

Spiritual Advisor Toolkit

Quarterly Reflection Series

January – February – March



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Cincinnati District Council

2022

Introduction

Enclosed are a series of reflections compiled to serve as a tool to guide the Spiritual Advisor, or President, as Vincentians strive towards deeper bonds of faith and fellowship in our work of serving our neighbors in need. While many Conferences meet twice a month, we know the needs vary for any given Conference. The enclosed reflections will be one of the options available to your members. Each section is limited to one sheet, double-sided for ease of use at a given meeting.

Readings

- The Gospel reading will be one which connects to a theme or topic within the overall reflection. On special occasions, the Gospel reading will be from the liturgical feast day being celebrated, or another source.

Reflections

- There is a single reflection format offered for each accompanying reflection that may be adjusted for the needs of the group as the facilitator sees fit.

Reflection Questions

- At least two questions are provided for each overall reflection. The first is more for personal reflection if participants desire. The second question, as well as any remaining, is oriented more towards facilitating group discussion.

Group Prayers

- Conferences are encouraged to utilize the Opening and Closing Prayers from the SVDP U.S. National Council. If your Conference needs additional copies, please contact the Formation and Service Learning Director: Chris Kelley at ckelley@SVDPCincinnati.org or formation@SVDPCincinnati.org. These are available at no cost to the Conference.
- During Beacons of Light, Conferences are encouraged to pray the official “*Radiate Christ*” prayer, composed by Archbishop Dennis Schnurr, from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

Reflections For This Quarter

- I. Feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (January 4, 2023)
- II. Vincentian Virtue: Simplicity
- III. Lenten Reflection

**Feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious
(January 4, 2023)**

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 5:13-16)

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he 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 translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day.

It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah," which is translated Christ.

Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas," which is translated Peter.

Reflection

What is in a name? Can we really imagine how life-changing it would be to suddenly be given a new name – a new identity – by someone we barely knew? For us as Vincentians, the same can be true for own path. While it is disorienting at first to think of ourselves as someone or something different, the reality is we are because we have heard a deeper call within us to be more than just another volunteer to help with a particular project. As Vincentians, we have truly been called to a greater witness of love and ministry in this world than we initially thought possible and we bring our entire selves into this daily work – our gifts, our talents, our hopes and dreams, even our very life experiences. The same can be said for the saint we remember today, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

For much of her early life, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton lived and worshipped as an Anglican. She eventually began to feel a calling to a new life as she explored her relationship with Christ. As she balanced the pull towards our Lord in the Eucharist and the Catholic faith with the social attitudes of her time and city, that call to go out and seek the presence of Christ in those who were suffering never stopped calling her. Eventually, the call grew until she could no longer deny this part of herself, as someone called to embrace that newly revealed identity from the depths of her relationship with Jesus. Because of this, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton converted to

Catholicism and embraced a life with the Sisters of Charity, helping form a new community in Maryland as the first new religious community for women established in the United States. For her, those experiences of life – whether large or small – all helped her see the subtle ways the Lord invites each of us to go deeper in our relationship with Him and use all we have and are to make His presence known.

The story of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is one of perpetually bringing together our many gifts, experiences, and our unique ways of experiencing the Lord. The particular ways in which we can do this that can sometimes be hidden to us at first. Using those gifts and experiences to inform our service to others, helping them to feel the warm embrace offered by our Lord and to feel His true love.

May the witness of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton help guide us in discovering our many gifts and putting them at the service of the Call which we have received, no matter how ordinary they may seem.

Discussion Questions on St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

1. **(*Personal Reflection Question*)** As you reflect on your life experiences, how have you been able to find the presence of the Lord in those times where you least expected? Is there a moment that was challenging/painful that prepared you for ministry?

2. **(*Group Discussion Question*)** Each experience we have in life helps reveal a part of who we are and how we have been made to encounter God's love in the world, what has been one experience which has helped you feel especially loved by God? Is there a particular experience you bring to your ministry?

3. **(*Group Discussion Question*)** As we reflect on St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's life, we realize that she was an average woman of her time, yet she brought all that she had into her work to build up others. What is one gift you see in those around you as you minister (Vincentian or neighbor in need)?

Vincentian Virtue: Simplicity

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 5:3-12)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Reflection

The Lord calls out to us in the Beatitudes about the ways we are meant to live. The Beatitudes share the core ideals for being faithful witnesses to the Christian life despite the chaos of the world. As Vincentians, we can deeply appreciate the Beatitudes for their true simplicity – they give us the truth in no uncertain terms, while communicating the deeper love of God for His people. They invite us into a deeper relationship of trust with the Lord, as well as with each other, and call us to persevere when things are difficult.

The Virtue of Simplicity can be interpreted in the material sense, for example, in not accumulating items we do not need or in overly consuming beyond our immediate concern. Yet the virtue itself is focused more deeply on the bigger picture – communicating the truth of God’s love and call for a full life without hiding it, letting the deeper reality guide us. To live a life of simplicity ultimately means to live our lives in trust and openness to what God is saying, following that guidance ever more directly even when all else can seem uncertain.

When we come to meet our neighbors at their home, we can naturally focus on the material need before us rather than the deeper reality which the Lord invites us to look at. The ways we speak with our neighbor in love and charity can bring about the deeper questions, like “Why do you think you are struggling with this? How do you want to be supported, or grow?” Asking such questions invites both the Vincentian and the neighbor into a deeper relationship of trust,

away from the transactional feel sometimes associated with offering assistance. For a moment, we offer the neighbor the opportunity to express their deepest needs, their truest desires, rather than looking at the fires consuming the world around them. It is into this space that the Vincentian can step and bring the powerful witness present in the truest gift of God's love and compassion, the gift which calls out to them directly and can give them the greatest assistance possible in those dark moments – Hope.

Let us take the time to seek after the deepest parts of ourselves, and others, let us rejoice and be glad that the Lord has given to us a great hope of one day inheriting the Kingdom, and may we come to Him with a heart that has emptied itself in love for each person as we keep the flame of hope alive a little bit longer for those in our midst.

Discussion Questions for the Vincentian Virtue of Simplicity

1. **(Personal Reflection Question)** Part of simplicity is speaking the truth to ourselves and others, yet we can often hide behind a mask or be too harsh on ourselves in life. What is one truth you have come to discover about yourself, and how has that helped you trust more in the Lord?

2. **(Group Discussion Question)** Reflecting on each Beatitude, is there one that speaks to you most in your relationship with yourself? With the Lord? With our neighbors or others?

3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Walking alongside someone, sharing their burdens, and helping carry them is difficult. What helps provide hope and comfort to you in those moments?

Lenten Reflection

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 6:16-18)

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them.

Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

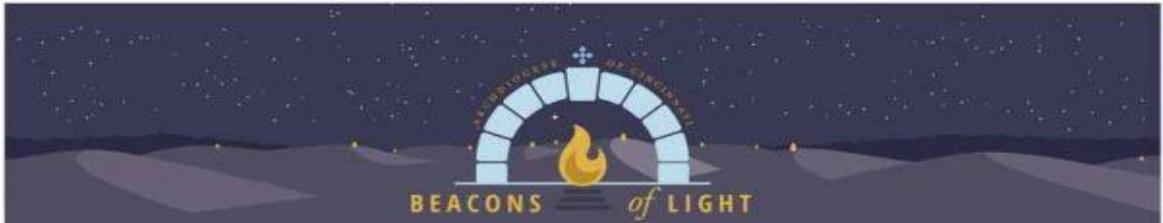
Reflection

As we enter the Lenten season, we are invited to look deep within our hearts to see what it is that we truly are holding and offering to the Lord. Do we genuinely bring the secret needs and desires of our lives to Him? Or do we instead focus more on the surface level aspects, asking the Lord to reward us for something that really isn't going to build us, or those around us, up? Do we ask the Lord who we are truly called to become in this time of reflection and renewal as Christians?

The Lord desires for us to always bring the deepest needs that we have – the most genuine thoughts and longings of our heart – to Him, so that He may journey with us and reveal the great love He has, as well as the great longings He desires for us as Children of God. The finding of God takes moments of quiet peace, a time of surrendering to His will, and opening our minds to the great realm of possibilities that the Lord is asking of us.

Like many Vincentians, the Lord works in the hidden parts of life, behind the scenes, without making a big show of the work that is being done as He works tirelessly to guide those seeking to live the life that we are meant to in a dignified and beautiful way which reveals the gift of every human life – regardless of the external circumstances.

Archdiocese of Cincinnati Prayer for Beacons of Light



RADIATE CHRIST

*Mary,
Mother of the Church
and our Mother,
present our prayer
of thanksgiving to your Son.
Beg from Him the graces we need
to be faithful disciples who follow Him
with enthusiasm and joy.
May our witness to the love of God
bear fruit in our archdiocese,
parishes, homes and hearts.
Teach us to be God's joyful witnesses,
to radiate Christ in all we do,
so that all people might know,
love and follow your Son
through this life
and into the next.*

Amen.



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