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Spiritual Reflection Guide

The Fruitful Vine

January – April 2021

Meeting the Stranger

3 January
2021

EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Is 60: 1-6

Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6

Mt 2: 1-12

The experience of an epiphany in someone's life is an experience of a sudden and striking realisation. This revelation can occur in any situation in which an enlightening consciousness allows a problem or situation to be understood from a new and deeper perspective and meaning for our personal lives.

In Matthew's Gospel narrative, Herod was confronted with the revelation of the Christ-child's birth in Bethlehem and his reaction was not one of "enlightening consciousness", but one of agitation. In fact, the Gospel uses the term that Herod was "perturb". In hearing this reaction I believe that an epiphany in life is only received when we are open to possibilities beyond ourselves. That is, we don't react with our own agenda but we avail ourselves it a deeper agenda, that is God's agenda within our lives. The key is living a life open in prayer and reflection rather than our own success and ambitions.

The other aspect here is that such epiphanies may come to us through different pathways. The visit of the strangers from the east reminds us of the influence of strangers in our lives. This is a deeply Vincentian charism as we acknowledge Christ in the stranger in whom we learn much from. Reflecting on God as friend and stranger creates an interesting paradox. However that is the very nature of God. As friend, God knows us intimately, and loves and accepts us in all ways and yet as stranger God opens us to new possibilities, epiphanies, and leads us on roads less travelled. Fr Ron Rolheiser OMI shares that, "with the stranger lies surprise, new possibility, contact with that part of God and reality that we have never experienced before."

The Epiphany, the visit of the magi strangers from foreign lands to the Christ child, reveals the divine nature of Jesus to humanity. It opens our hearts to the truth of the incarnation. The visit and presence of the stranger in our life may also reveal a different perception of God in our lives. May we always be open to the difference the stranger offers us, their different perspectives, their different ways of understanding, their different reflections of our God. Such new possibilities in our life are the heart of our epiphany experience.

When has an epiphany changed your perspective?

THIS WEEK...

"And you Bethlehem... out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people"
(Micah 5:2,4)

PRAYER

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



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Entry into grace

10 January
2021

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Is 55:1-11

1jn5:1-9

Mk1:7-11

In the Gospel account of the baptism of Jesus, Mark emphasises the presence of the Trinity. This presence is expressed in the form of a dove descending, and the voice of the father to his son. This Trinitarian presence is central to our concepts of baptism today. For we are baptised within the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Gospels speak of this as a baptism and they speak of two kinds of baptisms: the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus – adding that John’s baptism is only a preparation for Jesus’ baptism. What is John’s baptism? It’s a baptism of repentance, a realisation of what we are doing wrong and a clear resolution to correct our bad behaviour. What is Jesus’ baptism? It’s an entry into grace and community in such a way that it empowers us internally to do what is impossible for us to do by our willpower alone.

I have been privileged to journey with people in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults leading up to the waters of the Easter Vigil. In each, I have witnessed a deep sense of coming home and a realisation that this is where they are called to be. For some they are awoken to a deeper sense of mission in their life. The joy they come to is very infectious and I would say is the very blessings of Easter in the life of our faith communities. 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 Jesus for his mission, but also enlightened all who experienced this moment as a sign of his intimate relationship with God.

Vincetians 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.

How do you understand the sacrament 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. Amen.



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17 January
2021

“Samuel, Samuel...!”

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1 Sam 3: 3-10, 19

1 Cor 6: 13-15, 17-20

John 1: 35-42

Not long after the passing of my wife, Anne, our son Ben talked to me of his great fear at night of his mother coming to talk to him, of course, in some spirit form. His faith that Anne’s spirit still profoundly lives reflects this fear of a nightly ghostly visit. I simply reminded him that of all people his own Mum knew and loved him deeply and would never want to frighten him and so would only call him in his dreams.

In many ways these words are reflected in the calling of the boy Samuel in the Book of Samuel. It is a beautiful encounter of the revelation that the God of all creation quietly calls Samuel in his sleep. Although not stated I feel Samuel “knew” this voice but assumed it was Eli calling him. Eventually Eli understood it was the Lord calling and offer the boy a wonderful response; “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”.

There are two aspects to this encounter with the Lord. First is the simplicity of the call but secondly is the close companionship of God for as Samuel grew up, “the Lord was with him and let no word of his fall to the ground”. The path of companionship opens us as Vincentians to a radical relationship with God and with those we engage with. In 2016, an important paper from the International Council addressed “a fraternal relationship where, eventually, there is no beneficiary nor caregiver, but rather a relationship of friendship”.

May we continue to be mindful of our companions on the journey, listening to their call not as phantoms in the night but as a response in love reflecting always the joy of the Gospels.

What does companionship mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

“Here I am Lord; Speak your servant is listening”.
(Book of Samuel)

PRAYER

Lord, may we hear your call strong in faith and love. Amen.



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24 January
2021

Sorry God but No?

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jonah 3: 1-5,10

1 Cor 7: 29-31

Mk 1: 4-20

The story of Jonah speaks volumes of the compassion of God towards the people of Nineveh when they 'renounce their evil behaviour'. What precedes these verses in the Bible is the compassion also shown to Jonah after he refuses God's first call to deliver the message of repentance to the people of Nineveh. Even after saying 'No' to God, God has compassion and offers forgiveness.

There is much freedom and beauty in God's forgiveness and compassion. God's forgiveness for us at those times we have said 'no' to God or haven't quite done our best reflects for us the forgiveness and compassion that we are asked to have for others at those times when they haven't lived up to our expectations. And not only forgiveness for others, but forgiveness towards ourselves when we have failed to do what is right in the eyes of God.

Most evenings I try, although most times fail, to spend some time reflecting on my day. These reflections generally end with the penitential prayer of the "I confess...", which opens us to the intimate and profound love and mercy of God; a God who understand those things that we "have done and for those things that we fail to do".

Through compassion and forgiveness we have a chance to let go of the past and move on into the future – whether we are forgiving ourselves or forgiving others. Such beauty in that feeling of freedom! And such beauty in knowing that God is always there waiting to forgive.

Have you ever said 'No' to God?

THIS WEEK...

*When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future.
(Bernard Meltzer)*

PRAYER

Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.



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“The beauty that had crept unnoticed...”

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Deut 18:15-20

1 Cor 7: 32-35

Mk 1: 21-28

Early last year I shared this wonderful story from the Washington Post who conducted an experience with renowned violin virtuoso Joshua Bell. Bell, who commands at least \$100 for the cheap seats at concerts in the great halls of the world, was asked to play in a busy Metro railway station.

The pieces he played were some of the most exquisite and beautiful music ever composed for the violin as well as the most complicated. In the 45 minutes the musician played, only six people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition. In the presence of such sublime beauty only a few children wanted to stop, but they were hurried along by preoccupied parents.

No one even recognised that the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth \$3.5 million.

St Paul's words this week remind us of the distractions of the “world's affairs” and how we may lose our sense of appreciation or thankfulness for the beauty around us. Not that we mean to, but we can get so caught up that we forget the important things. As Sue and Leo Kane reflected in “*The Little Brown Book*”; which are a collection of reflections from St Mary McKillop, “...the beauty that had crept, unnoticed, into their day.”

I believe this message of St Paul and the beautiful reflection of St Mary of the Cross is vitally important to be heard in today's post-pandemic world. It is not an easy message because the world stopped and is now trying desperately to recover but also over one million people died globally. We will breathe deeper when a vaccine is discovered physically but how do we breathe deeper spiritually to move forward in hope?

Blessed Frederic stated near the end of his life that the “chief work of the Society is the saving of souls”. In simple terms, I believe Frederic is reminding us that our being present with people, in whatever way we can, lifts hope from the dust in people's lives and enables a realisation or epiphany that our world continues to share gifts of love and profound beauty.

THIS WEEK...

*Be still and know that I am God
(Psalm 46:10)*

PRAYER

Lord, continue to distract our distractions! Amen.



“Restless I fret till twilight falls”

7 February
2021

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7

1 Cor 9: 16-19, 22-23

Mk 1: 29-29

I came across the expression *naturale desiderium Dei* several years ago. This term was considered by St Thomas Aquinas and is related to other concepts of Aristotle, Plotinus, and Augustine. It is an expression which inspires a deep faith journey concerning the nature of our soul's desires. In simple terms it means that our souls innately have a natural desire or longing to return to God. In this, Aquinas would express that at the point of our dying, our souls are “released” to naturally and passionately yearn to be with God. This natural desire I believe gives much life and expression to our faith.

These thoughts are similar to the ancient philosopher Plotinus, 204 AD. In his philosophy there are three principles: the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. The One is the creator and source of all things and all things come from the One and all innately return to the One. St Augustine also spoke for this strong natural yearning for the One, or in his faith world, God, in “my heart is restless until it rests in you”. In this Job in our readings this week reflects, “restless I fret till twilight falls”.

Through this brief journey we can also look toward the theology of the beatific vision in that we only attain perfect happiness when we are standing in God's presence, face-to-face, at the end of our time. Perfect happiness cannot be attained in this life as we will always yearn, desire, long to return to our very source of being, i.e. God.

What do these musings have for us in our Vincentian journey? On reflection, it is firstly companionship, for we are companions in this faith journey assisting each other in our thoughts, kindness and prayer. Secondly, Frederic Ozanam tasked us as a spiritual Society, for the “chief work of the Society is the saving of souls”, to support, to encourage with compassion and to be empathic advocates for each other and for those voices crying in the wilderness. Our spirituality opens us to the call of God in our lives. We are attuned to this call through the scriptures, reflections and prayers, our Christian faith tradition, all as part of the creedal response to our faith journey within the communion of saints.

Is your faith expressed in a natural desire for God?

THIS WEEK...

It were my soul's desire to see the face of God, it were my soul's desire to rest in God's abode. Hymn Morning (Prayer Office)

PRAYER

Lord, encourage our faith, our hopes and our love which reflect our innate natural desire to stand in your presence. Amen.



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14 February
2021

Ancient healing

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Lev 13: 1-2, 44-46

1 Cor 10: 31 – 11:1

Mk 1: 40-45

Our first reading and Gospel today both relate to Lepers and their disease. It was the curse of biblical times, maybe somewhat like COVID-19 has been for us throughout much of last year. We masked up to go to Church, travel, shop and I'm sure even now, we avoid anyone with the slightest symptoms of a cold or flu. As I write this in October 2020, I can only wonder whether the crisis will be over or still ongoing as we move through 2021.

For the Jewish people without modern medical knowledge, leprosy was seen as a punishment from God, for sins committed; and banishment was prescribed in Jewish Law. If a person contracted it they were cast out and shunned. They looked different and were not allowed to participate in the life of the community because their skin bore sores and suffered decay. They had to identify themselves as unclean. Some parallels exist today with the progress of the coronavirus in many parts of the world. It has divided communities, with many quick to judge others.

If a leper became well, they had to present themselves to the Priest to confirm their good health before returning to the community. But this good health was external, as was their disease which was physical, and not related to the real person within. When approached by a leper with a request for healing, Jesus defied the Jewish Law and tradition. He came close, reached out his hand and touched the man saying, "be cured!" He connected with the person beyond surface appearances and found the real person within.

And this is our Vincentian challenge too. To follow Christ's teaching and not turn away from *the unclean, the unwanted, the lost* of today's world. And not just not turn, away but reach out the hand and welcome them as fellow sons and daughters of God.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

What is my greatest challenge as a Vincentian?

THIS WEEK...

*"God expect but one thing of you....
let God be God in you."
(Meister Eckhart)*

PRAYER

*Lord, may the joy of the Gospels be
a lamp unto my feet. Amen.*



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21 February
2021

Lenten practice

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 9: 8-15

1 Peter 3: 18-22

Mk 1: 12-15

Lent has begun again. I remember in my very young years, it was all about giving something up, usually lollies, chocolate or ice cream. And eating fish on Fridays of course! Later, our Lenten practice focussed on choosing either prayer, fasting or alms giving, or a combination of the three. But giving up something that you liked for lent was still the main idea and giving that money not spent to the missions was what we did.

These practices are still important aspects of our Lenten preparations, but thankfully, our understanding of lent as a time of preparation and penance has matured, and the readings today help us to focus on our 40-day Lenten journey. In the Gospel, as Jesus prepares for his public ministry, he withdraws to the desert. His desert experience is a time of real connection with his Father, and his true self, as He faces the temptations that life presents to all of us and as he discerns where God is leading him.

Retreating from daily life for a period of solitude and prayer is a tradition shared by many religious traditions. It takes away the distractions of everyday life and allows us the time and space to be our real self before God. It doesn't need to be a structured month, week or day. Taking some retreat time – prayer time, each day, where the external world can be shut out and the spiritual life becomes our focus is all that we need. Just as Jesus was tempted, so are we and these desert experiences are spaces when we can acknowledge our sinfulness and plan the changes needed to get us back into full relationship with Jesus.

Personal change is hard. Facing up to our own sinfulness is as well, but it is this change that will allow us to grow and come closer to God. Being made in his image empowers us to be like him, as much as humanly possible.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

What has been your experience of “the desert”?

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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28 February
2021

Times of retreat

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 22: 1–2, 9-13, 15-18

Rom 8: 31-34

Mk 9: 2-10

In last week's readings, Jesus sought solace in the desert to pray and discern His Father's will. 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, "Rabbi, it is wonderful for us to be here." As wonderful as it was, they also experienced fear and uncertainty in that moment and for the first time had to ponder what rising from the dead could mean.

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 Beloved. Listen to him."

Being with Jesus in prayer can be a challenge, in much the same way the disciples were challenged to climb the mountain with Jesus. 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 from Greg Ryan)

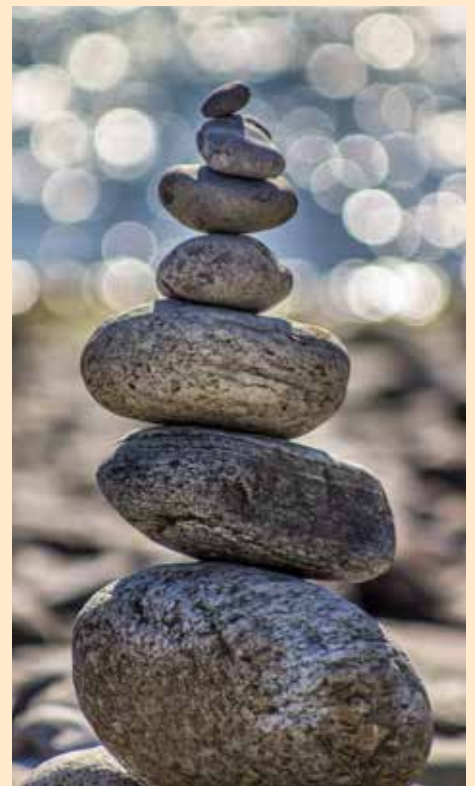
Where are my Sacred Spaces where I encounter God?

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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Reacting without reflecting

7 March
2021

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Exodus 20: 1-17

1 Cor 1: 22-25

John 2: 13-25

From “no idol making” to “signs and stumbling blocks” and “Christ the power of God” and “clearing the temple”! Such a richness of wisdom and learning here in our readings this Sunday. As someone who can regularly tap into zeal, I am always drawn to the angry Jesus as he passionately berates those who were taking advantage of the poor for their own gain. The religious system at that time (and many times afterwards) had become one that took advantage of the poor and those who travelled to the temple for religious festivals. I am sure the words here have never changed, I have read them many times before, but what I am noticing for the first time is Jesus’ action of making a whip with cords...just how long does it take to make a whip of cords?

I can see that despite his anger he was also very aware, measured and methodical. To engage in his anger and at the same time to gather what was needed to make a whip, to use, to drive out those making the temple a market place, that to me is a person who acknowledges and owns their anger while responding from it rather than reacting, without reflection. Didn’t Paul say, “be angry but do not sin?”

How often as Vincentians are we encouraged, in prayer and contemplation to reflect rather than react? Isn’t that why we gather together to spend time with each other, to check in that the path we are on is indeed the most loving? It can be hard to walk a path of unconditional love over years without being impacted by the behaviours of those we serve, many who have endured such challenging lives that they have learned how to “take advantage” of the system.

So this third Sunday in Lent we might reflect on not only putting down any thought or feeling of angst towards those who seem to be taking advantage of the system, but also to pick up and dust off your compassion-weary heart and give it a little refreshing. It may be a new practice of gratitude, of reflection that enlarges your unconditional love, perhaps a little more space in which to be with God and seek the experience of God’s unwavering unconditional love.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

How can I grow my capacity to love unconditionally those who challenge me in my ministry?

THIS WEEK...

What can I do to grow my ability to love unconditionally and without judgement?

PRAYER

Loving Father, Fill us with a kindred spirit so that we may grow in our ability to love those that challenge and poke us. Have us be grateful for all they teach us and how, if we are open, we can grow more into your image. Amen.



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Presence of being

14 March
2021

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Chron 36: 14-16, 19-23

Eph 2: 4-10

Jn 3: 14-21

Recently I had the pleasure of supporting a young Vietnamese seminarian in his pastoral placement at the Matthew Talbot Hostel over a month. An eager, energetic and cheerful young man who was on a mission to do, (and of course doing has its place). On his last day, he shared his biggest and most challenging learning with me - it was to know how to be rather than do and to value that.

To show that one has time, is patient, is available to be, present, is a really difficult thing to value over or at least equally to doing. The people we serve at the Talbot truly appreciate being deeply listened to, without judgement and with empathy. If we give a sense that we are available, show we are available, they will trust us.

The words in Ephesians and the Gospel narrative of John today remind us that it is not by our own DOING, not our own WORKS that we are saved, rather it is by faith, not by works, so no one can boast! Because of his great love for us, he is rich in mercy! How truly fortunate we are to have such a God. Not all are so fortunate. I found this out when a very devout Hindu friend of mine made a mistake; his error was not going to be easily forgiven by his family at all. I asked why wouldn't your family forgive you and his reply was, "forgiveness isn't a big thing in my faith."

Grace as gift and light, as people who live in truth come into the light... such beautiful metaphors and expressions of Gods enormous love. So dominant in our lives today...light, every morning at sunset, every time we turn on the light switch, every time we light a candle, we can remember!

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

How important is forgiveness to me in Lent? Is there anyone I need to offer forgiveness to?

THIS WEEK...

When do I fall into the dark? What is it that helps me to stay in the light of truth? What can I do to stay committed to God's truth in my life?

PRAYER

Light of the world, shine on us so that we are vessels of your truth and spirit. Grow us into people of truth and love so that others see your heart in us. Help us to continue to do good works and to balance them with times of being, still, reflective and prayerful. Give us too a heart of forgiveness knowing that forgiveness has no end date. Amen.



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21 March
2021

Gifts of Lenten time

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Jer 31: 31-34

Heb 5: 7-9

Jn 12: 20-33

So it's here I remember all the Lents gone by and my weak spirit; when time seems to be dragging on. As a child the most profound act of fasting I could think of doing was to give up my little lunch money, often spent on lollies, each school day for the poor children, thus earning my team extra points that would be rewarded at the end of lent with a bag of lollies! Ironic hey?

As an adult in Lent, the freedom to choose the feelings, actions, thoughts that enhance my being to be a forgiving, loving and just centred human seems a much more complex and disturbing journey to commit to.

With this week's readings echoing the possibility of transformation through suffering, cutting close to the bone, the more I note the serious obligation of the Catholic life. "Unless a grain of wheat dies and falls to the ground....." Wow! If you truly reflect on this image, all that has been known by that seed is being destroyed, it must feel catastrophic! The outer layer that had held its shape, given a layer of safety, insulation is now being torn apart. Here in our own lives, those feelings of difficult change keep coming and how do we "hang in there?"

How do we remember in our own suffering that there is opportunity for growth in the breaking of what was and moving into that "liminal space"? (Richard Rohr). Where we sit in the doorway, a pile of pain and confusion, betwixt and between, waiting in hope for the dawn of new life. I'm sure many of you have lived this journey and know that new life is around the corner, the corner is sometimes a very large corner, and our outer shell will always be softer and more attune to others in pain.

The other verse that calls to me is... "I will put my law into their minds and write it in their hearts, I will be their God and they will be my people". As Vincentians, the times we gather to reflect are those times we listen to that law written in our hearts and share it with others. It is in the community of believers where we support each other in faith and spirit, so as to be the very best we can be so we can be of service to others, with love and compassion. So often, we need the regular support of another who hears us and reminds us of who we are.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

How can I support others through their challenging times without impeding their growth?

THIS WEEK...

What is it that supports and enthuses me when I feel there are so many changes and I doubt the coming of new life?

PRAYER

Writer of Law in my heart, fill me with zeal for your ways and give me courage to walk out strongly to others who may be very different from me. Amen.



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Praise the Everlasting King

28 March
2021

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Is 50: 4-7

Phil 2: 6-11

Mk 14: 1 – 15: 47

If we look at the readings that the Church proposes to us for each week of the liturgical calendar, we can have a sense of fragmentation, of small passages of scripture given to us to think about. Many of the Sunday Gospels relate individual parables of Jesus or particular incidents of the preaching and public mission. But when we come to Passion Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, there is a much more coherent, detailed and confronting account of the events leading to Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

This year, the formal reading is ‘the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark’, and then the ‘Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to John’ on Good Friday.

One person who appears only in the account of Mark is a woman; she anoints the head of Jesus with precious nard. Jesus says of her, ‘She has anointed my body beforehand for its burial’.

How important to simply read quietly and at our own pace the sequence of events that lead to Calvary. In fact I think that a personal reading of Mark’s account in the New Testament is almost as important as being part of the public proclamation at Mass on Palm Sunday. Some of the details are unique to this Gospel, such as; ‘They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and of Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross.’

As we reflect on the suffering and death of the Jesus, we remember the deaths too of all the innocent victims of violence and disaster and we continue to pray for peace in our volatile world especially in light of the global pandemic.

Choose one section of the passion narrative from Mark’s Gospel and make your own comment on it.

THIS WEEK...

*“Try to deepen your understanding of these two words, “I Thirst”.
(St Teresa of Calcutta)*

PRAYER

*Father I put my life in your hands.
Amen.*



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Easter morn

4 April
2021

EASTER SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION

Acts 10: 34, 37-43

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-9

The Gospel readings for Easter Sunday are all powerful.

The appearances to Mary Magdalen, Peter and John or the Road to Emmaus are all stories where Vincentians can be fed by the Gospel. There are always at least two people who encounter Jesus. They struggle to recognise Christ amongst them in the encounter. Yet as they reflect together their eyes are opened and they share with others.

The tradition of our Conferences, our visitation, our special works with companions is pre-mapped in the Easter Gospel stories. On this Easter Day and as we Easter over coming weeks, we can share anew what our visitations, companionship with those we serve and our community experience in Conference makes clear to us about God alive in our work.

In many ways as Vincentians we are called to be Easter people – we bear witness in all our actions to this celebration of God alive amongst us.

(Reflection from Jack de Groot)

How do we best bear this witness in our lives?

THIS WEEK...

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light... light has dawned.”
(Matthew 4:16)

PRAYER

Christ our Light, thanks be to God.



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11 April
2021

Peace be with you

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4: 32-35

1 Jn 5: 1-6

Jn 20: 19-31

In John's Gospel, just after the resurrection, Jesus came in the doors that were closed, and said "peace be with you".

Thomas had said to the disciples I will not believe, "unless I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the marks of the nails, and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

When we are hurt by our friends, we want to make sure that they are aware what has happened, we may hold onto resentment. Richard Rohr would say, in the Gospel the men were not transparent, they were hiding, and avoiding anyone to know that they were one of Jesus' disciples. In the wider society we live, we know that men have a significant power and influence. In the Gospels the women were extremely courageous and loyal, very faithful to Jesus, at his side every step of the way.

Jesus said, "blessed are those who have not seen yet have come to believe". Jesus' message calls each of us to believe, and to be authentic in everything we do. This requires us to allow our vulnerable self to come to the surface, and to be transparent and open.

There are times when I falter in my faith, and question where I position Jesus in my life. When I am with people who experience extreme vulnerability, coming with immense courage, this helps me to focus on the purpose of each day, and the importance that Jesus has on my life.

I often have the privilege to see and meet people in a very vulnerable time in their lives. Each person teaches me something new, one of the most important things I have learnt, and re-learnt is the importance to be present in the moment.

Jean Vanier spoke about the mission of the church, "Jesus gives to the church a mission of compassion and goodness". What a powerful statement, it is what is central to Vinnies to be active in service by sharing compassion and love to all the people we serve. To listen and hear and help someone become more visible in the world that allows Jesus to enter their world.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

What helps you to believe when we see and experience suffering and pain in our life, and the lives of others?

THIS WEEK...

How do you commit yourself to work in the name of Jesus?.

PRAYER

I pray that I have an open-heart, mind and soul, and I bring and share compassion and healing to all the people I serve, and everyone I have contact in my day. Amen



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Non Judgemental

18 April
2021

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19

1 Jn 2: 1-5

Lk 24: 35-48

The disciples were talking among themselves, and Jesus stood among them and said "Peace Be with You". Jesus asked the disciples if they had any food, he then took the bread, and broke it and said the blessing. It was at this time they recognised and believed.

We all make judgments at different times in our life, I know I do. I find it helpful to consider what is the purpose or the intention of the judgement, and how does this help the person or myself.

I recall a time when I was a hospital Pastoral Carer, and was visiting a woman who was living with HIV/AIDS. She spoke about the judgments she received from the general community, and the LGBT+ community. What I experienced was a profound spiritual awakening in me. I felt an unbelievable closeness to God in that moment. I will call her Joan, who believed that Jesus was very present in her life and provided healing to herself, her children, and her husband.

After communion, she would enter a deep sense of silence, stillness and quietness. Joan would enter her moment with her God. She held a great deal of grief, and the loss over the life she once lived. What was profound though is that Joan was living with grief in many aspects of her life, at times she felt torn by the experience. She was able to be open and honest, Joan's story connected me to the breaking of the bread and Jesus came to be recognised.

At times, we can feel that God is invisible, then out of the blue in meeting Joan, Jesus was made visible in that very small but intimate moment.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

Have you had an experience where Jesus became visible, in the most unlikely moment for you?

THIS WEEK...

Have you had an opportunity to notice the people surrounding you that gives us love and strength?

PRAYER

Lord, I prayer today to gain strength in my life and to stop, and notice when you are present in my daily life, and the strength and wisdom you give me. Amen.



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25 April
2021

Vocation of kinship

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 4: 8-12

1 Jn 3: 1-2

Jn 10: 11-18

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”.

This week’s reading, I am sure will challenge each of us in different ways. These readings leads us toward the theme of vocations and this Sunday is commonly known as Vocation Sunday and is often a strong focus on the priesthood and religious life. It is important to hold onto the idea that we all have vocations – women, men and children – through our baptismal calling though this will look different for every person.

The idea of the Good Shepherd comes from the Old Testament (Ezekiel). Anderson would say that people of the day took advantage of their position. The focus of their needs comes first, “at the expense of the people”.

How often do we say, my focus is on the love of God. Then power and status becomes more important than the people we serve, or the people we meet. The sheep know the voice, and follow the Shepherd because they know the voice that they trust. The Shepherd holds connection, love and security.

We all yearn for a deeper connection, spiritually, psychologically, and emotionally. The idea of being connected sustains us over our lives, and gives us meaning and purpose. Maybe during COVID times brings frustration that you may not be able to have the usual contact with family or friends.

As Jesuit Fr. Greg Boyle would say, we are all trying to find ways to be connected in kinship, because we all belong to each other. He would say if there is no kinship, there is no peace, no justice, no equality.

If we go back to the reading for a moment that has a simple yet complex message. The message is to love each other, and know that through Jesus we can, and are able to demonstrate care and love for each other.

We are here to walk alongside each other and to be present. To hold to the idea of kinship to all people. We need the people we serve, who teaches us about love, reaching out and putting our own needs before others.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

How do you live out your daily vocation, and is there anything you would change how you build kinship.

THIS WEEK...

We commit ourselves to see that we are all people of God, and we need to build connections with everyone we meet.

PRAYER

I pray that I listen to the call of God in my day, and stop being busy, so I can be in the moment with God. Amen.



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The fruitful vine

2 May
2021

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1Jn 3:18-24

Jn 15:1-8

The Gospel reading last week was Jesus expressing to his disciples the model for life as the Good Shepherd and this week's reading begins with the statement "I am the true vines and my Father is the vinedresser."

The fruitful vine offers true life; life which this Gospel tells us in the earlier chapter is "life abundant". How does this vine become fruitful? This does depend on the vinegrower who must carefully prune the vine enabling it to bear good fruit. Vines naturally have two kinds of branches -- those which bear fruit and those which don't. The non-bearing branches must be carefully pruned back in order for the vine to conserve its energy for bearing good fruit. There is a clear and profound message here: We are either fruit-bearing or non-fruit-bearing. There is no fuzzy in-between. For true grow the dead bits must be pruned.

So it is with us I believe. Jesus promises that we will bear much fruit if we abide in him and allow him to abide in us. Abiding in the work of God in our life requires careful reflection each day. My son learnt at school a very simple end of day reflection which I share here. It asks two questions; What was I grateful for today and What was I ungrateful for? The answers need not be complicated or deeply perplexing but simply from the heart. It is in this way that the Spirit will bear much fruit within each of us.

How does Jesus speak to you in this "bearing of fruit" metaphor?

How do we "abide" or "remain" connected to the vine?

THIS WEEK...

The branches of a vine will bear fruit only if they are attached to the vine.
(Jn15.4)

PRAYER

Father, continue to challenge us in your profound love that we may respond to love of others. Amen.



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Spiritual Reflection Guide

Remain in Me!



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