



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Spiritual Reflection Guide

May – September 2024



The Trinity

The Divine Model



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to this issue of the Spiritual Reflection Guides; it is always a privilege to share some thoughts with you.

These Guides begin near the end of the Easter season and continues through to the Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Highlighted are the feasts of the Ascension, Pentecost, Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi.

Throughout the liturgical year of 2024 the focus is on the Gospel of Mark. This focus shifts in the last Sunday in July to Chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. John's gospel provides a different perspective to the synoptic gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. It is the last of the gospels to be written and shared and so presents a deeply theological perspective to all the words and actions of "the Word made flesh". John's prologue is not so much a genealogy of Jesus but an expression of faith echoing first words of Genesis and expresses the eternal essence of the Christ.

With this in mind, the gospel of John is not viewed as a historical narrative of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus but as a constructed framework to proclaim belief in the Messianic Jesus offering life in abundance.

Throughout this period of the Guides, we will celebrate a number of important feasts. Some of these are the feast of the Visitation, the feast of the Assumption, and the feast of St Mary MacKillop. The Visitation expresses a deep spiritual focus to our visitations whether by home, Hubs, or even in the streets and the Assumption opens us to the depth of the love of God and our hope to come through our Society patron, Mary the Mother of God. Finally, the feast of our nation's first saint provides us with much inspiration as Mother Mary MacKillop's mission echoes fondly that of the Society especially to those in the struggles of poverty.

Lastly, I ask that each Conference and Council, if needed, update their addresses for where the Guides are sent. These can easily be updated through our Mission team at mission@vinnies.org.au

Leo Tucker

Executive Director, Mission and Spirituality
NSW State Council

Acknowledgements

The Spiritual Reflection Guides of the St Vincent de Paul Society are produced by Leo Tucker

Text: Leo Tucker, Greg Ryan, Corinne Lindsell and Leonie Duck

Design: Claire Hutchinson

Prayers and Scripture texts taken from St Pauls Sunday Missal, © 2012 St Pauls Publications – Society of St Paul, Strathfield.
Published and approval of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Love Builds Bridges

05
May
2024

6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

1Jn 4:7-10

Jn 15:9-17

This week's gospel continues the true vine narrative from the gospel of John. The vine is a strong metaphor for community. The Creator is the owner of the vine. Christ is the vine. All those who respond to the call of God, become signs of the universal love of God, as Jesus did, and become grafted to the vine.

In October 2020, Pope Francis released the third of his social encyclicals, *Fratelli Tutti*. This document is seen as the third part of the Pope's fuller vision for church and humanity. The first encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* was restoring our relationship with God, then *Laudato Si* was restoring our relationship with the earth, and *Fratelli Tutti* restores our relationships with each other. This encyclical expresses Pope Francis' aspirations for a fraternity that transcends and crosses all boundaries of distance and culture and that, like St Francis, sows "seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his sisters and brothers".

This gospel has Jesus commissioning each of us to bear fruit in the community of the love of God. This commissioning, similar to our Vincentian Commissioning, opens us to the servant leadership ministry of Jesus. We are all co-responsible in co-creating a society that is able to "include, integrate and lift up those who have fallen". Love builds bridges, "we were made for love" and in this, the Pope encourages Christians to recognise Christ in the face of every excluded person. Pope Francis describes this bridge of fraternity in terms of the central principles of Catholic Social Teaching, respect for human beings for their intrinsic value and not for their use, solidarity based on their social nature and the primacy of the common good.

There is an urgency in the tone and expression of *Fratelli Tutti*, which I feel is similar to the urgency expressed in this gospel and in revolutionary writings of Frederic Ozanam. Frederic wrote in a letter to his friend Ernest Falconnet in 1834, "I believe in authority as a means, in liberty as a means, and in love as the end." Our Vincentian tradition is echoed in the words of *Fratelli Tutti* each day in our service of fraternal and social friendship with those we serve. This, unknown to many of us, "holy" pursuit, is I believe, our dialogue of action and advocacy in alleviating poverty and homelessness. This dialogue may also seem at times too lofty an aim but in each of our members, our staff and many of our volunteers, it is an aim worth continuing and addressing.

Does your Conference reflect the image of the true vine?

THIS WEEK...

"Each one of us, at one time or another, has heard that call"
(Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ)

PRAYER

Lord, may we recognise the goodness and beauty that you have sown in each of us. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

12
May
2024

It doesn't stop here

THIS WEEK...

Let God's promises shine on your problems. Corrie ten Boom

PRAYER

Lord, hear the desires of our hearts, hear the whispers in the night, Grant us peace. Amen



THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Acts 1:1-11

Eph 4:1-13

Mk 16: 15-20

Anyone who has ever lost anybody and experienced loss and deep grief may look at this particular Gospel and this moment in Christianity and think... this is a lot. I am often perplexed by this moment of what the disciples might be feeling – they had already lost Jesus, on Good Friday, they were mourning, they were grieving and their hearts were sad, lost. And then they experienced His resurrection, spending time with the resurrected Christ. And now, He leaves them again.

However, it doesn't stop there. It was never meant to stop there.

This is not about losing somebody, “letting them go” and finding peace that they are in heaven. What He actually says to His disciples is that you are going to be empowered, you are going to be able to do things in this world that you never thought possible, and you do this in my name, and I am always going to be near. – spoiler alert – He sends His Holy Spirit to be with us... next week (Pentecost Sunday), which we know becomes our companion and the one who will prompt us and guide us along the way.

Jesus, here, urges His disciples in this moment, to go into the world and tell everyone about this love and this way of life that I have spent time with you showing you how to love one another and how to treat those who are most rejected.

So, it was their time then, and it is our time now to fully understand that we can do things we never thought possible in the name of love. With this backing of heaven, and the knowledge that all things are possible, we really do have the ability to give deeply of our time and our talents to serve those seeking our support.

Can you recall a time when you did something you initially thought was impossible?

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

Birth of the Church

19
May
2024

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Acts 2: 1-11

Gal 5: 16-25

Jn 15:26-27, 16:12-15

Pentecost Sunday marks a pivotal moment in the Christian faith tradition, commemorating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, empowering them to spread the message of love and compassion to whole world.

This sacred day in the Church's calendar serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of divine grace and the profound calling to embody the essence of Christ's teachings in our lives. In the Society, we see this as living the Gospel message through radical inclusion, accompaniment, and restoration.

For me, this holds a deep place in my heart, to always be mindful of the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, and the movements of the spirit of which compassion knows no bounds and transcends barriers of race, religion, or social status.

As we reflect on Pentecost Sunday, we are called to emulate the disciples' unwavering commitment to spreading love and understanding to those on the margins of society. Just as the disciples were moved to speak truth to power and challenge societal norms, so too are we called to advocate for justice and dignity for those most rejected in our communities. In a world often marked by division, exclusion and judgement, the message of Pentecost Sunday challenges us to confront our own prejudices and to extend compassion and empathy to those who are often overlooked, judged and mistreated.

May Pentecost Sunday serve as a powerful reminder of our shared humanity and our collective responsibility to create a world where we are all welcomed, accepted, and deeply cared for. And may we be filled with the same spirit of compassion and love that animated the disciples on that sacred day, as we seek to build a more just and compassionate society.

How do you recognise the daily promptings and movements of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

THIS WEEK...

The Holy Spirit transforms and renews us, creates harmony and unity, and gives us courage and joy for mission. – Pope Francis

PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. And kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

26
May
2024

The Divine model

THIS WEEK...

"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Mother Teresa

PRAYER

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



THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Deut. 4:32-34, 39-40

Rom. 8:14-17

Mt. 28:16-20

We know that the Holy Trinity is the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but have you ever thought that this Holy Trinity can also serve as a divine model of justice, compassion, and restoration? This offers us a profound insight into the nature of God's relationship with humanity and the call to emulate these virtues in our own lives.

This dynamic interplay between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we witness a harmonious unity grounded in perfect justice. The Father's righteousness, the Son's sacrificial love, and the Holy Spirit's transformative power combine to form a blueprint for a just and compassionate world.

Justice, in this light, is not merely about punishment or retribution but is about seeking balance and harmony. Justice can never be separated from charity, for our spirit is an attunement of human desires to God's, in Christ's self-giving love. Just as the Trinity upholds the divine order, we are called to seek justice that honours the inherent dignity of every person and seeks to rectify injustices.

Compassion flows naturally from this Trinitarian love. It is the fruit of the love and mercy between the Father and the Son. It inspires us to extend kindness and empathy to those in need.

Restoration is the heart of the mission of the Trinity. Through the redemptive work of Christ and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, all things are made new. We are called to participate in this work of restoration and become instruments of hope in a broken world.

Our international motto of the Society is Service in Hope. We can look to The Most Holy Trinity, or every time we bless ourselves, and be reminded of this deep call to Service in Hope, and embrace our mission for justice, compassion and restoration.

In what ways do you see Justice, Compassion and Restoration in the Society's works?

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

Do this in memory of me

02
June
2024

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

Ex 24:3-8

Heb 9:11-15

Mk 14:12-16, 22-26

Our readings this week mark a very significant aspect to the Catholic faith. The Eucharistic and sacramental life of the Church. As Vincentians, we are deeply Eucharistic.

I don't mean to say every Vincentian is Catholic, but that our works deeply mirror something profound that happens in the tradition of the Eucharist. Just as the Eucharist embodies the selfless love and sacrificial offering of Christ, so too does the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society reflect this same spirit of service and solidarity.

Just as the Eucharist unites believers in a shared communion with Christ, so too does the Society unite its members, volunteers, and staff in a common mission of charity and justice. Inspired by the example of our patron St. Vincent de Paul and our founder Frederic Ozanam, who both devoted their lives to serving people experiencing deep poverty; our members, volunteers and staff come together in solidarity to alleviate suffering and address the root causes of poverty and injustice.

And most importantly, a Eucharistic community is challenged to see the face of Christ in all they meet, and the Society in its very mission embodies this principle by recognising the inherent dignity of each person they encounter and treating them with deep respect, kindness, and without judgement.

Can you recall a time, when you have seen Christ in someone suffering?

Reflection by Corinne Lindsell

THIS WEEK...

To love another person is to see the face of God – Victor Hugo

PRAYER

Father, may we continue to be united in our mission to all those in need. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

09
June
2024

1% Better every day

THIS WEEK...

Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.
Benjamin Franklin

PRAYER

Lord, remind me daily of your boundless mercy and give me the grace to share mercy to others.
Amen



10TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Gen 3:9-15

2Cor 4:13 – 5:1

Mk 3:20-35

The reading from Genesis is so very human. It wasn't my fault! The other person made me do it! Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent. I imagine parents and teachers amongst us would find the refrain frustratingly familiar. Sadly, some of us grow well into adulthood, still unable to accept responsibility and/or accountability for our behaviours.

Is the Responsorial Psalm for the week an accidental choice? "With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption". Probably not. A reminder perhaps that it's ok to own up, 'fess up when we've messed up? Our God is merciful and forgiving, and ideally, we are with one another as well.

The message of the Gospel seems to be about unity. If a kingdom or a house is divided, it can't stand. A family, a community, a Society divided won't last. As human beings, we often seem to be preoccupied with putting one another in boxes – according to various factors – our professions, our family situations, our financial circumstances, our religion, our politics – and then dividing along those distinctions.

From a Society perspective, whatever our involvement – be it paid or unpaid – providing food and companionship, assisting a homeless person or family to secure and maintain a roof over their head, to raising funds, working in stores, managing compliance to ensure the Society's work continues, we are one unit, striving for the one goal – our Mission – serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy.

It can feel overwhelming, to accept that possibly we ourselves are not blameless, that maybe we have made mistakes, or have attitudes that are unChristian, that we may be in need of God's (and our fellow humans') mercy and forgiveness.

St Paul's words to the Corinthians then can be comforting: "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day". My daughter has a t-shirt with the words "1% better every day" on the front. I'm aiming for that.

Am I truly blameless in the situation where I feel wronged or is there an alternate perspective?

Reflection by Leonie Duck

From little things, big things grow (eventually)

16
June
2024

11TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Ezek. 17:22-24

2 Cor 5:6-10

Mk 4:26-34

Today's Gospel seems to be the tale of two parables. Firstly, the unnamed seed that is thrown (not sown) and forgotten about - yet sprouts and grows into a healthy crop in time for harvest. I have no doubt there will be many primary producers across the state thinking 'If only it were that easy!!'

Next, we hear about the classic mustard seed - supposedly the smallest of all seeds (although, I've read it was not) which grows into an enormous shrub.

Important things often don't seem that way in the beginning. Things that are seemingly insignificant can become highly valuable, over time, or even sometimes suddenly. Christianity was small at the time of Mark's writing.

It's easy (and common in our world) to dismiss things or people that seem to be small or insignificant.

I think one of the hardest aspects of parenting is letting go; the ability and grace to trust that sometimes seeds know how to grow themselves. Sure, we might be able to provide fertiliser and pruning expertise, and maybe we can see that if the tree continues to grow in one direction it will come up against a fence which will limit its growth, but ultimately, the seed is most likely going to survive and will find its path upwards and outwards.

I feel like we're being called on to trust. In St Paul's words, to "*walk by faith, and not by sight*", to accept that we don't necessarily need to know the how or the why. And to allow our faith and our trust to encourage others to believe in the transformative power of the divine.

What tiny seed do I need to be patient with and trust that it will eventually grow?

Reflection by Leonie Duck

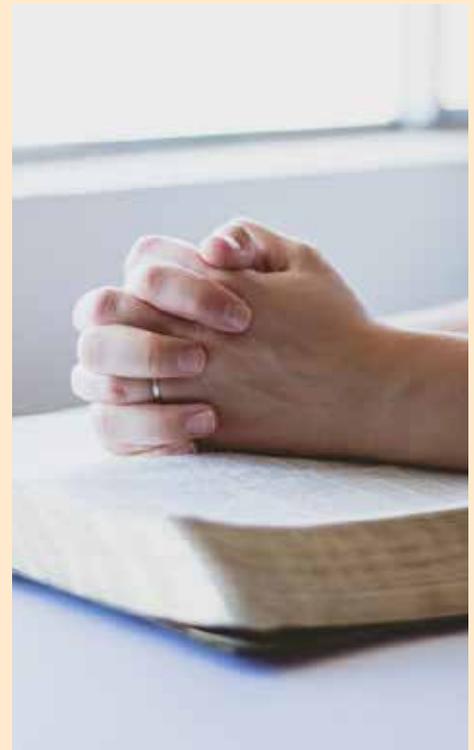
THIS WEEK...

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step".

Lao Tzu

PRAYER

Lord, grant me grace and patience to let go, and allow seeds to flourish in their own way. Amen.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

23
June
2024

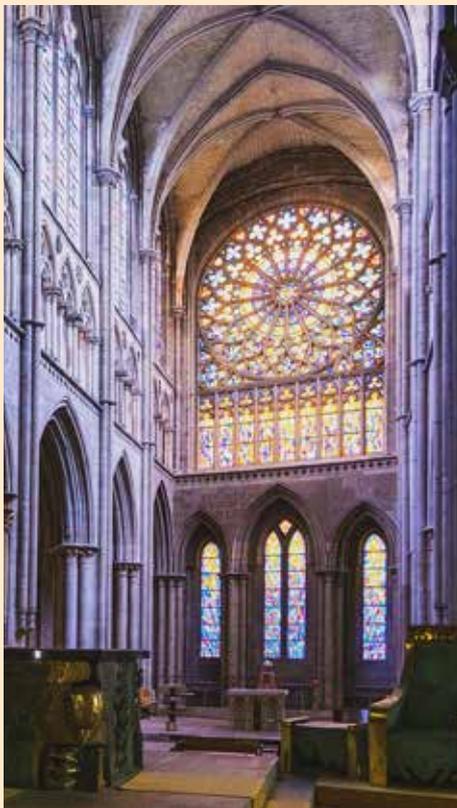
Who moved?

THIS WEEK...

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

PRAYER

Lord, help me to put you at the centre of my thoughts at all times. Amen.



12TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Job 38:1,8-11

2Cor 5:14-17

Mark 4: 35-41

I think this Gospel is meant to be about the awesomeness (in the word's true and original sense) of the power of God. "Even the wind and sea obey Him."

But what spoke to me about this Gospel was the urgency with which the disciples feel the need to wake Jesus and get him to fix things.

This wouldn't be the first rough seas or storm they would have been in. Why were they so scared?

Their abruptness ("Don't you care that we are perishing?") suggests great panic.

I think I'm very often like the disciples – suddenly thinking about God and what He can do for me in a panic, when something has or is going terribly wrong.

By contrast, I think of many people I know who seem to have a quiet and consistent faith. God is there with them all the time, and nothing seems to ever create a drama in their lives. This is not to say that bad things don't happen to good people – we know this happens all the time (that would be a topic for a whole other reflection!!). Many of the people I'm thinking of have had many challenges in life – way tougher than any I've experienced.

It's also not to say that I haven't had periods in my life where my faith has been calm, and my prayer life regular. I haven't yet put my finger on when, how and why this changes from time to time. (I do have some ideas, but I will spare you those). But in thinking about this, I'm reminded of a poster from my childhood. I have no idea who wrote it or where I saw it. "So God has gone out of your life, has He? Guess who moved."

What is it about those times of doubt that make me forget my faith?

Reflection by Leonie Duck

The risk of faith

30
June
2024

13TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Wis 1:13-15, 2:23-24

2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15

Mk 5:21-43

In this week's Gospel of Mark, we hear the story of two intertwined healing miracles. The healing of the haemorrhaging woman occurs on the way to the healing of Jairus' daughter – it is sandwiched into the middle of Jairus' story. The two stories are also linked by an age of twelve years. The woman has experienced twelve years of misery, with the uncontrolled bleeding that has caused her to live on the fringes of society. On the other hand, given her father's wealth and position in the community, it's likely Jairus' daughter has lived twelve years of comfort, prior to the illness which threatens to take her life. I think we've probably all read the gospels enough to know that when stories like these are co-located, it's typically not a coincidence.

Both characters requesting healing – the woman and Jairus – have gone to extreme lengths to approach Jesus. The woman is poor and being considered “unclean”, she is risking humiliation by even being in a crowd, let alone pushing through to touch Jesus. Such was her faith that He could help her, she took the desperate action.

Jairus, meanwhile, has left his dying daughter! I cannot think of a more difficult scenario to face. His faith drove him to risk missing his daughter's final moments.

(As a side note, the immense faith of these two ‘outsiders’ contrasting with the lack of faith of Jesus' own ‘inner circle’ in rough seas last week was not lost on me).

The stories put in front of us today remind me of the people who come to the Society for assistance. It cannot be easy for them to seek help. They risk humiliation, they risk rejection, they risk re-triggering trauma. Yet they have faith, perhaps born out of desperation, but no doubt encouraged by a long history of the Society, both locally and worldwide, that we can and will help, and we will hopefully do so without judgement.

The faith and trust of a vulnerable person is a humbling thing.

Do I fully appreciate the faith that the people we assist put in us?

Reflection by Leonie Duck

THIS WEEK...

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)

PRAYER

Lord, grant me the depth of faith to know that my prayer will be answered. Amen.



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

07
July
2024

Coming Home

THIS WEEK...

Make time to give thanks for the many people who love and care about you.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to see the face of Christ in all we meet. Amen



14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ezek 2:2-5

2 Cor 12:7-10

Mark 6:1-6

We know very little about the early life of Jesus, as the Gospels mainly focus on his three year ministry which began when he was aged about thirty. We know he came from a small town called Nazareth and was the son of Joseph, a carpenter. We can assume that he also followed in Joseph's footsteps and became a carpenter, and that he looked after his mother Mary once Joseph had died. He would have been well known in Nazareth as a resident of many years but not as a teacher, a preacher, or a holy man.

Mark's Gospel begins with John the Baptist preaching and baptising in the desert. It tells us that Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptised before being driven into the desert for a period of time. He then commenced his public ministry of preaching the Good News and gathering disciples to teach and lead. So after much travel, teaching and healing, Jesus returns in today's Gospel to his home.

Coming home should be easy and comfortable. It should be your safe place where you can relax, reconnect with family and friends, and be yourself. But this was hardly the case for Jesus. The man who had grown up there was a different man that came home. When the Sabbath came, he taught in the synagogue and shared wisdom beyond what was expected of him. They acknowledged the wisdom he shared and the miracles he had performed, but the community could only see the Jesus they knew from the past and so rejected him. He tells his disciples that, "a prophet is only despised in his own country among his own relations and in his own house." Jesus was not deterred by this lack of faith. As Mark's Gospel continues, Jesus continues travelling and teaching in the villages before sending out his disciples to do the same.

I wonder whether we do much the same as the people of Nazareth did in our own families and communities.

Do we really see the gifts and talents of our family members, members of our parish, and Conferences?

Reflection by Greg Ryan

Living Simply

14
July
2024

15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Amos 7-12-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6: 7-13

It seems that whenever I travel anywhere, I over pack. I take too many clothes, shoes and other bits and pieces, just in case I need them. And when I return home, I put away those things that were not used and realise that they just cluttered my bag and made it harder to find the things I really needed. Former Bishop of Lismore, John Satterthwaite was well known for his simplicity. When he travelled to Rome as he often had to, he took carry-on baggage only. He only needed one change of underwear and socks which he would wash each night. He travelled simply, only with his essentials, and he travelled light, a little bit like the disciples in today's Gospel.

Material possessions can weigh us down, hinder and control us and be a barrier to being truly free. Today we hear Jesus send out the twelve to spread his word and continue his mission. Take nothing for the journey except for a staff they are told. Also, no bread, haversack, spare tunic or money for their purse. They were to trust that God would care for them and that many people along the way would welcome and provide for them. This was to be a journey of trust and faith.

Today's Gospel story has many layers. How we view and value possessions I believe underpins the spirit and vow of poverty that religious men and women live by. It points out to each of us as well, that what really is important and gives meaning in our lives, can't be found in material things. Rather that, can only be found in and through God. Secondly, it also describes a model of discipleship and ministry for all of us to follow. Jesus sent them out in pairs. They did not have to do this alone, but make this journey with the support of another believer, another friend. And this is the Vincentian model of service, of Visitation too. The Rule of the Society tells us we don't do our work alone. And like the disciples, when we are rejected, we have the support of others to be with us as we move forward.

And finally, we can also take comfort that we are in good company. Jesus chose his twelve and what a diverse group it was. Common folk of the time. A few fishermen, and Matthew the tax collector. The chosen leader, Peter, who questioned Jesus, who drew a sword to defend him and who denied him three times before deserting him. The disciples that Jesus chose were not perfect, but they believed and trusted, and grew in faith. Maybe a little like us on our faith journey.

What is the challenge for each of us in living simply?

Reflection by Greg Ryan

THIS WEEK...

"Live simply and appreciate what you have. Give more. Expect less."
Stephen Covey

PRAYER

Lord, be with us on our journey of life. Take away our need for more and help us to live simply. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

21
July
2024

Never See a Need

THIS WEEK...

Be aware of the joy you bring to others when meeting the needs of our companions.

PRAYER

Lord, let us sit quietly with you for a short while. Let us rest and be refreshed in your presence. Amen



16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jer 23:1-6

Eph 2:13-18

Mk 6:30-34

Today's Gospel sees the disciples return from their mission that was detailed in last week's Gospel. They were tired from their journeys and had not had time even to eat. Jesus knew they needed time away, time with him, time to rest and relax. So he took them to a secluded place by boat. But people saw them leave and guessed where they were heading and followed. They too wanted to be with Jesus and were waiting for him when the boat landed, *and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*

He then responded to their needs, spending time with them, teaching them. One of the very well-known sayings of Mary Mackillop was, "never see a need without doing something about it." Jesus demonstrates that perfectly in this encounter. The immediate need of the disciples is rest and rejuvenation and Jesus responds by taking them away to a quiet place. However, on arrival, a new need presented itself. A large group of people, lost, and seeking direction from Jesus becomes the new need. And so with great compassion, Jesus sets out to shepherd them.

St Teresa of Calcutta is quoted as saying, "no matter how tired you are, no matter how physically exhausting this work may be, it's beautiful to bring a smile into someone's life, to care for someone in need. What greater joy can there be?" And I'm sure that Jesus brought not only wisdom but joy to that group of seekers as he compassionately met their needs that day. As for the disciples, well they were back together, and with Jesus, but they probably didn't get the deep rest they needed. The following verses of Mark's Gospel move on to the feeding of the five thousand as the crowd that Jesus was caring for also needed food.

And as Vincentians, the people we assist often call on us because of a need for food and sometimes companionship. The assistance is mostly received with thanks which not only makes a difference in their day but in ours too. As St Teresa reminds us, what greater joy can there be when you meet the needs of others.

What are the needs currently facing the people we assist?

Reflection by Greg Ryan

Small gifts make a difference

28
July
2024

17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

2 Kings 4:42-44

Eph 4:1-6

Jn 6:1-15

The miracle of the loaves or the feeding of the five thousand is our Gospel story today. It is recounted in all four Gospels with some slight variations. John's version that we read today is the only Gospel that includes a young boy with just five loaves and two fish. In the other accounts the food is sourced from what the disciples had with them, but John introduces the unnamed boy who becomes an important element of the story.

There are many themes emerging from this story. The Eucharist is the predominant one. Other interconnected themes are: hospitality, generosity, faith, belief, trust, compassion and community.

Jesus is with a crowd who have followed him, seeking truth, to listen and learn. And being far from home they were hungry. Jesus' need to care and show hospitality for these people and be compassionate to them was important to him. They need food and he needs to provide for them and there was nowhere near that could provide that food. It is now that the boy comes forward and provides the small gift, a gift soon to be multiplied. It wasn't much, just enough for himself and possibly his family, and only simple food. The food of the poor.

Once Jesus blesses these small gifts, the food is distributed with enough to satisfy the crowd and with much left over. Jesus shares The Bread of Life with those who are seeking him in abundance. This is the first sign of how Christ would institute the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He shows us that from small things, great things can happen.

Maybe that small boy represents us in this story and the story of our faith journey. As members of the St Vincent de Paul Society, you bring your gifts, often seemingly small, and share them not only with other members in the Society but with the people you assist. The young boy had no idea the impact his small offering of bread and fish would have in the hands of Jesus. With God's blessing, the small gifts you bring are multiplied in ways that might not be immediately apparent to you.

What gifts do I see in my fellow members?

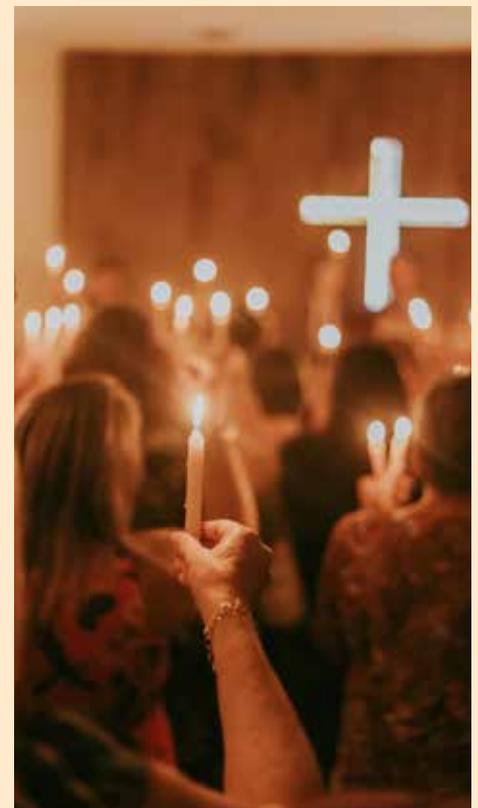
Reflection by Greg Ryan

THIS WEEK...

Look for the gifts that others bring into my life

PRAYER

*Lord, let us share the compassion of Jesus with those we assist.
Amen*



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

04
August
2024

Purposeful living

THIS WEEK...

Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. (Jn.1.3)

PRAYER

*Lord, be still our souls that we may walk deeply in your presence.
Amen*



18TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Ex 16:2-4, 12-15

Eph 4:17, 20-24

Jn 6:24-35

"I want to urge you in the name of the Lord, not to go living the aimless kind of life that pagans live"

I would like to share with you a story. There were three brick layers working very hard on a construction site. When asked "What are you doing?" the first brick layer stated that he was simply laying one brick on another brick; the second brick layer said that he was proudly building a great wall; the third brick layer stood back from what he was doing and looked around and said with great love that he was building a Cathedral!

This is a great story in understanding where people see their meaning or purpose in life. St Paul in his message to the people in Ephesus urges the community to always reflect on the deeper meaning of their faith in Jesus and that they must be renewed by a spiritual change of heart. The message of Jesus in the gospel this week is very similar. He too urges the people to understand the deeper meaning of the loaves and fishes not just the material meaning that they had plenty to eat with heaps left over. Although this does express the abundance of the love of God.

One of the strong aspects of our Vincentian spirit is that of prayer. This is an opportunity in which, we "reflect for some time and open ourselves to the presence of God". The difficulty is that we are sometimes too rushed to really give this moment together to God. Our time of prayer together needs to be a time that provides meaning and purpose to our work and personal lives. Our prayer together invites us to gather in God's presence and so places our thought and actions into a different realm to the physical one always distracting us. Pope Francis reminds us that without being Christ centred, without achieving this as our aim, will simply become and work as a "compassionate NGO".

May we take the time this week to stop and listen to each other in prayer and know that in this space we stand together on sacred ground.

Does our Conference or Council spend some time in reflection?

Bread of life

11
August
2024

19TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

1Kings 19:4-8

Eph 4:30 – 5:2

Jn 6:41-51

This is the third part of the narrative discourse from John's gospel on the teachings of bread from heaven after the miracle of the feeding of thousands by the Sea of Galilee.

Over the last two Sundays the discourse metaphor is building but John needs to establish a strong foundation. The bread which Jesus speaks of is the bread which was given in the desert to the hungry Chosen people of the exodus. This is the bread of Moses to which Jesus has a deeper understanding.

This teaching must develop in stages through the gospel. Firstly, the people are reminded of the bread in the wilderness which did not last, and Jesus encourages the people to strive for the bread of eternal life. This bread is a metaphor for the words and teachings of Jesus. For this is where they will find nourishment for souls. So, when Jesus expresses that he is the bread of life, which we in a Christian context may move quickly to the Eucharist but in actual fact Jesus is first expressing that the words and teaching are God's teachings that has come from heaven.

Now, turning to today's reading, Jesus brings the bread of life metaphor to a sacramental space. Jesus' bread has now become his flesh given to all and this life/flesh is later laid down in love for all to be our Eucharistic meal.

In this context, the Eucharist is challenging, life-giving and a profound act of love for all time.

May we continue to be profoundly moved by Jesus to act with practical love, to change our world.

How can we share the bread of life with those we serve?

THIS WEEK...

Nothing is more practical than falling in love...Fr Pedro Arrupe

PRAYER

Father, through Jesus, may our love grow every day. Amen



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

18
August
2024

Hard Listening

THIS WEEK...

Do this in remembrance of me
Luke 22.19

PRAYER

*I will bless the Lord at all times,
the Lord's praise always on
my lips.*



20TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Prov 9:1-6

Eph 5:15-20

Jn 6:51-58

I share with you these words of wisdom from Sr Mary Coloe PBVM...

"Today's gospel is the whole purpose of this long discourse by John, which focusses on the Christian Eucharist. The first disciples all had personal experiences of Jesus. They lived with him, heard his words and expressed their belief in him directly. However, by the time of John written for his Johannine community, they were possibly second or third generation Christians, or followers of the Way. They had no personal contact with Jesus, so where can these Christians experience Jesus' presence and express their faith in him?"

At this point we, today, are drawn into the narrative, for like the Johannine community we have not encountered Jesus of Nazareth. Our encounter must be through sacramental symbols of bread, wine, the Word, and of course the faith community gathered. Again, the contrast is between the Eucharist and the manna, for the life Jesus offers is eternal. The Jewish Christians of John's community have not lost touch with their traditions, nor have they lost touch with the God of their ancestors who fed them bread from heaven. In and through Jesus, God's nourishing gift of life for the world is available to all people of all ages."

Sr Mary concludes with this challenge, "But what is our response? The invitation is given, "Come and eat my bread and drink my wine", but some find this too hard to accept.

Pope Francis reminds us that, "Indeed, the Eucharist is God's response to the deepest hunger of the human heart, the hunger for authentic life because in the Eucharist Christ himself is truly in our midst to nourish, console and sustain us on our journey." And importantly, "The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

How often do we share Eucharist together as Conference or Council?

We Believe

25
August
2024

21ST SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18

Eph 5:21-32

Jn 6:60-69

In John's gospel narrative this week, it was decision time and many who had followed Jesus, turned away and left. He had been preaching about being the 'living bread' and telling his followers that, "whoever eats me, will draw life from me." The idea that Jesus was revealing required faith, deep faith that many who had been drawn to Him did not finally have. Jesus then challenged the Twelve and asked them if they were staying or going.

It was Peter who made the act of faith for the other disciples, "we believe, we know that you are the Holy One of God." They had been with Jesus and witnessed his healing, his preaching and his miracles, yet even those closest to Jesus didn't always understand the message and I'm sure had doubts too. But their faith was stronger than the doubt – they believed. This should give us consolation too when we doubt or struggle with an element of our faith.

We know that Christ's presence is not only found in the Eucharist but also in the Word. This mystery of our faith is seldom acknowledged with a deep sense of reality, sadly. In Matthew's Gospel we hear, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." *Mt 18:20*. He also taught us that he could be found among the poor and weak, the sick and imprisoned, the lonely and the hungry.

As Vincentians, our faith helps us to overcome the challenges and the doubts, and to find Jesus in the face of the people we assist, the disadvantaged, hurt and lonely people that we see in our local communities each and every week.

When have I been challenged in my faith?

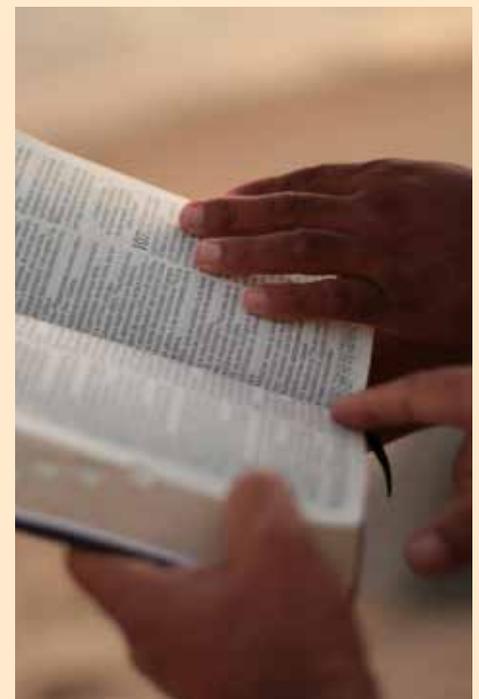
THIS WEEK...

"Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe."

– St. Augustine

PRAYER

*Christ with me, Christ before me...
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
St Patrick*



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

Spiritual Reflection Guide

Do this in
memory of me...

