

Spiritual Reflection Guide



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works



The Visitation

September – December 2021



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to this issue of the Spiritual Reflection Guides and again the opportunity to share some thoughts and reflections on the Sunday readings with you.

These Guides begin on the Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time and lead us to the feast of the Holy Family. Highlighted are the feasts of Christ the King, the end of Year B and the opening of Year A in the liturgical calendar. The Season of Advent, the time of preparations and waiting leads us beautifully into the joyous feast of Christmas. The Australian Catholic Bishops have announced 26 September as Social Justice Sunday and as Vincentians, we commemorate the feast of our patron St Vincent de Paul on 27 September. During this time, we also remember the feast of Blessed Frederic Ozanam, 9 September, and on 8 November, we remember the life of Charles Gordon O'Neill, co-founder of the Society in Australia in this 140th anniversary of the establishment of the first Conference at St Patrick's Church, in Grosvenor Street, The Rocks, Sydney.

This first Conference meeting in Sydney began with the support, spiritually and physically, of the Marist Fathers, and was the final coming together of much work in raising awareness of the importance of the Society's charitable works especially in the slums of the dock areas of The Rocks by O'Neill.

O'Neill continued to build the Society during the 1880s applying the experience he had gained in Glasgow and New Zealand. During the first couple of years, he established additional Society Conferences in Sydney: those of St Francis's Haymarket, St Mary's Cathedral, St Benedict's Broadway, and St Thomas' Lewisham even to as far as Braidwood. Such early growth of the Society outside of the initial establishment at St Patrick's and the continued communications between O'Neill and the International Council was possibly the reason the Society remained strong in NSW.

In addition to mainstream assistance such as food, clothing, travel and medicines, he gained approval from the International Council to provide money for rent for Sydney's struggling families. Providing rent assistance was unique and only particular to Sydney.

Today as we continue our journey of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW and elsewhere let us ask ourselves, "How well do we really listen to the voices in need?" "Do we listen to their stories?" "Do we acknowledge their potentials?" "How do we care through the values of *Compassion, Respect, Commitment, Integrity, Empathy, Advocacy, and Courage?*"

May we all in one Vincentian spirit continue our good works through tough times and times of celebrations and may the eternal God bless us each step in the journeys ahead of service to the vulnerable working in compassion for a more just and hope filled society.

This, then, seems to be the work of the Spirit: to keep you growing is to keep you vulnerable to life and love itself. Notice that the major metaphors for the Spirit are always dynamic, energetic, and moving. Spirit-led people never stop growing and never stop changing and recognising the new moments of opportunity. (Fr Ron Rolheiser)

Leo Tucker

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Place of Fear and Strength

5 Sept
2021

23RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 35:4-7

James 2:1-5

Mk 7:31-37

Isaiah says, "Be strong do not be afraid".

I recall a moment of fear and of strength, both are interwoven with each other. I was entering a housing estate that was always viewed as unsafe. The woman I was meeting had recently escaped domestic violence and my presence, especially as a male, brought about images of fear and loss of control. This fear was connected to the system of authority, our patriarchal society. Her fear of how I would personally, and the system, would treat her. Would it be with respect and kindness or abuse and controlling power? However she bravely held courage and connection to a power beyond herself, that enabled her to begin to trust myself and others.

This story reminds me of the message in the letters of St. James who spoke about people who are poor, and said they are the chosen. Some years ago, I worked with a man who had been without accommodation and fortunately, I was able to access a place for him to live. He was never able to remain connected to people due to his aggression and abrupt manner. The only way he was able to connect to someone was to call a radio announcer at least once a day.

Social isolation is our greatest poverty in Australia. I often wonder where God is in the middle of such loneliness, and isolation. People struggle to make sense of their life of isolation, and question how God and the church fits into a world filled with isolation and loneliness. Maybe at times you have similar questions.

God calls each of us to be open to listen, and to be present to him. For me, I know whenever I invite Jesus into the moment; I enter a space of quietness, stillness, joy and peace.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

Have you allowed fear to overtake you this week, and what helped you to take control of fear?

THIS WEEK...

"Do not be afraid", for "fear can paralyse us". Mother Teresa of Kolkata

PRAYER

Lord, I prayer you give me the strength to listen and hear you and that I always have an open heart, Amen.



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“The Lord has opened my ear.”

12 Sept
2021

24TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 50:5-9

James 2:14-18

Mk 8:27-35

These words open the reading from Isaiah and it echoes the beautiful words of the Rule of St Benedict. Good Samaritan, Sister Clare Condon, shares a little of this important way of being for others.

“Listen with the ear of the heart”, the opening words of the Rule of St Benedict. I ask myself, what does it mean to listen from the heart? Does it make any difference to listen in this way? By listening in this way, I hear not just words, but I find a place of feeling and of meaning within the depths of my inner being. I also listen with the intellect, from the place of my true identity.

To listen with the heart does not come easily. It is a difficult and challenging journey. I need to empty my heart of my own agenda, of all that clutters my life and my survival: to empty my heart of my own assumptions and prejudices; to empty my mind of all the preconceived answers and solutions I might conjure up. This is a place of inner openness to receive the other, the word, whether that be the Word of Scripture, the word of a confrere, the cry of despair, or the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation. That inner openness is what the desert fathers and mothers called “purity of heart”.

Listening with the ear of the heart can be a scary experience because it can call me to radical change, to a transformation of my limited human perspective. This is not simply a change in my opinion or even in my ideological stance, but a much deeper change in my attitude, a real change in my way of being and doing.

St Benedict, in his Rule, expects us to be constantly listening: to one another in the community; to the community leader (the abbot); to the guests; to the sick; and most of all, to God in the Scriptures at communal prayer and in personal *lectio* and prayer.

Perhaps if world leaders and others in authority stopped talking in slogans and began to listen to the fearful cries of those suffering from war-torn regimes, to the anguish of the poor and the hungry, to the desperation of those seeking asylum and refuge, or to the feeble whispers of those with incurable diseases, then our world might change: peace might replace war; the hungry might receive food and nourishment; the refugee might find safety and security; and the sick might be healed and made whole.

“To listen with the ear of the heart”, the opening words of the Rule of St Benedict, instruct those of us who seek to follow Benedict’s way, to continue to grow into this way of being, “lest our tongues make us deaf”.
<https://www.goodsams.org.au/article/listening-with-the-ear-of-the-heart>.

How can we “listen with the ear of the heart” more often?

THIS WEEK...

*“I love the Lord for he has heard”
(Responsorial Psalm)*

PRAYER

Eternal God, may I never hesitate in my presence wholly to another as you are to me. Amen



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To Have the Faith of a Child ...

19 Sept
2021

25TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Wis 2:12, 17-20

James 3:16-4:3

Mk 9:30-37

As I read and reflect on this narrative in Mark's Gospel, it seems there are two conversations going on. The first is opening a conversation about Jesus' future or the future of the Son of Man; the other is a conversation about who is the greatest among the Twelve.

In the first conversation, understanding it from our perspective of 2000 years of developing theologies, biblical hermeneutics and established creeds of faith, Jesus is opening the obscurities of the paschal mysteries but for his poor close friends hearing it face to face from the one that they have given up everything for must have been extremely confusing. We must remember that for many of his disciples their concept of the Messiah was the One who would save God's chosen people from oppression and raise them up to be a powerful nation once again. Therefore, for Jesus to tell them that he will be put to death must have been quite devastating. I guess I would have even questioned is this really the prophesied Messiah or just one of the many fakes?

The second conversations does not flow from the first and seems added into the narrative. For the Twelve have left the pondering about the messianic secret to then argue about leadership within the group. The Mission needs structure for stability. For as in the first conversation the followers of Jesus fear the unknown because it is sometimes confusing, unstable, uncomfortable and insecure.

Faith is just like this. It is believing in the sometimes unknown or at least the intangible. It is not always about the structures that we understand or even hope to know and understand and takes us beyond our preconceived ways. On retreat a few years ago, I remember in prayer, while pondering so much about my life, hearing the words "don't over think it!" I think that "voice" led me to find the understanding of the child of God and as confusing as it might be I need to let God be God in faith, in hope and accompanying me in love.

Do you question your faith in finding understanding in times of confusion?

THIS WEEK...

Consequently those who work in charity "need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others." (Pope Benedict Deus Caritas Est)

PRAYER

Father of hope and life, help me to know you more through the life of others. Amen



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Commitment to the Kingdom

26 Sept
2021

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY

Num 11:25-29

James 5:1-6

Mk 9: 38-43, 45, 47-48

It seems to me that sometimes commitment in today's Western world is on the decline. It is not only commitment to relationships, family, vocation, but also commitment to values. Values including those that Vincentians hold very dear, like respect, compassion, empathy - these seem to be waning out there in society. This situation can also make commitment to the Kingdom of God a difficult thing for many of us to manage, especially our young, when there is such a shortage of appropriate role models available. I remember being encouraged to read the lives of the Saints, does anyone remember reading the lives of the Saints, what radical examples of courage and determination, even though they were quite gory in parts.

I always like to explore just how many times a particular phrase is used in the Gospels. Did you know the "Kingdom of God" is mentioned 126 times in the Gospels and is defined as a key teaching of Christ. It seems that everything that Jesus teaches is usually intended to have that one outcome; that on the last day we shall inherit the Kingdom of God, where, with the Communion of Saints, we will be praising God forever.

Jesus is insisting, in a brutal way, that we should not let anything in this world distract us from having the Kingdom of God, everlasting life... neither our hand, our eye, our foot, money, family, friends. Jesus says that if the things we hold dear in our hearts make us lose the Kingdom of God, then let them go! If it is our parents, disconnect from them! If it is money or material wealth, throw it away or give to the poor! If it is a job, quit! If it is a business, close it! For it is better to be poor than live the rest of your after-life burning and gnashing your teeth in the fiery Gehenna, (the destination of the wicked). I remember an amazing young man at the Talbot, ready to inherit his family's rather lucrative business, fleeing the country. Why? That business was a drug making and selling business and he had the courage to run, far away.

I invite all of us to carefully reflect on our lives and resolve to identify those things that may lead us into sin and to shake them off, no matter the cost. Jesus says they are not at all important. What is most important is making sure we inherit the Kingdom of God.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

**Can you think of a weakness in your life that you were able to remedy?
How did you manage that?**

THIS WEEK...

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

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, help us to identify the negative distractions in our lives that can make us lose the Kingdom of God, give us the strength to avoid falling back into their tempting invitations. Amen.



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More ... Commitment to the Kingdom

3 Oct
2021

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gen: 2: 18-24

Heb: 2: 9-11

Mk: 10:2-16

There are two stories in today's Gospel. We have, Jesus with the Pharisees and Jesus with the little children, the subject is the Kingdom of God, for Mark is so concerned about the Kingdom of God and our ability to accept the invitation to that. Remember last Sunday? We begin with the words: *The Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?"*

It's a statement made to see whether they are going to catch Jesus denying the law of Moses so they can then tell the people that anyone who does not care about the command of Moses cannot be a Messiah. They were testing him to see what he would say, again. Do you remember the other stories where questions were used to try to trap Jesus?

Jesus is very careful how he answers this, and quotes Genesis itself. It was the custom of the people of that time that a husband could divorce his wife, but the wife could not divorce her husband. It was unfair; Jesus was condemning that system. Mark is reminding us that this Kingdom of God is God Himself. The marriage ceremony is where two people who are living the Kingdom, are made one.

The second story of the Kingdom of God is very sweet and one we can so easily relate to via our kids and grandkids. Jesus has been preaching all day long, he is exhausted. Women, carrying their children, bring their children up to him so he might bless them. You all know the words well. Jesus gets very angry and says: "Suffer the little children to come to me, forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God... unless you accept the Kingdom of God like these little children, you will never know what it is. That simplicity, innocence, and trust of a child, beautiful!

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

Can you think of a time you experienced the Kingdom of God as a little child might?

THIS WEEK...

"The Kingdom of God is peace in the Holy Spirit: he will reign in you if your heart is at peace." St Vincent De Paul

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, let us rejoice and be glad, for we have finally understood that the secret to opening the heart of God is to become a child. Amen.



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Sell what you have and give to the poor

10 Oct
2021

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wis 7: 7-11

Heb 4:12-13

Mk 10: 17-30

What is that radical interior calling given to us? Is it a calling to spiritual poverty? That is “spiritual poverty” that encourages each one of us to detach from the things of this world. As people of faith, as Vincentians, we are in the world yet not of it. Our values are radically different to mainstream society.

Remember the Beatitude. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” as Matthew says, and “Blessed are the poor,” as Luke says. Spiritual poverty means we discover the blessing of spiritual riches in our detachment from the material enticements of this world around us. It is not that material “things” are bad, rather it is our strong attachment to the things of this world that get in the way. Too often we want more and more and fall into the trap of thinking that more “things” will make us happy.

I remember a book in the 70’s that offered a list to check if you truly “need” to buy...the questions were: will it make you a better person; will it increase your faith; does it add value to your life? W.T Cavanagh in “Being Consumed” says, “the way you buy has a lot to do with the way you worship.”

Reflect, today, upon the clear calling you have received to live in this world without becoming attached to the things of this world. Possessions are only a means to the end of living committed to the Kingdom of God, to engage fully with life and fulfilling your purpose in life. You can have what you need, and you will strive to avoid excess and, especially, avoid interior attachment to worldly possessions and share with others.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

Can you think of a time you let go of the idea of purchasing a new “thing” realising you didn’t need it?

THIS WEEK...

“It is our vocation to set people’s hearts ablaze, to do what the Son of God did, who came to light a fire on earth in order to set it ablaze with His love”. Frederic Ozanam

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, help us to resist the material things of excess in this world and rather focus on real needs. In that detachment may we discover the true riches You have for me. Amen.



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Perfection a work in progress

17 Oct
2021

29TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 53; 10-11

Heb 4:14-16

Mk 10:35-45

Pride and ambition are not new human experiences in our world. Even in Jesus' close-knit group of followers, pride, ambition and a desire to be the favourite within the group, was evident, as we read in this Gospel. James and John ask a favour of Jesus, that they be allowed to sit, one on his left, the other on right, in his glory. Earlier in Chapter 3 of Mark's Gospel, when Jesus call the apostles, he calls these two brothers, men of thunder. I imagine it indicated passionate, strong and fiery personalities for these two men, which led to their request of Jesus, little knowing what such a place would really mean. Their request also led to disquiet in the group, with the other apostles feeling put out with James and John. I feel somewhat comforted by the fact that in this inner circle of believers who lived and worked with Jesus, that perfection was a work in progress.

The episode led however, to Jesus delivering some important messages about his mission. "Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave." Quite clearly, this scripture is a foundation for the servant leadership that Jesus lived and modelled.

Our Vincentian Rule in section 3.11 states that, *"Following Christ's example, the Presidents at all levels of the Society endeavour to be servant leaders. They provide an encouraging atmosphere in which the talents, capacities and spiritual charisms of the members are identified, developed and put to the service of the poor or to the St. Vincent de Paul Society."*

No matter what your position is in the Society, your work and connection with people being assisted, continues the mission of Jesus expressed in this Gospel. Your service to others is leading the way for others to grow.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

In what ways do I lead, serve or assist the leadership of our Conference?

THIS WEEK...

"We must be silent before we can listen. We must listen before we can learn. We must learn before we can prepare. We must prepare before we can serve. We must serve before we can lead." (William Arthur Ward)

PRAYER

*"Our soul waits for the Lord;
he is our help and shield.
Our heart is glad in him,
because we trust in his holy name.
(Ps 33:20-21)*



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Restoration

24 Oct
2021

30TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Jer 31:7-9

Heb 5:1-6

Mk 10:46-52

The story of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar sitting by the side of the road, waiting for Jesus, is one of my favourite pieces of scripture. It is a story full of hope and faith, in a world where having a disability of any kind left you behind, made you outcast. We can look at the story on two levels. Firstly, we have the blind beggar seeking out Jesus in faith, knowing he would be healed. On another level, we can look at Bartimaeus representing us and our need to be cured of our spiritual blindness.

As a healing and giving back of sight, the miracle demonstrates the power of faith and the love of God for those in need. However, it took courage to call out over the crowd, to seek out Jesus over the noise of the crowd and the discouragement they offered. Faith takes perseverance, courage and physical effort; it doesn't always come easily though Bartimaeus is a good role model, at least for me.

But what about spiritual blindness? What is blind to us in our daily life? Do we truly see and appreciate our partners, our family, those we work with and those we encounter in our daily journeys? And what about our own imperfections? The "me first" moments in our lives, that block out others and God, and prevent us from being whole and fully human.

Like Bartimaeus, I am also inspired by the life of Helen Keller and the positive attitude she brought to her life and the challenges that blindness presented, as well as the opportunities. Some of her inspiring words are: "Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadows." "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision."

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

What are we blind to in our daily lives?

THIS WEEK...

"The Lord has done great things for me; I am filled with joy." Ps 125

PRAYER

Lord, open the eyes of our hearts. Give us eyes that can see your wonder and ears that can hear your truth and your voice. Amen



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The Greatest Commandments

31 Oct
2021

31ST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Deut 6:2-6

Heb 7:23-28

Mk 12:28-34

The Jewish people had to keep 613 commandments listed in the Torah, the Jewish Law or Teaching. So the question posed to Jesus today is understandable. "Which is the first of all the commandments?" And I imagine that the scribe asking Jesus, wanted to know this to identify the most important commandment to follow. Jesus responds with two and states that no commandment is greater than them. Both commandments focus on love and simply reflect the pure love that God has for each one of us. First, we "must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength." Then, "you must love your neighbour as yourself."

It sounds easy at first but this love is a total commitment; one of the heart, mind, soul and strength. And not just for God, but for myself, and all those around me. It is not an easy love. This is the great challenge for us as Christians. To love like that, we must also believe that we are loved unconditionally as people made in the image of God. Yes, we have imperfections, and we are not perfect, yet God loves us for who we are, the person God created. Seeing and appreciating this reality in others, all others, is an equal challenge and commandment for us.

Tomorrow marks the Feast of All Saints Day remembering those saints who have gone before us and leaving us examples of how we can demonstrate the love expressed by these two commandments. Mark's Gospel story of the Sermon on the Mount links easily with the Beatitudes becoming our Christian mission statement, detailing just how we can express God's love. Be poor in spirit, gentle, mournful, thirst for what is right, merciful, be pure in heart and a peacemaker, and accept persecution if you are because of your faith in Jesus.

As Vincentians, you live out these commandments in a very practical and hands on way doing your good work with the poor and disadvantaged members of your local communities. Loving God and neighbour needs more than words, it requires action on our part.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

Who is my neighbour?

THIS WEEK...

Seek the face of Christ in the people we assist

PRAYER

Lord, help us to love as you love. Fill us with your Spirit so that we can choose what is right. We are weak Lord, but we know also, that even when we are weak, you are strong within us. Amen



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Mark's Gospel raises several powerful themes for reflection

7 Nov
2021

32ND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

1Kg 17:10-16

Heb 9:24-28

Mk12:38-44

Mark's Gospel raises several powerful themes for reflection.

Jesus tells the disciples to "be aware of the scribes wearing long robes and accepting greetings in the marketplace". They like to be called "rabbis," and even the way they dress invites attention. Jesus calls us to live in humility, while the scribes act out of vanity and pride.

What does humility mean for you? For me, humility is the space in which we embrace and hold onto vulnerability, regardless of failure and success.

Mother Theresa said, "we have forgotten that we belong to each other" and are connected through our humanity. Jesus describes this humanness, challenging each of us to love with complete humility, to be honest with ourselves and everyone we meet.

Humility is strength in honesty and openness. The woman in the passage had limited funds but gave two coins to the treasury. Rich people donate large sums of money and are praised, even offered reverence. However, what this woman did is "hand over all she had, her whole livelihood". How profound: to hand over all she had. How might her life change because of this gesture?

I worked with a man many years ago who became homeless when his wife died. When I arrived at his house, he offered me a coffee, a simple but powerful gesture. I had the choice to accept this gesture or reject it. This man had no money, but he had the gift of welcoming hospitality, of care and interest in others.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

How does such a response influence your reflection?

THIS WEEK...

I will make plans and efforts to be humble in how I relate and what I do.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me to live a life that is in relationship with Jesus. Give me the strength to be humble in heart.



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The King of the Jews?

14 Nov
2021

33RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Dan 12:1-3

Heb 10:11-14, 18

Mk 13:24-32

The story of Jesus before Pilate gives the impression, he is crowning Jesus, the King of the Jews, as he says, “your nation and chief priests have handed you over to me.”

Pilate has been clever in using power for his political gain of independence. But Jesus points out to Pilate: “My Kingdom is not part of this world.” Jesus reached out to others in an expression of love and encourages us to question how we use power in our own lives.

We can use our power to bring forth the love of Jesus that is respectful, loving, and divine. Do we relate to people with love, patience, and non-judgment, or with intolerance, rejection, and harm? We might ask ourselves: how do we repair damage and instead bring about love and peace in our relationships?

Jesus’s message is not to use power in an abusive way or for our own gains. His life was focused on the idea of how to love each other, how to build kingships, and know that we are all intertwined with love in all the complexity of human life. Jesus embodies love and loves every aspect of his creation: nature and all living things, animals, and humans beings. For Jesus, his most powerful response is love.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

How have you used your loving power with the people you have met this week?

THIS WEEK...

“Let us imitate Mother Teresa who made works of mercy the guide of her life, and her path towards holiness.” (Pope Francis)

PRAYER

Dear Lord, give me the strength to be humble in heart and mind, and help me to be connected to the life of Jesus.



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Spirituality of Humanity

21 Nov
2021

JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

Dan 7:13-14

Apoc 1:5-8

Jn 18:33-37

Today we hear about the coming of the son of humanity.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

We are encouraged to place our trust in God, not the ways of the world – though, in many ways it would be easier. Trusting in the world would not necessarily challenge our behaviours or attitudes. However, Jesus invites us to see His power and glory in our daily life.

There is a sense of urgency, Jesus is not trying to frighten us but calls us to follow him and live our lives as his Father would hope. When we make decisions in our lives, do we make decisions for our own selfish needs or the needs of others? When we are called to live by Jesus, we must put our own needs and wants aside.

“You will show me the life path, the fullness of joy in your presence, the delights actual right hand.”

God calls us to be ready. We never know when, where or how, but God will arrive when we least expect it. We are each called to build relationships, to hold Jesus close, to be open and transparent, and to express love. We put aside our own needs to be in control or be judgmental, instead accepting who we meet with love, compassion, and commitment as Jesus asks.

There is a beautiful quote in the Rule I will share with you. “Vincentians are aware of their brokenness and need for God’s grace. They seek his Glory, not their own”.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

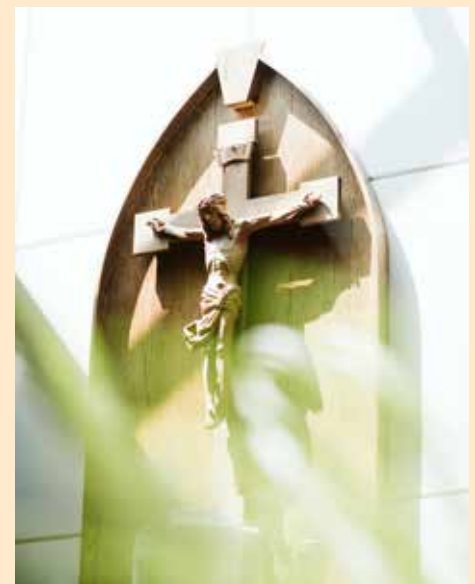
How have you prepared time to be with Jesus and be aware of his presence in your life over this last week?

THIS WEEK...

Place out Trust in God

PRAYER

*“God of surprises, God of the unexpected, you approach us delicately, whispering your presence amid the noise of our world. Make us sensitive to the sounds of your name echoing in the quiet places where you wait for us.”
(Gemma Simmond)*



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Watching, Waiting

28 Nov
2021

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Jer 33:14-16

1Thess 3:12-4:2

Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

The word Advent is from the Latin word *adventus* translated simply as “coming”. It is the season that prepares us liturgically for the coming of the joy of Christmas. However, the reading of this week’s Gospel from Luke paints a fairly grim picture of the future time. Christmas joy is certainly not found in people “dying of fear as they await what menaces the world”.

The narrative in Luke this week is about being awake and watchful too. It like Jesus giving his disciples “the heads up” on the future. However, when destruction arrives, the followers of the Son of Man can stand erect with heads held high as their liberation is at hand. This news would have been comforting for the disciples who still yearned for the foretold Messiah to raise up the chosen ones.

This reading calls us today into a time of advent, a time of the coming and to be watchful. Advent too is the promise of abundance. And that is what we prepare for over this season – a God so abundant that God takes on the fullness of our humanity. That fullness of being human is to know how to read signs of God’s action as we have seen over our last years and yet be perplexed and to live with fear. To see healing in treatments and vaccines and yet sickness that shakes our world and finally to now know that God is amongst us brimming with love for all of our human experience – its fear and hope, its despair and joy; its loss and salvation.

(Reflection from Jack de Groot)

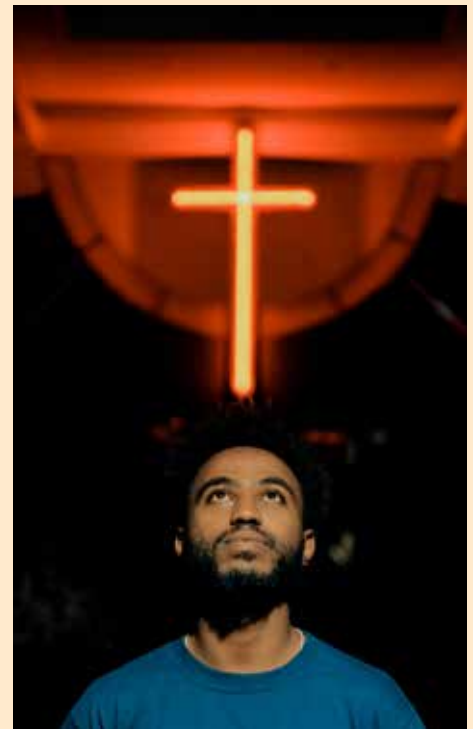
What does “being watchful” mean to you, especially at this time of year?

THIS WEEK...

*O come, O Wisdom from on high
Who orders all things mightily
To us the path of knowledge show
And teach us in her ways to go.*

PRAYER

O come, O come Emmanuel



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Making of Paths

5 Dec
2021

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Baruch 5:1-9

Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Lk 3:1-6

Who are the voices that “cry in the wilderness” today?

“Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?” This was a question I was invited into at my front door one Sunday afternoon. I have to admit I actually admire faith traditions that step outside the four walls of the building called “the church” and take up the vocational call to be voices crying in the wilderness for their faith. It is a tough gig and at many times they are confronted with hostility and abuse. Don’t get me wrong, I am not perfect in my hospitality. I generally see them coming down the street and try to “go out” or sit in the back yard so I don’t “hear” the front door bell.

I would not immediately see my Sunday afternoon visitors as modern day John the Baptists but for what they do for their faith, well it’s worth a thought! They too have a message which they are passionate about sharing. They too, can make us uncomfortable. They too, have a particular dress sense although I feel it is a little more conservative than the Baptist standing in the Jordan River!

As Vincentians we too are influenced by voices crying in the wilderness. St Vincent de Paul, Blessed Frederic, Blessed Rosalie, Gerald Ward, Charles O’Neill, Pope Francis and others cry out a very passionate but clear message...serving Christ in the people alienated by poverty through love, respect, justice, hope and joy. Their message is uncomfortable especially in a secular society focussed only on looking after ourselves.

As we prepare for the birth of the Christ-child may we continue in faith to hear the voices that influence our mission offering hope for the hopeless, shaping a more just and compassionate society.

Who are the voices that “cry in the wilderness” that you hear?

THIS WEEK...

May we share with someone this week our love for the work of the Society.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we continue to look beyond ourselves in sharing gifts of love. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Celebration of New Life

12 Dec
2021

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Zeph 3:14-18

Phil 4:4-7

Lk 3:10-18

The third Sunday in Advent shifts focus slightly from “preparing the way” to the celebration of new life and the birth of a Child. This shift is very much a visual act in many of our churches as the liturgical colour of vestments and banners have changed from purple to rose. The traditional name is Gaudete Sunday and it has a liturgical counterpart in Lent with Laetare Sunday. The significance of both celebrations is witness, hope, joy and encouragement.

There is a known phenomenon that couples celebrating the soon birth of a child experience. It is essentially a time of cleaning and clearing in preparation. It is a time of hope-filled joy shared between the couple and it also makes it all very real!

I remember vividly the birth of both our children. We had a book which provided us with a week by week “visual” of the stages of growth of our babies. Anne was greatly surprised when I mentioned something from the book; “So you are reading it!” I responded appropriately, “Yes dear!”

In those few months we not only counted down the weeks but also prepared the house and our lives for the new family member. Then at some point there was a change in focus from preparing for a child to the birth of our baby. This change is slight but came with excitement, anxiousness, fear, tears, joy, apprehension and trepidation.

Christmas is just around the corner. There is so much that needs to be prepared. Our challenge is to find time now for a slight change in our preparations from simply experiencing the birth of a child in a manger 2000 years ago to the wonder and awe of a God incarnated bringing a radical source of joy, love and light to lives darkened by despair and hopelessness.

How will we be open to this slight change? Do you remember the joy of new birth in your life?

THIS WEEK...

“You have come near, God-with-us... making of our heart a habitat of love” (Joyce Rupp)

PRAYER

Emmanuel, God-with-us, draws us near and enliven our heart to the joy of Christmas. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
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The Vincentian Visit

19 Dec
2021

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Micah 5:1-4

Heb 10:5-10

Lk 1:39-44

The Gospel of Luke this week tells us of the visit of Mary to her pregnant kinswoman Elizabeth. This visit was a moment of grace. The profound love of two people coming together to share a deep mystery, the gift of life. Mary, who was also carrying child, had much to offer and share with Elizabeth.

I remember that at the time my wife Anne was pregnant with our daughter, Maddie, one of her sisters was also pregnant with their first child. During that period Anne and Susan visited often sharing stories of the joy of feeling kicks and movements, the pains of backaches but also sharing the fears of the actual child-birth and delivery and whether they will be good mothers. They walked in each other's shoes, often in loving support, laughter and reassurances.

Much would have been the same with this visit of Mary and Elizabeth although in this account there was a profound difference in the relationship. Elizabeth, through the eyes of faith, recognises the coming birth of the incarnation; *Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?* This is so much more than simply an account of relatives visiting. It actually becomes a proclamation of faith.

This time of Visitation is deeply grounded in our Vincentian visit. The Visitation is unique to the works of the Society. This moves us to reflect beyond just a "home visit" to "what is needed is any form of visitation?" Blessed Rosalie Rendu reminded the first Conference to "be kind and love, for love is your first gift...if you have nothing to give, give yourself". The Visitation opens us today to many possibilities and opportunities for compassionate care and support embracing the heart of welcome and hospitality. In this way our Vincentian Visitations will always lead us in our good works in sharing the very simple gift of our humanity, where we share graced moments giving life through our response in love.

How do you understand your Vincentian visits?

THIS WEEK...

During this Christmas time let us remind ourselves of the gift of self to others.

PRAYER

Father, may we always share the best of our humanity being graced moments for all we visit. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Conference Family

26 Dec
2021

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

1Jn 3: 1-2, 21-24

Lk 2: 41-52

The vocation of a parent offers much insight into the mystery of faith. Many parents spend their children's growing years emptying themselves of their own needs and yearnings for the sake of providing the best for their children. Then, when the children become adults, parents must be willing to "let go" so that the children live their lives and recognise and understand their true identity and vocation. This is so children can find the reality of their own place in the world.

Family is not about power and ownership, it is about relationships. Relationships are built on love and at the heart of this love is God.

The feast of the Holy Family reminds us of this very fact. It is never perfect and it needs to be nurtured every moment of every day. The Gospel today finishes with the understanding that Mary "pondered all these things in her heart" and we are reminded of this in the last moments of Jesus' life. The example of Mary is needed when one moment of family life is a celebration and the next moment is lost in frustrations, disappointments and even sadness.

Blessed Frederic pondered many things in his heart especially his three loves in life; the love of God, the love of his *Confreres* and his deep love for his wife Amelie and daughter Marie. For Frederic all three are part of his family. I guess I always wonder how well do we nurture family among our confreres in the Society?

May we draw on these inspirations as we head toward a new year strengthening our Vincentian spirit through our relationships and the promise of being as one in family.

Do you see your Vincentian confreres as family? If not, why not?

THIS WEEK...

Pope Francis in speaking on grandparents states that a society or community that does not value, respect and care for its elderly members "doesn't have a future because it has no memory, it's lost its memory".

PRAYER

Help us, O Lord, to ponder in our hearts the unconditional love of our family. Amen



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Spiritual Reflection Guide

**140th Year
of the Society
in NSW**