

Spiritual Reflection Guide

May – August 2023



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works



The Keys of Faith



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflection Guides. The liturgical cycle for 2023 follows in general the Gospel of Matthew with some highlights from the Gospel of John (Year A).

Over these weeks, we will journey from post-Easter time through to the celebration of the Ascension of Jesus, and to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Following this special time, we remember the foundations of our faith in the feast of the Holy Trinity and the celebration of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known to many as Corpus Christi. From this space, we move into Ordinary Time to the 22nd Sunday.

Recently the Society has developed and approved a new Strategic Plan. The discernment for this strategy was quite remarkable with many members, staff and volunteers gathering and reflecting on the needs of those we assist today and into our future. We began these gatherings reflecting on the parable of the talents from the gospel of Matthew and recognised the importance of the gift we have of the Society. For we have been given an important gift to be nourished and cherished not just for our own sakes but for the people we walk closely with in service. However, we could hold this gift emotionally in fear and trepidation returning only a single response of compassionate care to those asking our assistance, similar to the steward in the parable, or we could step out of conservative comforts striving for the best in care, practice, excellence in our preferential option for the poor.

This way of discernment reminded me of the path of synodality that Pope Francis is leading us, and which calls us to listen to each other and to the Holy Spirit in new ways to excel, grow and cultivate for the future. May we continue our discernments and work remembering the words of St Pope John XXIII, to not guard a museum, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life.

Leo Tucker

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All Spiritual Reflection Guides can be accessed on the website, www.vinnies.org.au, and follow the Publications link. For any mailing enquiries, contact natasha.maatouk@vinnies.org.au

A helpful weblink for the full Sunday readings is the Liturgical Commission in Brisbane, www.litcom.net.au.

Acknowledgements

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Chosen to serve

7 May
2023

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Act 6:1-7

1Pet 2:4-9

Jn 14:1-12

This week's reading from the Acts of the Apostles expresses the needs and demands of the expanding discipleship of faith in the early church, and so the pressure to choose more faithful leaders to spread the message.

To this, it is written that the "whole community" chose seven men of "good standing". It would be hoped that in the Church of today we would be calling seven people of good standing?

The ministry of the Diaconate throughout many of our Dioceses is flourishing. The nature of the diaconate is expressed in two ways. The transitional diaconate, a step before priestly ordination, and the permanent diaconate. These are generally married men with the life experiences of marriage, families, work/careers, are called to support ministry in the Diocese of preaching and service. This ministry is not a steppingstone to priesthood, a sometime seen pinnacle ministry, but it is a vocational calling in its own rite and respect. The Diaconate has much to offer a Diocese and Church.

I deeply believe that a call to serve is in the heart of each of us. It is where God inspires us to reflect the ministry and life of Jesus. Frederic Ozanam was not a deacon or priest of the Church, but he was devoted to his faith and lived it through actions of love, and commitment to the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Being a lay Catholic organisation opens us to a vocation for the people and with the people. It is a vocation of the "whole community" that is church at every level of society. This is a privileged vocation and one that we need to reflect and prayer upon together often.

The Acts narrative finishes with, that the chosen stood before the apostles, "who prayed and laid hands on them". This expresses for me the importance of Commissioning Masses for our chosen office-bearers in the Society. May these significant occasions continue to be a prayerful response to our "Yes" to serve.

THIS WEEK...

"Are you resolved to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God" Chrism Mass Renewal of Promises

PRAYER

Loving Jesus, as you have prepared a place for us may we in thoughts and actions prepare a place for you in our hearts. Amen



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Death is not Death

14 May
2023

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

1Pet 3:15-18

Jn 14:15-21

The gospel of John this week speaks of the promise of Jesus that we will not be left orphaned. This promise is empowered by love; love of Jesus for us, our love for Jesus and the empowering of the spirit of truth and love soon upon us in Pentecost given because of the love of the Father. This profound sense of love is the heart of John's gospel themes.

However, the phrase by Jesus puzzles me. When Jesus leaves, the apostles will be orphans? Jesus is not their birth mother or father but an intimate friend, their mentor, their Rabbi. My parents died close together, about 18 months apart. I remember the deep feeling of aloneness, disconnection, grief and how was I to live life without the ones who gave me life. I used to say that when my parents were alive I always had somewhere to "hang my hat"! They were a part of my person and identity.

So, what a powerful image Jesus uses here. It must have been extremely tough on the apostles and on Mary, Jesus' mother. To have lost Jesus on Good Friday to a crippling cruel death on the cross, then to regain his presence, although different, on Easter morn, then to lose him again on the Ascension. It had to be a roller coaster ride of emotions.

A few years ago, I shared this family story of my then 15 year old son upon a visit to Anne, his mother's grave. We were only there a very short while when Ben came to me and asked, "When are we leaving?" It was not because he was upset or uncomfortable about being there, it was simply because he was hungry, as most 15 years old boys are! He saw my frustration with his whiney question and then stated, "You know Dad that Mum's not really there, yes I know that is where we buried her, but that is not her because she lives. She lives in my heart and yours, so let's go and eat, I'm starving!"

Ben is no theologian, but these words and thoughts reflect literally the promise Jesus shares and offers each of us. He states, "In a little while the world will not see me, but you will see me...because I live and you also will live." Such words of hope and profound consolation is what drives me every day. Death without this promise is death.

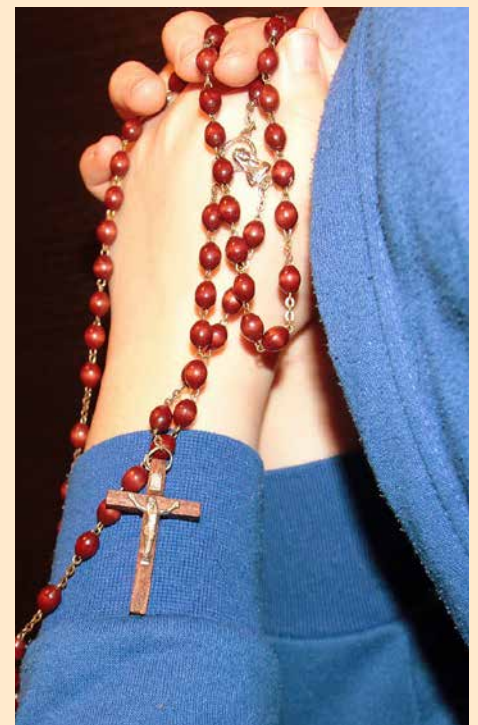
How sure are you of this promise?

THIS WEEK...

"Life has changed, not ended..."
Rite of Christian Funerals

PRAYER

Father, fill our hearts with your love and led our grieved hearts to your promise of life. Amen



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Separation and Loss

21 May
2023

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Acts 1:1-11

Eph 1:17-23

Mt 28:16-20

And so, we are now nearing the end of the Easter Season which concludes next week on Pentecost Sunday. And with today's reading, we also hear the end of Matthew's Gospel as Jesus ascends and leaves his disciples. But before leaving, Jesus entrusts the eleven with his mission and a promise of his continued presence.

Separation and loss of a loved one or a friend, is always a hard moment in our lives despite knowing that the ultimate separation, death, is an inevitable part of human life. Still reeling from his death, the disciples were most likely to be frightened and uncertain. In today's passage it tells us that "when they saw him, they fell down before him, though some hesitated." Another version of this passage uses the word doubted rather than hesitated.

The disciples were still growing in their faith and were at different stages on their faith journeys, as it is for each one of us. And, some of them still hesitated/doubted, which is also part of our faith journeys. Even so, the Ascension marks the moment when they were commissioned, to take the lead in the mission started by Jesus just three years beforehand. So, what did Jesus ask of them? "To make disciples of all nations, baptise them, and teach them to observe my commandments." The mission that Jesus asks of them and us seems like an impossible task for individuals but is achievable as a community, as Church. And Jesus' final words in this Gospel promise his continued presence and support. "Know that I am with you always; yes to the end of time."

In the Society, we evangelise differently to the general mission above. Our Mission statement states that we "aspire to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy."

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

What does the mission mean for us as Vincentians?

THIS WEEK...

*"Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words."
St Francis of Assisi*

PRAYER

*Lord, make me an instrument
of Your peace*



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Birth of the Church

28 May
2023

PENTECOST SUNDAY

Acts 2: 1-11

1 Cor: 12:3-7, 12-13

Jn 20: 19-23

Pentecost Sunday is often referred to as the birthday of the Church, reflecting the fact that at that moment, the Apostles began the mission that Jesus had already commissioned them for. Gathered in the upper room, still feeling doubt and fear at the loss of their friend and rabbi, they experienced the Holy Spirit enter their lives. A powerful wind from heaven and the appearance of tongues of fire settling on their heads, were the symbols of the Holy Spirit entering, filling, and empowering them.

This encounter with Jesus and his Spirit changed them. No longer in hiding, they went out into the streets of Jerusalem with a gift of speech which made them heard by all who listened. The account from Acts lists people from many parts of the world, all who heard the message in their own language.

In his 2020 homily for Pentecost, Pope Francis said;

“Let us go back to the origin of the Church, to the day of Pentecost. Let us look at the Apostles: some of them were fishermen, simple people accustomed to living by the work of their hands, but there were also others, like Matthew, who was an educated tax collector. They were from different backgrounds and social contexts, and they had Hebrew and Greek names. In terms of character, some were meek and others were excitable; they all had different ideas and sensibilities. They were all different. Jesus did not change them; he did not make them into a set of pre-packaged models. No. He left their differences and now he unites them by anointing them with the Holy Spirit. With the anointing comes their union – union in diversity. At Pentecost, the Apostles understand the unifying power of the Spirit. They see it with their own eyes when everyone, though speaking in different languages, comes together as one people: the people of God, shaped by the Spirit, who weaves unity from diversity and bestows harmony because in the Spirit there is harmony. He himself is harmony.”

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

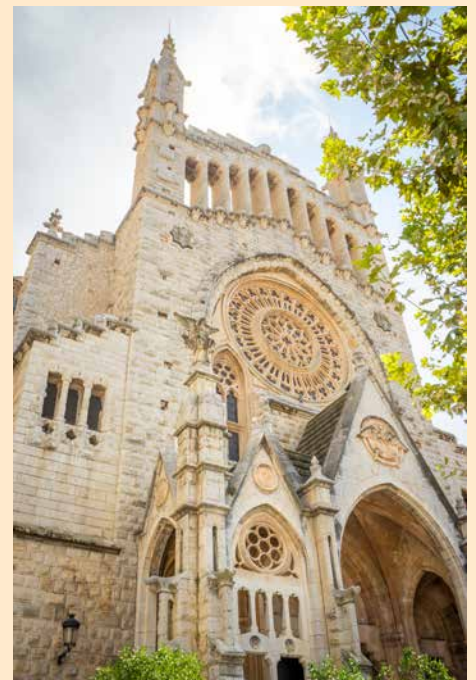
How can we accept and celebrate, the diversity, talent, and strengths of our Conference members?

THIS WEEK...

Look for ways to bring unity and harmony in to my life, my family, my Conference and my community.

PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful; fill me with your presence.



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Three in One

4 June
2023

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Ex 34:4-6, 8-9

2Cor 13:11-13

Jn 3:16-18

When we celebrated the great feast of Pentecost last week, we experienced the power of God's Spirit working through the Apostles, as they formed Church and began living out Jesus' mission. It was this Spirit of God, promised by Jesus, and sent by the Father that gifted and enabled them to take the message of Jesus out to the world. The Most Holy Trinity that we celebrate today has been a central doctrine of our Church since its foundation at Pentecost.

The presence of Father, Son and Spirit continues in the early Church, in its early writings from Paul and others. In today's second reading from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he ends his letter with familiar words we often hear in our celebration of the Eucharist. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." The Gospel also tells us today of the love of God, a love so complete that he gave his only Son to save us and show us the way to the Father. But I want to focus on this idea of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that Paul speaks of. What is it?

I think it might just be the unifying effect of God's Spirit that brings us together as believers, and gifts us with all that we need to be disciples of Jesus. In the first chapter of the letter to the Corinthians we read, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same Lord is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their service."

So as the Church continues on its journey two thousand years on from its beginning, we pray that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit continue to guide us as we walk the same journey of faith that the early disciples walked.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

Think of your fellow members and reflect on the gifts they bring to our Conference.

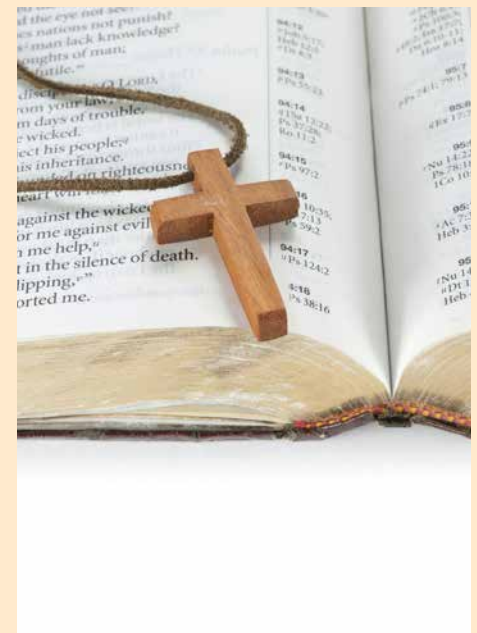
THIS WEEK...

Reflect on the gifts the Spirit has given to me and how I have used them to follow Christ.

PRAYER

*Glory be to the Father
and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

*As it was in the beginning, is now
and ever shall be, world without
end. Amen*



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11 June
2023

Corpus Christi

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

Deut 8:2-3, 14-16

1Cor 10:16-17

Jn 6:51-58

When I reflect on the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) I am reminded of a common hymn “we are one body, one body in Christ, and we do not stand alone...” and this immediately highlights to me our very own mission statement:

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

How does this connect to our mission statement? Serving Christ in the poor. This biblical and Christo-centric language is very intentional, that it highlights to us our heritage and identity is Catholic. But have you ever wondered what we mean by serving Christ?

I look at this frequently, and I’m more and more convinced that we are tending to the body of Christ, the second reading points to this beautifully, “because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many are one body”. The Body of Christ – we are all part of the body of Christ. Further in the first letter to the Corinthians the Body of Christ is more fully explored where there should be no division in the body and that there should be equal concern for each other “if one part suffers every part suffers with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

Therefore, if we are all part of the Body of Christ, then when we are serving Christ as our mission statement indicates; we are serving our fellow human beings, our neighbours, our community. And when our neighbour is in pain, poverty, disadvantage than we stand with them and we work to shape a more just and compassionate society.

(Reflection from Corinne Lindsell)

What does being part of the Body of Christ mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

The hand of Christ blesses the cup, the hand of love offers the cup, the hand of suffering receives the cup.



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PRAYER

*Christ has no body but yours,
no hands, no feet on earth
but yours...Amen*



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The Harvest is rich, but the Laborers are few

18 June
2023

11TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ex 19:2-6

Rom 5:6-11

Matt 9: 36-10:8

Our Gospel reading today strikes me as one with three themes: Compassion, Commissioning and Clarity.

Jesus often uses analogies with his teachings, and I love this. I'm definitely someone who appreciates concepts and theories when there is a good analogy behind it.

This Gospel message is no different – here He uses a farming analogy. The crowd are like sheep without a shepherd; and He is moved with pity – in another translation it says, “he is moved with compassion for them”.

Taking the farming analogy further, He mentions that the harvest is abundant and yet there are very few laborers to tend to this harvest, which then inspires Him to gather his twelve disciples and send them out to those who are abandoned and troubled.

This is a commissioning, a sending forth, and not for just anything but for those who are lost. This is a very intense task at hand, and I am drawn to think about the commissioning's we have within the Society – this too is a very intense task at hand, to lead fellow Vincentians in supporting people in need, who may be lost.

Interestingly, Jesus was quite specific of the task. He gave incredible clarity to the twelve. He advised them of where they should go, who they should go to, what they need to do. And why? Because He was moved with compassion.

When we think of our own tasks at hand, especially those that may seem intense do we look for the clarity? And do we seek the why? Do we commit to our own yes because we too are moved with compassion?

(Reflection from Corinne Lindsell)

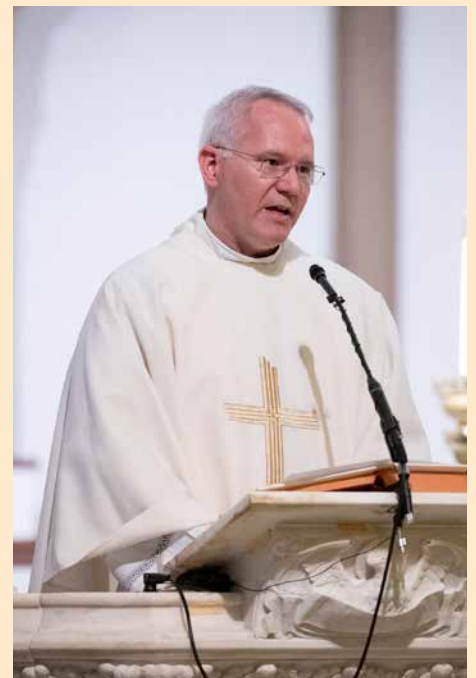
What role does clarity have in your service to the community?

THIS WEEK...

In my life I want to become better and do a little good. I would like to embrace the whole world in a network of charity. (Frederic Ozanam)

PRAYER

Lord may our commitment to those who are lost and abandoned be one that is inspired by compassion. Amen.



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Be not afraid

25 June
2023

12TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jer 20:10-13

Rom 5:12-15

Mt 10:26-33

A little bit of bible trivia here – did you know the phrase “do not be afraid” appears in the bible 365 times? That is one for each day of the year. There is a daily reminder within the scriptures to not let fear take over our lives.

This Gospel reading highlights to us, that not only are we not to give in to fear, but that we, as human beings are so precious and that our lives matter, that we will be taken care of.

Fear can be crippling, and we see this in the many lives of the people we assist. Their bravery and courage for asking for help should be seen as a remarkable strength, because perhaps behind this ask is a deep fear of how they are going to make it through this next week, day, or even meal.

As fellow human beings, as Vincentians – we have something to offer here. Hope.

Hope is the antidote to fear. One of my favourite authors and social researchers Brene Brown says “We need hope like we need air. To live without hope is to risk suffocating on hopelessness and despair” (The Atlas of the Heart, B. Brown). But what does hope look like practically?

Hope is activated when we have connection, seeing the human being behind the circumstances. Hope is felt when we offer empathy, being fully present to someone’s pain. Hope is actualised when someone is equipped with knowledge and understanding, where they can then have agency over their lives.

If within the scriptures it is so important for us to understand that we do not need to be afraid, then let’s continue to offer that message as people of hope for one another, especially to those who are in distress.

(Reflection from Corinne Lindsell)

Can you recall a time, when you offered hope to someone who was afraid?

THIS WEEK...

“Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people— the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven... the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world” (Colossians 1:4-6)

PRAYER

Lord, Make me a channel of your peace. Where there’s despair in life, let me bring hope. Where there is darkness, only light. And where there’s sadness, ever joy. Amen.



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A Challenge, close to the bone

2 July
2023

13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

2 Kgs: 4:8-11,14-16

Rom 6:3-4, 8-11

Mt 10:37-42

To be honest I have struggled with this scripture passage and still I do. “Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me.” As a mum with family, sons, daughters, and grandchildren it is a very stark and ... brutal exhortation!

I reflect too on the times that it refers to, that period of Christian, a time when publicly choosing and confirming to be a follower of Jesus could put you seriously at odds with family and society, (I acknowledge too that in some parts of the world that is still the case).

This exhortation about preferring members of one’s own family to Jesus holds a starkness, one is challenged to not prefer family members to Jesus. Remember it was one of the facts of life of the early Christian community that people had to make stark choices to follow the path of the Gospel. Loyalty towards family members, for example, might have persuaded Jewish believers to stay within the confines of their family’s loyalty to the law, while Gentiles who embraced the Gospel were exposing their families to the accusation, they were following a “deadly superstition”, as the Roman historian Tacitus put it. This is closely related to the saying about bearing the cross and following in the footsteps of Jesus.

“Anyone who does not take their cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds their life will lose it.” Today we commonly, in the comfort of Western society, use the expression ‘taking up the cross’ to mean patiently enduring the sufferings of everyday life without remembering that Matthew’s community would have understood it in a much more radical and threatening sense. The cross was a horrific punishment destined for slaves and revolutionaries. It was a painful but, above all, shameful death. To take up the cross and follow Jesus was to be ready to face the same shameful death as he did.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

How will you love more in your life?

THIS WEEK...

“Jesus crucified and resurrected is the whole pattern revealed, named, effected, and promised for human history.” Fr Richard Rohr

PRAYER

Lord, grow in us a vocation to share the fate of God for the life of the World, and to love the way that God loves. Amen.



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Words to remember

9 July
2023

14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Zech 9:9-10

Rom 8:9, 11-13

Mt 11:25-30

What a wealth of inspiration and challenge in today's reading. How much easier is it to understand the word of God when we have some lived human experience of them? The prayer of Jesus, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children", is known as truth to those of us who have danced in a space of wonder and joy with little humans. Their pure love, wonder and trust is so often such an example to the sometimes-rising cynicism and "bah humbug" of older humans.

The next passage- "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him", expresses an intimacy of relationship that again is sometimes, perhaps rarely, also experienced in unique human forms. Last week I had the absolute honour and sadness of being at the funeral of a dear friend, Kath. She absolutely exuded love her whole life long in an exceptional marriage of intimacy, truth, and commitment. Her husband had nursed her for the last few years, he, Adrian, was greeting each person who arrived with such love and grief, I was in awe, his energy, no doubt God-given. His last words, "I cannot believe I will never hold my Kath in my arms again... but I know, the second I die, I will run to ravish her". Remember, the very best of our human capacities are outshone by the capacities of our God.

And finally, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." A promise of sustenance and consolation to millions of people over the centuries. May we all remember in times of carrying heavy burdens of failure, pain, loss, shame, guilt, depression, hopelessness that rest is offered and a soul at rest can share with many the peace of God.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

How will I grow my practice of gratitude?

THIS WEEK...

"Our vocation is to go and enflame the heart of men, to do what the Son of God did, He who brought fire into the world to set it alight with His love". St Vincent De Paul

PRAYER

Lord, grant me a grateful heart, no matter what difficulties life throws at me. May those who are suffering bereavement know your consolation. Amen



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Time to wrestle with a parable

16 July
2023

15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55:10-11

Rom 8:18-23

Mt 13:1-23

Late last year we shared this parable during a renewal day at Mulgoa, it was a moving and meditative time. Just as Jesus told the parable to the crowd, we too listened, centuries later.

Amazingly, Jesus doesn't seek to explain the parable to the crowd or interpret it for them. That's not the way the parable works, rather it forced the hearer to think about the message, wrestle with its meaning, and thus examine their own hearts. Jesus intends the parable to move people to contemplate and respond to his teaching. Parables were culturally relevant illustrations that functioned like a puzzle box enclosing the nature and purpose of the kingdom of heaven. Yet only those who have ears to hear the truth can hear it.

At first glance, this seems to suggest that Jesus was being deliberately vague so that people would not understand the truth—and so could remain ignorant and obstinate. The opposite is true and his deliberate vagueness is a studied gentleness, a deep compassion that recognises that people's lives are complex, and that truth is not a sledgehammer.

Fr Ronald Rolheiser offers, "Jesus was once asked why he spoke in parables. His answer is more than a little curious: "I speak in parables . . . lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn again, and I should heal them" (Matthew 13:15). May we turn again and be healed.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

How can I ensure my words are gentle and loving?

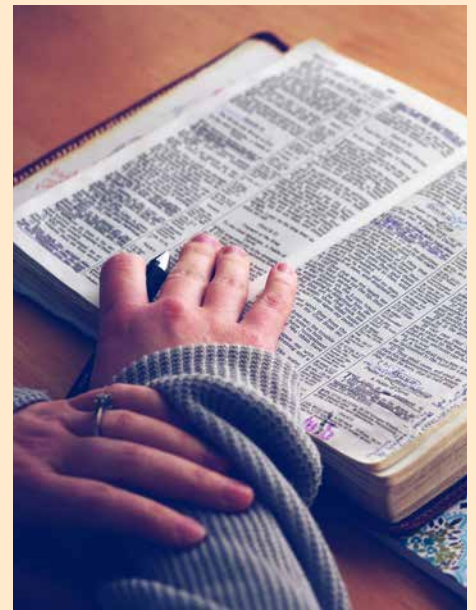
THIS WEEK...

"For it is more blessed to give than to receive—and it is also a lot easier!"

St Vincent de Paul

PRAYER

May we, in our encounters, foster a studied gentleness, a deep compassion that recognises that people's lives are complex. Amen



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Moments of Grace

23 July
2023

16TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wis 12:13, 16-19

Rom 8:26-27

Mt 13:24-43

The short reading from St Paul's letter to the Romans this week shares with his faith community the wonders of the Holy Spirit.

For me, over the years, the Holy Spirit, although always the third person of the Trinity, has also been defined through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts we learnt about generally at Confirmation for those of the Catholic faith tradition. Those seven gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord are also expressed in the twelve gifts as charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.

However, St Paul profoundly reflects that the Spirit comes to us to strengthen and guide us in times of weakness or, I guess, in times of our profound humanness.

These words of Paul give me enormous hope especially in my relationship with God. Many times, I prayer without really and consciously engaging in the prayers. Many times, I may attend Mass but not really participate fully due to tiredness, distractions, or simply a lack of enthusiasm. It is in these times that the liturgy or my personal prayers just wash over me and lack connection and even, dare I say, mystery. I have often prayed to the Holy Spirit to express my thoughts and prayers to God with a deeper love than I could ever muster. As St Teresa of Kolkata once shared always pray even in the depths of times of doubt and distraction.

The words of St Paul guide us in our Vincentian prayers and works. Many times we struggle in knocking on that front door or the next person who will walk into the room looking for assistance. It is sometimes tough work but with words of St Paul, the mundane becomes a moment of grace.

How do you understand the Holy Spirit?

THIS WEEK...

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you. (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.)

PRAYER

Loving God, help us to trust that your hand will lead us.



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Where your heart is

30 July
2023

17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1Kg 3:5, 7-12

Rom 8:28-30

Mt 13:44-52

A number of years ago I lost a gold ring that was very sentimental. At that time, I worked between a parish centre and a school and crossed a field between the two on a regular basis. So, it was quite possible that I had lost my “treasure” in that field. I scoured that field for hours and was rewarded!

What do you do with something of value? Significant relationships with good friends, time to spend with family visiting from far away, photo albums that preserve memories, special songs that evoke fond memories. We try to preserve these things of value. The material things we store carefully and the perishable items we handle with extreme care.

Think about this hidden treasure of today’s Gospel: it inspires, enlivens and opens horizons of new plans and dreams. As Pope Francis said: “The treasure is the Kingdom of God, found through the person of Jesus Christ, and to obtain it, our hearts must burn with the desire to seek it and find it out. He is the hidden treasure, he is the pearl of great value. He is the fundamental discovery, which can make a decisive turning point in our lives, filling it with meaning.”

Have I found the pearl of great value, for which I am ready to sell all I have to buy it? Am I still looking for it, or am I resigned to a life of mediocrity in my relationships with others, with God in my prayer, in my work life? If I have found it, am I ready to sell all that I have to obtain it? The parable is not inviting you to think about somebody else – Jesus is inviting you to recognise where your heart is. For whom or for what would you go without everything else?

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

How often do I ask for wisdom and freedom to seek the kingdom before all else?

THIS WEEK...

Our treasure is the Kingdom of God.

PRAYER

Source of all life, to take up the invitation, we must empty our minds and hands from the idle thoughts and trivial pursuits that occupy us now. Lord, deliver us from evil and grant us peace today. Amen.



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Jesus touched them

6 Aug
2023

TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Dan 7:9-10, 13-14

2Pet 1:16-19

Mt 17:1-9

The account of the transfiguration in the gospel of Matthew has much to reflect upon for us personally and as Vincentians.

Of the three synoptic Gospels of this account, Matthew is the only one that shares that Jesus came to the disciples and “touched them”. Touch is such a human thing to do. In touching we engage closely with people. Touching can comfort people in distress or illness, draw friends closer together, lead us in prayer and even awaken people for sleep.

In the moment of Jesus’ touch the disciples had encounter something beyond their wildest dreams. They thought they were simply accompanying Jesus to a place of quiet prayer, but they seemed to get more than they bargained for! It was incomprehensible and in some way, they may have been relieved when Jesus asked them to tell no one. For what were they to tell? Even in the three gospel the scene is a little downplayed as to what might have actually occurred.

But in the visions of the great prophets, the brightness of their light, in the sudden darkness and the frightening voice of God there was only one thing that could bring the disciples back to their senses and that was the quiet presence and touch of Jesus.

In this I recall many times when I believe that Jesus has guided me through tough moments, I may not understand or recognise it in the actual moment. The night my wife died I know there was another presence with us in that room, sharing our pain and comforting us but at the time it was all far too painful to understand.

As Vincentians we are called to recognise the risen Christ in the poor and each other. This too may not happen in the actual moments, but we are also called to a life of prayer and reflection. So, in these times may the touch of Jesus guide us through the moments of the incomprehensible or times to be awakened, that in time we may recognise more fully the God who walks with us in our journeys.

Let’s share our lived moments where we have felt touched by God.

THIS WEEK...

“This is my Beloved Son; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him”

PRAYER

Lord, may we learn to recognise your presence and find your peace. Amen



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“Jesus went up to the mountain to prayer”

13 August
2023

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1Kg 19:9, 11-13

Rom 9:1-5

Mt 14:22-33

Where do we find God? Our readings this week from the book of Kings, has that beautiful account of Elijah’s encounter with holiness. For Elijah God was not in the foundational aspects of the world like earth, wind or fire but in the gentle whisper of the breeze. The Twelve had a similar encounter as God was not in the mighty storm at sea but was there with them through it, transcended above it, and the calm of it.

Meister Eckhart, philosopher and mystic of the 13th Century, wrote that “nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness”. The ancient psalms express that knowledge of God is in the stillness, “Be still and know that I am God”.

As Christians we find God in all aspects of our everyday life. We have an incarnational God who journeys with us in the messiness of life. Through times of celebrations and joy, in the tough times of loneliness and despair, in our anxieties, griefs and losses. I remember Emeritus Bishop Terry Brady telling me of a time he assisted a homeless man near the Cathedral with a new pair of jeans and a clean shirt. This encounter changed Bishop Terry as he has never sighted that stranger again and he deeply believed that he met Jesus.

As Vincentians, we are called to meet Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ. Challenging to say the least, but it is the deeper purpose of our Mission. I remember one of the final expressions of Frederic Ozanam was that he believed that the chief purpose of the Society was to “save souls”. Here is where we meet the God who accompanies us in our travels and calls us daily to a life of prayer and reflection. Here is where we will hear the God in the gentle breeze and the one always there to pull us out of times of darkness and into the story of light.

Would you step out into the deep?

THIS WEEK...

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.” Nelson Mandela

PRAYER

“Truly I tell you, I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Gospel of John



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Through Great Faith

20 August
2023

20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 56:1, 6-7

Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

Mt 15:21-28

The words in Matthew's gospel this week are difficult to hear and even understand. Jesus' actions toward the Canaanite woman are abrupt. She is calling to him for help and he seemingly rejects her. Even the disciples walking with Jesus begs for his hearing of the woman.

The woman was not someone blinded by faith. She was persistent, wise and courageous in her faith. Jesus answered her through a brief parable, which the woman understood immediately but was not defeated. In some ways, she bravely presented Jesus with a returning parable, which Jesus heard through the depths of her faith.

Our Catholic faith tradition presents us with many challenges especially in present turbulent times. For some this faith is heard in blind obedience. Through such blindness fundamentalism is expressed, no other voices are heard, Christ is served not so much in the poor but only in the law.

This is why the Canaanite woman in this Gospel is so important for us all. Her response to Jesus reminds us that our faith journey deepens through our continual reflections, our continual prayer and our persistent striving and yearning to find the God of great compassion and love. In this way our good works founded in grounded faith, providing living hope and responding in love are our needed response to Jesus but we like the Canaanite woman expresses faith which is a journey towards holiness. This is when Jesus will respond to us, to our prayers accepted through our simple faith.

What was your reaction to Jesus in this narrative?

THIS WEEK...

"Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them" Pope Francis

PRAYER

*O God, be gracious and bless us
And let your face shed its light upon
us. Amen*



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27 August
2023

The Keys of Faith

21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 22:19-23

Rom 11:33-36

Mt 16:13-20

The readings this week are beautifully crafted. The first reading speaks of the elevation of the Lord's servant Eliakim. He is given the vestments and the authority of the past master Shebna who supported the works of the Egyptians opposing Isaiah's policy of non-violence. Most significantly, he receives the key of the "House of David" which is the authority to grant or deny admittance to the royal presence and was worn over the shoulder, signifying the master of the royal palace.

The gospel echoes another elevation of the Lord's servant, Simon Peter, who Jesus bestows the name Peter, the rock on which he builds his Church. Peter is given not keys of an earthly authority but the keys of the kingdom of heaven for "whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loose in heaven." Peter is called to be the master of the palace in the *ekklesia*. In this way, Peter was called to be more than just the Chief Rabbi in the pilgrim Church but was called to be the one to open to others eternal life.

These two readings surround the striking Hymn of the merciful God in the letter to the community in Rome by St Paul. These words, possibly influenced by Greek philosophies, express the overall providential action of God. St Paul's words are in great admiration and gratitude rather than in awe and fear and in this way express a boundless wonder in God as the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles.

Today is the feast of St Monica, the mother of St Augustine, who profoundly understood the richness and the depths of God and to this she, responded in love; love of God and love of her son. In the Vision in Ostia, described in the *Confessions*, Augustine shares with Monica an experience of the divine far greater than an earlier experience in Milan. Both are experiences just prior to a death, first the death of his son and other later the death of his mother. The profound difference is that Monica shares with him the kingdom of heaven; no misery and through pain only joy. In this, he experiences a bond, which goes beyond the door of just the "House of David" but into the realms of the eternal life. Through the experience and prayers of St Monica, Augustine knew life eternal.

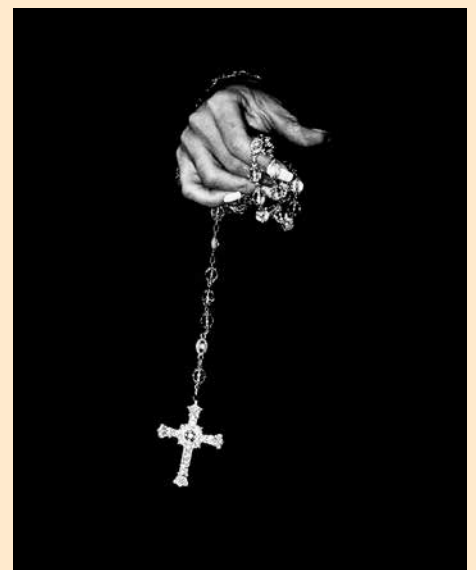
Has anyone shared with you there thoughts on eternal life?

THIS WEEK...

My heart is restless until it rests in you. Augustine of Hippo

PRAYER

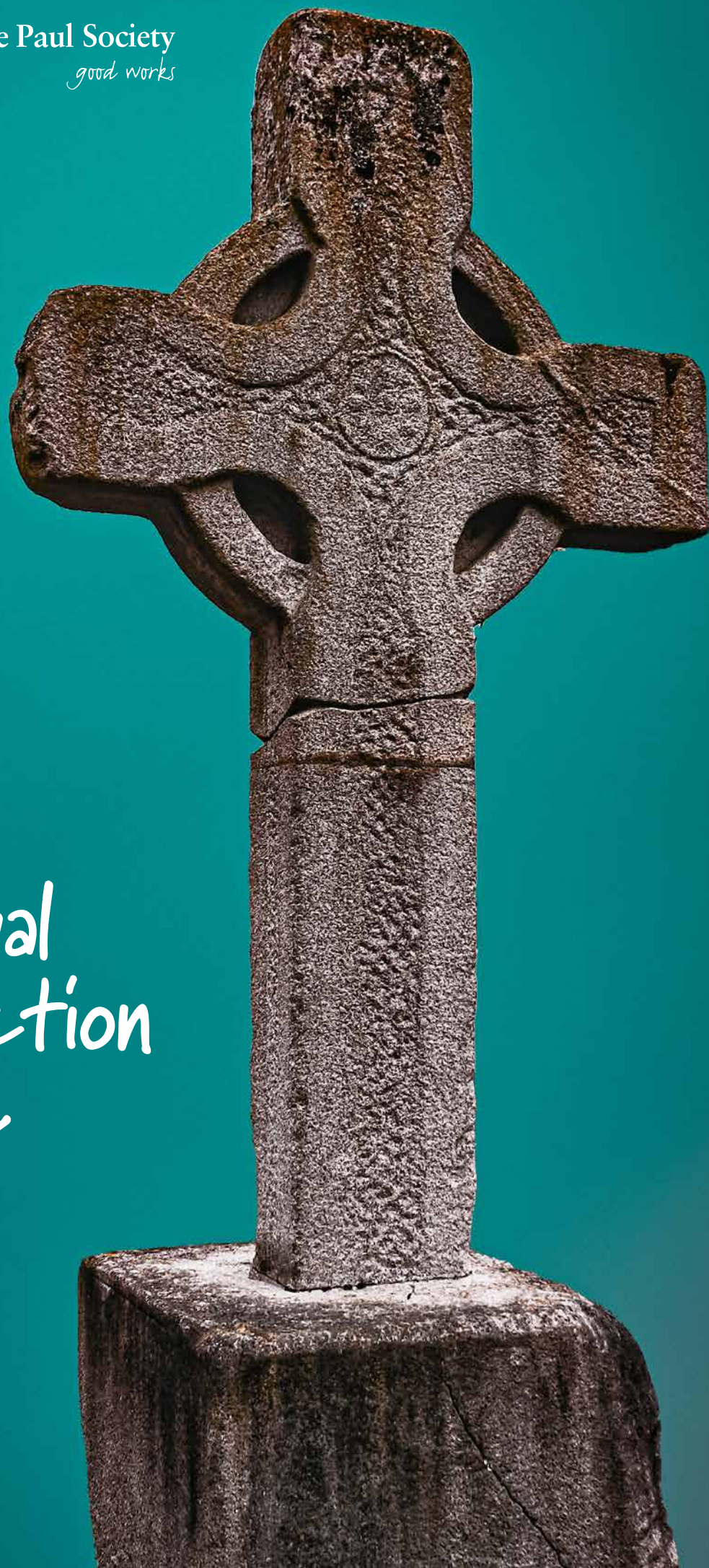
*God of Love and Beauty
Everything made by you is good.
Teach us compassion and justice
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other. Amen
may they be the gateway to wisdom,
enlightenment, peace and mercy.
Amen*



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Spiritual Reflection Guide