

Lenten Reflections

This Lent, to help prepare you for the passion and resurrection of Christ, we have prepared a series of daily reflections. Available will be three sets of eight reflections, each set around the three temptations of Christ in the desert. Then to finish, there will be 14 daily reflections, up to Good Friday, aiding contemplation on the Stations of the Cross. Sundays are not included in the 40 days of Lent and so we haven't included a daily reflection for each Sunday.

**"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test"
Luke 4:12**

Saturday, March 12th - Control

Even though statistics suggest that riding in a plane is much safer than driving a car, many more people fear flying than driving. Why is that? The answer is likely control. More often than not, we like to be in control (or at least feel as though we are). But imagine for a second what it would be like to give up our need for control. Imagine surrendering, not to just anyone, but to the author of the universe – One who is not only extraordinarily powerful and extremely loving but is also concerned with your overall wellbeing. God invites us to walk in the midst of uncertainty.

What are some areas of our lives where the control that we have is causing stresses and problems? What can we do to increase our reliance on Divine Providence? What opportunities can we create for the Holy Spirit to guide us?

Monday, March 14th - Trust

One of the most beautiful prayers you can pray comes from the Divine Mercy devotion: Jesus, I trust in You. So do you? If you trust in God in the deepest way, then you have faith in Him in an active way. Having an active faith in God means more than just believing in Him – surprisingly, even the demons believe in God (see James 2:19). An active faith means that you fully surrender your life to Him, entrusting your whole being to Him and His providential care and guidance. Who else would we turn to with such trust except Him? All of us, as humans, will inevitably fail to be perfectly trustworthy. If we only put trust in ourselves, in others, or in institutions, we are bound to be let down. We have a God who is not only supremely trustworthy, but also supremely good.

As Vincentians we are called to put much trust in our neighbors, even when it seems illogical. We are called to be truthful, respectful, and loving. How have your interactions with neighbors enabled you to show trust, both in them and in God?

Tuesday, March 15th - Unity With Love

In every community there is a shared interest, meaning, vision, or hope that binds them together. There is a *common unity*. That interest, meaning, vision, or hope may be the initial inspiration for the community to form, but what grows as time goes on isn't just a shared interest; love grows! That love is what binds that community together. After all, we say at the start of Conference meetings, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, here am I in the midst of them." How strong then is a community whose common interest, meaning, vision, or hope is Christ? That community is the Church, and it has stood as a community of living stones for thousands of years. Christ then also tells us that "whoever see me sees the one who sent me." So, when we spread this community of Christ, of love, we share much more. Our love then has great significance and meaning, especially in knitting us all together. We are connected to each other and to God by love, let us then seek to strengthen that unity with ever greater love.

What binds our Vincentian community together? Is it that same love? What sets us apart and how does that strengthen us in charity?

Wednesday, March 16th - Patience

Did Jesus know the exact day he was to be crucified? We don't know, but regardless, he lived for approximately 33 years before completing His journey. Jesus knew that He couldn't be crucified on just any day, everything had to happen exactly as the Father willed it so. His sacrifice was vital, but the timing was also crucial. We don't like to wait. If you know something is going to happen to you, good or bad, you want it to happen now; you want success to come sooner or to get the hurt out of the way. However, the Lord's training ground is often in waiting. The lesson of waiting helps us to pause, examine our inner world, and become open to the Lord's ways, which are not our ways. It is a call to trust in the Father's plan and say, "Thy will be done".

Are you ever impatient in your Vincentian work? Landlords not responding, neighbors giving you conflicting stories, wishing you could do more? Could you offer everything up to God saying, "Thy will be done"?

Thursday, March 17th - Practicing Presence

A lot of things are more enjoyable to do with a friend instead of all by yourself. Take, for example, watching a movie. Even though you don't spend those two hours talking with your friend, sharing the experience with that other person makes the experience more valuable, fruitful, and enjoyable. This is much like our relationship with the presence of God. Even when we're alone, we're not. Practicing God's presence means living every activity of the day with Jesus, by his side, sharing every experience with Him. This also means that when we leave our prayer time or the church after Mass, we don't leave God behind. We as Vincentians see that very readily. When we leave Christ in the chapel, we go to meet Him in the person at the door.

How can you help yourself to see God's presence in your life? Has God ever been present to you through your Vincentian brothers and sisters?

Friday, March 18th - Contentment

How are we to ever find contentment in a world that's screaming "more, more, more"? In Philippians, Paul says that he has learned the key to being content in every situation: Jesus Christ. Just as we can't be good enough for God to save us, we can't muster up contentment on our own. Instead, we must consciously, daily, connect with Christ and allow Him to work contentment into our lives, like a baker works yeast into dough. Gradually, thankfulness for what He's already given us will overtake us, and we'll find that the size of our bank account, house, or job title doesn't matter as much as it once did. Instead, we'll rejoice in Jesus, who has become our everything.

Our work with those in need can make clear to us just how blessed we are, thus helping us to be content. How can we remember our blessings and find further joy in everything God has allotted to us?

Saturday, March 19th - Holiness Is a State of Mind

We recently saw the Russian ice skater, Valieva, after becoming embroiled in a doping scandal, being expected to win Olympic gold but then falling during her final. She was probably the best skater in the Olympics, but her mind was not in the right place and she ended up missing out on a medal. In a similar way, how many of us are capable of incredible things, but do not believe it and so settle for mediocrity? How much harder would we work if we believed we could? How much of our ability to help others and strive for sainthood is in how we perceive ourselves? You can become a saint! You can reach heaven! With God you can achieve anything! Let's get out there and fight the good fight!

The mother of all virtues, and the cornerstone of the Vincentian virtues, is Humility. How can we remain humble but while also believing that sainthood is achievable? How can we understand and appreciate the gifts God has given us, using them for loves sake?

Monday, March 21th - Being Tested in the Fire

It's often said, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going," but how often do you live out this mantra? Do you respond to your challenges or let them overcome you and become stuck in self-doubt? Do you see your obstacles as chances to dive deeper into God's grace, or do you instead say, "woe is me," and become bitter for having to face difficulties? God created you to be stronger and more resilient than you give yourself credit for! Remember, though our circumstances, emotions, and thoughts may change, God is ever-present and ever-persistent in loving, caring, and fighting for us. Difficulties are not without purpose. It does not mean that God always wills it, but it does mean that God's grace can redeem it.

Can you think of a challenge that has help you grow? Do you have any current challenges that you can use for your betterment? When have you met with a neighbor who has inspired you by their fortitude through challenges?

Please keep your eye out for the next 8 reflections.