

Finding Peace in Extra-Ordinary Times



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Spiritual Reflection Guide

September – December 2020



Dear Vincentians and Friends of the Society,

Welcome to another edition of our Spiritual Reflection Guides. The liturgical cycle for 2020 follows the Gospel of Matthew until we arrive at the season of Advent where the other evangelists highlight the time of watching and waiting in joy and hope.

Apart from Christ the King, Advent and Holy Family our readings are very Ordinary! As you know the Church calendar has about 33 Weeks of what is called Ordinary Time but as Fr Ron Rolheiser reflects there is something extraordinary in this ordinary. In these COVID 19 times, I guess nothing has been ordinary too!

The term “Ordinary Time” sounds bland to us, even as we unconsciously long for precisely what it is meant to bring. We have precious little “ordinary time” in our lives. As our lives grow more pressured, more tired, and more restless, perhaps more than anything else we long for “ordinary time”, quiet, routine, solitude, and space away from the hectic pace of life. For many of us the very expression, “ordinary time”, draws forth a sigh along with the question: “What’s that? When did I last have ‘ordinary time’ in my life?”

For Vincentians finding time to pause, breathe and pray between being social justice advocates, welfare helpers, retail assistants, fundraisers, hamper gatherers as well as workers, parents, grandparents and more is crucial to our physical and spiritual health. This aspect of life has been highlighted strongly due to the global pandemic. It is unprecedented times, which calls on personal resources and strengths that may seem beyond us. In all this, we must remind ourselves that our Society heritage of Frederic and the First Conference members first gathered not as a charity but as a faith group debating, discerning and praying for the signs of the times. Therefore, in our reflections it is wonderful that the feasts of Vincent de Paul and Francis of Assisi are marked and remembered on Sunday’s this year. Both lives have and continue to inspire our work and spirituality.

I have added additional resources for further reflections.

A reflection on Vincent is one of many available on the MAVS site: <https://mavs.vinnies.org.au/conferences/spirituality/spiritual-reflections/>

Richard Rohr’s book on Francis <https://store.cac.org/products/eager-to-love-the-alternative-way-of-francis-of-assisi-1>

Gospel Commentary: https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=996

May these reflections be a companion to you in your faith journey together listening to the ordinary - especially in these extraordinary times.

All Spiritual Reflection Guides can be accessed on the website, www.vinnies.org.au, and follow the Publications link. For any mailing enquiries, contact lewisham.reception@vinnies.org.au. A helpful weblink for the full Sunday readings is the Liturgical Commission in Brisbane, www.litcom.net.au.

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6 Sept
2020

As we gather

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ezek 33: 7-9

Rom 13: 8-10

Mt 18: 15-20

Sadly, the St Vincent de Paul Society is not perfect. Each week there is a small “fire” lit by one or two of our Members, Volunteers or Staff. Generally, it is relational issues; he said/she said or sometimes it is philosophical issues; I do not like the way it is or where money is being spent etc. Each party stand correct in their stance and unfortunately are not open in hearing any other way or any other point of view. At the height of the differences the Mission and Spirituality of the Society becomes either a weapon to action or a shield of protection.

Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel this week opens a path of sharing, collaboration and reconciliation. This passage is found in between the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. It at best joins two losses; loss of the vulnerable and loss of the way of mercy. However, as always, hope lingers in the background. For Jesus continues to remind his faithful friends of the loving support of our Father and the presence of Jesus as we gather.

I believe that this last point of the Gospel is crucial to Vincentians. Finding Jesus in our gatherings in the words, reflection, prayers, lives and experiences of each other continually nourishes, supports, shares wisdom, reconciles and provides a depth of hope for our work and our growth in faith. We must remind ourselves why the First Conference in Paris gathered. It was not to build a charity but to discern, debate and pray. Their faith was the reason to gather and that through these conversations and fellowship they were moved to charity. Unfortunately, I have spoken to some Conferences who tell me that we only meet when they receive a call for assistance. This reduces the Society to simply a charity or as Pope Francis once said a “compassionate NGO”. The Society did not begin with charitable works but with debates, prayer and reflection in formation of faith and spirituality. This simple fact gets lost on many occasions!

What is it to be a member of the Society?

THIS WEEK...

To follow Christ through service to those in need and bear witness to his compassionate and liberating love (The Rule 1.2)

PRAYER

O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts.



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Leading lives in forgiveness

13 Sept
2020

24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sirach 27:30-28:7

Rom 14:7-9

Mt 18:21-35

I recently read a little book by Pope Francis on the Our Father, simply called *Our Father - Reflections on the Lord's Prayer*. In this, he shared a wonderful reflection at a Mass in the prisons where one of the prisoners misread "Let us pray to God our solderer" and he flashed a memory of his own father soldering two pieces of metal together. What a great image of God as mender of relationships, bringing the broken pieces together! The Pope also shared these words "Forgiveness, forgiveness. It is so difficult to forgive...You will be able to forgive if you have had the Grace of feeling forgiven." One can never ask for more in life than to be forgiven. I have heard from people who have attended psychics that one thing their loved one's ask is for forgiveness. Interesting thought!

The heart of this prayer of Jesus is a discovered treasure echoed in these words of the Book of Sirach or other known as the book of Ecclesiasticus from this week's first reading. "Forgive your neighbour the hurt he does you, and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven" is echoed later by Jesus as, "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us".

These words of Sirach and the prayer of Jesus need to remind us in leading lives in forgiveness rather than in judgement of each other and of those we assist, especially those we continually assist! This is not easy work and may at times challenge all fibers of our being principally when forgiveness comes from our "thoughts and in our words, of what we have done and what we have fail to do".

May we pray together the Lord's Prayer, opening our hearts, minds, words and actions to the compassionate and unconditional love of a God who calls us to life each day.

Is unconditional forgiveness possible?

THIS WEEK...

*"How often must I forgive?" Gospel
of Matthew*

PRAYER

*Our Father who art in heaven, holy
by your Name.*



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20 Sept
2020

Turning back to God

25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55: 6-9

Phil 1: 20-24, 27

Mt 20: 1-16

This week's Gospel narrative from Matthew is a hard pill to swallow! The Parable expresses at first a very generous landowner offering a day of work, but the generosity fades when the landowner pays the workers the same agreed amount whether they were working a full day or just called at the 11th hour. The workers feel robbed or even tricked into working a full day in the heat with only receiving the same as those who strolled in for the last hour. Moreover, in a practical and rational way, I would agree.

Personally, I find it hard to be charitable to those who cut in on a line that I have been patiently waiting in and do not get me started on those who cut in during long traffic queues on the M4 in Sydney.

So apart from frustrating the reader with this as a notion of the Kingdom of Heaven, what is Jesus teaching us?

The words of Isaiah and the Gospel of Matthew may hold a key to our reflections. Isaiah calls each of us to simply turn back to God for God is rich in mercy and forgiveness. The Gospel Parable in Matthew expresses a God who is generous to all but in ways that are beyond our thinking or even our full understanding. Both Isaiah and Matthew express a God who is unconditional in love and mercy. This notion alone is difficult to understand in our simple human terms, just as is the conception of the Kingdom of Heaven as a place of eternity. Yet a place which we call our true home.

May we this week be open to this living hope in our lives as we share such life with others who feel they walk in the dark of hopelessness.

When have you known the mercy of God in your life?

THIS WEEK...

It's the illusion of religion brokers blind to the reality that all is sacred. God is free and immediate! (Noel Davis)

PRAYER

Lord, let me see your face, know your heart and experience your love in my life. Strengthen in me the precious gift of faith. I believe Lord; Help my unbelief. Amen



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Feast of St Vincent de Paul

27 Sept
2020

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ezek 18: 25-28

Phil 2: 1-11

Mt 21: 28-32

In today's readings, I find myself drawn to the first sentence of Paul's letter to Philippians where he implores them to be united. ... "Be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind."

Since March of this year we have been hearing messages of 'We are one' and 'We are all in this together'. Scenes on television of people working together, supporting each other accompanied by a virtual choir are intended to comfort and inspire as we navigate our individual and collective lives during a worldwide pandemic. Paul's intention it seems to me, in this letter is also to inspire as well as to remind the Christian community in Philippi who they are and how Jesus is a model for living. Paul also speaks of humility which St Vincent de Paul also wrote about and is one of the essential virtues cited in The Rule (2.5.1). Humility is sometimes associated with putting oneself down, but both Paul and Vincent are making the point that humility comes from a place of strength and confidence. Vincent said, "At the core of humility is a profound sense that God has given us everything that is good. Humility allows us to see all as gift. So we rejoice, not in our own doing, but in God's bounty."

If we believe, like Vincent, that life is gift, the response is gratefulness and humility. We are recipients not creators of goodness. Yes, we cooperate with God and model our lives on Jesus which then makes us witnesses and bearers of this gift for others. This core principle of Vincentian Spirituality is expressed in The Rule where it says that we "share the compassionate and liberating love of Christ" Thomas McKenna expresses it this way, "Vincent recognised that all of his successes, talents, and works came from the Grace that God alone provided. Recognising our complete dependence on God is the beginning of humility."

David Williams in his book, The Mind and Heart of a Vincentian says that, "Humility is a realistic awareness of our own weaknesses, but also of our strengths. It has been a distinctive mark of the spirit of the Society since its foundation." This understanding of humility suggests that as we are secure enough in ourselves to appreciate the gifts and perspectives of others, we will set aside our viewpoints for the sake of the group. We will act as Paul requests, "united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind."

(Reflection from Kate Scholl)

THIS WEEK...

"Proceed quietly, pray a great deal and act together." – St Vincent de Paul

PRAYER

Gracious God, grant me the Grace to see all of life as gift from you. May my life bear witness to your loving presence.



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Feast of St Francis of Assisi

4 Oct
2020

27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 5:1-7

Phil 4:6-9

Mt 21:33-43

This Sunday's Old Testament and Gospel readings are filled with strong imagery and decisive action such as this passage: 'The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit' (Matt 21:43) Focussing on the tenants' actions in this story, a commentator suggests that the landlord may have been living far away in Rome and clearly there was a breakdown in the usual relationship. Over time, the tenants came to see the vineyard and its produce as their own, the fruits of their efforts and forgot the source. Reflecting further in applying this to our lives, the writer suggests that 'It is so easy over time to come to see that where we serve and live are all about our work, our energy, our church. Our self-centred pride takes over, and we lose sight of the One who provides in the first place.'

It's also the feast of St Francis of Assisi this Sunday who was driven by a desire to rely on God completely and he called the Church back to its Gospel roots and live with God as its centre. Richard Rohr says this about him, "Francis' embrace of Christ-like poverty was a radical notion at the time. The Christian Church was tremendously rich, much like the people heading it, which concerned Francis and many others, who felt that the long-held apostolic ideals had eroded. Francis set out on a mission to restore Jesus Christ's own, original values to the now-decadent Church."

When the newly elected Pope Francis spoke of the name he chose he said that after the last vote was counted Cardinal Hummes embraced him and said, 'Don't forget about the poor.' When he thought of the poor he thought of Francis and also of wars. "Francis was a man of peace and that is how the name entered my heart. Francis of Assisi. The man who gives us this spirit of peace, the poor man". He concludes by saying, "How I would like a poor Church and a Church that is for the poor."

Years ago, living in Chicago, I sometimes attended Mass at St Thomas, a Church where street people and people on the 'fringes' of society were present. At the time of the Our Father we would move from our seats to hold hands so everyone in the Church who wanted to could be connected to others. As we prayed I would look around at the faces feeling grateful for this diverse community and a bit sad that this was the first Church I had attended where people living on the margins were truly welcome and felt at home. The words of Pope Francis and the saint from whom he took his name were very much alive in that parish, 'To be a poor Church and a Church for the poor'. (Reflection from Kate Scholl)

How would a Church for the poor be different from the one we know at the moment?

THIS WEEK...

"While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart."

– St Francis of Assisi

PRAYER

Gracious God, may we grow a heart for the poor and see all people as you see them.



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11 Oct
2020

Hope and promise

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 25: 6-10

Phil 4: 12 -14, 19-20

Mt 22: 1-14

My sisters, father and I were gathered around her beside. The doctors had told us that my mother did not have much time left. She was on a ventilator so her body seemed quite active but her eyes were closed and she appeared to be sleeping. Every now and then a tear would fall from her eye down her cheek and my sister would gently wipe it away. When we planned her funeral liturgy we were immediately drawn to this week's reading from Isaiah which always evokes the memory of my mother's last hours so many years ago. It was a very emotional and sad time but we were comforted knowing that we had all managed to arrive home from three different states and be with her as she died. We know she would have been glad we were together. It was a time that drew us together as a family and she would have liked that too. Most people I speak to about being at a deathbed describe it as a sacred and privileged time, a gift that stays with you as it has for me.

This reading from Isaiah is filled with hope and promise. It's uplifting beginning with the image of a fine banquet for all peoples. The scripture passage offers the promise of unity and overcoming death which seems a fitting message for our times, "He will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples and shroud enwrapping all nations."

How powerful this image is for our time when the news each day tells of huge numbers of deaths and new infections from COVID-19. We live in the hope for the end to this pandemic and hope for a time when we can feast together again with friends and family, and our communities.

After my mother's death and funeral I noticed that I was acutely aware of life. It was June in the USA, early summer, so gardens were blooming with flowers and veggies. The planted crops were growing tall and the trees were full of leaves. It was like a switch flipped in my senses and I saw people, children and nature differently. Perhaps more than what I saw was what I felt. I felt appreciation for life in a new way. Within my grief there was a sense of fullness.

Just as I awakened to new awareness while grieving my mother's passing, many people speak of how sheltering in place has given them a deeper appreciation of simple activities such as going out for a coffee with a friend, visiting our family interstate, sharing a meal, going to Mass (and singing!), attending a workshop or forum. Isaiah reminds us that God invites us to hope no matter where we find ourselves. Richard Rohr offers further insight on hope, "The theological virtue of hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves." (Reflection from Kate Scholl)

THIS WEEK...

*"The Lord will wipe away the tears from every cheek; he will take away his people's shame everywhere on earth, for the Lord has said so."
(Isaiah: 25:8)*

PRAYER

God of hope, may we be hope for one another and a witness to your tender love in our world.



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Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God.

18 Oct
2020

29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 45: 1, 4-6

1 Thess 1: 1-5

Mt 22: 15-21

Give back to Caesar what belong to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God.

It is often said that there are only two certainties in life; death and taxes. In this week's readings we are shown how to live our spiritual life in a secular world. Ironically, today's Gospel comes from Matthew, himself a tax collector who worked for the Romans. We all know that Judea was a Roman Province ruled by a Governor who ensured that Roman law was adhered too and taxes collected. This was resented by the people as they supported the occupying force and reminded them every day they were not free.

The story takes place during the last week of Jesus' life. On the Sunday, he was triumphantly welcomed into Jerusalem and by the end of the week he will have been crucified. The passages recorded in between these two events are rich in Parables and teachings from Jesus, about how we should live our life.

He would have been very aware of what was happening and I imagine trying to live that week to his fullest. The Pharisees and Herodians were challenged by the teachings of this man and needed him silenced. But aware of the trap posed for him, Jesus uses it as an opportunity. When asked if is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, he is aware that If his answer is no, he offends the Romans and can be arrested. If he says yes, he offends the Jewish people. And so the middle ground. The coin proffered has Caesar's face on it so it can be given back to him. "Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar and to God the things that are God's"

So what belongs to God? Everything we do and everything we have is a gift, which reminds us of God and his love for us. Whatever we have; whatever we possess should lead us to God. If what we have becomes the focus – "our god" – then it takes us away from God and should be given back.

But hold on to everything that enriches us, gives us life and leads us to God.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

To whom do you belong?

THIS WEEK...

Be aware of God's presence in you and in the people around you. Be especially aware and welcoming of the people coming to you seeking assistance. God is present there.

PRAYER

Lord, as we build your Kingdom here on earth, open our eyes to your presence in all.

In our work with your people, help us show them your love, compassion and joy.

May we work for the common good of all, making your name known through our work. Amen



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A voice for the voiceless

25 Oct
2020

30TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ex 22: 20-26

1 Thess 1: 5-10

Mt 22: 34-40

You shall love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself.

Loving your self doesn't come easy to many of us. Growing up we were often taught that self-love was akin to pride and therefore sinful. Many of us grew up forgetting this aspect of Jesus' command. The Gospel this week still finds Jesus being tested by the Pharisees to see if he was breaking the Jewish law. "Master, which is the greatest commandment?"

I grew up to believe there were only ten to choose from, but in Judaism there were actually 613 commandments listed in the Old Testament. About half were positive commandments telling the people how they should act. The other half were negative, in that they were lists of things you were not allowed to do. Jesus had plenty to choose from.

This week's first reading from Exodus gives us some guidance on what that love should look like in practise.

"Don't molest or oppress the stranger. Don't be harsh with the widow or orphan. Don't demand interest from others. Give a person's cloak back to him."

And it mirrors the message we hear from Jesus throughout the Gospels, but especially in Matthew 25, when we hear about other ways we should treat strangers: "For I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

And this is the work of a Vincentian; to love God and to love others in a very special way. Seeing Christ in the poor is not always easy. In fact, your work can be quite challenging at times, but like the people of Thessalonica who had Paul there to imitate, Vincentians have the example of many who have gone before, back to Frederic Ozanam and the founding members. Members who have been there to show us how to offer a hand up to people in need.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

Who are the Vincentians that have inspired you?

THIS WEEK...

Seek the face of Christ in the people we assist.

PRAYER

Lord, we ask your blessing on us and those we help. We pray for each other today and ask you to give us the Grace to be your face to the people we serve. We ask this in your name. Amen



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Communion of Saints

1 Nov
2020

FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

The Communion of Saints includes each of us who are pilgrims on the way on earth; it includes those undergoing purification and who are helped by our prayers; and it includes those who enjoy the glory of God and who intercede for us. So, those of us who are on the way, despite how imperfect we may be, all have the opportunity to attain heaven: and anyone in heaven is a saint.

We often think of saints as being perfect, and so we think that, for us, it is just about unobtainable.

However, what we honour in the Saints is often only the final chapter in their history, and we forget that they too were human. Thomas doubted; Peter denied; Paul persecuted; Augustine prayed, 'Lord make me chaste, but not yet.' Magdalene was a prostitute; Oliver Plunkett, the latest Irish Saint, was overbearing, arrogant, and temperamental; the good thief spent his life hurting others, until the final moment.

Our Saints are a mixed bag of weak, human, and vulnerable men and women, who had to confront and overcome all the things we do ourselves. So, let's be careful when tempted to criticise someone, because we may be talking about a Saint. Each of the Beatitudes - which are a blueprint for living the Christian life - involves a choice, a choice for ourselves, not for what we want others to be, but rather what we want ourselves to be. Blessed are those who choose to be simple in the midst of plenty; blessed are those who choose to be peaceful in a warring world; blessed are those who choose to be gentle in an aggressive culture; those who choose to be merciful in an uncaring time; those who choose to be just in an unjust land; those who choose to be detached in a consumer oriented society.

A man once said, 'When I was young, my prayer was, "Lord, give me the energy to change the world." When I reached middle-age and realised that half my life had gone without me changing a single thing, my prayer became, "Lord, give me the Grace to just change my family and friends." Now I am old, I've begun to see how foolish I've been and my prayer is, "Lord, give me the Grace to change myself." If only I'd prayed this right from the start, I wouldn't have wasted my life.'

If we pray this prayer, then like the wise old man, we'll be able to look at the final chapter of our own history and, like those who are canonised, become one with them in heaven.

All Saints Day sermon by Fr Jim Reilly. 1942 – 2015. (Reflection from Greg Ryan)

What does the Communion of Saints mean to you?

THIS WEEK...

Be aware of the Saints around us, those who visit us and those that have gone before us

PRAYER

"Lord, give me the Grace to change myself."



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8 Nov
2020

God's House is my life

32ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wis 6:12-16

1Thess 4:13-18

Mt 25:1-13

This week's reading is the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids; getting ready, planning and being ready for what is ahead.

There were five bridesmaids who were foolish, and five wise bridesmaids. The wise bridesmaids stopped to think and plan what they would need to take for the journey, when they went to meet the bridegroom. They knew they needed to take extra oil along with them, as they did not know how long they would need to wait, so they had to take enough oil to last the night. The foolish bridesmaids were keen to see the bridegroom. However, they did not think what they may need, what would happen if they were held up for the amount of oil they had in their possession. When they saw the bridegroom in the distance, they asked the wise bridesmaids if they could share some of their oil with them, as they only had a small amount of oil left, as they knew the Bridegroom was still a long way in the distance.

How often have we jumped ahead, not stopping, and planning what we may need to take on the journey or task at hand. When we do not plan, it often does not work out as well as we may have hoped or expected and at time this leads to disastrous outcomes.

The wise bridesmaids saying no was not about being ruthless, but to acknowledge, there was not enough for the wise and the foolish bridesmaids, as trying to share the oil would put everyone in an unsafe situation. The Parable talks about being ready; to plan what is ahead, though you do not know when that time may be.

All of the bridesmaids fell asleep waiting; Jesus is calling us to enhance our spiritual life. For all of us to be ready, for Jesus to arrive, we never know when.

How often do we move our focus from Jesus, to see other things as more important, such as the material possessions, or simply being too busy? I know I can move my attention from what is important, and when I move my attention back, it can be profound. As Jesus says, we need to be ready at all times.

In reality, we never know when God will arrive, what God will look like, are we open in seeing God in our own life today. As my father would say, 'you never know, when, where or why'. (Reflection from Peter Gormly)

What stops or gets in the way in planning a time to pray?

THIS WEEK...

May I stop myself this week, to notice and see God in all the people I meet, and to always be prepared in all aspects of my life.

PRAYER

Lord, you give me nourishment, through the scriptures. Help us, to live our lives with the Gospels at the centre of all we do. Amen



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Lost opportunities, faithful servant

15 Nov
2020

33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Prov 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31

1 Thess 5: 1-6

Mt 25: 14-30

In this week's readings, the Parable of the Talents, is a powerful and a meaningful message, this Parable is about how we use our gifts, and spread the good news.

One servant is given five talents, the second is given two talents and the last servant, was given one talent. The rich man, called his servants to look after his property, according to his ability.

The first two servants made a profit of 100% the master gave praise and increased their responsibility. The master's expectation was for the talents to be used wisely and to engage in a business venture that would increase the benefits to the master. Then the master went to the third servant, who was frozen by fear of the master, the servant had dug a hole to hide his talent. When the master learnt the servant had not gained any profit from the talent the master was very harsh towards him. How do we find ways to be open and share the Christian message, maybe our initial way is to hide our skills because it feels easier and safer. When I stop and think what God is asking of me, it is about sharing what I have been given, my gifts, my skills and knowledge. The sharing at times may take us to a place of vulnerability, it also gives us strength and meaning in our life. This means, at least to me, we need to take risks to love and be loved, and if we do not take risks we lose the opportunity to live life fully, and fully experience the love of God.

We all have moments like the third servant, where we are closed or approach a situation in a conservative way. In doing this, we stop using our gifts, skills, strengths, resources, and ability. In being trustworthy to spread the good news, we are also taking on responsibility. It is what happened to the first two servants, they took a risk, I am sure this has happen to each of us. We all have great, and varied gifts, how do we know we have them, and how do we share them in our lives. Sometimes we may notice we are holding back in sharing our gifts, and strengths with other people, just maybe fear is taking hold of us, I know at times fear takes hold of me, to stand aside of fear requires a risk.

As Mother Theresa would say, "It's not about how much you do, but how much love you put into what you do that counts".

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

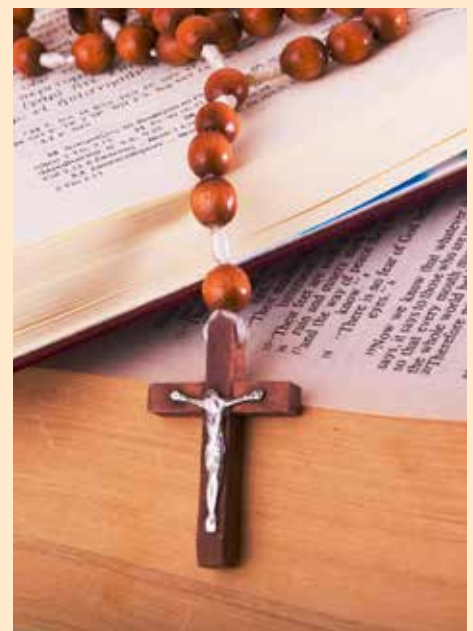
What gift do we bring to this Conference / Council, and other relationships in your life?

THIS WEEK...

May we have the insight and ability to invest our time, and gifts to other people.

PRAYER

Lord, give me the awareness to be aware of the gifts you gave us. May we have the strength and courage to share our gifts in our daily life with humility. May I use my gifts and strengths wisely.



St Vincent de Paul Society
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Kingship driven by mercy

22 Nov
2020

CHRIST THE KING

Ezek 34: 11-12, 15-17

1 Cor 15: 20-26, 28

Mt 25: 31-46

Christ the King is a significant feast day for the Catholic Church, the reading in Matthew's Gospel speaks of the mercy of God and the importance this holds for Christians today.

As we celebrate the feast day of Christ the King, we reflect on Matthew's Gospel, Judgment of the Nations. When we are thinking of Christ the King, we are referring to Jesus sitting at the right hand of his Father. What comes to mind is mercy, and faith in action. Maybe we may think of mercy as building connections with others through compassion, and meeting the vulnerable person where they are in their life. On our part, it requires strength and courage and trust in God.

There are times in our life where we will meet vulnerable people particularly as Vincentians, how do we respond to them? There may be people we would not usually choose to develop relationships, yet we find as Vincentians we are meeting different people that are enhancing our life. When we think of compassion, at least for me, it has three parts: head, heart, and hands. It is the integration of all three that compassion comes alive. We are invited to develop relationships with the person we serve that is meaningful and purposeful. Vinnies is about a service of value and action. It is in this richness that everyone strives to achieve at Vinnies.

One day when I was walking around Kings Cross, I came across a woman who we will call Jane who was begging for money. I did give her some money; this is not what was important to her. What she said to me that still holds strong meaning for me today, was "thank you for stopping and noticing me". By stopping and talking to Jane, it seems it was important because she became a person, and saw value in herself for that short period of time.

(Reflection from Peter Gormly)

What is your experience of mercy?

THIS WEEK...

Lord, help me to be open to your word,

And that I take steps each day of my life,

To live a faith in action. Bring us to know the joys of his kingdom. AMEN

PRAYER

In this past week, can you recall a moment when you stretched out your hand to help someone in a small way.



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29 Nov
2020

Watching, waiting

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 63:16-17, 64: 1, 3-8

1 Cor 1: 3-9

Mk 13: 33-37

As a busy mother of a tribe of children, preparation for Christmas was often, in my mind, a massive chore. Food, gifts and the like became a burden that was taking away my peace and therefore the peace of my family. As that sense peaked I decided to change my perception and focus on the profound meaning of the season. There is so much inspiration in this reading that can encourage us to be more in touch with the depth and opportunity of inspiration that we can experience at Christmas. I put down my “societal” expectation of Christmas and focused more fully on the deeper, faith dimension of meaning.

The immediate greeting in and of itself of Paul’s greeting is so beautiful and affirming, “I always thank my God for you because of his Grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge - God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.” Read it through, slowly, what a beautiful affirmation of what and who we are, and the amazing gifts that we have already received, the confirmation that Christ is amongst us. How often do we actually, literally, consider that truth? How would we view our relationships and actions if we actually did stand on that truth? Paul continues: “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord”.

Paul wants the Corinthians to realise that they are not yet at the resurrection; they are waiting for it, their clocks are set all wrong. This is the time of waiting for the end, the time of expectation. He assures the Corinthians not only that they must do these difficult things but that they are able to do these difficult things; they are able to wait, they are able to be obedient, to suffer, to die, to sin. In Paul’s word, they are able to be ‘blameless’ because of the Grace of God.

Paul is convinced that God in Christ has given those ‘in Christ’ everything they need in order to wait well for ‘the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’. In that day “God may be everything to everyone”. The goal of waiting is not only to reach that day, but to reach it, as Paul says, ‘blameless’.

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

What can you change to depth your Christmas experience?

THIS WEEK...

May I be open and ready for the gifts that are promised make time to reflect with open heart and mind so as to change, grow and sow love

PRAYER

O come, O come Emmanuel



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Words of comfort

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 40: 1-5, 9-11

2 Pet 3: 8-14

Mk 1: 1-8

How quickly our time flies at this time of year with the increased “doing’s” of Christmas. So much to organise, decide along with competing schedules. So little time to spare, yet if we truly want a meaningful Christmas, time to reflect is paramount. For, in this second week of our preparation for Christmas what better reading is there to reflect upon?

“A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

My heart is drawn to the word “desert” as I remember that for many Christmas is experienced as a desert, a time when what was hoped for and dreamed of is no longer. Rolheiser’s reflection on Dorothy Day explains how, shortly after her conversion to Catholicism, she went through a painful, desert time. She suddenly found herself alone. All her old supports had been cut off and she was left with no money, no job, few friends, no practical dream, and no companionship from the person she loved the most deeply in this world. For a while she just stumbled on, trusting that things would soon get better. They didn’t. She remained in this desert.

One day, not knowing what else to do, she decided to spend a day praying at a Shrine of Our Lady. She describes how she laid bare her helplessness, spilling out her confusion, her doubts, her fears, and her temptations to bitterness and despair. In essence, she said to God: “I have given up everything that ever supported me, in trust, to you. I have nothing left to hold on to. You need to do something for me, soon. I can’t keep this up much longer!” She was, biblically speaking, in the desert – alone, without support, helpless before a chaos that threatened to overwhelm her – and, as was the case with Jesus, both in the desert and in Gethsemane, God “sent angels to minister to her.” God steadied her in the chaos.

The desert, as we know, is the place where, stripped of all that normally nourishes and supports us, we are exposed to chaos, raw fear, and demons of every kind. In the desert we are exposed, body and soul, made vulnerable to be overwhelmed by chaos and temptations of every kind. But, precisely because we are so stripped of everything we normally rely on, this is also a privileged moment for Grace.

As we prepare for the birth of the Christ-child may we continue in faith to be the voice of comfort that influences our mission, offering hope for the hopeless, shaping a more just and compassionate society. (Reflection from Joy Bowen)

Who comforts you in the desert?

THIS WEEK...

May we share the comfort of God with someone this week.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as you offer comfort to all in all circumstance, may we continue to look beyond ourselves in sharing comfort with others . Amen



13 Dec
2020

Meditation on joy

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Is 61: 1-2, 10-11

1 Thess 5: 16-24

Jn 1: 6-8, 19-28

Every year on the third Sunday of advent, the Church asks us to do a meditation on joy. As I was named “Joy” by my parents it is a particular emotion and state I have a personal interest in! A time to reflect on “joy”, what a good idea!

Sometimes we might think of ordinary times in our lives as keeping us from joy – the grind, the routine, the rat-race, the work-week – and so we look forward to special times, weekends, nights out, holidays, celebrations where we can break the routine, break out, enjoy ourselves, and experience joy.

Yet Rolheiser reminds us that, “Joy can never be induced, cranked up, or made to happen. It is something that has to find us precisely within our ordinary, duty-bound, burdened, full-of-worries, and pressured lives. This is joy: Imagine walking to your car or to the bus after a day’s work, tired, needing some rest. But, just as you reach your car or the bus-stop, you fill with a sense of life and health; in some inchoate way, all jumbled together, you feel your body, mind, soul, gender, sexuality, history, place within a family, network of friends, city, and country, and this feeling makes you spontaneously exclaim: “God, it’s good to be alive!” That’s joy”.

C.S. Lewis says, “it has to surprise you”. Joy is always the by-product of something else. As the various versions of The Prayer of St. Francis says, we can never attain joy, consolation, peace, forgiveness, love, and understanding by actively pursuing them. We attain them by giving them out. That’s the great paradox at the centre of all spirituality and one of the great foundational truths within the universe itself: The air that we breathe out is the air we will eventually breathe back in. Joy will come to us if we set about actively trying to create it for others.

The great mystic, John of the Cross, wrote this poem:

“To reach satisfaction in all desire its possession in nothing. To come to possess all desire the possession of nothing. To arrive at being all desire to be nothing. To come to the knowledge of all

desire the knowledge of nothing. To come to the pleasure you have not you must go by the way in which you enjoy not. To come to the knowledge you have not you must go by a way in which you know not. To come to the possession you have not you must go by a way in which you possess not. To come to be what you are not you must go by a way in which you are not.”

(Reflection from Joy Bowen)

At this coming Christmas time, where do you find true joy?

THIS WEEK...

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us. What joy!

PRAYER

We pray that we may be open to the rising of joy within us and to participate in the creation of joy in others. Amen



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The first disciple

20 Dec
2020

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

2 Sam 7: 1-5, 8-12, 14, 16

Rom 16: 25-27

Lk 1: 26-38

When I was young I had many plans for the future; what work I might do, where I might go and what life might look like. And yet here I am, many years down the track, and the reality is nothing like that early dream. Much better and richer though than what I imagined, which is a great relief. Life takes twists and turns, some natural and others unexpected. There was a movie called Sliding Doors, where a young lady played by Gwyneth Paltrow rushes to catch a train. The story splits into two parallel stories. One where she got on the train and the other detailed what life was like when the train doors closed and she missed the train. What if experiences, are common to most of us, and so it was for Mary. Today's Gospel recounts the Annunciation story that we also hear on that feast day in March.

Life looked well planned. Marriage to Joseph and a simple life together in Nazareth was the future. But God opened another door for her with an angelic invitation to be at the centre of God's love for the world. "Rejoice, so highly favoured. The Lord is with you." She didn't understand, but who could? She was not married and pregnant, yet still a virgin. So how could this be?

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you...and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And the child will be holy and will be called Son of God." And filled with God's Grace, Mary said, yes.

With that yes, she became the first disciple of Jesus and a guide for each of us as we follow him. She shows us how to be open to God in our lives, how to accept the unexpected, how to receive the Grace of God, how to listen to God's message and how to respond faithfully. Part of the Angel's message to Mary concerned her cousin Elizabeth and her miracle. This demonstrates to us, how as disciples, we serve others in need unselfishly. It is a model of discipleship lived out by Vincentians throughout the year.

Today we light the last purple candle on our Advent Wreaths. It is called, the "Angel's Candle," and it represents peace. And later this week we end our Advent season and celebrate the birth of Jesus. During this week, many of you will be busy packing and delivering the last of your Christmas hampers before taking a well-deserved break over Christmas.

I hope that this time is one of peace and joy for you, your families and your Conferences. My hope and prayer for you is that you too feel God's peace, Grace and presence as you continue his work into a new year.

(Reflection from Greg Ryan)

Can you recall your "Yes" moments?

THIS WEEK...

Be aware of my "Yes" responses to the Lord.

PRAYER

"Alleluia, alleluia! I am the servant of the Lord: may his will for me be done. Alleluia!"



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A celebration of family

27 Dec
2020

FEAST OF HOLY FAMILY

Sirach 3: 2-6, 12-14

Col 3: 12-21

Lk 2: 22-40

Celebrating family is at the heart of Christmas. And yet, we live with all of the complexities of the family. Christmas is often a challenge where we experience the hurt of relationships that have fractured and where aspirations have been disappointed.

It is often the time of distance from family. This year of 2020 has been a time where families have felt isolation from their aged parents, the loss of time with family and anxiety about the well-being of our family. This is what God knows family to be this year as we celebrate the coming of God in a fully human way. That is what Christmas does commemorate – that God became flesh within the family – not a perfect family but a human family.

The second reading is comforting for every family and wherever we find ourselves in relationship to our families – “Put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience”. We are loved, holy and beloved by God and because of this, we can be kind, humble, gentle and patient to ourselves and our families.

This times of 2020 has been the greatest call for these gifts. It is what we as Vincentians can offer to the wider family of our community where there has been anxiety, fear, unemployment and crisis. We accompany through kindness and gentleness at this time.

(Reflection from Jack de Groot)

What have been your experiences in meeting and assisting families with children especially in these days?

THIS WEEK...

Children are a blessing and a gift from the Lord.

May you see your children’s children. (Psalm 127,128)

PRAYER

Lord God, no one is a stranger to you and no one is ever far from your loving care.

In your kindness, watch over refugees, those separated from their loved ones,

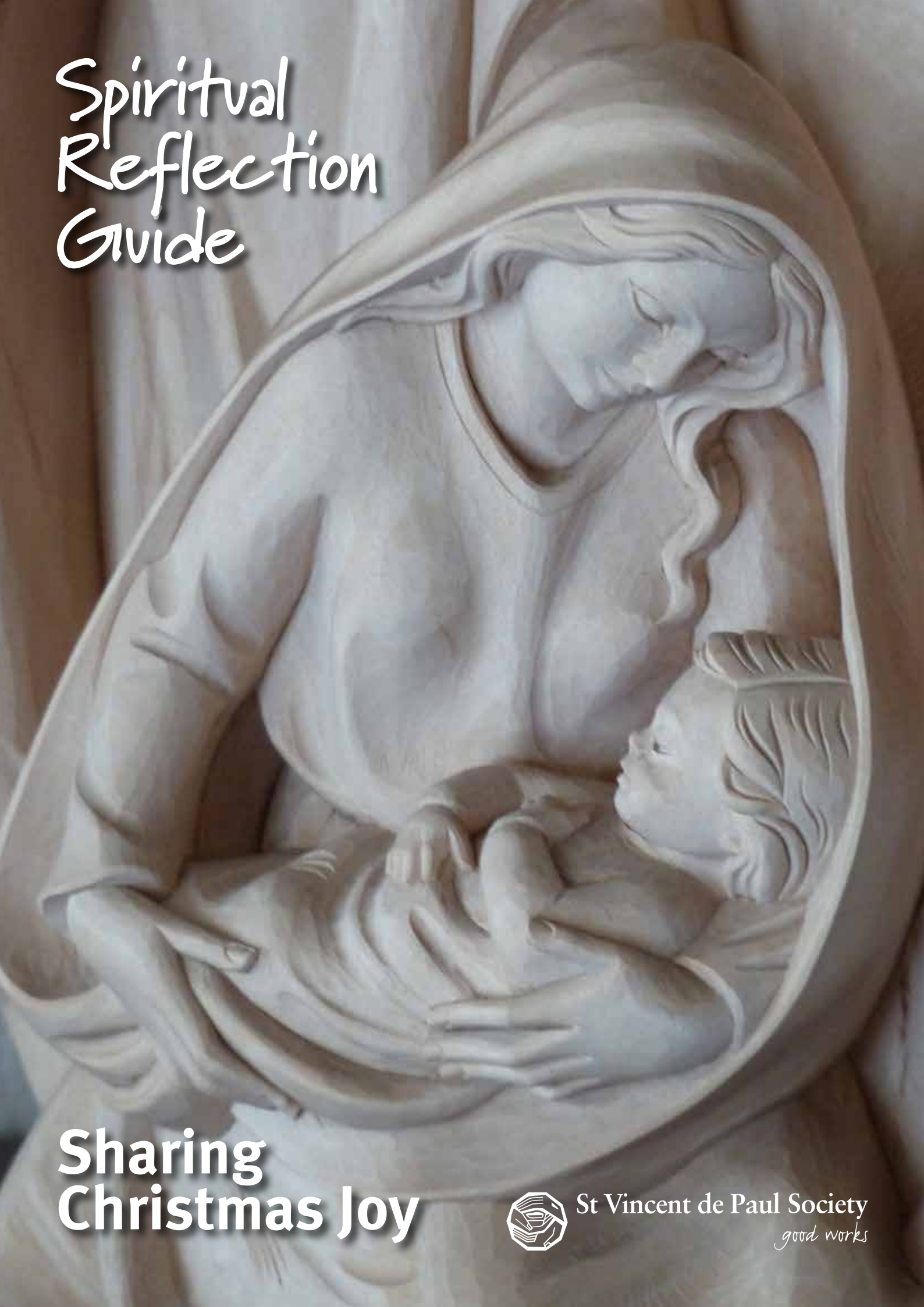
young people who are lost.

Help us always to show your kindness to strangers and to all in need. AMEN.



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Spiritual Reflection Guide



**Sharing
Christmas Joy**



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