

VINCENTIAN REFLECTIONS



Liturgical Year: Cycle C

*First Quarter-2010
(January, February, March)*

Available on WWW.SVDPUSA.ORG (*Spiritual Resources*)



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
 - Words of Founders

OPENING PRAYER/QUIETENING 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

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.

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 CHURCH YEAR-CYCLE C
2010**

JANUARY

<i>January 1, 2010</i>	<i>Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God</i>
<i>January 3, 2010</i>	Epiphany of the Lord
<i>January 10, 2010</i>	Baptism of the Lord
<i>January 17, 2010</i>	Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
<i>January 24, 2010</i>	Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
<i>January 31, 2010</i>	Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

FEBRUARY

<i>February 7, 2010</i>	<i>Feast of Sister Rosalie Rendu, D.C.</i>
<i>February 7, 2010</i>	Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
<i>February 14, 2010</i>	Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
<i>February 21, 2010</i>	First Sunday of Lent
<i>February 28, 2010</i>	Second Sunday of Lent

MARCH

<i>March 7, 2010</i>	Third Sunday of Lent
<i>March 14, 2010</i>	Fourth Sunday of Lent
<i>March 15, 2010</i>	<i>Feast of St. Louise de Marillac</i>
<i>March 21, 2010</i>	Fifth Sunday of Lent
<i>March 28, 2010</i>	Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD
January 1, 2010

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:

Because Mary's conception and giving birth happened under such extraordinary circumstances we might think that Mary took all this for granted and that it was easy for her. The central lines to the gospel suggest other wise: "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." This suggests that Mary's on-going yes to God wasn't really very easy at all. The only way she continued to be faithful was that she took a contemplative stance: reflecting, pondering, praying. Mary shows us the way: fidelity to God's way means we, too, must adopt a contemplative stance before God and the mystery of salvation. (Living Liturgy, p.30)

Vincentian Meditation:

Vincentians are called to be contemplatives in action and apostles in prayer. Prayer and action go hand in hand in a healthy Vincentian spirituality. St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac were incredibly active, but they were also persons of deep prayer. An apostolic spirituality is at its best when it holds prayer and action in tension with one another. The person who loves God "with the sweat of his brow and the strength of his arms" as Vincent said, knows how to distinguish between beautiful theoretical thoughts about an abstract God and real personal contact with the living Lord contemplated and served in his suffering people. (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 176)

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

How can you become a better "contemplative in action" this year?

Closing Prayer:

Mary, to 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 a "contemplative in action",

-help us to contemplate Jesus in his suffering people. Amen



THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD January 3, 2010

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:

The three Magi from the east must have been men of means; they traveled a long distance to find the “newborn King of the Jews” and to offer him precious gifts, trusting in only the star’s guidance. They must also have recognized the prior generosity of God, for their initial response in finding the Child was to “do him homage.” The symbolic meaning of their treasures is: giving the gold was a response of sharing their possessions; giving the frankincense was a response of reverence and gratitude for God’s gifts to them; giving the myrrh was a response of sharing of obedience in following God’s revelation in the star. (Living Liturgy, p.32)

Vincentian Meditation:

The Magi came to worship the newborn king. Are we capable of that ourselves? Are we willing to bow down before the Lord and pay him homage? Are we able to make Christ the *absolute center* of our lives? Or do we clutch alien gods as Herod did? These are manifold: power, popularity, security, comfort, only to name a few. Most such gods are reflections of our inner selves. They mirror forth our own desire to be the center of the universe. Unlike Herod, the Magi bowed down before the Lord and worshipped him. May we also bow down before him in the person of the poor, who are—in a phrase we use so often that it can easily lose its meaning—our “Lords and Masters” as Vincent said. (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 81)

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

How can we better serve “our Lords and Masters” the poor?

Closing Prayer:

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

-Let your light shine upon us.

As the Magi bowed down in homage,

-May you be the absolute center of our lives.

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

-As we discover you in the lives of the poor.

Amen



THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD January 10, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 3:15-16; 21-22)

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Reflection:

As Jesus was baptized by John, so must we be baptized –not just in the waters of repentance but by the Holy Spirit and fire which calls us, too, to give ourselves to God. Thus receiving the Spirit in our own baptism manifests our identity as ones who are saved, renewed, justified and heirs of eternal life, that is, those who also share in God's life. Being baptized by fire means that we share in Jesus' mission. We come to an appreciation of all this when we, like Jesus, contemplate this mystery of baptism in prayer. As we appreciate more and more who we are and what we are to do, we gradually come to realize that *we ourselves* are God's presence for another. (Living Liturgy, p.36)

Vincentian Meditation:

The fire of the Holy Spirit gives us the grace to be God's presence for another: "The best thing to give...to your enemy is forgiveness; to an opponent, tolerance; to a friend, your heart; to your child, a good example; to a mother, reverence; to your father, conduct that will make him proud of you; to yourself, respect; to all people, charity." All that was precisely what Jesus Christ did. That, too, was what His Mother did. It was what St. Vincent de Paul and all God's saints did. May we be strengthened to do likewise. (McCullen, *Deep Down Things*, p.728)

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

What are the "best things" that the fire of the Holy Spirit calls you to give?

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 fire of the Holy Spirit,
-may we be the presence of God to one another.
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, 2010

Gospel: (John 2:1-11)

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "*Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.*" His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."...When the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from, said to the bridegroom, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good win until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

Reflection:

We identify with Mary's sensitivity in noticing that the wine was running short and Jesus' sensitivity in keeping the miracle quiet. The purpose of the miracle, then, wasn't to save the wedding couple's day or to draw attention to Jesus. The purpose runs deeper: the sign revealed Jesus' glory. The wedding feast as an opportunity for epiphany and belief. The epiphany (manifestations and revelations) of Jesus' glory is a sign of the persistence of God's overtures of love to us—God reveals glory to us in many ways to make sure we catch it—and the depths of God's love, so much so that we are espoused to God. Belief entails a *Who* rather than a *what*. Our own encounters with Jesus in prayer, through others, in struggling with daily living, are truly epiphanies of God's glory which also invites us to respond to divine Presence with belief. (Living Liturgy, p.42)

Vincentian Meditation:

Epiphany signs might come in many ways—through others in a cry for help, in a lonely person's plea for companionship, in the spontaneous laughter of delight, in the beauty of nature, in the love of family and friends. The challenge to us is to see these as revelations of God's glory, as epiphanies of God's love for us, and an opportunity to respond in belief. Yes, these common, ordinary signs of God's love are all around us. By *responding* to other persons, recognizing them as revelations of God to us, we ourselves also become signs of God's in-breaking, *epiphanies for others*.

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

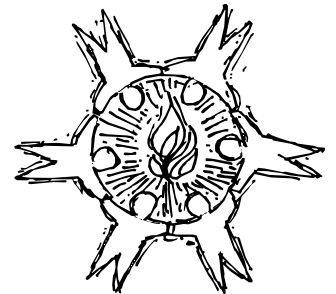
What "Epiphanies of God's love" have happened in your life?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, thank you for all of the "Epiphanies of your Love" in our lives,
-**May we find you in all of the common, ordinary signs all around us.**

Lord, thank you for our call to be Vincentians,
-**May we be the "Epiphany of your love" to those who are suffering.**

Lord, thank you for our family and our friends,
-**May we share together your hope and love, your laughter and joy. Amen**



THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
January 24, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 4:14-21)

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll and found the passage where it was written: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”* Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, *“Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Reflection:

We would guess that Jesus introduced a long, pregnant pause, before he said what the synagogue people could hardly expect: *“Today, this Scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing.”* We are still in the time when the scroll has been set aside, when all eyes turn to Jesus, and there is a pregnant pause. Now we—our own lives—fill the meaning of the pregnant pause. We can do so because, like Jesus, in our baptism we also have been anointed with the Spirit. And so, we are called to look for the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed among us. We don’t have to look very far! *“Today this passage has been fulfilled”* is now true only when we ourselves respond to those around us who need a nourishing, strengthening, joyful word. (Living Liturgy, p.46)

Vincentian Meditation:

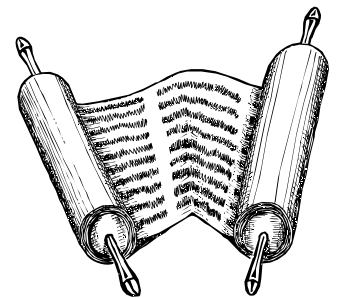
In light of Vincent’s regular practice of taking the imitation of Jesus Christ as the model of behavior, the saint, in Jesus’ manner, chose the words of this Gospel: *“He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,”* as the motto of his life and ministry. Jesus modeled doing before teaching. Accordingly, Vincent noted that Jesus first integrated *“fully into his life every type of virtue.”* That was his preparation, after which our Lord, then went on to teach, by preaching the good news of salvation to poor people, and by passing on to his apostles and disciples what they needed to know to become guides for others. As followers of Vincent, we must imitate Christ the Lord, first...imitate his virtues and then we can go out in service to the poor. (Melito, St. Vincent -Windows on His Vision, p. 45)

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

How is this Scripture passage from Luke being fulfilled in your life today?

Closing Prayer:

To the indigent and those who are in despair,
 -Lord, send us out to bring good news to the poor.
To the abandoned poor of the inner city,
 -Lord, send us out to bring good news to the poor.
To the captive, blind and oppressed among us,
 -Lord, send us out to bring good news to the poor.
Amen



FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
January 31, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 4:21-30)

Jesus began speaking in the synagogue...and all were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph? He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician heal yourself.' And say 'Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'" And he said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place." When the people heard all that he was saying, they were filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, to hurl him down headlong. But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went away.

Reflection:

As the crowds doubted who Jesus was because of his simple origins, so will others doubt who we are if we courageously live the gospel. No matter what simple origins we might have, our living the gospel is what must shape our everyday choices. This means, for example, that if the chatter around the coffee machine at work grows uncharitable or coarse, we have the courage to walk away. If prejudice exists among our friends and acquaintances, we have the courage to extol the dignity of the minority. We are called to place gospel values before any other values and to be willing to put our lives on the line for them. (Living Liturgy, p.50)

Vincentian Meditation:

St. Vincent was also from "simple origins" but he also had a striking belief in the power of the gospel. He told us that, "Each one must strive, above all else, to ground himself in this truth: the teaching of Christ can never deceive, while that of the world is always false, since Christ himself declares that the latter is like a house built on sand, whereas he compares his own to a building founded upon a solid rock." For this reason we must always make claim to act according to the maxims of Christ, never according to those of the world. (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 150)

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

How does your living of the gospel shape your everyday choices?

Closing Prayer:

We pray for the grace to proclaim the gospel in our lives:

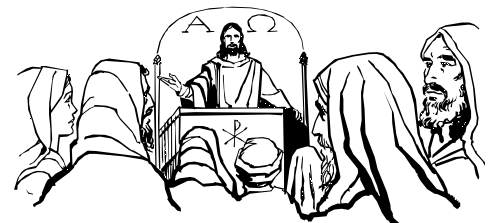
-May we live the values that Jesus taught.

We pray that our words and actions bear witness to Christ,

-May we live the values that Jesus taught.

We pray that we may bring hope and healing to the sick and suffering.

-May we live the values that Jesus taught.



Amen

FEAST OF BLESSED SISTER ROSALIE RENDU, D.C.
February 7, 2010

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 SSVDP, p.179)

Vincentian Meditation:

“Last night I dreamed that I stood at the judgment seat of God. God received me with great severity and was about to pronounce my sentence when, suddenly, I was surrounded by an immense crowd of people carrying old boots, shoes, and hats. They presented all these things to God saying: ‘She was the one who gave us all these things.’ Then Jesus looked at me and said, ‘Because you gave all these old clothes in my Name, I open heaven to you. Enter, for all eternity.’” (Words of Sister Rosalie Rendu, DC)

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

What do you think God will say to you as you stand at the judgment seat?

Closing Prayer:

Holy God, we thank you for the gift to us of Bl. Rosalie Rendu,
-grant us the grace to be kind and loving.
For the poor we serve,
-grant us the grace to bring your help and solace.
Provident God, provide what we need to give to the poor,
-grant us the grace to lighten their burdens.
For all the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul,
-grant us the grace to live the spirit of Bl. Rosalie Rendu.
Amen



FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
February 7, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 5: 1-11)

After he had finished speaking, Jesus said to Simon, “*Put out into the deep water and lower your nets for a catch.*” Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing...when Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him...Jesus said to Simon, “*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.*” When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

Reflection:

Jesus’ power manifested in the great catch of fish brings Peter to confess his sinfulness. But the story does not stop with the confession of unworthiness, but continues with Peter who then “left everything and followed him.” The appearance of God always reveals our own sinfulness, but God’s focus is elsewhere—on our call and our mission. God sees humanity as created to be good, as persons who can choose to respond to God’s call and fulfill the mission God gives. If we look for “large catches of fish” we will miss God’s message. The gospel invites us to look to the simple manifestations of holiness that indicate the presence of God, for example, in the generosity of so many volunteers, in the faithfulness of husbands and wives, in the unselfishness of parish workers, in the uncomplaining suffering of the sick, in the gracious wisdom of the elderly. The “yes” response to our call is to imitate these good behaviors and by so doing we extend God’s reign. (Living Liturgy, p.54)

Vincentian Meditation:

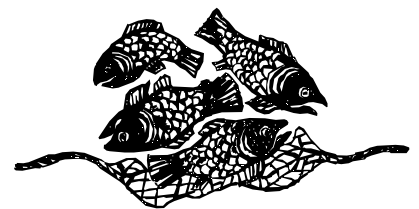
The holiness of St. Vincent and of each one of us in the last analysis is a gift of God. The holiness of a saint is a sharing in the holiness of God Himself, and we recognize holiness when we see the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.316)

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

How have you seen the presence of God in the “simple manifestations of holiness” in those around you?

Closing Prayer:

O God, there are those who do not know your presence,
-may our lives be a sign of faith for them.
O God, there are those who live in fear and doubt,
-may our lives be a sign of hope for them.
O God, there are those who do not experience your love,
-may our lives be a sign of love for them.
O God, there are those who are poor and oppressed by others,
-may our lives be a sign of justice for them. Amen



SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
February 14, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 6:17,20-26)

Jesus raising his eyes toward his disciples said: *“Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.”*

Reflection:

The blessing is *Jesus* who stands on level ground with the poor, hungry, weeping outcasts. Jesus is an epiphany of God’s presence among all those who had been excluded. The gospel also indicates the decisiveness of choice: blessing or woe. There are two paths in life one can follow, and either one is with Jesus or against Jesus. The lure is to be consoled *now*, have our fill *now*, laugh *now*, be respected *now*. Jesus is showing another way: our condition now doesn’t matter so long as we trust and hope in the Lord *now*. Blessedness isn’t a matter of social status, satisfaction, possessions, respect, etc; it is a matter of keeping our own eyes glued on Jesus. (Living Liturgy, p.58)

Vincentian Meditation:

The heart of Jesus’ preaching is the Beatitudes. They speak of basic attitudes of being and dispositions in life. Vincentians are Beatitude people; they opt for the Beatitudes that confront them with decisive choices concerning earthly goods. The Beatitudes purify their hearts in order to teach them to love God above all things. Vincentians understand Pope John Paul II’s words: *“The Beatitudes are a call to action.”* (US Manual of the SSVDP, p.20)

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

Which Beatitude speaks most to your heart?

Closing Prayer:

For the grace to know the grace of being poor and hungry,

-O God, teach us the Beatitudes.

For the grace to know the grace of weeping and laughter,

-O God, teach us the Beatitudes.

For the grace to choose blessing and not woe,

-O God, teach us the Beatitudes.

For the grace to be true Vincentians,

-O God, teach us the Beatitudes. Amen



*“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.”*

Lk 6:20

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
February 21, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 4:1-13)

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. ...The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered: "*It is written: One does not live on bread alone.*" ...The devil then said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory...All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus replied: "*It is written: You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.*" ...Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus said to him in reply, "*It also says: You shall not put the Lord, you God, to the test.*" When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

Reflection:

Try as he might by offering every attractive thing—wealth, power, esteem—the devil couldn't prove stronger. The gentle persuasion of prayer and fasting kept Jesus stronger and able to resist temptation. Not even the Son of God was exempt from being tested! Temptation, then, isn't necessarily a sign of great sinfulness. It is an occasion for showing that our lives are turned to God, for remaining steadfast in the faith that we profess. Lent isn't simply our desert time to overcome temptation. It is also a springtime of renewed relationship to God. It is a time when we are strengthened, with the gentle warmth of God's Spirit leading us, to overcome even temptations to wealth, power, and esteem. (Living Liturgy, p.70)

Vincentian Meditation:

I urge you to reflect, during Lent, on the temptations that we inevitable meet as the Spirit guides us through the desert. None of us is spared these. The Spirit is a pillar of fire to lighten our path on the journey, but daily events allure us to follow other pillars of fire as we wander through the desert. But we find our hunger satisfied, our thirst quenched, only in the person of a loving, provident God who walks with us always. This Lent all of us must ask ourselves: what is the greatest temptation I face as a follower of St. Vincent? (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 95)

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

What is the greatest temptation you face as a follower of Vincent and Frederic?

Closing Prayer:

For the grace to be detached from wealth,
-**Jesus we turn to you.**
For the grace to be detached from power,
-**Jesus we turn to you.**
For the grace to be detached from esteem,
-**Jesus we turn to you.**
Amen



SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT February 28, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 9: 28-36)

Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white....Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them...Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "*This is my chosen Son, listen to him.*" After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.

Reflection:

The only way for us to "remain" in Jesus' glory is to accept the baptismal challenge to recognize Jesus as the beloved Son and to "*Listen to him.*" This means that we take to heart gospel living. This Sunday we are given a glimpse of glory to help us on our journey of a lifetime of self-emptying. This tells us something about how we might keep Sundays. If each Sunday is a day of rest, a time to be good to ourselves, to do something special that is uplifting, to enter into a moment of glory by praying, we would be better fortified to continue our journey. (Living Liturgy, p.74)

Vincentian Meditation:

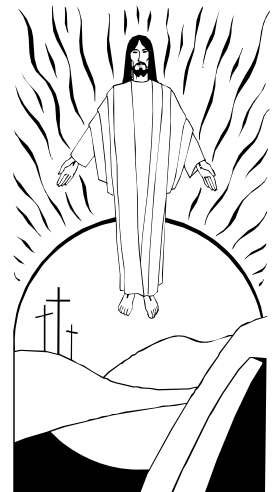
Though God is utterly transcendent, do we not *experience* the self-communication of God at times? Looking back at times, do we not perceive that we have been transformed by events that were beyond our control, often by our contact with the poor, by their faith, their gratitude, their persistent trust in God's presence and providence? Are there not "angels" who enter our lives and touch us deeply because of their authentic witness to the gospels, because of their persevering hope in the face of sickness, suffering and death? Are there not occasions when we are deeply touched by the loyalty of friends, by their faithful love? Are these not ways in which we glimpse God's freely-bestowed presence in our own human experience? I suggest this Lent that we focus on growing in awareness of God's self-gift, in its many expressions, and raise our hearts and voices to the Lord in gratitude. (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 99)

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

How have you *experienced* God touching your life?

Closing Prayer:

Christ appeared in the splendor of a vision to his disciples,
-may we find the face of Jesus in ordinary events of our life.
For all Vincentians who dedicate themselves to the service,
-may their love and justice transfigure the lives of the poor.
We bring all of our petitions before God,
-may God's face shine upon us. Amen



THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
March 7, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 13: 1-9)

Jesus said, *“Those eighteen people who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!”* And then he told them this parable: *“There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardner, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’ The gardner said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down.’”*

Reflection:

The parable of the non-fruit-bearing fig tree describes the fate of those who do not repent. Even though God gives us everything we need for our journey toward salvation, we ourselves need to “cultivate and fertilize” our spiritual lives. We “grumble” our way through life—we judge others, fail to live up to our baptismal commitments, do not heed all the warnings given us. Jesus is quite clear in his message: “bear fruit or be “cut down.” The “fertilizer” is the charity, fasting, and prayer of our Christian penance. Repentance is “cultivating” the soil so we can bear fruit. Repentance is changing one’s mind, letting go of the narrowness of our own perception of how life should be and embracing the expansiveness of God’s plan for salvation. Repentance is really conversion. And God waits everyday of our lives for us to bear fruit. (Living Liturgy, p.78)

Vincentian Meditation:

Conversion for us as followers of Vincent and Frederic will mean allowing Jesus and the poor to invade the citadels of our minds and of our hearts. Our minds and hearts are like fortresses. We live within them, but are reluctant to admit Jesus and his poor into the very center of them. We will allow Jesus in just so far, but we often by our action or inaction show him that we don’t wish Him to take us over completely. He is continually asking us to surrender to him. He is asking us continually to let go, and we insist on holding on. Conversion or repentance is about surrender. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.698)

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

What conversion do you need, so that you can “bear fruit?”

Closing Prayer:

The discipline of Lent calls us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus,
-may your love guide us to conversion.
Lord, you came to give sight to the blind,
-open our eyes to see beyond our own selfishness.
Lord, you came to bring good news to the poor,
-may our actions bring hope to those we serve.
Lord, give us the grace to “fertilize and cultivate” our spiritual life,
-so that we may bear fruit. Amen



FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
March 14, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 15:1-3,11-32)

Jesus told this parable: “A man had two sons, and the younger said to his father, ‘Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself ...to tend swine. ...Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; make me one of your hired servants.’”

Reflection:

It is the father in the parable who models for us the mercy of our heavenly Father. The prodigal son is brought to repentance because he was “dying from hunger.” There is nothing he does to deserve the response of the father except to repent and to return. What leads *us* to decide to repent? Like the prodigal son, “changing our minds” is probably precipitated by some specific catalyst—probably not physical hunger, but possible by spiritual hunger. The penance of Lent can be the external factor that brings us to realize our life is much richer when we turn from our sinful ways and turn to God who gives life. (Living Liturgy, p.84)

Vincentian Meditation:

This parable tells us most about the meaning of conversion, and is found in two verbs. The request the younger son makes to his father is this: “Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.” Toward the end of the parable, when the younger son returns home, the request he makes of his father is this: “Father, make me one of your hired servants.” Between the “*give me*” at the beginning and the “*make me*” at the end lies the story of conversion. There is an altogether different attitude of mind expressed in the “give me my money” and “make me one of your hired servants.” In the story of conversion you will find that the starting point is a selfish demand, and the finishing point is a readiness to be a servant. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.698)

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

Have you experienced a conversion from “give me” to “make me your servant?”

Closing Prayer:

As we abandon ourselves to God’s will,
 -Father, we come to you.
As we allow prayer to change our lives,
 -Father, we come to you.
As we move from “give me” to “make me your servant,”
 -Father, we come to you. Amen



FEAST OF ST. LOUISE DE MARILLAC
March 15, 2010

Gospel: (Matthew 25: 31-46)

The King will say to those on his right hand, “ Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me...I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.”

Reflection:

Louise de Marillac, (1591-1660), married Antoine LeGras and they had a son whom they named Michel, and at the age of 34 she became a widow. Vincent de Paul became her spiritual director and under his guidance she began caring for the poor and visiting the Confraternities of Charity. Vincent and Louise co-founded the Company of the Daughters of Charity, and dedicated them to serve the poor with humility, simplicity and charity. In 1960, Pope John XXIII proclaimed Louise the patron saint of all Christian social workers.

Vincentian Meditation:

“As for your conduct toward the poor, may you never take the attitude of merely getting the task done. You must show them affection; serving them from the heart; inquiring of them what they might need; speaking to them gently and compassionately.”
(Gibson and Kneaves, *Praying with Louise*, p. 72)

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

In what ways do you see your Conference serving the poor today in the spirit of Louise: showing affection, serving from the heart, speaking gently and compassionately?

Closing Prayer:

Compassionate Christ, Louise ministered to the needs of your people,
-give us courage to walk in her footsteps.
You inspired Louise with a great love for the poor and the abandoned,
-grant us the grace to serve with the same spirit of love
You inspired Louise with compassion for the destitute and sorrowful,
-may we love them tenderly and respect them deeply.
May the Vincentian Family continue to grow and multiply throughout the world,
-so that the poor will know God’s love in a tangible way.
Amen



FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
March 21, 2010

Gospel: (John 8:1-11)

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "*Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.*" In response, they went away one by one...So he was left alone with the woman before him. Jesus said to her, "*Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?*" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "*Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.*"

Reflection:

A story that begins with deathly accusation ends with divine mercy. Where the community's condemnation would have led the adulterous woman to death, Jesus' mercy leads her to new life. A story that begins with exposing the sin of an individual ends with exposing the sinfulness of all. Where the community begins with awareness of the woman's sinfulness, they are transformed through encountering Jesus into awareness of their own sinfulness. A story that begins with human testing of the divine ends with divine invitation to repent. Jesus reveals a new order in which all are called to repentance and the experience of divine mercy. Jesus' desire for us is not death but new life. (Living Liturgy, p.90)

Vincentian Meditation:

God's loving presence is cleansing, as baptism and penance remind us. God's love labors to break down the resistance that it finds within us. It is a creative love that works toward change, transformation, new beginnings. God wants to make a home within us. The recurring Lenten season nudges us each year toward self-denial. The real point of ascetical practices is not merely to "give up" objects, but to reconstruct one's deepest self so that God might take fuller possession of our home. Jesus asks that the same energy we might have used in accumulating riches, consolidating power, or pursuing personal pleasure be channeled toward the building up of a "new person" as a dwelling place for God. (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul, p. 99-100)

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

Do you hold unjust prejudices and judgments of the poor?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, model of compassion and kindness,
-**free our hearts from prejudice and from unkind judgment of others.**
Jesus, model of meekness and mildness,
-**make us meek and humble of heart.**
Jesus, model of forgiveness and mercy,
-**open our hearts to all people. Amen**



PALM SUNDAY OF OUR LORD'S PASSION
March 28, 2010

Gospel: (Luke 19:28-40)

Jesus proceeded on his journey up to Jerusalem... And his disciples who had been sent went off and found everything just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying this colt?" They answered, "The Master has need of it." So they brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the colt, and helped Jesus to mount. As he rode along, the people were spreading their cloaks on the road; ...the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen. They proclaimed: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."

Reflection:

This Sunday we begin the holiest of Christian weeks, and we carry palms in procession with the atmosphere charged with both expectation and contradiction, with joy and soberness. For most of us Holy Week unfolds like many other weeks; we still contend with work, school, preparing meals, doing laundry, cranky folks, the usual triumphs and set backs. The readings for Palm Sunday invite us to make this an extraordinary week—a week that concentrates in a few days the ultimate meaning of our whole lives. We must slow down and make choices so that this week doesn't go by without our taking the time to enter into its meaning. The real pity of this Holy Week would be that we miss the opportunity to empty ourselves, take up our own cross, and follow Jesus through death to new life. (Living Liturgy, p.94)

Vincentian Meditation:

All Christian spirituality focuses on the crucified and risen Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. The cross is the symbol of what is at the core of Jesus' person: "The way we came to understand love was that he laid down his life for us; we, too, must lay down our lives for one another." (1Jn 3:16) The crucified Jesus proclaims that self-giving love is at the heart of being God and at the heart of being human. St. Vincent often recommended to us to meditate on the cross as the symbol of God's love. It is most important that we ourselves experience the love God reveals through the cross, that we have a deep confidence in a personal loving God who works actively in our lives. (Maloney, Seasons in Spirituality, p.58)

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

What will you do to find the deeper meaning of Holy Week this year?

Closing Prayer:

As we enter into 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



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