was also off. Dad was lying there peacefully. When I tried to arouse him, sadly, he did not stir. I then headed to the Nurses Station and asked about his condition and although I knew in my head what had happened, the emotions of the heart were overwhelming when the nurses confirmed the reality for me. Then, Leo wept.

In John’s narrative about Lazarus, the evangelist emphasises the love of Jesus for Lazarus and his two sisters, and how moved he was by their grief. He is described as speaking in “great distress and with a sigh that came from the heart”. He wept, and onlookers commented; “See how much he loved him”. Throughout this Lenten time, we have focussed on our relationship with God. It is through such times as this that God is the closest; in fact, God’s closeness is palpable. On a very personal note, at times of the death of someone you love most it is of great consolation and comfort to know a God that will stand beside me and weep.

In conversation with Martha, Jesus comforts and challenges her faith — and mine. Martha expresses her faith in the Old Testament sense of bodily resurrection then Jesus, possibly comforting her by holding her, tells us “I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me even though they die they will live and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Martha answers in a post-Easter statement; “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into this world”. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus’ relationship with Jesus was more than simply a deep friendship, for it was through their relationship that the Spirit of God dwelled.

As our Lenten time ends may we continue to deepen this relationship with a God who stands with us, cries with us and celebrates life with us in our pilgrim journey.

## THIS WEEK...

*Lord, for your faithful ones,  
Life is changed, not ended  
(Preface of Mass for Dead)*

## PRAYER

*Loving Saviour,  
You ask us to represent you in  
compassion with those who mourn.  
Give them your loving gift of peace.  
Amen*



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# Who Really Was on Trial?

2 April  
2023

## PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Is 50: 4-7

Phil 2: 6-11

Mt 26:14-27:66

I adapted this reflection from Fr Ron Rolheiser a couple of years ago but feel it speaks much for today and the coming of this special and sacred time of Holy week.

“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

*And that which is Christ-like within us shall rise up. It shall love and create. (Michael Leunig)*



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# Darkness to light!

9 April  
2023

## SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION

Acts 10:34, 37-43

Col 3:1-4 or 1Cor 5: 6-8

**Jn 20: 1-9** or Mt 28: 1-10 or Lk 24: 13-35

The gospel narrative of John has a few wonderful moments for our reflections.

We begin the time of resurrection, the joy of Easter morn, in the darkness; “while it was still dark”. When I read this, it reminded me immediately of the beginning of time announced in Genesis; “darkness covered the face of the deep”. In both narratives, it was from the darkness that we received light, the light of creation and the light of Christ. How often in our lives when the chips are down or we are simply doing it tough, that light in the form of a smile, a helping hand, some advice, a hug, rises and restores our faith, our hope and even our lost love.

I remember a story my father told me. When I was only 11 months old, I needed a cleft palate repaired. Hospital and surgeon were booked, but when my parents arrived at the hospital reception the clerk asked my father about payment upfront. Dad quickly apologised (or “white lied!”) and said that he had left the cheque book at home and that he would fix it up the following day. Well, with no health insurance and very little in the bank as we lived week by week, there was no chance payment was going to happen the following day.

Dad left in a very dark place; he had left his newborn son in the trust of a hospital for much needed surgery that he could ill afford. Then he told me in his moment of prayer the phone rang at home, and it was his sister-in-law who simply wanted to know the best way to transfer money for the hospital as she wanted to help and had the means to do so. In tears, he could not thank her enough and both my parents never knew how she knew about their situation

I guess when dark times are illuminated by light, Easter lifts our hearts and raises hope! In this, Vincentians are Easter people.

May the God of love who comes to us out of the darkness continue to always light of lives so we too may light the paths for others.

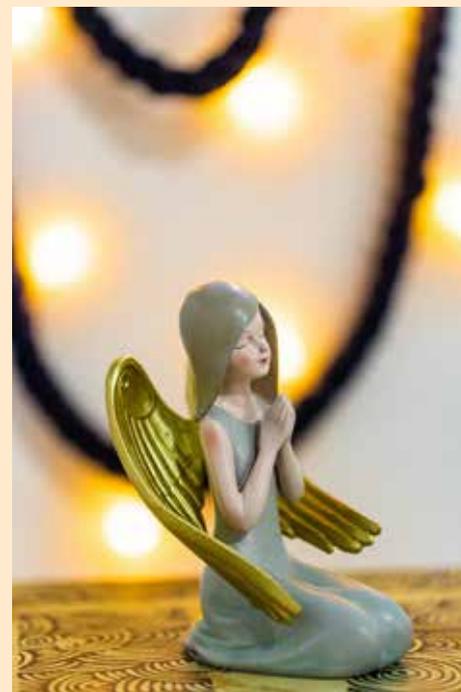
**When have we been amazed by moments of light?**

## THIS WEEK...

*As we contemplate Christ's Resurrection, may we be Easter people for all those we meet.*

## PRAYER

*Risen Lord, Give us faith and understand that we may live in hope of our own resurrection. Amen.*



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# Vincentian mercy

16 April  
2023

## DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 42-47

1Pet 1: 3-9

Jn 20: 19-31

In 2016, Pope Francis called the Catholic faithful to an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. This year began with a ceremony where the Pope pushed open the Holy Doors of St Peter's Basilica and asked that all bishops across the globe do similar in their Cathedrals and holy places. The Holy Door is a symbol of our starting anew in the life of Christ and that we start this renewal through God's mercy. It is a tradition that dates to the fifteenth century.

The Year of Mercy was a year marked by papal documents especially *Misericordiae Vultus*, special Masses, special prayers and conscience acts of mercy. There were retreats reflecting on the Parable of the Prodigal Son which Pope Francis highlighted as the model of mercy and Rembrandt's famous painting of the merciful Father became an icon of mercy personified.

*Misericordiae Vultus* held the importance of corporal and spiritual acts of mercy and it is these that lead my focus in mercy. The corporal acts are "to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead." The spiritual acts of mercy are "to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead".

Mercy is like leaven in bread. Leaven is the life of bread, it is what makes it rise, makes it look like bread, taste and feel like bread. Leaven is its life source, when you cut a piece of bread you can't say, please take the leaven out or leave it on the side. Our mercy is an integrated and integral part of us. It is the life force that enables us as a lay Catholic organisation purpose; it is the heart of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Many of us come from all faith backgrounds but we connect to the simple values that we hold; compassion, justice, dignity and respect. These values are very human. They are also imperatives from the gospels calling us to act and give life to others. Compassionate is the action and the deepest of all love.

Love is at the very heart of the depth of compassionate care. What gave our founders life in their harsh unwelcoming environments...Love. Love for the vulnerable, love for those that need it at the most meaningful part of their life.

Divine Mercy Sunday calls us to our Vincentian spiritual heart and reminds us of our need for God's mercy and our vocation to share God's mercy with all we walk with.

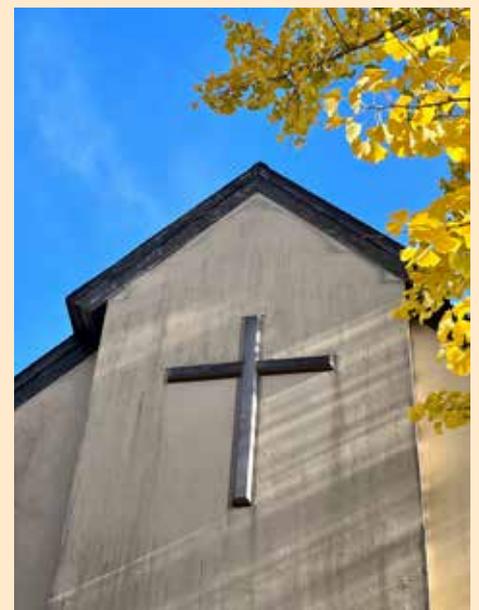
**How do we express mercy to others?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"If we could measure compassion,  
the symbolic unit of measurement  
might be simply a glass of water"*  
Neil Roberts (1954-2002)

## PRAYER

*May the Lord bless us in our  
searching and our questions,  
may they be the gateway to wisdom,  
enlightenment, peace and mercy.  
Amen*



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# Birth of Frédéric, Birth of the Society

23 April  
2023

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 14, 22-33

1Pet 1: 17-21

Lk 24: 13-35

Today is the 210<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Blessed Frédéric Ozanam, and the 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

*“And you, who pride yourself on your Catholicity, what are you doing now for the poor? Show us your works”.*

This was the taunt from an anti-religious debating opponent to Frédéric Ozanam that led to a meeting between Ozanam and his friends and the founding of the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1833. This date was also significant as it was the twentieth birthday of Frédéric Ozanam, a youth initiative by all standards!

These young men attracted the comment *“What can seven young men hope to achieve in alleviating the suffering of Paris?”* Fortunately, Ozanam paid little heed to such comments, determined to satisfy his own conscience that he was doing what he could to bear witness to his Christian upbringing by assisting those less fortunate in the community.

An important part of this story, that still holds significance today, is the group agreed to meet weekly to strengthen their friendship, develop and share faith and spirituality and to respond to the needs of those they served. This is in some ways the reason for a Conference, a place where *“Confreres”* met to share life, faith, prayer and reflection; not just a place of business!

In 1834, the expanding group discerned three important actions. Firstly, was to name the Conference after the spiritual patron St Vincent de Paul, the second was to sought the protection of Mary the Mother of God and the third, and far more difficult action, was to spilt conference (group) into three separate conferences. Through this difficult decision, which was not decided until 1835, other conferences were encourage and sprang up in parishes around Paris. In its first decade, the Society spread to 48 other cities in France and Italy and numbered over 9,000 members. After some years, the Society came to Australia. The first establishment was in Melbourne in 1854 with Fr Gerald Ward, which seemed to dissipate after a short while, then significantly to Sydney with Charles O’Neill in 1881.

The Ozanam story is not some story of ancient history that means little to our story today. It’s a living breathing reality that each day gets added to by the 1,000,000 active members around the world, including the dedicated Vincentian staff and volunteers who support the Society in fulfilling its mission.

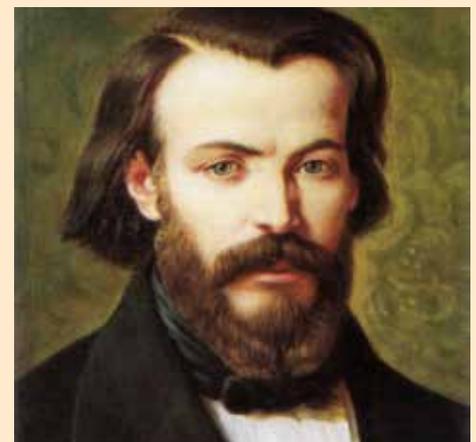
**The question we should continue to ask ourselves is, would Frédéric Ozanam be drawn to the Society today?**

## THIS WEEK...

*All my life I have followed  
the poetry of love in preference  
to the poetry of anger.  
I will not change now.  
(Frédéric Ozanam)*

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father,  
Blessed Frédéric Ozanam was  
for our times a faithful witness to  
your justice and your love.  
May we as his followers, in the  
same spirit, live in the service of  
our brothers and sisters.  
Amen*



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# Revisiting the smell of the sheep

30 April  
2023

## 4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14, 36-41

1Pet 2: 20-25

Jn 10:1-10

A couple of Sunday's ago we collected our thoughts on God's mercy through the feast of Divine Mercy Sunday. This week I was reminded again of mercy in the reading from St Peter as he recounts that Jesus endured all suffering without insult or retaliation. One of the Corporal works of Mercy is "to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked" and although a difficult challenge to us all, we reflected that those who provide food and drink, clothing and shelter for our own families, and those who cook and clean at home, are already practicing these works, at least outwardly. The deeper challenge is to follow in Jesus' actions by practicing them inwardly as well, from the heart, not grudgingly or merely out of routine, but with compassion and love for family, doing all to the glory of God and giving thanks to God the Father for providing for all our needs. In this way, as St. Paul wrote, the simplest daily chore becomes "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," a true "spiritual worship" (Rom 12.1)

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

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

**Would Pope Francis smell the sheep among Vincentians?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Fidelity is always a change, a blossoming, a growth. The Lord brings about a change in those who are faithful to him."*  
(Pope Francis)

## PRAYER

*Father of all, bring relief to the oppressed, the hungry, those without hope.*

*Give them courage. Amen*



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# Spiritual Reflection Guide

***Hosanna  
to the King***