



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*

# Spiritual Reflection Guide

January – April 2025

**Travelling as  
Pilgrims of Hope**



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflections Guides.

The liturgical cycle for 2025 follows in general the Gospel of Luke (Year C) with Easter falling a little later in April. Much voice throughout this year will be given to the prayerful discernments of the Synod on Synodality and this special year of Grace as a Jubilee Year.

Pope Francis officially declared 2025 a Year of Jubilee with a papal bull, titled "*Spes Non Confudit*," meaning "*Hope Does Not Disappoint*." The Jubilee Year began with the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas Eve 2024.

The theme of the jubilee is "pilgrims of hope" as the pope is calling on all Catholics to renew in the hope of Christ, using St. Paul the Apostle as a guide for this special year. "Everyone knows what it is to hope," said Pope Francis. "In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt.

Often, we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness. "For all of us, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. God's word helps us find reasons for that hope. Taking it as our guide, let us return to the message that the Apostle Paul wished to communicate to the Christians of Rome," continued the pope.

In the papal bull, Pope Francis also decreed that on Sunday, Dec. 29, in every cathedral and co-cathedral, diocesan bishops are to celebrate Mass as the solemn opening of the Jubilee Year. The Jubilee will officially come to an end with the closing of the Holy Door in St. Peter's Basilica on Jan. 6, 2026, the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.

"During the Holy Year, may the light of Christian hope illumine all humanity, as a message of God's love addressed to all!" said Pope Francis. "And may the Church bear faithful witness to this message in every part of the world!"

Finally as our Vincentian Rule states "Vincentians serve with hope", may this special year of jubilee enhance our service and encourage us with the year's extraordinary graces.

**Leo Tucker**

Executive Director, Mission and Spirituality  
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All Spiritual Reflection Guides can be accessed on the national website, [www.vinnies.org.au](http://www.vinnies.org.au), and follow the Publications link. For any mailing enquiries, contact [lewisham.reception@vinnies.org.au](mailto:lewisham.reception@vinnies.org.au). A helpful weblink for the full Sunday readings is the Liturgical Commission in Brisbane, [www.litcom.net.au](http://www.litcom.net.au).

These Guides are also available with extended versions via podcasts through Spotify and Apple as Vincentian Spiritual Reflections.

**Acknowledgements**

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

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

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# Moments of sudden revelation

05  
Jan  
2025

## THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Is: 60:1 – 6

Eph: 3:2-3, 5-6

Mt: 2:1-12

The account of the birth of Jesus is a little different in this gospel of Matthew. There is no stable or worldwide registration of families as mentioned in Luke. Interestingly Mark does not even mention an infancy narrative at all! In fact, Matthew is the only gospel that accounts for the visit of the “wise men from the East” which precludes the family’s escape into Egypt and the genocide of infants across Bethlehem by an infuriated Herod.

It is interesting how our traditions and stories can slightly move away from what is actually recorded. Many would see the wise men’s visit in the stable, along with the shepherds, moments after the Christ-child was born. For some even the story of the little drummer boy is part of the same narrative.

Reading the actual words of gospel reveal some aspects, which need to be considered and reflected. Firstly, the wise men inquire as to where the child “who has been born” could be found because they have observed his star “at its rising” and at the visit the wise men “entered the house” and saw “the child with Mary his mother”. In this reading it would be assumed that this wondrous visit occur sometime after Jesus’ actual birth and in fact the wise men observed the incarnation at the rising of his star in their foreign lands. This alone expresses that the God-with-us was not just an Israel event but one that embraces all people, the whole of creation.

The celebration of the Epiphany, the visit of the magi strangers from foreign lands to the Christ child, reveals the divine nature of a God-with-us to humanity, not just a chosen people. From Jesus’ very beginning we have a God of all humanity. For Vincentians, to “serve Christ in the poor” is being open to moments of revelation of the visit and presence of the stranger in our life, who may not “fit” our way of living, may reveal a different perception of God. We are called to be open to the epiphanies of the everyday; the difference and gifts the stranger offers us, the different perspectives, the different ways of understanding and seeing our world, the different reflections of our God.

Such new possibilities in our life are the heart of our epiphany experience.

**Can you recall a profound moment of revelation in your life?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*  
Mark. 10.15

## PRAYER

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



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# Open to Mission

## THIS WEEK...

*Baptism; "is not a formality! It is an act that touches the depths of our experience"*  
Pope Francis 2014.

## PRAYER

*Father,  
May the Grace of our Baptism  
ground us in our faith,  
open us to hope and guide us  
in love.  
Amen*



## BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Is 40:1-5,9-11  
Tit 2:11-14, 3: 4-7  
**Lk 3:15-16, 21-22**

The Baptism of Jesus is a significant moment in the mission of John the Baptist and the mission of Jesus. For John, in many ways, it is the end times of his prophetic ministry and for Jesus; baptism is the call to his mission and beginning of his ministry.

The account of the baptism of Jesus is shared through all three of the synoptic gospels and in some ways referenced in the gospel of John. It is a significant moment in all accounts beginning Jesus' journey and mission. An aspect of all accounts is the heavenly commissioning of the Father for the Beloved of which the Father is "well pleased". This is somewhat echoed later in Jesus' journey at the Transfiguration where the Father again speaks of the beloved but this time we are called to "listen to him".

Pope Francis in recent years expressed that we should know and celebrate our day of baptism. He states that it is a "new birthday, because with your baptism you were born into the life of grace<sup>1</sup>." Recently I required my Baptismal Certificate, which reminded that I was baptised on the 16 September, only two weeks after my birth. I now hold the day in my thoughts and prayers giving thanks to life, God's grace and my parents.

As Vincentians, we too are "baptised" to a prophetic and action-oriented ministry through our Commissioning's. At these special Masses/ceremonies we are presented with the Scriptures, the candle, bread and sometimes a glass of water and the Rule. Each have a significant mark in the journey of a Vincentian. The Scriptures are an expression of our faith, and the candle is a profound symbol of the light of Christ inspiring and guiding us. The glass of water and bread reminds us of the Society logo of the hands offering assistance and the Rule connects us to the Vincentian traditions of faith in action. It is through these signs and symbols that we stand in awe listening to Jesus in faith, hope and compassionate love.

**What do you know of your Baptism?**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2024/documents/20240107-angelus.html>

# A model of expectant faith

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## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Is 62:1-5

1 Cor:12: 4-11

Jn 2: 1-11

Here in this weeks gospel we have a very important moment in the ministry of Jesus. We possibly know that this event at the wedding in Cana is the place where Jesus performs His first miracle.

There are some very significant things that I pick up from this gospel.

The first is the setting, it's a wedding. This signifies a special bond, a sacred connection, commitment and love. I thoroughly enjoy that this is the setting of something miraculous. That the faith is centred on love, connection and commitment, which are three very Vincentian qualities and actions.

I would love to dive deeply into the layout of what happens as this miracle unfolds.

1. "We have no wine". Not necessarily out of fear of frustration, although there was possibly a bit of panic, when spoken to Jesus this is purely stating their intention.
2. Jesus says to his mother "Woman..." theologically this is calling out the connection to Eve in the creation story in Genesis. Which points us to the Creator of the heavens and the earth.
3. "You have kept the good wine until now". This bends beautifully to scripture in Isaiah 43 "Behold I am doing a new thing, which now springs forth, do you not perceive it?" Trust that something is about to take place, that we may not even be able to comprehend.

A perfect model of expectant faith – set in the actions and qualities of love, connection and commitment:

- We state the *intention*
- We invite the *Creator*
- We *trust* in the outcome

What we know about faith and God, is that He isn't a magician, but he is God. Sometimes the outcome will be unexpected or surprising, and not just a wish fulfilled but something deeper and that it can sometimes be beyond our comprehension. Trust!

*(Reflection by Corinne Lindsay)*

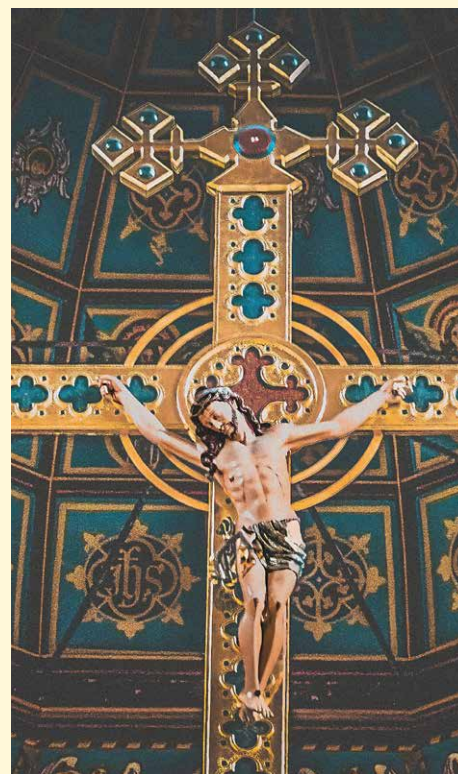
**What gets in the way of having expectant faith in your daily life?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God"*  
Corrie Ten Boom

## PRAYER

*Lord, hear the hearts of the faithful, Amen*



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# Connecting to the Power of the Holy Spirit

## THIS WEEK...

*"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" Acts 1:8*

## PRAYER

*Lord, Send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth, Amen*



## 3RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Neh: 8: 2-6, 8-10

1Cor: 12: 12-30

Lk 1:1-4, 4: 14-21

Ever since World Youth Day in Sydney in 2008, my understanding of being "filled with the Holy Spirit" was deepened to something beyond a sacramental moment at Confirmation, to being something very practical and supportive of how I assess and understand the situations I face in life.

In this week's gospel we see that "Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee". It doesn't just say He returned to Galilee, there is richness in what the power of the Spirit must be. Have you ever felt deeply moved, and stirred into action? It's a powerful thing, its what gives us a sense of motivation and dedication to be mobilised, and we can almost articulate it as a prompting.

We see again in the scripture that the "Spirit of the Lord is upon me" this same power, this same prompting, and then hands us a blueprint of our Vincentian call bring the good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind and oppressed go free.

What is this good news? What sets captives free? What allows blind people to see? What gives liberty to the oppressed? It's a huge ask.

I believe, it is an understanding of the human experience and suffering. It is a promise of hope and validation. It is deep reconciliation; it is an encounter with something sacred.

It is a person. Jesus, the person, says "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing". This is truly what I like to call an evergreen scripture. That it is true when the scriptures were written, it was true yesterday, it is true today and will remain true for tomorrow.

*(Reflection by Corinne Lindsay)*

**How does your understanding of human suffering impact the way you serve the community?**

# The Presentation of the Lord

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## PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Mal 3:1-4

Heb 2:14-18

Lk 2: 22-32

This Sunday is the Presentation of the Lord, this sounds amazing, but it is quite challenging.

Reading deeply into our readings this week it once again points us to suffering, but to look at it as something that refines us.

This challenges me so deeply. I have definitely been through deep suffering in my life, and some of the phrases I receive with well-meaning people is “this will make you stronger”, “this builds character” “you will become more resilient”. And to this I say (internally) is there a point? Do I really need more resilience? Is my character not built enough?

I was awestruck many years ago when I was a case worker at the Nagle Centre in Campbelltown, which I was supporting a person seeking assistance, her circumstances were horrible, and she was in a massive state of crisis. After she told me everything that was going on, she ended with “but God is good”. I couldn’t believe it, how could someone going through such trauma, still see there is something good.

All of this, as the scriptures point us to, is a purification, a testing, just like the presentation of the Lord, the refiners fire purifying silver: the process is hard and extreme, and yet the results can truly be remarkable.

What does it mean to refine? Does that build character? Does it always develop into resilience? No. But the connection here, is perspective – choice. We have the opportunity to choose to become bitter or better, its more than just finding a silver lining here – it is choosing a pathway to live.

*(Reflection by Corinne Lindsell)*

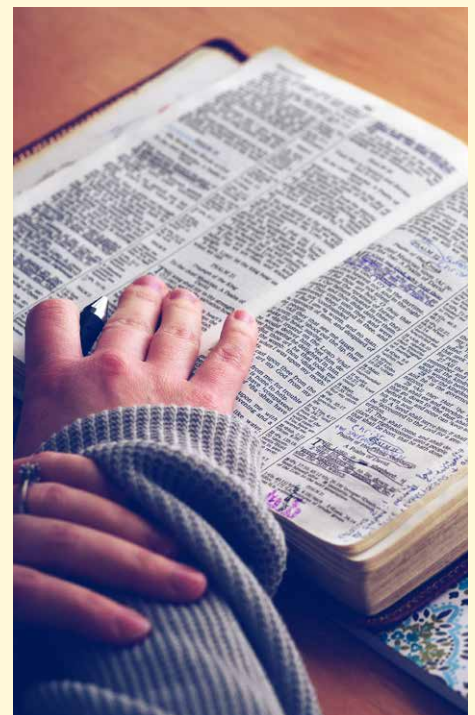
**Where have you had a refining moment in your life?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“People grow through experience if they meet life honestly and courageously. This is how character is built”. Eleanor Roosevelt*

## PRAYER

*Lord, help us to understand you are always near, Amen*



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# To be fishers of men



## THIS WEEK...

*"Life's persistent and most urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" Martin Luther King Jr*

## PRAYER

*Jesus, help me find the richness and stability of those within my own community. Amen*



## 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Is 6: 1-8

1Cor: 15: 1-11

**Luke 5:1-11**

What an exercise of trust. How often do we go through the motions of someone coming in with a NEW IDEA of how to do things better for better results? And all we feel is that we have been here before so many times.

This could potentially have been what was facing the disciples 'We have tried that'. But perhaps the lesson here with trust is less about just following someone blindly, but more about pivoting our attitudes to one for a positive outcome, for a grander plan even.

And Fishers of Men? What does this mean?

The fishermen were catching food for nourishment, for providence for stability. That was their job. For the families, for their communities.

Many years ago, I decided to do a tour of Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral. On this tour they talked about the architecture in great detail, and one thing that has stayed with me to this day, is what they said about the cathedral ceiling.

The ceiling is exposed beams, not a design flaw, but very intentional, as when looking at it, it gives the imagery of the bottom of a ship symbolising the metaphor of being fishers of men. (and many other places in scripture: Noah's ark, calming of the storm, etc.)

And so when we look to discipleship; the catching of people – we are asked here to be seeing it as the same reason why they would be catching fish. To be just as vital as food. People of nourishment, of providence and of stability.

This is true community. One that gives life and sustenance for the journey of life.

*(Reflection by Corinne Lindsay)*

**Who in your life provides this life giving nourishment?**



# The Sermon of level ground...

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## 6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Jer 17:5-8

1Cor: 15: 12.16-20

Lk 6: 17.20-26

Matthew's version of the Beatitudes, we also know as the Sermon on the Mount. What we hear today is Luke placing the same oration on level ground. No doubt, Jesus preached this same message many times in different spaces to different audiences. I love Luke's portrayal of the disciples amongst a 'great crowd' of people from all over, and this being where Jesus meets them and preaches. In amongst them. It's a very egalitarian picture, which perhaps contrasts with how our church feels at times.

In our Vincentian work, we hope that our attention to those we assist is perceived as being from amongst them. We know that, with birth into different circumstances, different school experiences or a different turn of events in adulthood, any of us could be in need of support for a short or even longer period of time.

And we know that it's not easy to seek assistance. The NSW Police Commissioner recently quoted that on average, a victim of domestic violence will endure 27 incidents before calling police (as an average, this means frequently the number is much higher). We hear time and again of people sleeping in their cars to avoid reaching out for assistance. And we know that any person walking through our doors has experienced some very difficult times before taking that courageous step.

The Beatitudes remind us of the power and responsibility associated with material possessions. Material wealth can lead to selfishness and unwillingness to share, or it can lead us to generosity and sharing. We are very, very fortunate in the Society to have a vast wealth of incredibly dedicated members, volunteers and donors, who share their time, their emotional selves and their resources. And we give thanks for you every day.

*(Reflection by Leonie Duck)*

**How can I make it easier for people to seek assistance?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"Before God, we are all equally wise, and equally foolish."*

*Albert Einstein*

## PRAYER

*Lord, we give thanks for our earthly blessings and the opportunity to assist others. Amen*



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# Serving Devotedly

## THIS WEEK...

*God is able to make all grace abound toward you. 2 Corinthians 9:8*

## PRAYER

*Father, in Heaven, give me the grace to forgive. Amen*



## 7<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

1 Sam 26: 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

1Cor: 15: 45-49

**Lk 6:27-38**

Even sinners can do good to those who are good to them. This really caused me to pause. We can all do reciprocity. Is that all I do? Do I only think kindly towards those I believe think kindly towards me? Do I only help those who I think would help me if positions were reversed? I really did some soul-searching about this and plan to be more conscious of it in the future.

Jesus is so counter-cultural in this message. Until now, the correct action was what was deserved – whether good or bad. How often do we think ‘That person deserved better’ or ‘They didn’t deserve that’ or ‘They got their just deserts’?

As I write this, the world continues to watch with immense sadness and horror, the loss and grief that results from the cycle of retaliation in the Middle East. Unfortunately, this will likely still be the case, by the time you read it.

The word ‘deserve’ originates from ‘serve devotedly’. It strikes me that if we take this definition, it leads us directly to the mercy that Jesus preaches. Mercy would release a person from revenge which they might be judged to ‘deserve’. Revenge is not serving devotedly. Mercy is serving devotedly.

But how do we do mercy? There are many incredible examples of forgiveness in our recent history – people such as Immaculee Ilibagiza (<https://www.immaculee.com/>), Lindy Chamberlain (<https://lindychamberlain.com/30th-anniversary-letter-august-2010/>) and Leila Abdallah (<https://www.i4give.com/>) come to my mind. How do we let go of ego, pride and hurt, as they seem to have done? I believe each of them would say it is by the grace of God.

*(Reflection by Leonie Duck)*

**How can I forgive those who are hardest to forgive?**

# Speaking from a humble heart

02  
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## 8<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Eccles.27:4-7

1Cor 15:54-58

Lk 6: 39-45

In this week's Gospel, Luke reports Jesus urging us to look inside ourselves and to not judge others. It contains some beautiful phrases and concepts.

A tree will be known by its fruit – a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce sound fruit. And words are spoken from what is in the heart. We draw good or bad from what is stored in our hearts, and our words flow from this.

John Michael Talbot puts this beautifully: "If our heart is cleansed, we will speak beautiful words and we will bear good fruit". John Michael goes on to say "we cleanse our hearts through repentance". His analysis is reflected in Psalm 51:15: *Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.* If our hearts are pure, clean, our Lord will be present when we open our lips to speak.

The phrase *humble and contrite hearts* which the priest prays on our behalf during Mass from verse 17 of the same Psalm (51:17), is most often translated as *broken spirit, broken and contrite hearts.* Sometimes we need to be broken to become humble.

Often, the kindest, most compassionate and understanding people, have emerged from experiences of significant challenges. It's true for the tree and the fruit as well - we know that vegetation grows back healthier after a fire.

Inspiration from Psalm 51 (51:10) also gave us a beautiful hymn *A New Heart for a New World*, from the talented Trish Watts and Monica O'Brien. The song is a prayer to our Lord to create a new heart in us, to heal us of pride and hurt and to open our eyes to His call for a united world. To go forth in His name, we pray our hearts change.

*(Reflection by Leonie Duck)*

**How can I cleanse my heart?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Create a new heart, holy Lord. Heighten our minds to your thoughts. Trish Watts and Monica O'Brien.*

## PRAYER

*Lord, help me to keep my heart clean. Amen.*



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# Holy Spirit armour

## THIS WEEK...

*O Holy Spirit, descend plentifully into my heart. Saint Augustine*

## PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, accompany me this Lent. Help me to fast from ugly emotions and feast on loving and compassionate thoughts and actions. Amen.*



## FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Deut 26: 4-10

Rom 10: 8-13

**Lk 4: 1-13**

This story is not on a level playing field. I feel a great sense from the get-go that the devil is no match for Jesus. Satan *seems* to be clever in his approach of amping up the offer each time, but there is an almost mystical calmness about Jesus. The offers *sound* like something that would be attractive to a person in Jesus' position – alone, starving – but Jesus is not ruffled. He knows who he is, he knows who this eager beaver following him around the desert is, and he knows where he is headed.

He's not tempted. Not interested. In my mind, he doesn't even seem to come close.

Yet Satan's planning to have another go. He's going off to regroup and figure out what else he can offer to get Jesus across the line, and when might be an opportune time to return.

A very wise and engaging priest who recently left this world, would frequently in his homilies, say, that the day's Gospel "is a story about you, and it's a story about me".

Temptation is plentiful in our world, including our Vincentian world – temptation to gossip, to judge, to complain, to want more.

How do we go with temptations? Most of the time, not so calm and detached, is my experience. And unfortunately for us, I think we get the return visits with much greater frequency than Jesus does.

But of course, if we look back to the opening line, Jesus has entered this desert-time "filled with the Holy Spirit".

Lent is our special time to draw on the Holy Spirit to boost our armour against the devil and strengthen our kindness and compassion.

*(Reflection by Leonie Duck)*

**What do I want the Holy Spirit to help me fast from this Lent?**

# Seeing God in new ways

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## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Gen 15: 5-12, 17-18

Phil 3: 17 - 4: 1

**Lk 9: 28-36**

Today in Luke's Gospel we hear and read about Jesus' Transfiguration. In the verses prior to this scripture, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the coming journey to Jerusalem and the events that would lead him to Calvary. And so, following these disclosures, Jesus takes Peter, James and John away. Up a mountain, to be alone in prayer.

In that prayerful moment between Jesus and his Father, he is transfigured. The disciples briefly see Jesus as the Son of God and are embraced in that experience of relationship, love and peace. They see a vision of Jesus with Moses and Elijah and hear God's voice confirming for them that Jesus is the chosen one, his Son, the new covenant. Peter wants to camp and stay in this space and place of revelation, but Jesus returns down the mountain because he knows that the journey is not finished, and he still has his Father's work to complete.

The Transfiguration illustrates for us two essential elements of discipleship. The need to have time away in prayer, reflection, stillness and quiet. And the need to return to the world in which we live and work.

"We often wish the rest of the world would just go away, but the truth is, we can't love God and ignore the world around us. We can't love God unless we love our neighbour; and so, like the disciples we must follow Christ down the mountain again and become involved in human suffering and confront it with compassion." (Fr. Jim Reilly)

And for Vincentians, this is where the Transfiguration experience continues. It is when you gather prayerfully together as members and reflect not only on the scriptures but on the work, you do in God's name. It is in the daily contact with the people you assist, especially those who are marginalised and in need. Being open to see the face of Christ revealed in the person you are visiting and being the face of God for them.

(Reflection by Greg Ryan)

**Where have I encountered Christ this week?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Take some time out to see God in the world and people around you. And reflect on what God is asking of you at this time in your life.*

## PRAYER

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



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# Serve in hope

## THIS WEEK...

*"Knowledge of the poor and needy is not gained by poring over books...(but)...feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes." Frederic Ozanam*

## PRAYER

*Lord, may we be your hands and voice, cultivating hope in all we see and assist. Amen*



## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Ex 3: 1-8, 13-15

Cor 10: 1-6, 10-12

Lk 13: 1-9

This is the logo of the International Confederation of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The motto, "serviens in spe," translates to serve in hope. And this is specifically stated in the Rule section 1.2 under the heading of, Vincentian Vocation. Vincentians serve in hope.



The nineteenth century Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, reminds us that, "to live without hope is to cease to live." Hope then is central to life, to living well and to our Vincentian service. And it seems that many of the people we visit, and assist have lost hope, lost a sense of life being good and worthwhile, and instead living becomes something to be endured.

Luke's Gospel today has many themes including repentance, redemption and judgement but I think hope is a key theme too. The parable of the fig tree has the landowner coming back every season for three years to see if the tree had produced fruit and when no fruit is grown, he orders the gardener to cut it down. The gardener asks for it to be left for one more year when he will dig around it, fertilise and care for the tree hoping that it will bear fruit.

The image of the gardener being patient with the tree and taking as much time as needed to cultivate it, resonates with the work of Vincentians. Building a relationship with the people we assist takes time. Learning their story and understanding their unique circumstances also takes time and patience. The people we see, often need to be nurtured, to be cared for, as was the tree in the parable. They need to be given the support and opportunity needed for them to grow and "blossom."

In this significant jubilee year as pilgrims in hope we continue to understand that hope is at the heart of enhancing human dignity and human flourishing as we are Vincentians who serve in hope.

*(Reflection by Greg Ryan)*

**Can you think of an encounter that has led to real growth and change in the life of someone you have assisted?**

# Invited to change

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## FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Josh: 5: 9-12

Cor: 5: 17-21

Lk 15: 1-3, 11-32

The parable from Luke today is probably one of the best-known teaching stories that Jesus gave us. When I was young, I remember it being called The Prodigal Son but more recently has also been known as, The Forgiving Father. Whatever we call it, it is a complex story with many messages for us.

The father in the story is the image of God. A father who is there for us, providing all we need in life. A father who gives each the freedom to choose how they will embrace their life and make decisions for themselves, whatever direction that decision may lead them in. And two sons who represent the human condition. The younger son is allowed to take what the father offers and leave him for a life focussed just on self, that leads down a path of self-destruction. The older son meanwhile lives a life conforming to the rules and expectations of his father, staying and working the family farm.

We hear that the younger son wastes everything. He literally hits rock bottom and for a Jew, feeding pigs would have been about as low as you could go. He then realises his mistakes and bad decisions and decides to return home to seek forgiveness and security back with his father. But not as a son anymore, just a servant as he had lost the right to be family.

But he is welcomed home with open arms by his father and his return is celebrated with a feast. He is given sandals, a sign that he was not a slave but a son. He has been found again. The elder son though is not as forgiving and resents the celebration, as he had never been offered one, even after his years of fidelity. He refuses to join the feast, and his father has to remind him that he has always been there with him and all he has in life, is his too. The story doesn't tell us what decision the elder son made but we do know that his father would have been patient and waited to welcome him back in to the family when he was ready, as he had for his prodigal son.

*(Reflection by Greg Ryan)*

**When have I found it hard to accept someone unconditionally and to forgive them for a past hurt?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"Be kind and merciful. Let no one ever come to you without coming away better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness." Teresa of Kolkata*

## PRAYER

*Lord, give us the courage to be honest with ourselves and change when needed, to turn back and be embraced by you. We ask this in your name. Amen*



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# True Leadership – Putting Others First

## THIS WEEK...

*Quick to listen, slow to speak,  
slow to become angry, always to  
put others first James 1:19*

## PRAYER

*Let us mourn till others are  
comforted,  
Weep till others laugh...  
Let us be frugal till all are filled  
Let us give till all have received.  
Amen  
John Harriott*



## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Is 43:16-21

Phil 3: 8-14

Jn 8: 1-11

The lament of St Paul in his letter to the faith community in Philippi is prayer-like and profound. We must remember that Paul was not always a loving person and follower of Christ. We first learn of the ancient figure of Saul who was a Zealot “hell-bent” in eradicating any thought of this new rising faith in the falsely claim resurrected messiah even to condemning many Jews and ordering their executions.

Paul lived the letter of the Law until his profound conversion in which he reminds his reader; “for him I have accepted the loss of everything...”

The gospel reading chosen for this Sunday shows the calm strength of Jesus when he confronts the law and those accusing the woman found guilty of “the very act of committing adultery”. I feel that Jesus would have really frustrated the accusers especially as he answered them with doodling in the sand. And while he is so commanding in dealing with the accusers, that contrasts with his gentleness towards the woman’s shame and embarrassment.

I would always hold that laws and rules are needed to guide a society in behaviours and attitudes although these same laws are as vulnerable as those conferring them. Pope Francis is continually calling us to listen to the signs of the times as does the Rule (1.6). As we continue our journey with Jesus to Jerusalem may we be open to the new spaces of poverty in our world offering a presence of encounter, listening and discernment. We too may count the cost of this like St Paul of “loss of everything” but we do this for a Jesus who gave so much more.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, gave expression to this call of Lent when he prayed:

*“Teach me good Master to be generous; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not to seek for any reward save that of doing your blessed will”.*

*(Reflection by Greg Ryan)*

**How often do we ever share and count our personal costs in our good works?**



# Humility

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## PASSION SUNDAY (PALM SUNDAY)

Is 50: 4-7

Phil 2; 6-11

Lk 22: 14 - 23: 56

Today we begin the journey with Jesus into Jerusalem. Today the people are excited to see Jesus. He enters the city similar to royalty but not in fine garments and beautiful steeds but as a rabbi and on the humblest of animals, the donkey.

Jesus knew his time was “at hand” and he knew that this jubilation will turn very sour in a few moments. How does Jesus lovingly wave to a crowd who will deny and discard him so lightly and call for his death before the palms which they wave have dried up.

He “emptied himself”; “He humbled himself by being obedient unto death”. He empties himself of all claims to divine glory and honour to become a human being — not a human of high status and honour, but a lowly slave serving other human beings. He humbles himself even to the point of dying a slave’s death, for the shameful and tortuous form of execution by crucifixion was reserved for slaves and rebels against Roman rule.

Jesus is not a passive victim rather he enters fully and willingly into his mission. On this Sunday marking Jesus’ passion, we might ask ourselves does our life together reflect “the same mind that was in Christ Jesus”? Are we looking to the interests of others rather than our own interests?

Jesus emptied himself and took on a human; incarnate, he was not just wearing a human mask but entering into our humanity in all its fullness and sometimes bitterness.

Fr Ronald Rolheiser puts it beautifully; “To “self-empty” in the way Jesus is described as doing means being present without demanding that your presence be recognized and its importance acknowledged; it means giving without demanding that your generosity be reciprocated; it means being invitational rather than threatening, healthily solicitous rather than nagging or coercive; it means being vulnerable and helpless, unable to protect yourself against the pain of being taken for granted or rejected; it means living in a great patience that doesn’t demand intervention, divine or human, when things don’t unfold according to your will; it means letting God be God and others be themselves without either having to submit to your wishes or your timetable....that’s the invitation”.

**Can you think of a time you were able to be present in the way described above?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“We must make the choices that enable us to fulfill the deepest capacities of our real selves”.*  
Thomas Merton

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, help us: to be present without demanding our presence be recognised; to give without demanding; to be invitational rather than threatening, to be vulnerable; living in a great patience that doesn’t demand intervention, divine or human, when things don’t unfold according to my will. Amen.*



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# How do we recognise Jesus?

## THIS WEEK...

*While he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing...*

*Their eyes were opened and they recognised him. (Lk 24: 30-31)*

## PRAYER

*Breathe on our minds and open our eyes  
that we too may know him in the breaking of bread. AMEN*



## EASTER SUNDAY

Acts 10: 34, 37-43

Col 3: 1-4

Jn 20: 1-9

Lk 24: 13-35 Mk 16: 1-13 Mt 28: 1-10

What a complete turn of events of this week. We began with an entry into the city of Jerusalem of shouts of blessings and the waving of palms but on a donkey. Celebrated Passover but there was something remarkably different. Then Jesus' arrest, charged, tortured and then crucified but everyone betrayed, denied and abandoned him, including those closest to him. Then came the dawning, still in the dark, of Easter morn and a tomb empty but this was very different to the raising of Lazarus and Jairus' daughter.

A consistent feature of the resurrection stories is that the risen Jesus was different and initially unrecognisable. Resurrection is not simply a resuscitation of the old body. Lazarus was immediately recognised and would have still had that sore knee and aged aches or that tooth broken. All knew that Lazarus because they experienced and lived with that Lazarus, but resurrection is profoundly different

Jesus is in a "new" space and the disciples and others were not, they were still in the turmoil of grief and change. In their fear they returned to the safety of the "old" space as in some way returning to become fishers of fish and not of humanity. Resuscitation and resurrection are not the same. Resuscitation just restores to the same life; resurrection changes, glorifies and transforms.

Change is a difficult process, but it is only the sum of the greater part. It is the hanging on the cross part where we too, like Jesus, may feel abandoned, disempowered, disconnected. But to stay there is to be like the apostles who perceived only that part and not the possibilities of the resurrection. It is to this time of the Easter morn that I look forward to and share these words....

Easter needs to be celebrated, reflected, prayed and discerned not just our Easter Sunday but throughout the whole of our lives. Easter morning changed history.

May this time of Easter Season find hope for our journey, purpose in our faith and depth in our love for all in your life. Amen

**Which account speaks most to you of the joy of the Resurrection?**

# Where is the proof?

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## DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

Acts 5: 12-16

Apoc 1: 9-13, 17-19

**Jn 20:19-31**

We live in a world where facts and figures hold a stronger argument to faith, spirituality or awe. We struggle with things that cannot be explained or even that there is more to life beyond ourselves.

If we reflect on the narrative in this week's gospel around Thomas, we hear Jesus saying, "Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed; blessed are they that have not seen and have believed." We do not see Jesus physically walking the land as the disciples did, and sometimes our fear gets in the way of seeing, feeling, and noticing what is around us. How often are we told something and then check it out to see if it is correct?

Many years ago, when I was working in the funeral industry, a young woman with her carer/friend came to arrange her Mum's funeral. Generally, this meeting may take about 90 mins, but this was a different and challenging person. Sadly, the young woman suffered a psychological illness where she needed to check, double check and treble check all her past movements. For example, she chose flowers for her Mum, but we had to go over and over the choice till she was okay to move to the next part of the arrangement. The 90 mins became 4 hours with many apologies in-between, which wasn't needed. Her illness had robbed her of the capability to understand and trust anything beyond the physicality of searching, finding and repeating the search. She constantly need proof of everything. The front door was not able to close till everything was accounted.

Taking nothing away from this young woman's very challenging life, I see a lot of myself in this space of unable to fully trust especially in terms of the things beyond me. "Are my prayers really heard?", "Is the Eucharist truly the real presence?"; "Is there really life after this life?"

We all have a little "doubting Thomas" in us and I believe we have two choices. To listen to the doubts and walk away thinking that is the final answer or will listen to that other voice which draws us close and tell us that "Peace be with you". "Doubt no longer but believe"

**How and where did I encounter God this week?**

## THIS WEEK...

*If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. (John Henry Newman)*

## PRAYER

*Dear Lord, I pray for all the people who have taken advantage of me. Help them to encounter love, integrity, and acceptance.*



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# Spiritual Reflection Guide

The tomb is  
really empty

