

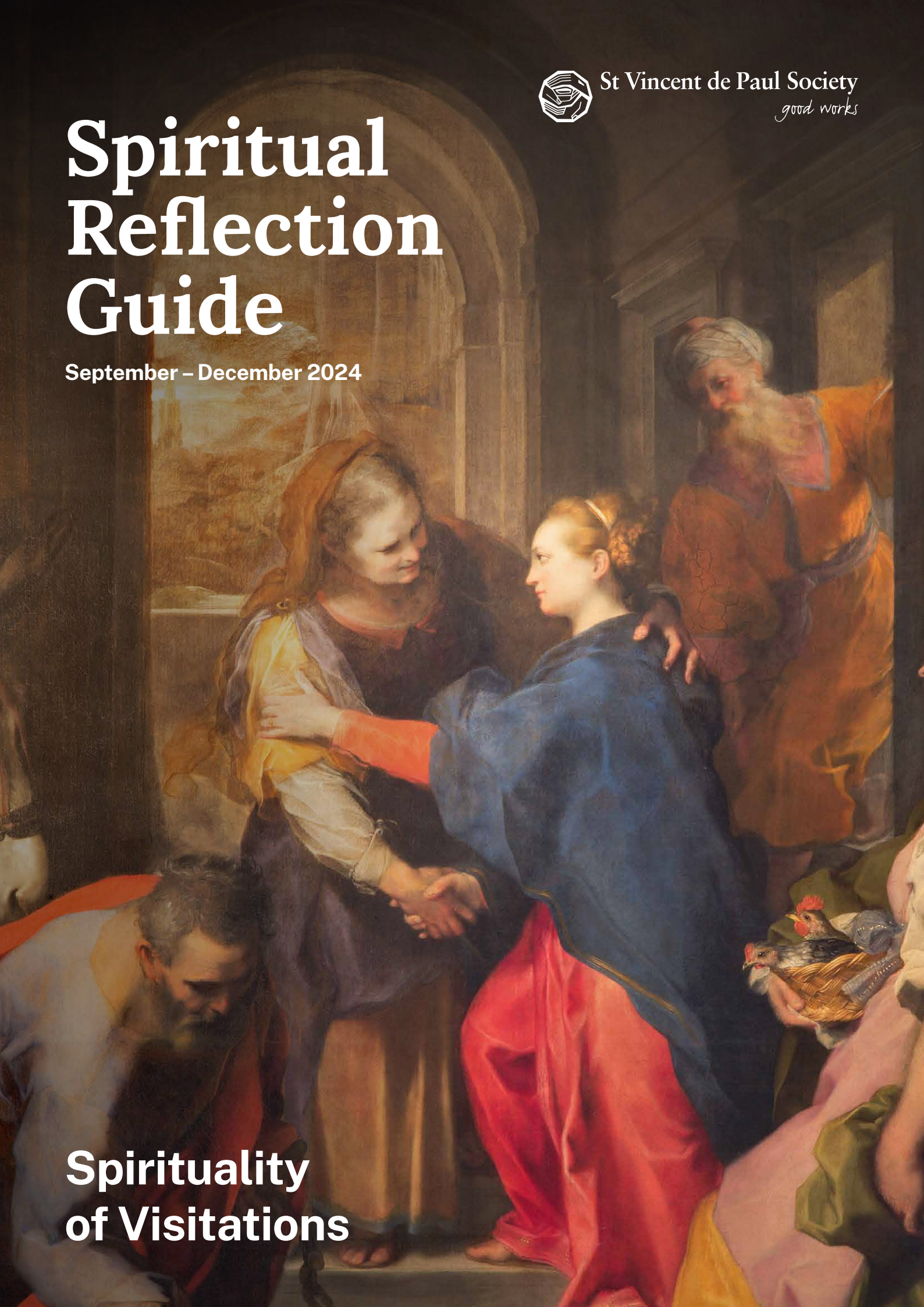


St Vincent de Paul Society
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Spiritual Reflection Guide

September – December 2024

**Spirituality
of Visitations**



01
Sep
2024

Silence of the heart



THIS WEEK...

"Time is precious. Silence of the heart is a treasure"

PRAYER

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew my spirit within me." (Psalm 51.10)



22ND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Deut 4:1-2,6-8

James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27

Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Recently I had a robust discussion with a group of Members regarding their time of prayer and spiritual reflection as *Confreres* at meetings. I began the conversation stating that this is the most important aspect of our meeting time, to open our hearts to God and to deepen our relationship with God. All in all the conversations agreed but many reflected that it is not always like that in practice!

Jesus' words to the Pharisees hold much for each of us today. The reading expresses the vital importance of the difference between human laws, through the law of Moses and God's law which is simply the law of love. In context, hand washing or ablutions were needed by the Judaic law as it marked the transition between the secular world of the marketplace and the world of the Judaic person in reverence of God. The Pharisees of course were very particular about this separation of the sacred and secular and so needed to challenge Jesus and his disciples.

It is unfortunate when people simply focus on the rubrics and laws and only pay lip-service to the deeper challenges of the model of unconditional love. It is a very difficult way of being

Prayer is a conversation with God and just like our conversations with each other sometimes it comes with depth and wonderment and other times we just babble with a hundred other thoughts passing through our mind! We concentrate on the rubrics of prayers yet miss the moments of grace expressed in the conversations. Pausing before I pray, collecting my passing thoughts, being aware and attentive does offer some assistance in letting go and being conscious that I rest in God's presence. There is a mindfulness in silence of the heart for it is here that we truly find time in the presence of our God.

Are our prayers and response to each other more than simple lip-service?

The touch of the heart...

08
Sep
2024

23RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 35:4-7

James 2:1-5

Mk 7:31-37

In the mix of this week's readings is that familiar term in scripture of "Do not be afraid". Importantly this phrase of hope is expressed throughout our scriptures 365 times. Isaiah uses this phrase in presenting a God of compassion and love and that we take courage in this understanding. But Jesus always wanted us to know that no matter what we struggle with in life, Jesus is always there, coming to us in love, and will see us in hope towards the shores of God's peace.

It is in this coming to us in love that the gospel narrative this week leads us.

This account of the healing of the man born deaf is particular to the gospel of Mark. We are told that the person was brought to Jesus and that not only was he deaf but he had a problem with his speech. A fact which many would understand is the challenges of a person born without hearing. Jesus' healing is not superficial, but has many and varied layers. Jesus could have healed the man immediately on the accounts of the people who had concern for him. However, he spent some quiet time with the man, possibly listening to his journey and his pain. It is through this pastoral encounter that healing begins.

The second point is within the word *ephphatha*. This word and action is carried through the Sacrament of Baptism, where the priest or deacon touches the mouth and ear of the child or candidate asking that they are open to hear God's word and to share God's word with others "*May the Lord soon touch your ear to receive his word and your mouth to proclaim his faith.*" This touch is important in the gospel account too. Jesus heals and communicates to the deaf person through the sense of touch which would have been the only way he understood his world. Jesus expresses not just profound understanding and compassion but also a deep sense of "do not be afraid" through this action.

In essence, Jesus' listening touched the ears of one who yearned to hear.

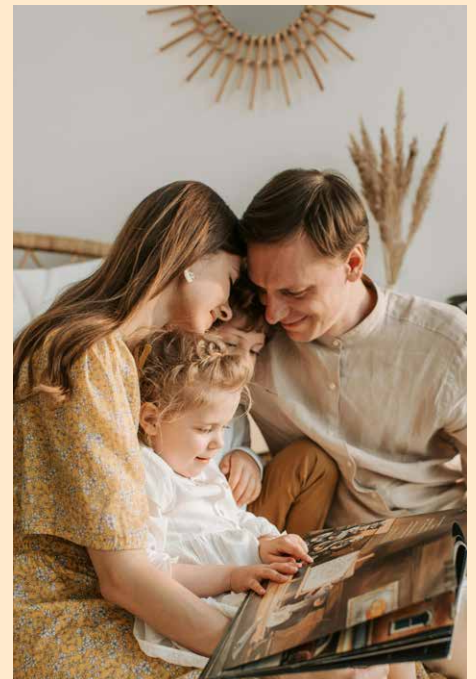
When do we touch the ear of those yearning to be heard?

THIS WEEK...

Pope Francis also offers a profound encounter. Take some time this week to watch this clip; www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSJGJC33df8

PRAYER

Lord, touch my ears to hear your voice and my mouth to tell others of your love. Amen created.



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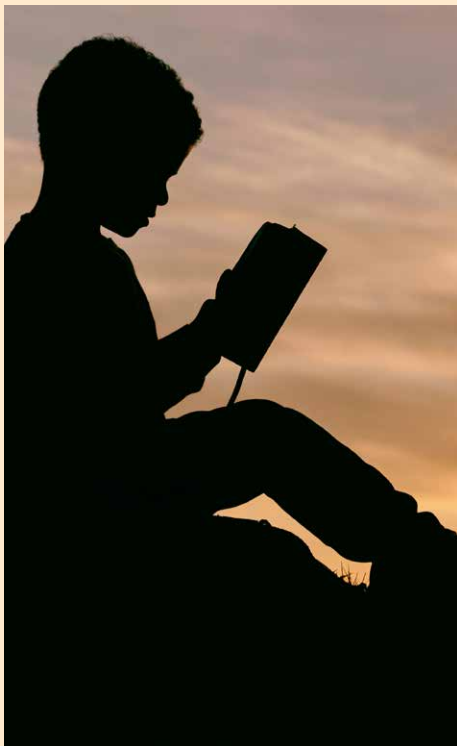
Understanding God's ways

THIS WEEK...

"Never see a need without doing something about it" (St Mary of the Cross Mackillop)

PRAYER

Eternal God, may I never hesitate in my giving as it shines your love to others. Amen



24TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 50:5-9

James 2:14-18

Mk 8:27-35

The narrative of today's gospel seems to be a turning point in that Peter acknowledges Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, however, Peter doesn't fully understand how Jesus will be a saviour. In Judaic prophesy it is the Messiah who will "release captives" and be the saviour of the chosen people but God's ways are not our ways so when Peter opposes Jesus' "way" and is sharply put in his place as a disciple not the leader.

The words of Jesus to Peter resound often throughout the ages. "Get behind my Satan! The way you think is not God's way but humanity." To this there have been many times in my life where I have struggled with this mystery. This morning I was talking to someone in our parish who told me of a family who lost their six month old child to AIDS last night. In hearing this it is hard not to ask the question "why would God allow this to happen?"

How often do we all ask this question? Finding understanding in the mystery of God places us often in front of questions like this. They are our emotional and "reasonable" response to tragic moments. To think beyond questions like this is the beginning of the journey to the heart of the gospel messages and life in God's presence.

To be a follower of Jesus is not always the easier path of life. Pope Francis expressed this in a morning Mass homily last year; "God's peace is real peace, that enters the reality of life, that does not deny life; that is life. "Peace without the trials and tribulations is not the peace of Christ: it is a peace that can be purchased. But this peace does not last; it comes to an end."

Even poet Robert Frost offers us Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.

How often have we taken the less travelled path?

And the first shall become last

22
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2024

25TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Wis 2:12, 17-20

James 3:16-4:3

Mk 9:30-37

I have always loved this idea within the scriptures, it is mentioned a few times within the New Testament, and here in Mark, Jesus uses the example of a child, taking a look at status—a child would be seen as the most vulnerable and one to be protected. And therefore, whoever welcomes one such child, welcomes the Lord.

Why is this such a meaningful thing to ponder? It is forcing us to step away from self-serving gains and status for ourselves and is looking out for those who are deeply dependant in this world. If our gaze stops being on what can advance us, and more about what it means to understand the frailty and beauty of life then we are unlocking a more purpose-filled and more deeply examined life.

"Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." This verse suggests that societal status and material wealth are not the ultimate determinants of one's value or destiny. It encourages humility and the recognition that true worth is found in character and actions rather than external achievements. We see this often in religious and ethical teachings, where the emphasis is placed on serving others, compassion, and justice, and this is exactly what we are called to do as Vincentians.

Reflecting on this principle in our daily lives, calls us to reevaluate our goals and the ways we measure success. It urges us to consider the importance of empathy, kindness, and community over personal gain and competition. In practical terms, it might mean prioritising relationships and service over accolades. It allows us to cultivate a deeper sense of purpose and interconnectedness with those around us. In doing so, we align ourselves with a more equitable and compassionate worldview that values every individual, in particular the ones who are the most vulnerable, like a little child.

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

How can you respond to being a "servant to all" within your Vincentian works today?

THIS WEEK...

*"We make a living by what we get.
We make a life by what we give."
Winston Churchill*

PRAYER

Lord, may we always know how close you are to us and guide us in true humility and service, Amen.



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Integrity

THIS WEEK...

*“Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.”
Albert Einstein*

PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, Open our eyes,
help us to see you in all we meet.
Amen*



26TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Num 11:25-29

James 5:1-6

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

When I read this Sunday’s Gospel, I am thrown into trying to understand a perspective. We are so quick to judge and stand on moral high grounds based on our own moral compass, that we (as if its second nature) point out everything wrong with the way others live their life if it’s not conducive to ours.

However, Jesus in this reading really hands down a beautiful lesson in integrity. “If it’s your hand that causes you to stumble, cut it off”. This is very extreme, but to me it draws a parallel of when the woman, caught in adultery is about to be stoned to death. In this instance, Jesus kneels and writes in the sand and then says, “whoever of you is without sin cast the first stone”, and no one can. What did He write in the sand? This will always remain a mystery, and I have heard it said that perhaps he wrote down all their sins?

This parallel is deeply important, because I think whenever we are confronted with something that we deem as “not right” we need to be challenged to hold a mirror up to ourselves, to see what is possibly going on within us first and foremost.

This is a call to integrity.

I am a believer that integrity will always win, no matter what is spoken against you or may seem unfair or unjust or unholy, the way we respond and hold ourselves will be what is measured.

I am drawn to think that if this is the way Jesus responded to His disciples when they were (in good faith) pointing out the way others were going through life, I wonder how He would respond to our time today in the eyes of inclusivity and human dignity.

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

What stumbling blocks to we put in front of ourselves or others?

An ordained union

06
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2024

27TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Gen 2:18-24

Heb 2:9-11

Mk 10:2-16

Our readings this week speak of an ordained union from the creation narrative in Genesis through to the Gospel reading. What I love about the scriptures and this particular narrative is it doesn't stop there, it continues through to the book of Revelation, speaking of the Church being the bride and Christ as the bridegroom. And for those who are invited to feast at the table, are part of this union, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19.9).

This eucharistic union of Christ's sacrifice is in full glory here in Revelation, which I can't help but draw similarities to the story in Genesis, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh".

My favourite verse in this reading in Genesis is "it is not good for man to be alone", whilst in context it is talking about this divine union, the notion of human beings designed from the very beginning is to be relational beings –connecting to one another brings to light how much we need each other.

The relational nature of Vincentian works, the apostolic notion of providing good works together, and the deep need that is crying out in today's world, where loneliness is rife. Human connection cannot simply stop at a partnership –but a full union of community. Which is why I believe we have the image of the marriage of the Lamb's supper in revelation. All are embraced in this divine union, therefore, our call is not just for a select few, or for people that walk in the same steps, but for everyone. As everyone is invited to the table

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

How can we be more responsive to the loneliness we see today?

THIS WEEK...

*"We come to the table of the Lord
As one body formed in your love"
John Burland*

PRAYER

*Dear Lord, strengthen our
connection to one another as we
serve those in our midst. Amen*



St Vincent de Paul Society
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All things are possible



THIS WEEK...

*"It always seems impossible,
until it is done" – Nelson Mandela*

PRAYER

Jesus, I trust in you, Amen



28TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Wis 7:7-11

Heb 4:12-13

Mk 10:17-30

This week's Gospel talks to us about what seems to be impossible and a deep call of faith in action. Almost that your life may become an act of worship. Jesus not only addresses the commandments that we possibly all know, but He then challenges a full and complete commitment of mind, body and heart.

"Sell what you own and give the money to the poor". Possibly for Vincentians, this isn't such a hard concept, as we are confronted with this need on a daily basis, but the point here, is possibly looking at the sacrifice it takes to live out this call. Sometimes its uncomfortable, sometimes we may have to let go of our own understandings or plans. I do like how it is left open ended though; the man "went away grieving, for he had many possessions" it doesn't say, and continued to live his life as he did... in fact, we don't know if after he grieved, he decided to follow Jesus.

Sometimes we are called into places that seem so impossible, sometimes things happen in our lives that truly hurt, and yet we know there is a higher calling for us. When I lost my brother very tragically a few years ago, I was acutely aware of the choice I had in front of me... it could make me bitter, or make me better. It was a very unfair challenge a very traumatic and tragic loss and the grief is still very strong, but it didn't stop me from trying to make something beautiful from the pain.

I think the key here is within the commandments; the "thou shall nots" if we kept them at the things we don't do, are we really moving forward? How about we examine what the opposite to the 'nots' are; thou shall not murder – where can we give life? Thou shall not steal – where can we give? Thou shall not bear false witness – where can we speak the truth?

We always have an opportunity in life to do what is seemingly impossible, because all things really are possible.

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

Where have you been asked to answer an impossible task?

Glory and Servanthood

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2024

29TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 53; 10-11

Heb 4:14-16

Mk 10:35-45

What do we want? Glor-y! When do we want it? Now!

Maybe that's an unfair way of looking at James and John's desire for glory. In any case, they are pulled up by Jesus with a pertinent question: "Can you drink from the cup I have to drink?" In other words, glory doesn't come on a free ticket. It's not even a smooth ride. There's no money for jam.

The path to glory is the path of servanthood.

One of my favourite hymns is The Servant Song by Richard Gillard. One of our long-time members who knows an enormous amount of history told me that Gillard wrote this hymn about the St Vincent de Paul Society, honouring his mother's experience as a volunteer with us.

Will you let me be your servant? Let me be as Christ to you.

We are pilgrims on a journey, we are trav'lers on the road.

We are here to help each other, walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you, in the night-time of your fear.

Our roles in the Society, whether members, employees, or volunteers, are about servant leadership, day in, day out.

Robert K Greenleaf might be called the father of servant leadership. He posed three foundational questions for servant leaders to check. Two of these are:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants?

I see these questions as something of a re-wording of our simple philosophy of a 'hand up'

Reflection by Leonie Duck

What does holding the Christ-light for others mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

"At the end of the day, it's not about what you've accomplished. It's about who you've lifted up"
Denzel Washington

PRAYER

Lord, I pray that I may have the grace to be a humble servant-companion. Amen.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

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What do you want me to do for you?

THIS WEEK...

“Allow yourself to be led by the Lord. He will direct all things through you”. St Vincent de Paul

PRAYER

Lord, remind me that our relationship is a two-way street. Like Bartimaeus, may I be responsive when you call. Amen.



30TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Jer 31:7-9

Heb 5:1-6

Mk 10:46-52

As is so often the case, there is repetition in our Gospel readings that we cannot ignore as coincidental. Jesus, today, asks the exact same question as last week: 'What do you want me to do for you?'

James and John wanted glory – one to sit at his right hand, one to sit at his left, living in His glory. Bartimaeus asked for sight. Not a small thing. In fact, a very significant thing. But just asking for the playing field to be re-levelled. Bartimaeus was requesting simply to have the same capability as others in society to enable him to become self-reliant.

To be fair to James and John, they did say in last week's Gospel, that they were willing and able to drink from the cup and be baptised with Jesus. But thinking back to our most familiar Bible stories, I don't recall any of the apostles, springing to their feet when Jesus called them, as Bartimaeus does, "throwing off his cloak" in his haste.

What sticks in my mind from other stories are doubts (Thomas), fear and doubt (Peter walking on the water), denials (Peter again), excuses, hesitations (just wait, I need to take care of something else first). These narratives make me feel very much like an apostle! I think I would've fitted in perfectly to their never-fully-on-top-of-things environment.

Bartimaeus is a great model for us. His unquestioning faith was evident.

Reflection by Leonie Duck

What do you want Jesus to do for you? And how responsive are you to his call?

It's all about love

03
Nov
2024

31ST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Deut 6:2-6

Heb 7:23-28

Mk 12:28-34

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

This is much more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices.

We all know this passage so well. On the surface of it, listening to the words, it makes the task of our faith sound really simple. When we start to unpack 'love' (agape love) and try to live out, it's much less simple.

We're given a definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 which is a popular choice of reading for wedding Masses. It describes love in a broader sense than romantic love. It's the love required to sustain a marriage, or any long-term friendship. It's also a love that is concerned with the greater good. A charitable love.

St Paul lists the elements of love as: patient, kind, not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Love rejoices in the truth.

Agape love transcends feelings. It is selfless and understanding. It involves sacrifice and unconditional care.

Martin Luther King Jr once described it as "a love that seeks nothing in return; an overflowing love; what theologians would call the love of God working in the lives of men". He went on to say: "And when you rise to love on this level, you begin to love [people], not because they are likeable, but because God loves them".

Loving on this level is fulfilling the Catholic Social Teaching principle upon which the work of the Society is based - the dignity of the human person.

Reflection by Leonie Duck

Which aspects of agape love do you find most difficult to live out?

THIS WEEK...

Agape doesn't love somebody because they're worthy. Agape makes them worthy by the strength and power of its love.
Rob Bell

PRAYER

Lord, give me the grace to love selflessly, with kindness and without judgment. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

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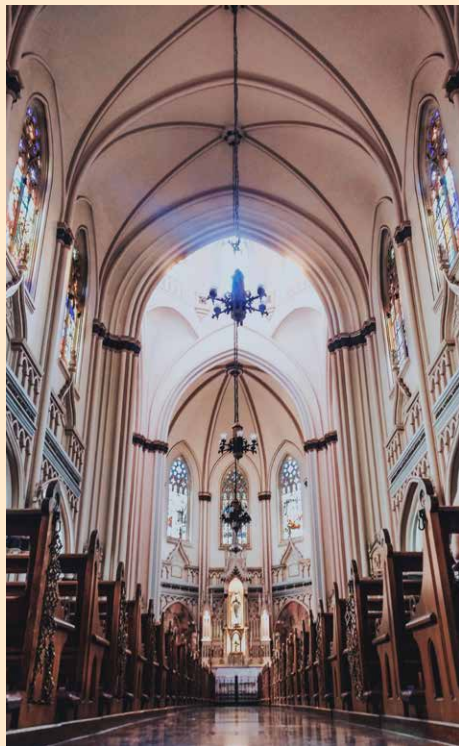
Everything she had.

THIS WEEK...

*It's not how much we give but
how much love we put into giving.
Mother Teresa*

PRAYER

*Lord, remind me to look to those
we are assisting for the lessons
they can teach me. Amen.*



32ND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

1Kg 17:10-16

Heb 9:24-28

Mk12:38-44

I find this one of the most humbling Gospel stories I know.

Many of us give our time, or our money, or both. And many people, particularly Society members, give a lot of time, money, and energy. The poor widow in the story, while seeming to give only a tiny amount, delivers an enormous lesson.

I've seen often, and I don't think it's unusual, for the greatest generosity to come from amongst the most disadvantaged and marginalised in our community. I'm aware of families in some cultures, and members of communities which have become a 'family', that truly live by 'what's mine is yours' (and some in that same community reap the benefit of the corollary 'what's yours is mine'). The approach is if a person is in need and one has something they can give to help (be it money, time or goods), then it is an obligation to give it – even if it leaves the giver with not enough.

I feel like the story is also a reminder to appreciate every person for what they have to offer. It may not be much, or may not be our idea of what's needed, or delivered in the way we would do it. Often in these situations, when I've paused, stepped back, or held my tongue, I've watched a situation unfold very differently – and much better – than I had expected.

To me, the beauty of humanity is that we have all come to our current point in time from a myriad of different experiences and backgrounds, from which we've developed different perspectives, and different beliefs about the best way to achieve an objective.

As one of our lovely members recently said, in noting how much we can learn from the people we assist and others outside of the Society: Every person has wisdom in their own way.

Reflection by Leonie Duck

Do I judge others, believing I give more than they do?

Do small things with great love

17
Nov
2024

33RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Dan 12:1-3

Heb 10:11-14, 18

Mk 13:24-32

Father Andrew Greeley, the great sociologist from Chicago, says that Christ's Second Coming should be happening today and every day, and he gives examples of what he means.

At a soup kitchen, a woman volunteer gave a hungry man a hot meal, and as he was leaving she noticed he had no shoes. She got some from a cupboard and tried them on till she found a pair that fitted; and in that encounter, Christ in his second coming was present.

At a McDonald's restaurant, a bus of hungry school children treated their overwhelmed waitress with kindness. Please and thank you were more plentiful than the burgers. The Lord was present.

A young man pulled up in his car when he needn't have, to allow an elderly woman to cross the road. Christ was present. A single mother came home from a stint in hospital, and on her kitchen table were a dozen carnations, placed there by her teenage son. Christ was present.

As Andrew Greeley says, the answer to the 'when' of the second coming can be readily given. The Lord is present anywhere people treat each other with gentleness, generosity and thoughtfulness.

A man spent his holidays with Mother Teresa and was so impressed by the way she cared for the sick and dying that he told her, 'I want to remain here with you,' but she said, 'no, go home and bloom where you're planted.' The message that each one of us is a member of God's family is as much needed where you came from as it is here. We must do small things for one another with great love.

And Christ's second coming is present in a student who is about to assist the poor in Cambodia. And Christ's second coming is present in the kindness and generosity of those who are assisting her in her work, by their financial support.

The gospel isn't meant to be frightening. It offers an image of hope even in the worst of times. No matter how tough things get, Christ has brought us salvation and, as his followers, we can be part of that new life.

A homily by Fr Jim Reilly. St Mary's, Bellingen. (RIP: 1942-2015)

Where have you seen the Lord present recently?

THIS WEEK...

'Do small things for one another with great love.' Mother Teresa

PRAYER

Lord, may I reflect your goodness and love and be your hands and voice to all those I meet each day. Amen.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

24
Nov
2024

Building God's Kingdom

THIS WEEK...

*Be alert to signs of God's Kingdom
being established around you*

PRAYER

*Lord, your kingdom come, your
will be done, here among us.
Amen*



JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

Dan 7:13-14

Apoc 1:5-8

Jn 18:33-37

Today we come to the end of the liturgical year, Year B in the cycle of readings, and as always at the end of each year, we celebrate the feast of, Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. God as a king and the kingdom of God are mentioned many, many times throughout both the Old and New Testaments. And every time we pray the Our Father we pray for His kingdom to come, for God's will to be done, now and in heaven.

The image of kingdom that Jesus portrays for us is in John's Gospel today is not one identified with any earthly image of royalty. It is not the image of a Roman Emperor or his representative, Pilate, or a King Herod with all the trappings of secular regal life. Rather, it is quite the opposite. Jesus deflects Pilate's questions about being a king and rather than answering, he poses questions of his own, but finally declares that yes, he is a king. But "my kingdom is not of this kind," Jesus says as he stands before Pilate. "I came to bear witness to the truth and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice," is how Jesus finally responds. In Isaiah 9 he is prophesied to be the 'Prince of Peace.' So, we have a kingdom of peace, of justice and of love.

In the preface before the Eucharistic prayer of today's Mass, we hear what this kingdom will look like. Christ will present to his father, 'a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.' In Luke 17: 20-21 we also read that the Kingdom of God is among you. It is both here and now and will also be fulfilled at the end of time.

We have a role as disciples of Jesus in working to bring about God's kingdom. Some of the greatest obstacles to that kingdom are the opposites of all the values listed above. Injustice, hatred, untruths, anger, selfishness and divisiveness; all these are barriers to the Kingdom being a reality. So our role in building the kingdom is to contribute to justice, love peace and truth in our homes, parishes, work places and local communities. Jesus has even given us a guide in the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes give us a blueprint for building the Kingdom here on earth before Jesus comes to bring it to perfection.

Reflection by Greg Ryan

In what ways can I contribute to build God's kingdom in my local community?

Meeting the Lord

01
Dec
2024

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Jer 33: 14-16

1Thess 3:12-4:2

Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

We begin our new liturgical year today as Advent commences with Luke's Gospel. It is the featured Gospel of Year C which we now begin. In a sense it is the New Year celebration for the Church. Advent is that special time when we prepare for Christmas and for the coming of Jesus into the world. As we listen and reflect today, all the secular activity of the season is being organised. Christmas decorations, advertising and Christmas music are all around us, on the television, social media and in the shopping centres. The festive season is here already. Though to listen to Luke's Gospel today, you wouldn't be feeling so festive and joyful.

Luke paints a picture of the end times and what we can expect when Jesus comes again at the final judgement. Signs of disorder occurring in the natural world and fear gripping people. We are urged when that time comes to stay awake, aware and be faithful. The word 'advent' means coming, and today we both begin our annual preparation to remember and celebrate his coming into the world at Bethlehem and be conscious of the prophesied second coming at the end of time.

But Jesus comes again to us many times. We meet Him in every Eucharist we celebrate together, as we do in all the sacraments. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us, 'for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.' Later in the same gospel when talking about the last judgement, he tells us that when he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison; the good people were there to assist him. When they asked him when they had seen him in these situations he responded, "Whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.

As Vincentians, our spirituality is grounded in St Vincent de Paul and the Rule 2.5 reminds us that one of the key aspects of his and our spirituality is, 'to see Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ.'

Reflection by Greg Ryan

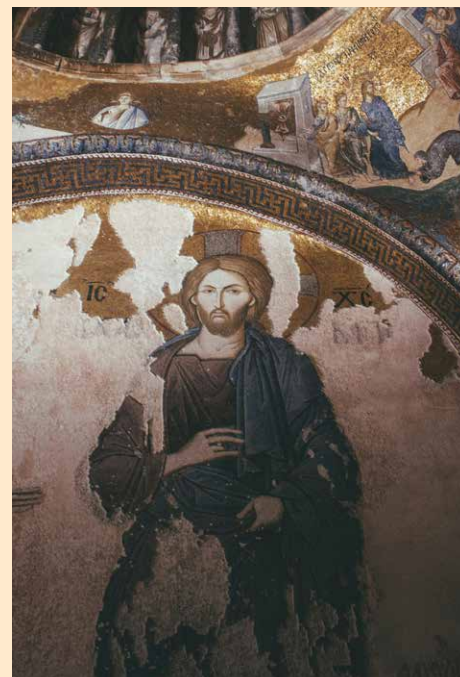
Where have I encountered God this week?

THIS WEEK...

Be aware – "Let us allow God to act; He brings things to completion when we least expect it." St Vincent de Paul

PRAYER

Lord, open our eyes to see you and our ears to hear you in all those we meet. Let others meet you through our actions. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

8
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Prepare a Way

THIS WEEK...

"The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have and it may never be enough. Give your best anyway. For you see, in the end, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway." St Teresa of Calcutta

PRAYER

Lord, guide us, like John the Baptist, as we prepare a way for you into our conference, parish and local communities. We ask this in your name. Amen



SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Baruch 5:1-9

Phil 1:4-6, 8-11

Lk 3:1-6

Today's Gospel is a prelude to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Chapter 2 concluded with Jesus returning to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph after being found in the temple and now we fast forward into the story of John the Baptist preaching and baptising in the wilderness, being about the same age as Jesus.

Luke sets this prelude in history. He gives it a specific time and reference to the people who were the rulers of the time, both Roman and Jewish. Caesar and Pilate are the Roman authorities. Herod, his brother Phillip and Lysanias were the regional tetrarchs. Herod was also the Jewish King and a Roman appointed tetrarch or regional administrator. Also listed are the Jewish High Priests of the temple, Annas and Caiphas.

Now during the time of these great leaders, God came to John, the son of Zechariah leading him throughout the land to proclaim a baptism of repentance and to prepare a way for the Lord. As prophesied in Isaiah, "prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight." And valleys will be filled, mountains laid low, winding ways straightened and rough roads made smooth. Someone far greater than the secular leaders of the time was coming; it was the Lord.

Many of the people who seek us out for assistance have had a rough road in life. It hasn't been a straight path for them and often they are travelling on this road without close support that can assist them. Our welcome to them and our non-judgemental acceptance of them as fellow travellers in life could just be the encounter that made a real difference in their lives. As St Vincent de Paul said, "I will always welcome joyfully any opportunity that comes my way to be of service to you."

Reflection by Greg Ryan

How do we welcome the people who seek assistance from us?

Rejoice in the Lord

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THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Zeph 3:14-18

Phil 4:4-7

Lk 3:10-18

The Third Sunday of the Advent season is also known as Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete in Latin means rejoice. So, in the middle of our preparations for the coming again of Jesus, we pause our preparations and remember that soon the Lord will be with us and it is a time to rejoice. The liturgical colour is rose which is only used twice each year, now and once during Lent. And today we light a rose candle on the Advent wreath with the colour symbolising joy. Our first and second readings today are also full of joy, happiness and rejoicing. In Zephaniah we are told, "He will exult with joy over you, he will renew you by his love." And Paul says, "I want you to be happy, happy in the Lord."

Luke's Gospel goes on to highlight for us what we need to do to rejoice in the Lord to be truly happy. John is still in the wilderness preparing the way and his followers ask, "what must we do?" John gives some practical examples. People should share clothing and food with those who have none as basic expressions of our faith. To tax collectors he says, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also ask him, "And we, what should we do?" John replies, "Do not extort money from anyone with threats or false accusations and be satisfied with your wages."

To follow Jesus, we can't be burdened by material possessions. Having more is not always best for us. To live simply and appreciate what we have and then to share with others, what we don't need in life is not just a Christian ideal. Marie Kondo is a famous Japanese writer and presenter who teaches people to declutter. And then to only keep the items that spark joy. Her approach has developed from the spirituality of her Shinto religion.

And at the heart of the St Vincent de Paul Society is the sharing of time and goods with others. Currently your conferences are probably putting together or delivering your Christmas hampers. This is made possible because of your time but also the generous donations of our many supporters which helps to share so much joy to the people we assist.

Reflection by Greg Ryan

What does my lifestyle say about my Christian life, my faith in God?

THIS WEEK...

Be happy in the Lord

PRAYER

Lord, grant me a spirit of poverty that values people over things and let it lead me closer to you. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

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The spirituality of Visitation

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 moment for all we meet. Amen



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Micah 5:1-4

Heb 10:5-10

Lk 1:39-44

In the Society, I have heard it said that the grassroots of the works of the Society is home visitations. It is an important time where Vincentians visit the homes of those, they serve offering support and assistance. It is a time where the Vincentians can understand the environment, culture, social life and situations of those seeking need.

Today, home visitations have become challenging and difficult for many reasons. Many Conferences are unable to home visit due to numbers, safety and personal wellbeing. On occasions, Vincentians meet people outside of the home, in hubs or parish rooms, on the street, or Conference rooms in the back of retail shops. So, have we lost our grassroots approach to compassionate care?

Two aspects of the visitation in today's gospel may assist our reflection for I sense that Elizabeth offered visitation to Mary as much, if not more, than Mary did for Elizabeth.

Firstly, is Elizabeth's joy at seeing face to face her younger cousin. We may not always perceive this joyful moment when we have a visitation moment to offer assistance, but I remember perceiving a sense of joy in relief and simply being listened to especially during the floods in Lismore NSW a few years ago. People knew that they could merely come to us, and we were there in "visitation" for them. They could pause and feel a deep sense of dignity given to them, we listened to their story, and we offered our hearts in hospitality. This visitation is the grassroots of our pastoral and compassionate care. This spirituality of "visitation" needs to be nurtured as our way in serving divinity or the sacred in the disadvantaged, marginalised and those doing it tough.

The other is that when Mary visited her cousin, she had only just learnt of her own pregnancy outside of a married union. I could only imagine the rumours around this event at home. There would have been disbelief and accusations of infidelity to her betrothed. I am sure she was fearful of being stoned by the elders of the Jewish law and the loss of any shred of dignity. But in the arms of her cousin, celebrating the gift that each carry, it seemed that she was fully accepted, honoured, without any form of judgement and fully celebrated, understood and loved.

The Vincentian Rule reminds us that our service is without judgment and that in reverence Vincentians serve, "listening to them, respecting their needs and recover dignity". Wherever we meet those in need, whether in the homes or on the streets, Vincentians are visiting. We continue this wonderful tradition in our actions, our conversations and our prayers, the heart of the Visitation of these two remarkable women!

Can you recall visits where you received more than you gave?

Relationships Built On Love

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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. 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 Conferences and his deep love for his wife Amelie and daughter Marie. For Frederic all three are part of his family.

May we draw on these inspirations as we head toward a new year strengthening our Vincentian spirit through being grounded in faith, living in hope and always growing in love.

Could Grounded in faith, Living in hope, Growing in love be central to our New Year's resolutions?

THIS WEEK...

Pope Francis in speaking on grandparents (a society) "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

The peace
of Christmas

