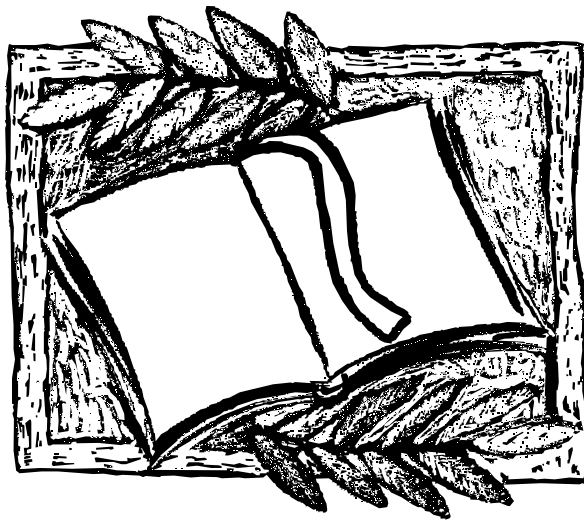


VINCENTIAN REFLECTIONS

First Quarter 2021



Liturgical Year: B

(January—February—March 2021)

Available on SVdPUSA.org





HOW TO LEAD THE VINCENTIAN REFLECTIONS IN A CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Leader describes to the group the process which is going to take place:

- Provide a copy for each member of your Conference for their personal reflection
- Stress that sharing is not compulsory and mention the need for confidentiality
- Ask, or assign, different members to read the different sections:
 - Gospel reading
 - Reflection
 - Vincentian Meditation

OPENING PRAYER/QUIETING DOWN PERIOD

Leader invites group to:

- Become relaxed and aware of God's presence with us
- "Let Go" of distractions and quietly pray to the Holy Spirit

READING OF THE VINCENTIAN WEEKLY REFLECTION

- Each section is read aloud, slowly and prayerfully, by the different members
- Hearing different voices will allow different emphasis on words/phrases

QUIET PERIOD

Leader invites everyone:

- To quietly reflect on the readings and notice if anything strikes them
- Introduces the Discussion Question suggested in the Reflection
- Allows 2-3 minutes of quiet – don't hurry this. God speaks to us in the silence.

SHARING

Leader invites members who wish to share on the Discussion Question, or on how the one of the readings struck them. Possibly not everyone will share, but time should be allowed for each person who wishes to share his/her thoughts. It is important that you resist the urge either to prod members to share, or to try to "fill the silence" with your own thoughts.

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader closes the Prayer Reflection by beginning the Closing Prayer, and all answer the response (in bold).

(This entire process should take about 10-15 minutes)

INTRODUCTION



St. Vincent de Paul never wrote a book about his spiritual teachings. But we find the living voice of the saint in his letters and conferences in which he trained his followers for the mission of service to the poor.

The two fundamental sources of his teaching are the GOSPEL and LIFE. He wanted his followers to put the whole of the Gospel into the whole of their lives, and he never wearied of deepening both with all the faith that God had put into his heart. That is why all that Vincent says to us has the simplicity of our everyday life and the penetrating strength of the Word of God.

The Vincentian Weekly Reflections are therefore offered to all who strive to serve the poor in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. The prayer and reflections are based on the Sunday Gospel of the Liturgical Calendar, together with the feast days of some of the saints of our Vincentian Family. Each reflection offers a time for prayer, silence and discussion so that our everyday life, like Vincent, can become penetrated with the strength of the Word of God.

You may want to run copies for each member of your Conference so that they may take them home for personal reflection during the week.

LITURGICAL YEAR B

First Quarter - 2021

January

January 1 Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God
January 3 Epiphany of the Lord
January 10 Baptism of the Lord
First Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 17 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 24 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 31 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February

February 7 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 7 Feast of Blessed Rosalie Rendu
February 14 Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time
February 17 Ash Wednesday
February 21 First Sunday of Lent
February 28 Second Sunday of Lent

March

March 7 Third Sunday of Lent
March 14 Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 21 Fifth Sunday of Lent
March 28 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

January 1, 2021

Gospel: (Luke 2:16-21)

The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in a manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Reflection:

Often New Year's resolutions are about such things as losing weight, trying to stop smoking, cleaning up our language, etc. The readings for this festival honoring Mary might challenge us and our resolution-making in another direction. Perhaps this year we might resolve to take time each day to see and hear what God is revealing to us in the ordinary things of our lives: in the grateful smile of a child, in the gift of a compliment, in the unexpected call or visit of a friend. Also, we might resolve to spend more time, as Mary did, pondering and reflecting in our hearts God's mystery of salvation. We might set aside a special time each day to pray and then stick to it. (Living Liturgy, p.30)

Vincentian Meditation:

Mary is the ideal disciple, the model listener. She hears God's word and acts on it. In Luke's first two chapters Mary is evangelized by Gabriel, by Elizabeth, by the shepherds, by Simeon, by Anna, and by Jesus himself. All of them proclaim the good news of God's presence and sing in praise of God's goodness. Luke tells us that Mary kept all these things in her heart, turning them over and over again. Mary is indeed the "Listening Disciple", and this is the core of New Testament spirituality: all disciples, like Mary, are called to listen to the word of God attentively and act on it. Let us ask from Mary the grace to be a listener, "to listen to the word of God and act on it. (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 110-111)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts after a moment of silence*)

What New Year's resolution do you want to make this year?

Closing Prayer:

Mary, you who are the Mother of God, we now pray:

-help us to see and hear what God is revealing in our lives.

Mary, wellspring of grace and peace,

-help us to take time to ponder and reflect.

Mary, you who are the "Listening Disciple",

-help us to listen to the word of God and act on it. Amen.



THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

January 3, 2021

Gospel: (Matthew 2:1-12)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ...Herod sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child..." After their audience with the King, they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Reflection:

What happens if we would lead our life as if the star stopped on us? The answer to this question is most startling when we consider the gospel as a whole: what it means and what happens is that the only way to light and life is to die to self so that darkness can be overcome. Life has its sorrows and sufferings. It also has its joys and celebrations: the mystery of salvation has been revealed in Jesus. And in us. (Living Liturgy, p.32)

Vincentian Meditation:

The Magi were searchers. They traveled by night, following a star, moving like pilgrims, struggling through deserts. That is so often the human way. Most of us grope in the darkness most of our lives. The wise men's search revealed to them how closely light and darkness, birth and death, joy and sorrow, belief and unbelief are interlocked. It is crucial for us to recognize ourselves as searchers, as did the Magi. Our life is a journey, in which we often travel by night. In fact, the Lord's star is visible for us only when we acknowledge the darkness. Life holds so many unanswered questions, so many unfulfilled desires. Our hearts find ultimate fulfillment only in God, whom we search for during the entire course of our lives. This is what the Magi proclaim to us very clearly. (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 81)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts after a moment of silence*)

How has the Lord's star been visible to you in times of questioning and darkness?

Closing Prayer:

O Lord, bring light to the darkness as we search for you,

-Let your light shine upon us.

As the star guided the Magi,

-May we be guided by your light and grace.

May we, like the Magi, offer you our gifts each day,

-As we discover you in the midst of our lives. Amen



THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

January 10, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 1: 7-11)

This is what John the Baptist proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Reflection:

Baptism is not something that happened in the past, an event over and done with. None of us has "been baptized"; we are all **being** baptized. Baptism plunges us into an ongoing way of living whereby our lives are patterned after Christ's. John's baptism was one of repentance, "turning from, turning toward." At his baptism Jesus turned from his private life to his public life and mission. John baptized with water, but Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit who is the source of power for his mission. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we become adopted sons and daughters of God, God's "beloved," too. By this indwelling, Jesus' mission is our own mission. Jesus' way of living is our own way of living. (Living Liturgy, p.36)

Vincenian Meditation:

Our Mission Statement tells us: Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts after a moment of silence*)

How has the mission of Jesus become our mission, Jesus' way of living our way of living?

Closing Prayer:

The heavens are opened, and the Spirit of God comes to rest upon Jesus,

-Spirit of God, rest upon us

For all who have been baptized by water and the Holy Spirit,

-may we join together to grow spiritually

Christ, the Anointed, you began your public ministry after your baptism,

-may we offer person-to-person service to the suffering

Christ, the Beloved, you emptied yourself in love for the human family,

-open our hearts to the poorest and most abandoned in the spirit of St. Vincent and Blessed Frederic. Amen.



SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 17, 2021

Gospel: (John 1:35-42)

John was standing with two of his disciples and as he watched Jesus walk by, John said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, "*What are you looking for?*" They said to him, "Rabbi"-which means Teacher-"where are you staying?" He said to them, "*Come, and you will see.*" So they went and saw where Jesus was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon.

Reflection:

We cannot truly be disciples of Christ unless we, too, wait to hear God's call and respond by transforming our lives, evidenced in the simple willingness to be obedient to God's will. This means more than keeping the commandments, it means that our whole lives are directed to waiting and listening for God's self-revelation. Sometimes this revelation comes through others—perhaps in their cry for help. Sometimes the revelation comes through prayer in which we take some time to listen to God. However, when the revelation or call comes, if we respond, we will be transformed. And Jesus will turn and ask us, "What are you looking for?" (Living Liturgy, p.42)

Vincentian Meditation:

Our Identity Statement tells us: As a reflection of the whole family of God, Members, who are known as Vincentians, are drawn from every ethnic and cultural background, age group, and economic level. Vincentians are united in an international society of charity by their spirit of poverty, humility and sharing, which is nourished by prayer and reflection, mutually supportive gatherings and adherence to a basic Rule.

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

"What were you looking for" when you joined the Society?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you turned and asked the disciples, "*What are you looking for?*"

-we heard your call to be a disciple and we followed you.

We thank you for the call to be a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,

-may our Conference be a reflection of the whole family of God.

You call us to be united in a spirit of poverty, humility and sharing,

-may we be nourished by prayer and reflection.

You call us to mutually supportive gatherings,

-may we share a deep sense of friendship.

You call us to adherence to our basic Rule,

-may we be faithful to the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Amen.



THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 24, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 1: 14-20)

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: *"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."* As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, *"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."* Then they abandoned their nets and followed him.

Reflection:

The transformation that is a necessary consequence of hearing Jesus' call to discipleship takes place through repentance. Jesus calls and the disciples abandon all to follow him. Jesus' call was to simple fishermen while they were plying their trade. The starting point for Jesus' call to discipleship isn't with "holy" or "perfect" people; the starting point is with sinful humanity. The good news is that we *can repent* and believe. All we need to do is let go and let our daily lives be characterized by repentance and belief. Jesus gives us a continuing call. Our transformation doesn't come all at once but takes place throughout our lives. We only have to repent and believe in the gospel, for indeed the kingdom of God is at hand. (Living Liturgy, p.46)

Vincentian Meditation:

Our Mission Statement tells us: Organized locally Vincentians witness God's love by embracing all works of charity and justice. The Society collaborates with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes, making no distinction in those served because, in them, **Vincentians see the face of Christ.**

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)

How have you seen the face of Christ in those you serve?

Closing Prayer:

For the grace to respond to the call of discipleship, quickly and decisively,

-Merciful God, hear us!

For the grace to witness God's love by embracing all works of charity and justice,

-Merciful God, hear us!

For the grace to collaborate with other people of good will in relieving need and addressing its causes,

-Merciful God, hear us!

For the grace to make no distinction in those we serve because, in them, Vincentians see the face of Christ,

-Merciful God, hear us! Amen



FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 31, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 1:21-28)

Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach. The people were spellbound by his teaching because he taught with authority and not like the scribes. There appeared in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit that shrieked: "What do you want of us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him sharply: "*Be quiet! Come out of the man!*" At that the unclean spirit convulsed the man violently and with a loud shriek came out of him. All who looked were amazed. They began to ask one another: "What does this mean? A completely new teaching in a spirit of authority! He gives orders to unclean spirits and they obey him!" From that point on his reputation spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Reflection:

From that point on, they "remembered" and told the story and "his reputation spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee." "Remember" is a word that is often on our lips when we pray and when we speak to our friends. Sometimes we also feel ourselves to be better people when we *remember* the goodness of others to us, their generosity, their unselfishness, their tenderness, their thoughtfulness. This word "remember" is important, for Jesus has also done great things for us. (Living Liturgy, p.42)

Vincenian Meditation:

The little word "remember" is at the heart of our greatest prayer, the Mass. The Mass is the great prayer in which along with Jesus we ask God the Father to remember the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of His only Son. Christians gather together and offer Mass, renewing again and again the great act of "*remembering*," while at the same time making present again the offering that Jesus made of Himself on the cross. In doing so, we are bringing down upon the entire world, whether we know it or not, an uncountable number of graces, favors and blessings. Every day we hear some frightening things about the cruelty and wickedness of men. What would the world be like if it did not have the Sacrifice of the Mass? Always remember that there is no grace, no joy, no good thing in this world that has not come to us through Jesus Christ. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.587-588)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

Remember and share some stories of the "great things that Jesus has done for you."

Closing Prayer:

Christ, healer of hearts,
-**teach us compassion for others.**
Christ, maker of peace,
-**help us bring peace to all people.**
Christ, the light of life,
-**show us the path of life. Amen**



FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 7, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 1:29-39)

When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to Jesus all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him. Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you." He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come." So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

Reflection:

Jesus rose "very early before dawn" and went out to a "deserted place" to pray, to be in communion with God. He is able to turn his back on the adulation and keep his mission on a steady course because he does not lose sight of why he came—to preach the good news of salvation. He does not lose sight of his mission because he never loses sight of his Father. This is how we reorder ourselves—by praying, being in communion with God so that Jesus' mission is truly our own. (Living Liturgy, p.54)

Vincentian Meditation:

There is a balance in the activity of Jesus. There is prayer: liturgical prayer in the synagogue, and that is balanced by private prayer. There is hard work, and that is balanced by rest and relaxation with his apostles. We, as Vincentians, must have that same balance in our lives. St. Vincent wanted us to pray privately and to pray together: to work and to take time to be together in community. If we blend prayer, work and Conference life properly, then we will be balanced and effective Vincentians after the heart of St. Vincent. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.681)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

In our lives as Vincentians, do we have a balance or an unbalance between prayer, service and community?

Closing Prayer:

For the grace to pray privately and to pray together,

-Lord, hear us!

For the grace to serve the poor with dedication and faithfulness,

-Lord, hear us!

For the grace to support and care for each other in our Conference,

-Lord, hear us!

For the grace to be balanced and effective Vincentians after the heart of St. Vincent,

- Lord, hear us! Amen



FEAST OF BLESSED ROSALIE RENDU, DC

February 7

Gospel: (John 15: 9-17)

Jesus said to his disciples: *"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love. You will live in my love if you keep my commandments, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and live in his love. All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."*

Reflection:

On April 23, 1833, Frederic Ozanam's twentieth birthday, six students met in the office of their mentor Emmanuael Bailly, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was born. They resolved to respond to Christ's call by dedicating themselves to the poor after the example of St. Vincent de Paul. They asked Sister Rosalie Rendu, a Daughter of Charity, for the names and addresses of several families in need. Sr. Rosalie was known as "The Mother of the Poor" in the Mouffetard Quarter of Paris. She taught Frederic much about the poor and how to minister to them with love and respect. The first members of the Society were determined not only to bring bread, but, above all, friendship to the poor. (US Manual of the SVDP, p.179)

Vincentine Meditation:

Sr. Rosalie Rendu told Frederic and the first members of the Society: "Always remember, that if our childhood has been one of constant want, perhaps, we too, would have given away to envy and hatred, as I must admit have many of the poor we serve. Be kind and love, for love is your first gift to the poor. They will appreciate your kindness and your love more than all else you can bring to them. If you wish to be loved, you must love, and if you have nothing to give, give yourself." (Sr. Rosalie Rendu)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)

How do Vincentians live the spirit of Frederic and Sr. Rosalie, by bringing love and friendship to the poor?

Closing Prayer:

Holy God, we thank you for the gift to us of Sr. Rosalie Rendu,

-Grant us the grace to be kind and loving.

For the poor we serve,

-Grant us the grace to serve in friendship.

For the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,

-Grant us the grace to live the spirit of Sr. Rosalie. Amen



SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 14, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 1: 40-45)

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "*I will do it. Be made clean.*" The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. He said to him, "See that you tell no one anything..." But the man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Reflection:

Jesus was "moved with pity", and so he chose to heal the leper. And in spite of Jesus' command to "tell no one anything," Jesus knew that the leper would not be able to keep the good news of his healing quiet. And, yes, the leper does "publicize the whole matter." Indeed, the leper proclaims the gospel. Perhaps Jesus healed the leper because he recognized one who would be a disciple and spread the good news. Jesus wished that the leper be made clean, he had the power to heal. But more important, his heart was filled with mercy. And Jesus was announced to all by this leper who became a disciple. Jesus' commission to us is to tell everyone the good news-do we tell no one? (Living Liturgy, p.58)

Vincentian Meditation:

"It's not for everyone. It's not for anyone. But being a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul—being a Vincentian—is for some. It is a special calling by God. A member of the Society puts his or her faith into action. The Vincentian vocation is the intimate desire to participate personally and directly in helping the needy by person-to-person contact and by the gift of one's heart and friendship, doing so within the communal spirit of a Conference of lay persons each inspired by the same vocation. The Vincentian vocation may be expressed in many ways and with different shades of meaning. Practical translation of faith into action, meditating upon it and adapting it to our changing world is the very life of every Vincentian, the very life of the Society. (US Manual of the SVDP, p.54)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

How can we spread the "good news" of being a Vincentian?

Closing Prayer:

O God, we stand in gratitude for our vocation to be a Vincentian,
-give us the grace to offer our heart and friendship to the poor.
May we have the desire to serve the needy by person-to-person contact,
-give us the grace to invite others to join the Society.
May we have the grace to put our faith into action, to meditate upon it,
-and to adapt it to our changing world. Amen



ASH WEDNESDAY

February 17, 2021

Gospel: (Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18)

Jesus said to his disciples: *"Be on guard against performing religious acts for people to see. When you give alms, for example, do not blow a horn before you in synagogues and streets like hypocrites looking for applause...Keep your deeds of mercy secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. When you are praying, do not behave like the hypocrites...Whenever you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees what no man sees, will repay you. When you fast, you are not to look glum as the hypocrites do...When you fast, see to it that you groom your hair and wash your face. In that way no one can see you are fasting but your Father who is hidden; and your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."*

Reflection:

In the gospel we hear Jesus direct his disciples to surrender their money in alms, their bodies in fasting, and their spirits in prayers. May Jesus gift us with his presence this Lent, so that we can be a gift to others in carrying out our service as we:

Fast from judging others; to feast on the Christ dwelling in them.

Fast from unrelenting pressures; to feast on unceasing prayer.

Fast from self-concern; to feast on compassion for others.

Vincentian Meditation:

"I should not judge the poor peasants, men or women, by their exterior nor by their apparent mental capacities. All the more is this so since very frequently they scarcely seem to have the appearance or intelligence of reasonable beings...But turn the medal, and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by these people." St. Vincent de Paul (McKenna, *Praying with Vincent*, p. 59)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)

Recall your last encounter with a poor person. Was it an occasion during which you saw below the surface-you turned the medal- and caught a glimpse of God's presence?

Closing Prayer:

Lent is the acceptable time for renewing our desire to serve as Jesus served, so we pray:

When we walk with those caught in the cycle of poverty,

Help us to see your face, O God!

When we look into the wondering eyes of a child,

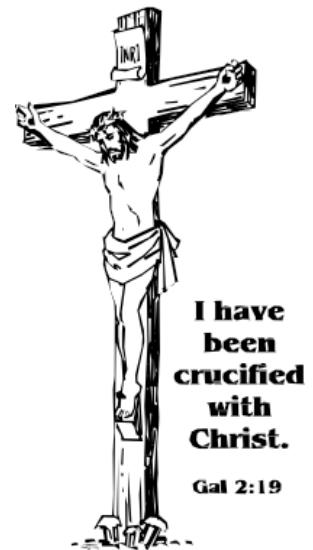
Help us to see your face, O God!

When we reach out to the homeless,

Help us to see your face, O God!

When we listen to the fading voice of the aged,

Help us to see your face, O God! Amen



FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

February 21, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 1:12-15)

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: *"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."*

Reflection:

Jesus went out into the desert to be alone. He is on the brink of inaugurating his public ministry. Something new and important is about to happen. He does the natural thing: goes off alone to think things through and confront the demons that would dissuade him from his mission. Then he goes to Galilee to proclaim the gospel of God. This defines in a nutshell what Lent is all about: we, too, spend extra time by ourselves during Lent so that we can come to the Easter celebration better able to proclaim the gospel. (Living Liturgy, p.74)

Vincenian Meditation:

The Manual of the Society states: Vincentians are called to holiness by striving to conform ourselves to Jesus, doing God's will, and devoting ourselves to the service of God's suffering and poor. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is composed of women and men who seek personal holiness by works of charity. In this essential way, the Society differs from charitable associations or agencies whose principal objective is not the spiritual advancement of their members but the doing of good for others. (US Manual of the SVDP, p.53)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)

How can we better take the time to pray both alone and at our Conference meetings so that we can truly proclaim the gospel of God?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, model of prayer,
-lead us into silence and prayer.

Jesus, model of compassion,
-give us merciful hearts.

Jesus, model of meekness and mildness,
-make us gentle and humble of heart.

Jesus, model of proclaiming God's kingdom,
-transform us so that we can extend your kingdom. Amen



SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

February 28, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 9:2-10)

Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white... Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them. As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

Reflection:

We can find the rhythm of the dying and rising of the paschal mystery everywhere. In the gospel we see the transfigured glory then allusion to Jesus' dying. In our daily lives we see the "dying and rising" between our work and leisure, between times with loved ones and times away, between success and failure, between doing something we would enjoy and doing something someone else would enjoy more. In our daily lives as we see the paschal mystery unfolding, the distance between the religious and secular spheres of our lives becomes less and less. Instead of putting religion in a neat box it becomes truly the very way we live. (Living Liturgy, p.78)

Vincentian Meditation:

"Pope John Paul II says to the laity: "There cannot be two parallel lives in your existence as lay men and women: on the one hand, the so-called 'spiritual life', with its values and demands; on the other, the so-called 'secular life,' that is life in a family, at work, social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture.... Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility are the occasions ordained by Providence for a 'continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity.'" (US Manual of the SVDP, p.59)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

How have you found that you no longer have "two parallel lives?"

Closing Prayer:

When we struggle with our own weaknesses,

-Change our hearts, O God!

When we resist the call to conversion,

-Change our hearts, O God!

When we become bitter and judgmental,

-Change our hearts, O God! Amen



THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

March 7, 2021

Gospel: (John 2:13-25)

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as money changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area saying, "*Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace.*" His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered, "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.*"...He was speaking of the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Reflection:

The simple call of the gospel is to see the signs of God in our midst. This story gives us a glimpse of the human struggle of often failing to see and believe the signs of God. Jesus showed us the signs so clearly; he was crucified and then raised up. Like Jesus, the zeal that ought to consume us, too, is a single-mindedness about suffering and dying to ourselves so that we, too, can live. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so will we be raised up. (Living Liturgy, p.84)

Vincenian Meditation:

St. Vincent tells us: "It is our vocation...to set people's hearts ablaze, to do what the Son of God did, who came to light a fire on the earth in order to set it aflame with his love. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love him. I must love my neighbor as the image of God and the object of his love...I must act in such a way that people love their Creator and each other in mutual charity for the love of God who loved them so much that he delivered up his own Son to death for them." (US Manual of the SVDP, p.54)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

Does zeal consume us, so that we can set people's hearts ablaze with God's love?

Closing Prayer:

When we look into the wondering eyes of a child,

-Help us to set their hearts ablaze.

When we reach out to the homeless,

-Help us to set their hearts ablaze.

When we walk with those caught in poverty,

-Help us to set their hearts ablaze.

When we listen to the fading voice of the aged,

-Help us to set their hearts ablaze. Amen



FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 14, 2021

Gospel: (John 3:14-21)

Jesus said to Nicodemus: *"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have life."* For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God...Whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

Reflection:

Jesus is the One raised up and by whom we are saved, we only must gaze on him and believe in him. The light of Christ enables us to see; seeing is believing. But we can only come to the light and believe if we "live in the truth" which is expressed in good works. Light and faith are gifts, and we demonstrate that we accept these gifts when we do good works. God demonstrates great love for us by sending the Son to be lifted up on the Cross and then raising him to eternal life. We demonstrate our great love for God by doing good works. Our good works: reaching out to others, doing our daily tasks for our family with love and care, working professionally and honestly, acting justly and charitably, then our way of being is "lifted up." This is how we live in the truth, so that our works may be clearly seen as done in God. (Living Liturgy, p.90)

Vincentian Meditation:

In the Manual for the Society we read: On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the canonization of St. Vincent de Paul, Pope John Paul II quoted the famous historian of Christian spirituality, Henri Bremond, about Vincent de Paul: "It was not love for men that led him to sanctity; rather it was sanctity that made him truly and effectively charitable; it was not the poor that gave him to God, but, on the contrary, God gave him to the poor." God acts in the same way in the lives of all Vincentians. Holiness makes them truly and effectively charitable. It is God who gives them to the poor. (US Manual of the SVD, p.53)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

How have you found that it is "God who gave you to the poor?"

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you urge us to take up our cross, and so we pray:

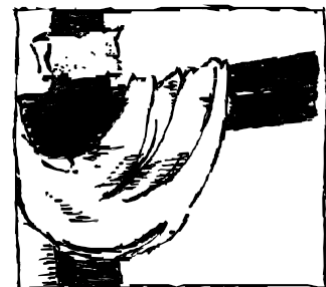
-Jesus, we turn to you.

For the grace to love life and faith into our families,

-Jesus, we turn to you.

For the grace to have "God send us to the poor,"

-Jesus, we turn to you. Amen



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

March 21, 2021

Gospel: (John 12:20-33)

Jesus answered them, *"Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit...Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me."*

Reflection:

Serving means following; following Jesus means serving. Also, serving means entering into Jesus' death – like Jesus we must also be the grain that dies to produce much fruit. When we follow Jesus into his service, we, too, have the pledge of receiving the same honor that the Father bestows on Jesus. We see Jesus by *being* Jesus. It's that simple! And that challenging. We see Jesus in those who lay down their life in servanthood and others see Jesus in us when we are servants. (Living Liturgy, p.94)

Vincentian Meditation:

In the Manual of the Society, we read: If Jesus stands at the center of Vincentian spirituality, the poor stand next to him. Jesus' words, *"You always will have the poor with you,"* are the reason for being for Vincentian existence. Blessed Frederic said: "Sons of Saint Vincent de Paul, let us learn of him to forget ourselves, to devote ourselves to the service of God and the good of men. Let us learn of him that holy preference which shows most love to those who suffer most." Mercy is a facet of charity that calls us, first to identify in spirit with our suffering brothers and sisters. Mercy calls also for outward signs and actions. We weep with those who weep, we rejoice with those who rejoice. We empathize; we reach out in compassion. (US Manual, P.16-17)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

How do we see Jesus in those who lay down their life in servanthood and how do others see Jesus in us when we are servants?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, we seek refuge in your loving heart and so we pray:

-Jesus, keep us close to you.

For the grace to be your servant,

-Jesus, keep us close to you.

For all members of the Society who model a life of service,

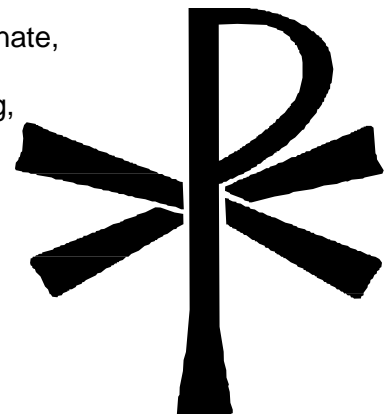
-Jesus, keep them close to you.

For our families and friends who teach us how to be compassionate,

-Jesus, keep them close to you.

For all those who are suffering, especially the sick and the dying,

-Jesus, keep them close to you. Amen



PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

March 28, 2021

Gospel: (John 12:12-16)

When the great crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they took palm branches and went out to meet him, and cried out: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel." Jesus found an ass and sat upon it, as is written: *Fear no more, O daughter Zion; see, your king comes, seated upon an ass's colt.* His disciples did not understand this at first, but when Jesus had been glorified they remembered that these things were written about him and that they had done this for him.

Reflection:

The essence of discipleship is that we carry his cross. Disciples go wherever the Master goes. Coming to understand who Jesus is, his mission, and how that relates to us his disciples is not an easy task; it takes a lifetime. Like Jesus, to be faithful followers by taking up our cross means we will *feel* this in the depths of our humanity: we will suffer, we will lose heart, we will cry out to God to take life's miserable lot away from us. But also like Jesus we have divine life which gives us the strength to carry our cross. It is divine life pulsating within us – which we first receive at our baptism – that raises up our humanity enabling us to be faithful disciples carrying our crosses. (Living Liturgy, p.98)

Vincetian Meditation:

Jesus' dying love gives meaning to the many "crosses" his followers are called to bear...the cross today may take the following forms especially:

- laboring daily, and perseveringly, in the service of the poor
- sharing the helplessness and pain of the marginalized
- standing in solidarity with the abandoned and suffering
- accepting painful events, that we can do nothing about
- bearing sickness, our own and that of others
- coming to grips with aging
- enduring the death of friends and family

The following of the crucified Lord is the supreme act of faith; it is a surrender in hope and love into the incomprehensible mystery of God. (Maloney, *He Hears the Cry of the Poor*, p. 46-47)

Discussion: (*Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence*)

What "crosses" have you carried in being Jesus' disciple?

Closing Prayer:

As we enter the mystery of the passion of Christ, may our hearts be touched anew by the depth of his love, and so we pray:

-Christ, our Savior, hear our prayer.

That this Holy Week may deepen our understanding of the cross,

-Christ, our Savior, hear our prayer.

For all who suffer injustice and abuse, may we help them carry their cross,

-Christ, our Savior, hear our prayer. Amen

