



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

January – April  
2020

# Spiritual Reflection Guide

*Angel of Heartfelt Mercy*



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflection Guides. The liturgical cycle for 2020 follows in general the Gospel of Matthew with some highlights from the Gospel of John (Year A).

Over these weeks we will journey from Christmastide to our Lenten time, then to the most holy time of the year for Christians, that of Holy Week, and the Easter Triduum. This Lent I have thought through the readings and propose that we make Lent our time to deepen our relationship with our loving God. Lent is not just an objective task of the intellect but a deep personal experience of the heart. The Lenten experience need not be just a time of simply abstaining from the things in life we enjoy. Lent also needs to be a time to take up and restore, to renew and to be renewed.

The picture on the cover is of the marble fountain located on-site at the Vinnies NSW State Support Office in Lewisham. It was originally donated to the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary in 1926 when they owned and operated the Lewisham Hospital.

The fountain is carved from Carrara marble. This marble comes from and derives its name from Massa-Carrara, a small province in Tuscany, Italy and was Michelangelo's marble of choice. In fact, many of the world's famous artworks and indeed landmarks are carved from Carrara marble, including Michelangelo's David.

Recently we have developed the haven area around the fountain as a place of meeting outside of our office's meeting rooms. It is a place of contemplation and quiet conversation. In some ways the Angel personifies the essence of Lent. There is a deep sense of listening with the heart and holding an air of loving compassion. Actually compassion with intent and purpose.

Pope Francis expresses this beautifully when reflecting on mercy; "a merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realises its own poverty and gives itself freely for others."

May our time of Lent and the joy of Easter open us to the intentional love of our God through the experience of Jesus and the life-giving flame of the Holy Spirit.

All Spiritual Reflection Guides can be accessed on the national website, [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au) - just follow the Publications link. For any mailing enquiries, contact [lewisham.reception@vinnies.org.au](mailto:lewisham.reception@vinnies.org.au). A helpful weblink for the full Sunday readings is the Liturgical Commission in Brisbane, [www.litcom.net.au](http://www.litcom.net.au).

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5 January  
2020

# “No gift to bring, to honour him”

## THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Is 60: 1-6

Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6

Mt 2: 1-12

So many of our Christmas cards and nativity scenes have the three men from the east attend to the baby Jesus in the manger and the holy family in a stable. In the Christmas story of the Little Drummer Boy, the kings present their gifts “fit for a king” whereas the boy “has no gift to bring” apart from his love and the music of his drum. A wonderful scene but not actually the one mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel narrative.

In the Gospel today, this scene 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. St Vincent de Paul had a profound epiphany for the voice of the voiceless in celebrating Mass with the servant of the Gondri family: “the poor have much to teach you”.

What I love about the story of the drummer boy is that it too is a sign of the Feast of the Epiphany. It, of course, is only a story but it too is about our response to the wonder and awe of our faith and our personal response to the God of surprises.

**Have you experienced an Epiphany moment?**

## THIS WEEK...

*I played my drum for him....  
I played my best for him.  
(Little Drummer Boy Lyrics)*

## PRAYER

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



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# Blessed are you

## THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Is 42:1-4,6-7

Acts 10:34-38

Mt 3:13-17

The account of the baptism of Jesus in this week's Gospel from Matthew shares with us an insight into the relationship between Jesus and his Father.

Fr Ron Rolheiser expresses this insight with other scriptural perceptions. He offers: "The first image we get of God in the Old Testament, immediately after creation, is that of a God looking down on this earth and saying: "It is good; indeed, it is very good!" This is paralleled at the beginning of the New Testament, at the baptism of Jesus, when God is seen again as looking down from heaven, on his child, and saying: "This is my beloved child in whom I take delight!" The essential attitude of Jesus can only be understood in this light. He knew God intimately and thus, in the deepest part of himself, could hear God say the deepest thing that God does say: "You are blessed. I am pleased with you. The earth is blessed. I am pleased with it." Because he heard this inside of himself, Jesus could look at the world, and everyone in it, and see it and them as blessed: "Blessed are you."

Pope Francis in 2014 reflected that baptism "is not a formality! It is an act that touches the depths of our experience". Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John commissioned him for his ministry but also enlightened all who experienced this moment as a sign of his intimate relationship with God.

Vincentians are called and commissioned by our Rule, and of course the scriptures, to see Christ in the face of the poor, but I dare say that such vision is not a reality without engaging, experiencing, personally and intimately, with the God who delights in us in every moment of every day. It is then that we too may look at the world and everyone in it and experience being blessed.

**What is your experience of 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.*



# Planting the seeds

19 January  
2020

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

Is 49: 3, 5-6

1Cor1: 1-3

Jn 1: 29-34

To begin our reflection on this week's reading, let's reflect on the words of John Shea:

*I can denounce a king, but I cannot enthrone one.*

*I can strip an idol of its power, but I cannot reveal the true God.*

*I can wash the soul in sand, but I cannot dress it in white.*

*I can devour the word of the Lord like wild honey,  
but I cannot lace his sandal.*

*I can condemn sin, but I cannot bear it away.*

*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*

These few words open the message of the Gospel in that they highlight the importance of John's ministry to the ministry of Jesus. John became the architect of the mission, which Jesus was divinely accepting. John is the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant. In this way, John's ministry was difficult for he was not going to see it come to completion, as Jesus was to take it further and to continue it.

The recently canonised Oscar Romero spoke of the future as not our own. He expressed that nothing we do is complete because the kingdom is beyond our visions and efforts, and actually what we do complete is only a fraction of the magnificence of the enterprise that is the kingdom. What we do is "plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise."

As Vincentians we too are "baptised" to a prophetic and action-oriented ministry. There are times where our initiatives or our beginnings are not seen through to completion. This is frustrating and can even distract us from the heart of our motivations. However, like John the Baptist, we need to be the voice which continues to cry in the wilderness not for our own personal gain, satisfactions and achievements but for the many people on the fringes of society, for those we serve. Success is not always measured on one scale.

**When have your initiatives not seen completion? How did you handle the frustration?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Happy are we to be called..."*

## PRAYER

*Father,  
Through the Grace of our Baptism  
open our eyes to your kingdom.  
Amen*



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# Vocational calling

26 January  
2020

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

Is 8:23-9:3

1Cor: 1;10-13,17

Mt 4:12-23

The story of the brothers Peter, Andrew, James and John presents an account of a call to follow and an immediate response to that call. Interestingly in this account of Matthew, the fishermen's response was not in words, thoughtful reflection or discernment, but by immediate action. There were no second thoughts or hesitation, which I feel is remarkable. Jesus promises nothing to them nor tells them what this call to discipleship involves. There is no direction, no guidelines, no position description, no contracts signed, just simply that he called and they followed. Matthew does not seem concerned with the fuller details apart from the very harsh fact that once called, immediate response is needed and that everything, including the present moment, is left behind.

This account however does differ in the other Gospels, especially Luke and John, where time and discernment to discipleship seem evident. So what is Matthew's point of this call?

I actually don't think Matthew is too hung up on the call as he is on the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the response to that ministry. Matthew begins this account reflecting on the words of Isaiah. These words seem to be Jesus' mission statement: "the people who lived in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." Then the writer ends this account with Jesus' actions of proclaiming and healing, in some ways Jesus' response to the prophetic words.

Today the Gospels call us to discipleship with Jesus. It begs to question our call to the good works of the Society. Are they Christ centred? Are they open to the questions of healing and proclaiming? Or are they centred solely on business and administrations, our achievements and successes?

**How would you answer Jesus' call today?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"For those who've come across the seas we've boundless plains to share; with courage let us all combine to advance Australia fair."*

## PRAYER

*Loving Father, may we listen to the lives of those we assist, understanding the poverty of our humanity, and so share in your many blessings. Amen*



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# Contradictions of life

2 February  
2020

## THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Mal 3:1-4

Heb 2:14-18

Lk 2:22-32

Henri Nouwen once reflected that “every bit of life is touched by a bit of death”. He continues by saying, “in every satisfaction there is limitation; in every embrace, there is distance; in every success, there is the fear of jealousy; behind every smile, there is a tear; and in all forms of light there is knowledge of the surrounding darkness. When you touch the hand of a returning friend, you already know that he or she will have to leave again, and when you are overwhelmed by the beauty of a sunset, you miss the friend who cannot be there with you. Joy and pain are born at the same place within us and we can never find proper words to capture our own feelings.”

This reflection from Henri Nouwen truly captures the contradiction of the prophesies of Simeon and Anna. That this child will be on one hand the light to enlighten faith to the nations, but will be the reason for the fall of many and a sword will pierce your own soul. So, within two conversations this child received glory and praise, blessings from much loved elders of the faith, and the contradiction of dire dread to himself, his family and Israel.

Life is full of contradictions. For me, the prayer which reminds me of this fact is that wonderful prayer dedicated to St Francis. This prayer petitions God that, in the contradictions of life, I be an instrument of God’s peace. Therefore, where there is hatred I would sow the seeds of love, where there is darkness in someone’s life, I would sow the seeds of light and where there is deep sadness in someone’s life, I am called to hold them in joy.

The feast of the Presentation opens us to be a light in the hearts of those we serve.

**What does this special feast mean to you?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“The light to enlighten the Gentile and give glory to Israel your people.”*

## PRAYER

*For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*



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# Vincentian spirituality?

9 February  
2020

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

Is 58: 7-10

1Cor 2: 1-5

Mt 5: 13-16

On many occasions I am asked the simple question: “what is Vincentian spirituality?” We all use the term “Vincentian spirituality” but at its grassroots, what is it?

This week’s Gospel from Matthew provides some important insights for us moving forward. Our spirituality needs to be prayerful and reflective, based in our lay Catholic heritage, influenced by our founding voices and contemporary voices like Pope Francis. It’s also a spirituality that espouses the ministry of Jesus of radical inclusivity, restoration and accompaniment.

In February 1834 the fledgling Society proposed that St Vincent de Paul, a well-known French saint, be the Society’s spiritual patron. Frederic Ozanam became passionate about fidelity to this patron. He insisted that St Vincent always remain “a model one must strive to imitate... a heart in which one’s own heart is enkindled”, because by “appropriating the thoughts and virtues of the saint”, the Society could “escape from the personal imperfections of its members, that it can make itself useful in the Church and give reason for its existence”. For Frederic, the Society’s spirituality is personified in the Catholic faith and the words, actions and virtues of this saint of the poor.

All of these thoughts echo a faith that is “salt of the earth”, and how we lose this saltiness is when we move away from our spiritual heart towards the needs of only a secular heart. This happens when our prayers and reflections become a tick box on our meeting agendas rather than the heart of our coming together. This happens when we only meet in Conferences when we have work to do rather than for time to nourish our spirits, and this happens when we lose our sense of a pastoral ministry to a need to control “our” business.

At the heart of this spirituality is the serving of Christ in the lives of people in need with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. Here is mentioned the term “your good works” which is reflected in our current logo. It is in these good works that we can then fulfil the Gospel message this week of being people who are lights of the world and for the world.

**What do “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” mean to you in “your good works” today?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“We come to see that faith is a light for our darkness.”  
(Pope Francis Lumen Fidei 2013)*

## PRAYER

*Loving Father, may we listen to the lives of those we assist, understanding the poverty of our humanity that we may be lights in this world for you. Amen*



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16 February  
2020

# To leave everything behind

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

Sirach 15: 15-20

1Cor 2: 6-10

Mt 5: 17-37

This week's Gospel reading from Matthew is a continuation of the discourse of salt of the earth and light of the world. Of course, this conversation is really a further development of Matthew's beatitudes discourse on the mountainside, which is earlier in the chapter.

In both, Jesus is developing a way of living a life in faith. It is full of challenges and contradictions, enlightenment and joy. For the people hearing Jesus' words it must have seemed new, fresh, and even in opposition to the faith and traditions of the temple and their elders in faith. However, this is not what Jesus tells them.

Today a voice of change in our world and Church is Pope Francis. Sadly, the brand "Catholic" is seen as jaded, hypocritical and not to be trusted, but the brand of "Pope Francis" is far from that. Personally, I stand in support of Francis, especially his deep love and pastoral message to the vulnerable and disadvantaged. However, Francis is, on many occasions, not saying anything different from other Popes and Church leaders before him. What he is doing is understanding the ears of those who are listening and expressing the joy of the Gospel for those listeners.

A few years ago I read a book by Mathew Kelly. Kelly is a great exponent of understanding that the pathway to holiness is a journey to be the best version of ourselves. He states; "God sees our unrealized potential... God knows who we are but God also knows who we can be." Jesus calls us to go beyond just ourselves, to go beyond the precepts of the law, in teaching others to be holy or the best version of themselves.

This is why we gather in Conference, to nourish each other, to support and encourage. In this way, we respond to the words of St Paul that God is "revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God".

**How can we support each other in being the best version of ourselves?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"The Lord is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love." (Psalm 144.)*

## PRAYER

*Tender Jesus, may we strive to be like you, motivated by love towards those we meet. Amen*



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23 February  
2020

# The nature of discipleship

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

Lev19:1-2,17-18

1Cor 3:16-23

Mt 5:38-48

The Gospel this week is not so much about condoning a vengeful law but more about highlighting the very nature of a discipleship of love.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the preeminent leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India. Employing nonviolent civil disobedience, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Gandhi once stated that *“an eye for eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”* He offered a very different nature of revolution: *“whenever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer them with love”*, through this then he reflects that *“there is no path to peace...peace is the path”*.

Gandhi, similar to Jesus, may not have changed the nature of his opponents but such actions and perceptions would have confounded and confronted them. These words of Gandhi came from who he was and not from the circumstances which surrounded him.

Jesus expresses to his disciples the distinct nature of their vocation as disciples. A vocation centred on love no matter the agenda and circumstances that surround them. This is important in our Vincentian vocations too. No matter what the agenda is with those we meet, this does not change our hearts in meeting them where they are at. In meeting them in this space, we find a deeper understanding of their needs rather than our needs. The challenge is certainly in the meeting face-to-face.

**Do we always meet others where they are or is our own agenda the lead?**

## THIS WEEK...

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

## PRAYER

*Father of unconditional love and mercy, guide our hearts and action in your nature of discipleship and may we receive countless blessings. Amen*



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1 March  
2020

# Being led by the Spirit

## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

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

Rom 5: 12-19

Mt 4: 1-11

The first line in this familiar Gospel account is key to my personal beginning of the season of Lent. It simply says, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness..." What does this mean for us as we prepare to journey with Jesus to Calvary and beyond?

Recently my 17-year-old son, Ben, came to me and said that he had a surprise for me but it was upstairs in his bedroom. This, of course, greatly worried me as sometimes his bedroom looks like a field hospital in the middle of a war zone. So when he said, "trust me, close your eyes and I will lead you up there to see", I was getting steady to trip and fall over all sorts of things. However, to my great surprise when I safely "landed" in his room, he was showing me a transformed, well-kept room with a fully made bed. In many ways, he led me through distracted thoughts and held assumptions to a transformed place, and it was worth every confused and dark step.

I guess Jesus' journey was similar but fraught with many more dangers than in Ben's room. The desert was never a wonderland in ancient times. It was scorching through the day and freezing at night, there was generally no protection from the environment, from the wild and from those who would do you harm. Nevertheless, Jesus let go of all these real distractions and real assumptions to be "led by the Spirit" and to be transformed in love.

The Lenten journey each year calls us to be led by the Spirit. It actually sounds easier than giving up a host of our favourite things, but is it? The Spirit leads us to prayer but other things distract us; the Spirit leads us to be more empathic or humble but our comfort zone is safer; the Spirit leads us to love more deeply but it can be so hard to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply.

May this Lenten journey open us to the prompts of the Spirit in our lives so that we may experience the transformation of Easter morn more fully.

**How will the spirit lead you in this time of Lent?**

## THIS WEEK...

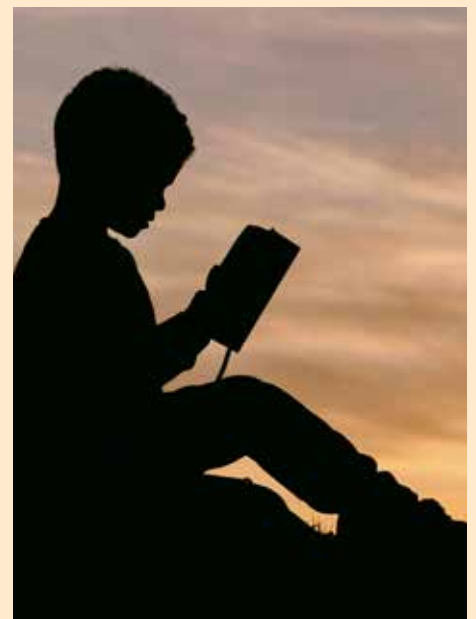
*Into your hands, Lord, we commend our spirit.*

## PRAYER

*Loving Father,*

*When our weakness discourages us, when our trust in you falters, Let your compassion fill us with hope.*

*We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen*



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# Building deeper relationships

8 March  
2020

## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 12: 1-4

2Tim 1: 8-10

Mt 17: 1-9

The account of the transfiguration shares with us an important message about relationships. I feel for Peter, James and John. This was a journey which they struggled to understand. Just when they thought they knew their beloved Jesus, this transfiguration scene opened up before them and as people of an ancient world, this must have “freaked them out” as my children would say!

Our Lenten journey is only in the early weeks and we still have a some time ahead. Now, we can go through this Lenten journey believing we know the person of Jesus without understanding the profound meaning of the Easter event, the Pascal Mystery, and person behind the face of Jesus. Here is where the rubber met the road for the astounded apostles and, I believe, the same for each of us.

Understanding each other in a relationship beyond just the face-to-face is challenging and time-consuming. Recently I attended a reflection day with a number of people I did not know. The facilitator went around the circle asking us to introduce ourselves and to check into how we were feeling. Some, very comfortably, shared quite a bit of detail about their lives and where they were at personally, whereas others were very short and discreet in their sharing. The check-in process was not just about who we were but also how well we listened to the different responses.

I believe building a relationship with people is central to offering those we care for a “hand up”. Empathically listening not just to problems but to life stories opens us to a deeper understanding. In this way Vincentians offer another voice to conversations, the voice of the transfigured Jesus.

**Have you ever opened a meeting with a “check-in”?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Quick to listen, slow to speak,  
slow to become angry,  
always to put others first*

## PRAYER

*Father,*

*As we continue our Lenten journey,  
may our faith, hope and love be  
instruments of compassion and  
peace in our world today. Amen*



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15 March  
2020

# Transformed in love

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Ex17: 3-7

Rom 5: 1-2, 5-8

Jn 4: 5-42

On the 7th May last year the world lost the voice and presence of Jean Vanier.

Vanier was an author, philosopher, theologian and spoke on many occasions of faith and spirituality. He reflected on this scripture narrative in terms of a model approach to those who are broken. He expressed...

*I find it very moving how Jesus meets and welcomes this fragile, broken woman. He knows the depth of her negative self-image. He does not judge or condemn her. He does not humiliate or give her any moral lessons. He approaches her like a tired, thirsty beggar, asking her to do something for him. He begins to dialogue with her and creates a relationship with her. She who has lost all trust in her own goodness is trusted by Jesus. In trusting her, he uplifts her and gives her back her self-esteem.*

*Jesus is showing us how to approach people who are broken and wounded: not as someone superior, from "above", but humbly, from "below", like a servant. Such people who are already ashamed of themselves do not need someone who will make them feel even more ashamed, but someone who will give them hope and reveal to them that they have value, they are unique, precious and important. To accept and love broken people in that way is the surest way to help them grow. We witness this so in l'Arche, where we welcome vulnerable women and men who have lost all self-confidence and self-esteem. What they need to begin their journey of growth is someone who appreciates, affirms and loves them just as they are, in all their weakness and brokenness.*

Vanier later in this chapter reflects that through such conversations, Jesus is transformed in love and the Samaritan woman, though broken and vulnerable, is also transformed in love.

May our works, actions, deliberations and conversations through this Lenten time together provide nourishment for our hearts, faithful companionship in these works of love, offering gifts of peace inspired by our service embracing a more just and compassionate society.

**Who has guided you through life?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"If community reaches its height in celebration, its heart is forgiveness."  
(Jean Vanier)*

## PRAYER

*"Let us mourn until others  
are comforted,  
Weep until others laugh...  
Let us be frugal until all are filled  
Let us give until all have received.  
Amen."  
(John Harriott)*



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22 March  
2020

# Relationships as ministry

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

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

Eph 5: 8-14

Jn 9: 1-41

The Strategic Plan 2020-2022 for the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW is a plan to simply call each of us to One Society. It states that we are one Society who “contribute to the common purpose” to “advocate a contemporary spirit of faith in action for a more just and compassionate society”. The heart of this call is reflected and grounded in the ministry of Jesus. This ministry is characterised by radical inclusion, restoration and accompaniment.

This week’s Gospel narrative from John of the healing of a blind man and the investigations by the Jewish elders shines light on this ministry but also on its challenges.

In Jesus’ time, the blind were outcasts and sinners. Jesus dispels this thought and raises the status of the blind to be revelations of God’s work. The blind lived outside cities and society but Jesus’ healing restored the blind man to new life. No one believed the blind man but Jesus walked with him and led him to full understanding with eyes of faith.

Not everyone will understand the Vincentian spirit of faith in action or serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy. On many occasions, we may have to stand up for the beliefs of our ministry in difficult times and we do this together as One Society of members, staff and volunteers.

This Lenten journey toward Easter empowers us to pause and reflect on our common call to be One Society of radical inclusivity, restoration and accompaniment. May we, like Jesus, see God’s wonderful revelation of life in all people we serve and journey with in these weeks ahead.

**When have “those we serve” served you?**

## THIS WEEK...

*All things change;  
we remember and give thanks.*

## PRAYER

*Divine Master,  
We ask for faith like that of the  
man healed of his blindness.  
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...

29 March  
2020

## 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 to 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, when you lose someone very close to you, it is of great consolation and comfort to know that God will stand beside you 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 comes to a close may we continue to deepen this relationship with God, knowing that God’s Spirit will always dwell in our hearts and walk our journey with us.

## 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*



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

5 April  
2020

# Who really was on trial?

## PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Is 50: 4-7

Phil 2: 6-11

Mt 26:14 - 27:66

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: "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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# He has risen!

12 April  
2020

## 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 readings for Easter, both for the Vigil and for Sunday morning, must be the most amazing, wondrous, joyful but confusing of all the Gospel stories, for those who were there. For us, twenty centuries later, “rising from the dead”, while still miraculous, is not an unknown concept, but one we have been familiar with from childhood. For Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, for Peter and John and the other apostles, it would have been beyond comprehension, even though Jesus had tried to tell them what was to happen.

Can we imagine how we would react if, having buried a loved one, three days later we were told that this same person has been seen by friends and relatives? Try to imagine you went to the cemetery and saw this person; would you perhaps imagine it was just someone who resembled your loved one, because we could not imagine that the one we had buried had come back to life?

The angel tells the two Marys: “There is no need for you to be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said he would.” Did comprehension come with these words; did they then believe? We are told that when Peter and John reached the tomb and saw the linen cloths which had bound Jesus’ body lying on the ground, then they believed. What a leap of faith that must have been, even given the evidence lying before them! What would be our reaction when we realised that this really was our loved one “risen from the dead”?

Pope Francis tells the story of his grandmother taking him to the Procession of Candles on Good Friday, and being told on seeing the resting Christ: “Look, he is dead; tomorrow he will be risen!” Pope Francis says that many people have wanted to blur this strong certainty and speak of a spiritual resurrection, but the Pope says: “No. Christ is alive.”

**What was God telling us by bringing Jesus back to life?**

## 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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# Birth of Frederic, Birth of the Society

19 April  
2020

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 42-47

1Pet 1: 3-9

Jn 20: 19-31

This week we approach the 206th anniversary of the birth of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and the 186th 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 Frederic 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 20<sup>th</sup> birthday of Frederic 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 that 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 the reason for a Conference, a place where “confrères” met to share life, faith, prayer and reflection; not just a place of business!

Within a year after that taunt, membership had expanded to 100 and it became necessary to split the group into three separate conferences. At the same time, other conferences 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 in 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 one million active members around the world, including the dedicated Vincentians, volunteers and staff who support the Society in fulfilling its mission. The question we should continue to ask ourselves is **would Frederic 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.”*  
(Frederic Ozanam)

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father,  
Blessed Frederic 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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# Joined by a stranger on the road

26 April  
2020

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 14, 22-33

1Pet 1: 17-21

Lk 24: 13-35

Today's Gospel presents the narrative of two disciples in mourning, walking to the town of Emmaus and joined by a "stranger". Of all the verses of scripture, this would be the one that touches my heart the most.

I truly understand the headspace of these two disciples; deep grief does this to us. We become inward-looking, for everything outside does not make sense anymore. It is a way that the body naturally holds us from the pain of shock. I know that I became forgetful, slightly confused and saw life in general but not in detail after Anne died. In fact, I think that life is coloured in black and white and it takes time to find the colours again. I understand the disciples' "blindness".

The placement of this story is vitally important. This narrative presents the light of the pilgrim journey, which Jesus continues to walk with us today. It also presents to us the profound message of the Eucharist within the light of the Resurrection. For without the Resurrection, the Eucharist is just another meal.

When we gather to celebrate the gift of Eucharist, we listen to the word of God and break bread together. Jesus, today, comes among us not as the pilgrim stranger; rather, Jesus comes to us in word and sacrament to nourish us in hope for the future with faith in him. We, like the disciples, are invited to share our stories with God in this extraordinary relationship. Our stories of pain, mourning, disappointments and unresolved conversations. We share our stories, we listen to God, we recognise God in the breaking of bread and through our faith, hope and love find peace and deeper consolation for our journeys ahead.

**What is your experience of grief?**

## 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,  
Bless and strengthen those who work throughout the world  
To bring relief to the oppressed, the hungry, those without hope.  
Give them courage. Keep them safe.  
We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen*



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# Spiritual Reflection Guide

*Hosanna to the King*