

# Spiritual Reflection Guide

*God of One in Three*

May – August  
2020



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# The smell of the sheep

3 May  
2020

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2: 14, 36-41

1Pet 2: 20-25

**Jn 10:1-10**

There are many things that I admire of other faith traditions; their passion, enthusiasm, peacefulness and vision of the world. One aspect I truly admire is the depth of knowledge of the Christian scriptures.

It is true that this knowledge may come unqualified and fundamentally understood whereas my personal love of the scriptures is through the lens of contextual, experiential and contemporary. Although, in all this, I critically struggle to remember passages and verses by rote.

I do have at least one exception to this personal rule and that is John 10.10. There is so much to reflect upon in the words of Jesus here; "For I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly!"

In many ways this is the final answer to the questions: why are we followers of Christ? Why do we dedicate our lives wholly (or holy) to this mission? It is, I believe, simply to gain this promise. All our hope, all our faith and all our love turns on these words. I guess all else pales into insignificance outside of this invitation to journey and share in the hope of life in its fullness, eternal life.

As Vincentians, who are called to see Christ in the faces of the marginalised and the vulnerable, may we continue to be motivated inwardly with love listening to our shepherd who goes ahead inviting us to experience life; life in all fullness.

**Pope Francis has asked us to take on the smell of the sheep.**

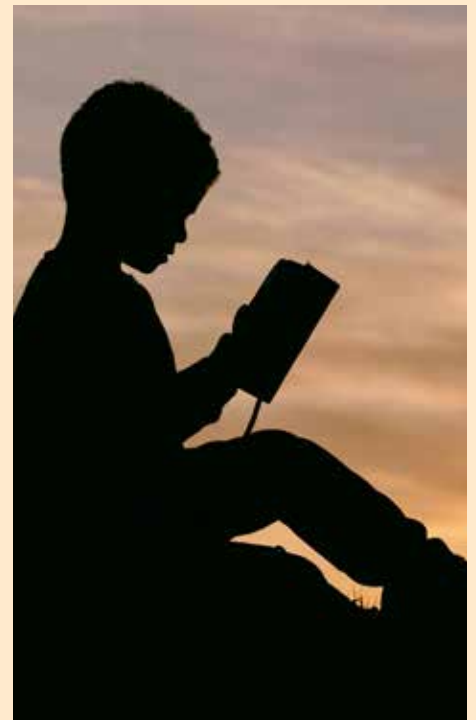
**What does that mean personally to you?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"That will be the great joy, the supreme joy, joy in all its fullness"*  
(St Augustine of Hippo)

## PRAYER

*Eternal Father, lead us always  
in the light of your joy. Amen*



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# Chosen to serve

10 May  
2020

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Act 6:1-7

1Pet 2:4-9

Jn 14:1-12

The account in this week's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles expresses the needs of the increasing disciples of faith in the very early church, and so the need to choose more leaders to spread the message of this increasing faith.

To this, it is written that the "whole community" chose seven men of "good standing". This term has been used often today especially in the preparations of the Synod of the Amazon and even our own upcoming Plenary Council.

Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia (QA)*, of which he states that he was not replacing what was expressed in the Final Document of the Synod, continues a deep discernment on dignity of the person, especially the original people; ecology and protection of the Amazon biome; fostering a culture of encounter; and the needs of the Church, understanding that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*).

Pope Francis' reflection or dreams led to empowering a *distinctively lay* Church. This speaks volumes to Vincentians as he reflects that; "A Church of Amazonian features requires the stable presence of mature and lay leaders endowed with authority and familiar with the languages, cultures, spiritual experience and communal way of life in the different places, but also open to the multiplicity of gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows on every one." (QA. 94)

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 pray upon together often.

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

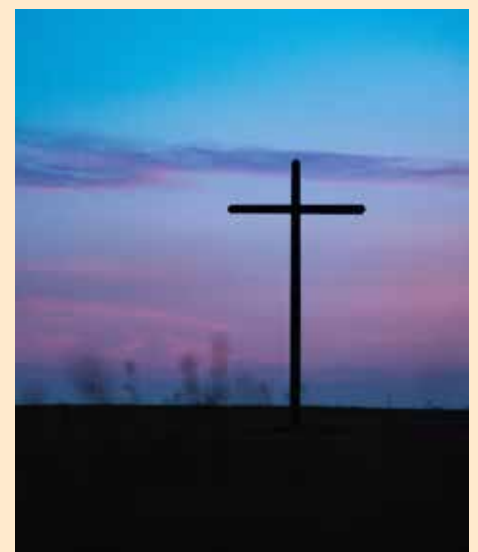
## THIS WEEK...

*"This requires the Church to be open to the Spirit's boldness...the growth of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay."*

(Querida Amazonia 2020)

## 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

17 May  
2020

## 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 at the heart of John's gospel themes.

A few months after the death of Anne, the family were gathered, before a lunch, to visit the grave to remember and pray. It was the first time since the funeral that Anne's sister had visited, although for me it was my then Sunday ritual after Mass.

We were only there a very short while when my son, 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-year-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 are 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 lead our grieved hearts to your promise of life. Amen*



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# Why do you stand looking into the sky?

24 May  
2020

## THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Acts 1:1-11

Eph 1:17-23

Mt 28:16-20

The Ascension story holds the tension of both Jesus' departure and his continued presence with the disciples. I am drawn to the moment in this story when two men in white ask, "Why are you men from Galilee here looking into the sky?" As the reader, I want to jump in and say, "Why indeed!? Isn't it obvious? Didn't Jesus just disappear into a cloud?"

Ann Johnson in her book, *Miryam of Nazareth*, offers a reflection on this encounter:

"Why do you stand there looking into the sky?"

"Because the sky has taken him away."

"Will he not come again from just such a sky?"

"Is it not right that I keep watch?"

What if the cloud should part and no one was here to greet the Christ?

I would remain fixed in this moment, in this place. I would capture forever the feeling and hold it like a flickering oil lamp in my cupped hands."

In our lives, we sometimes have moments like the disciple that we want to hold on to. For me, one such time was my son's wedding. The entire day was so very beautiful but I especially recall the speech he and his bride/wife gave. They expressed their gratitude for each other and the love and support of their family and friends. It was deeply emotional and the feelings I felt that day live on; just in recalling it, I am drawn back into the joy of the day.

Ann Johnson's poem continues with the disciple recognising it is time to leave. "The voices of companions grow distant and I would be with them. We have walked the long way together and we are somehow essential to each other."

Addressing Jesus, the disciple says, "Knowing I cannot stay with you, I will take you with me. Alive and thriving I will daily gather in the enveloping midst and place it in the midst of us."

Along with many other themes, the feast of the Ascension is about continuing presence. As Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel, "*And know that I am with you always, yes to the end of time.*" Unlike the narrator in this story, we weren't there to see Jesus disappear into a cloud, yet we know his continued presence in our lives. How does Jesus live in the midst of us today?

**Share an experience in your life that stays with you and continues to be a source of joy.**

## THIS WEEK...

*"And know that I am with you always, yes to the end of time."  
(Matt 28:20)*

## PRAYER

*Loving God, may we cherish your continuing presence with us and reflect your love to others through our life and actions.*



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# God being with us

31 May  
2020

## PENTECOST SUNDAY

Acts 2: 1-11

1 Cor 12:3-7,12-13

**Jn 20: 19-23**

How easy it would be for us all to gather together and shut the doors, because of fear. Many of our Vincentian ministries call us to have courage, visiting troubled families and being with many hurting people. I remember when I first started at the Matthew Talbot Hostel I certainly felt fear.

It is in today's inspiring Gospel reading we are so strongly and evocatively reminded of the peace, power and strength we are offered and contain. The peace that only faith in Jesus can give us and the strength that is the reception of the Holy Spirit. It is not only them Jesus breathed on, it is us!

Benedictine, Joan Chittister writes profoundly of Pentecost: "But only here in this time, between the bursting open of the tomb and, fifty days later, the overflowing of the Holy Spirit, does the full awareness of what it is to live in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ finally dawn", and...

"The Spirit of God moves us to new heights of understanding, to new types of witness, to new dimensions of life needed in the here and now... a wild thing, breathing where it will, moving as it pleases, settling on women and men alike."

"So his appearance at Pentecost was about more than good news -- more than the knowledge that God had raised Jesus body and soul. "Receive the Holy Spirit," he told the disciples. It was the beginning of a new way of God being *with us*. In that new presence is the peace for which we hunger. It is already ours, here and already ours if we can only embrace the gift. Creation is unbound now and tending toward completion in the cosmic Christ. Like the disciples, we are living in the days beyond the victory. This new consciousness is growing still. It is our job as disciples to live "as if," to live the hope and joy of the empty tomb here and now." (Rev. Victoria Ix, Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts)

**How often do I consciously remember I literally have that miracle within me?**

## THIS WEEK...

*"The beginning of a new way of God being with us."*

## PRAYER

*May the Gifts of the Holy Spirit bring fire to the earth so that the presence of God may be seen in a new light.. Amen. Sr Joan Chittister (Reflection from Joy Bowen)*



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# The greatest gift

7 June  
2020

## THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Ex 34:4-6, 8-9

2Cor 13:11-13

Jn 3:16-18

I have many memories of religion classes from years ago when I was in primary school, where firstly the Nuns and the Brothers in later years, explained the Trinity in a very simple manner using the shamrock to illustrate the mystery of our God. One God but Three Persons. I believe this analogy is attributed to St Patrick and is one that I used many times throughout my own teaching career when it came time to explain this greatest of mysteries. The other common image we used was the triangle. One shape with three corners and sides, which cannot exist if any element is missing. Of course, shamrocks and triangles are not adequate to describe the real meaning of the Trinity or the mystery of our God.

In this week's Gospel, we hear: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life." We first hear that we are loved, and loved to such a degree that God wants to be part of our lives so intimately that he sends his only Son, Jesus, to be in relationship with us, like us in all things except sin. Then we have through Him, the promise of salvation, and eternal life with God.

He came into perfect relationship with us when Jesus was born and entered into our humanity. The relationship fulfilled, as we heard in last week's Gospel when Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Father, Son and Holy Spirit; God in relationship with us and as we read in Genesis – "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." This then makes each of us, a reflection of the Triune God to the world around us and the people we encounter, especially the people we serve and minister.

**How do I share this great gift of love and reflect God and God's love to those I encounter?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Blest be God the Father, and the Only Begotten Son of God, and also the Holy Spirit, for he has shown us his merciful love.*

*(Entrance Antiphon – Mass of the Day)*

## PRAYER

*"At the end of this journey, lived together following the race of the Gospel in the world, the Holy Spirit revives in each of us the call to be courageous and joyful evangelisers."*

*Pope Francis*

*(Reflection from Greg Ryan)*



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# Corpus Christi

14 June  
2020

## THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

Deut 8:2-3, 14-16

1Cor 10:16-17

**Jn 6:51-58**

This week is the celebration of the body and blood of Christ. In Deuteronomy, God speaks of “know your inner heart”. I remember reading on a noticeboard in my local parish: “some people are so poor, all they have is money”. This reading challenges us to stop and be in the present moment, and listen to what God is calling us to do or say today. In John’s Gospel, *“I am the living bread, which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this will live forever. And the bread I shall give you is my flesh, for the life of the world”*.

As a child, I am sure many struggled with the idea that the bread and wine is Jesus, flesh and blood. Jesus is the bread of life; it is the word of God that gives us life. God is calling us to be in communion with him, and if we go back to what was said in Deuteronomy, the word of God is our richness, it is to be still and hear God calling, in the ordinary. It is noticing and having awareness in our humanness and failings, and we see Christ in the vulnerable. If we think of Jesus in our day-to-day lives, such as when we come across a homeless person on a street corner, they are stretching out their hands to be acknowledged, noticed and valued in even a small way. They are also stretching out to be in relationship, to be able to be still in heart and mind and be with God.

**When do I stop, listen and hear Jesus? Where is God calling me and will I accept his call?**

## THIS WEEK...

*“Come as you are, that’s how I want you. Come as you are, feel quite at home.*

*Close to my heart, loved and forgiven; Come as you are, why stand alone?”*

## PRAYER

*Father, nourish us with the gift of life. Amen*

*(Reflection from Peter Gormly)*



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# Mission calls

21 June  
2020

## 12<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jer 20:10-13

Rom 5:12-15

Mt 10:26-33

This week's Gospel of Matthew follows from the earlier part in Chapter 10 where Jesus is preparing his disciples for their mission. It's a pretty tough picture that he paints as he talks of the opposition that they will face: "You will be universally hated on account of my name" (Matthew 10:22). This Sunday's readings from the prophet Jeremiah and Psalm 69 echo the despair of facing an enemy and imploring God to protect and defend.

This experience of being hated by others arose in a radio interview I heard with Reverend Bill Crews about assisting refugees in Calais, France. He spoke of the refugees there with hopes of getting to England who were most unwelcome by the French authorities. Their despair is described in an ABC story about Bill Crews who was part of a charity providing food and other essentials to these people. "He individually meets and greets each of the 250 mainly men who turn up, shaking their hands and hugging them. One of them says, 'Thank you for smiling' because all they have seen is heavies and bullies and thugs."

The account continues: "The authorities come through and they slash all of the tents, they throw them away, they'll smash mobile phones, they'll smash batteries," Reverend Crews said. "I don't know how they do it. I look at them and think one of them could be my own son and would I want my own son to suffer these sorts of things?"

This story gives a stark experience of rejection, sadly one that many refugees around the world tell. Crews says that he does not worry about the politics of how people came to be there; he's led by the words of Jesus in today's Gospel. "Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

Members of the Society assist people who also face rejection from families, from society, and from friends. The hand of friendship offered with compassion and without judgement embodies these words of Psalm 68: "In your great love, answer me, O God, with your help that never fails; Lord, answer for your love is kind; in your compassion, turn towards me. The poor when they see it will be glad and God-seeking hearts will revive; for the Lord listens to the needs and does not spurn servants in their chains."

**Reflect on a time when you were a welcoming presence for someone.**

**What does it feel like to offer acceptance?**

Article on Bill Crews:

<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/being-like-bill-crews/10783210>

## THIS WEEK...

*"In your great love, answer me, O God, with your help that never fails."*

*(Psalm 69:16)*

## PRAYER

*May we welcome those who have been rejected and reflect the face of God's compassion by our actions and words.*

*(Reflection from Kate Scholl)*



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# A voice for the voiceless

28 June  
2020

## 13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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

Rom 6:3-4, 8-11

Mt 10:37-42

Today's Gospel contains, according to Richard Rohr OFM, "a selection of scattered sayings". When I was a little girl, and that was a very long time ago, I remember in my innocence feeling so very confused about some of these sayings. I could not imagine truly loving God more than my mum and dad.

Here Jesus also tells his followers that "he who welcomes you, welcomes me", and "he who welcomes me, welcomes him who sent me". How good are we as a society at welcoming people into our company? The homeless are often not welcome anywhere, locked outside by a society that does not want to adequately fund social housing, and pursued by the enforcers of laws that make it illegal to be homeless. Many a homeless person speaks of being "invisible", made of glass, "cause people look right through us".

Today's Gospel also says, "whoever gives a cup of cold water to these little ones". As a parent I always remembered that verse in the chaotic bedtimes of a large family, it made me smile! I also reflect on the journey of Mother Teresa, "the miracle is not that we do this work, but that we are happy to do it".

How satisfied we can be as Vincentians, following the example of Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Frederic Ozanam, Rosalie Rendu and closer to home, Charles O'Neill, to do this work in a way that speaks for those who have no voice, for those who are different and shunned, for those who need food and drink. Our radical inclusivity ensures that the most vulnerable have a place to belong and a hand up. Let us remember and rejoice in the foundation that keeps us strong and move forward with hope.

**Could this quote from today's scripture - "whoever gives a cup of cold water to these little ones" - inspire us to ensure fresh water is available in poor countries? (*Laudato Si* or *Querida Amazonia*?)**

## THIS WEEK...

*"The miracle is not that we do this work, but that we are happy to do it."*

## PRAYER

*Help us Loving God as we go out into the world today, to love the people we meet. Let your presence light new light in the hearts of those we minister. Amen.*

*(Reflection from Joy Bowen)*



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# The invitation

5 July  
2020

## 14<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Zech 9:9-10

Rom 8:9, 11-13

Mt 11:25-30

Today's gospel reading is one of the very well known and often quoted verses from the Scriptures. *"Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy burdened and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light."*

This is a favourite passage for many Christians. Firstly, we read of Jesus' invitation to come and be one with him. We then receive the promise of great consolation, of peace and support to live life, safe in the knowledge that he is there with you every step of the way, even through the hard and challenging times that are part of our everyday human lives.

I am reminded of the reflection called *Footprints*. When times were hard for the writer, only one set of footprints were seen in the sand and he felt abandoned when most in need. When questioned as to why, God responded: "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you." God is with us to share the burdens of life and we only need to be aware of that presence with us.

Yet many people in society don't have this relationship with God, this sense of consolation and support when things go wrong and the burdens build up. They don't have that restful space. As Conference members, you are serving people on a daily basis whose lives are lived on the fringes of society, whose burdens are heavy and whose yoke is not always easy. Some of these people don't have a relationship with God, so where will they find rest?

In their meeting with you as members of the St Vincent de Paul Society, seeking assistance, maybe you become the face, the voice and the hands of God for that person; much like Jesus did in his ministry of radical inclusion and acceptance of all. You and your members may be providing that restful space where burdens are lightened and people feel not only supported and accepted, but also experience the love of God.

**What is this scripture verse calling you to today?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Serving others and living the Gospel can be burdensome at times but it also brings freedom and joy to our hearts and rest for our souls.*

## PRAYER

*The Lord is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love.*

*How good is the Lord to all, compassionate to all his creatures.*

*(Reflection from Greg Ryan)*



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# The thinking of Jesus

12 July  
2020

## 15<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55:10-11

Rom 8:18-23

Mt 13:1-23

The “disciples are blessed because they truly see, and hear, and understand”. Jesus talks about how people hear the word of God, but struggle to follow Him when they are challenged in their life. They may have received the word with joy, excitement and love, however are unable to hold their belief and commitment to Jesus.

I am reminded when I walk down the street, and notice someone begging on the side of the road: do I really see them, and do I truly understand them? Do I understand that the person I walk past is the face of Christ, and is the vulnerable face of Christ? Another expression could be a young daughter or granddaughter who comes home to tell her family she is pregnant. We try to understand but something gets in the way for us to truly hear her. Our values or our fears?

The disciples were given the knowledge of the Kingdom of God. For many Christians the idea of the Kingdom of God is something separate from this world. Jesus was challenging us with the notion that the Kingdom of God is with us, each day, even in the beggar or teen pregnancy.

To focus on the people we serve, learning to understand all people with love and compassion, how often have we allowed judgement to take over, not just judging the person’s behaviour, but who he or she is as a person?

Jesus calls us constantly to open our hearts and minds. As Vincentians, it is about the action of our faith. We also need the stillness of our heart and mind to help us to see, hear and be present in the moment with God. There are three words that have helped me in my life’s journey: head, heart, and hands. We need all three to help us to be open to God, to see, hear, listen and understand. Our action is to respond with the love of God.

**What do I need for the soil to be rich, so that I can see, hear (listen) and fully understand?**

## THIS WEEK...

*We batter the stillness with our talk of stillness.*

*Words fuel the whirl of our lives. In silence comes the stillness that speaks to our hearts and calls us into action.*

*(Noel Davis: Earth gone Walkabout)*

## PRAYER

*Loving Father, open our minds and hearts to your Word being sown in us each day. Amen*

*(Reflection from Peter Gormly)*



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# Who is “in” and who is “out”

19 July  
2020

## 16<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wis 12:13, 16-19

Rom 8:26-27

Mt 13:24-43

On first reading this gospel story, it could appear to be another stark account from Matthew of good and evil...the growing wheat struggling to survive amongst the darnel, a noxious weed. However, Jesus’s strategy for dealing with the ‘weed’ breaks open the story, “Let it grow until harvest; and at the harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn.”

Elisabeth Johnson, Lutheran Seminary Professor, suggests that, “Jesus makes clear that we simply cannot be certain who is “in” or who is “out”. We can leave the weeding to the angels, and get on with the mission Jesus has given us proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God drawing near.”

A further insight into this parable comes from Irish Jesuits’ Sacred Space website, “The idea that good and bad might coexist gives trouble to the tidy mind. Jesus does not encourage a simplistic approach but calls us to humility, patience and tolerance as we allow God to work in our lives.”

This prayer of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. invites us to trust in the slow work of God. Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new...

And so I think it is with you, your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves, without undue haste... Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

### What is hard about ‘leaving the weeding to the angels’?

Irish Jesuits’ Sacred Space website:

<https://www.sacredspace.ie/scripture/matthew-1324-30>

## 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.*

*(Reflection from Kate Scholl)*



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# Where your heart is

26 July  
2020

## 17<sup>TH</sup> 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? 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?

**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.*

*(Reflection from Joy Bowen)*



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# Miracle of small things

2 August  
2020

## 18<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55:1-3

Rom 8:35, 37-39

Mt 14:13-21

As I reflect on today's Gospel reading I am presented with a number of themes and challenges that are central to our spiritual lives. The Gospel opens with Jesus learning of the death of his cousin, John the Baptist, and his need to withdraw and spend time alone and in prayer. We also need this time of retreat in our lives, to get in touch with our inner selves and our God. Quiet times when we can reconnect with the spiritual dimension of our lives that can be lost in the everyday busy-ness of life and reconnect with God without those distractions. They can be experienced anywhere and at any time. They don't need to be formal retreats, just a space where and when you feel the need. The challenge can be in making the time.

Unfortunately, for Jesus, the crowds found him and wanted to be with him. Seeing a need greater than his own, he reached out to them, healing and teaching the people. Was he finding God there in the people seeking him out at that time, rather than in the isolation of retreat? Yes, I believe he was. He was living out his prayer. And then night came and the people were hungry. On first reading this passage, my focus was drawn to the miracle of the 5,000 being fed from just five loaves and two fish. The miracle of small things being shared, the miracle of all being fulfilled because they were with Jesus. But there are layers to this story.

The disciples doubted. How could they feed so many with so little? When told of the small bounty available, Jesus said, "Bring them to me." And with these simple words, the miracle took place. God provided for the needs of the occasion and He continues to work miracles both small and big in our local communities every day. He relies on us though for these modern day miracles. The small gifts and abilities you bring to your role as people of God and Conference members, are multiplied and used to connect the people you serve to God.

Jesus says to each of us, "Bring them to me." Your skills and weaknesses, your strengths and fears, your hopes and dreams, your burdens and challenges. He will take what we have and transform it into what we need. Our challenge is to come as we are and trust in God's power to use us for his work.

**What small gifts do we bring to our work as Vincentians?**

## THIS WEEK...

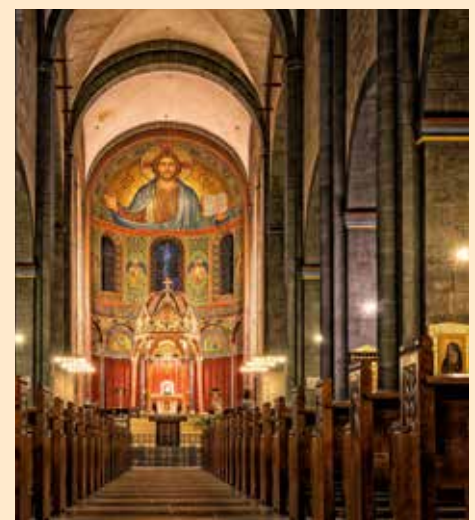
*"I am the bread of life says the Lord; whoever comes to me will not hunger and whoever believes in me will not thirst."*

## PRAYER

*"We need Jesus to bless our work, and Jesus needs us to feed the hungry and comfort the lonely of our world. Together we can do great things."*

*(St Paul's Sunday Missal)*

*(Reflection from Greg Ryan)*



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# “Jesus went up to the mountain to prayer”

9 August  
2020

## 19<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1Kg 19:9, 11-13

Rom 9:1-5

Mt 14:22-33

As Vincentians, we are called to a time of prayer and reflection. This is more challenging than it seems, especially through the busy-ness of our everyday. When you arrive at your Conference or Council meetings, there can be so much work to do that even time spent on our prayers may seem a meaningless response or simply another task. The Gospel this week reminds us that our ministry needs to be born, or come, from prayer.

At the end of 2019 and early this year, we experienced the devastation of bushfires. Through this time, several Vincentians and individuals of the broader community were overwhelmed by the nature of hopelessness. For several Vincentians especially, they never felt they could do enough, and at times held guilt and anger that they could not do more. When we listen to Matthew's Gospel - when Jesus walked on the water - the disciples became fearful. Jesus said, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid". These words take on profound meaning only through time with a God who works within us to find hope even in the most overwhelming of times.

How do I trust in God, in the moments of significant trauma or loss? I often feel like Peter as he was walking on water and lost his trust in Jesus, and started to sink. I can say I feel this courage, but when I am challenged, I can see this fear take hold of me and my "courage" seeps away like sands in an hourglass. Yet during these bushfires, I saw many people hold this courage. God does not want anyone to suffer, and has been with each of those in the midst of extremes, even in those times when you felt that Jesus was absent from you. When I stop for my time of prayer, which can happen in different ways throughout the everyday, I know God is present with me. We begin our Vincentian prayers with opening ourselves to the already present God.

**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, the one who believes in me will do the works that I do, and in fact, will do greater works than these. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."*  
(John's Gospel)  
(Reflection from Peter Gormly)



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# Through great faith

16 August  
2020

## 20<sup>TH</sup> 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 beg 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 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 are founded in grounded faith. Providing living hope and responding in love are our needed response to Jesus, just as the Canaanite woman expresses her 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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# The keys of faith

23 August  
2020

## 21<sup>ST</sup> 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.

This week 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 their 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*



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# The burning fire

30 August  
2020

## 22<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jer 20:7-9

Rom 12:1-12

Mt 16:21-27

“Lord, you enticed me and I was enticed,” begins this narrative of lament of the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is actually being incredibly bold in his “confessions”. He feels tricked by God, even to a point of deception. It is as though God had completely overpowered Jeremiah even against his own will. Early in the book, Jeremiah calls God a “treacherous brook” (15.18) but here his reproach really is even more audacious.

You could physically see Jeremiah standing in the desert with fist clenched, pointing to the heavens. It reminds me of those wonderful words of Scarlett O’Hara: “As God is my witness, I’ll never be hungry again!” The problem for Jeremiah is that his mission was to “pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (1.10). Until now, his message corresponded only with the first part of the program. As the Jerome Biblical Commentary suggests, “therefore, he had to face constant persecutions. He had been deceived for if he could have built and planted, the situation would have been different”.

Jeremiah’s situation could be seen as the same of many Vincentians! Someone initially came and enticed you to “help out” the St Vincent de Paul Society and on many difficult days, you are not appreciated or even supported. Some people that you assist even despise you for helping them! I would understand if you gave up, threw in the towel or shook your fist in frustration.

However, over the years I have seen what Jeremiah ends with, “within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones”. Frederic Ozanam and Rosalie Rendu spoke often of this “burning fire” and I recognise it often in the eyes of Vincentians across our membership.

**Have you prayed with fist clenched pointing to the heavens?**

## THIS WEEK...

*Think of the marvels of God...  
Pause a while and know that  
I am God  
(Psalm 46)*

## PRAYER

*Gracious God,  
We ask to be good listeners to the  
voices of all whom we meet,  
and attentive and receptive to your  
presence within us.  
Amen*



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# Spiritual Reflection Guide



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