

Spiritual Advisor Toolkit

Quarterly Reflection Series

July – August – September



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, these 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

- Offered in two formats, it is preferred to choose only one based on the amount of time offered for reflection and discussion. The Spiritual Advisor is encouraged to invite members to read the reflections, dividing up the longer portions into turns. Citations are offered to further understanding and inspiration, as desired.
 - o The shorter reflection is offered for those gatherings where the spiritual portion of the meeting occurs each time and may be for a shorter time
 - o The extended reflection is offered for gatherings where the primary focus of the meeting itself is on faith and fellowship, or where more significant time is available at the meeting.

Reflection Questions

- At least two questions are provided for each overall reflection. The first is more for personal reflection but may be discussed as someone feels comfortable. The second question is oriented more towards group discussion.

Group Prayers

- Conferences are encouraged to utilize the Opening and Closing Prayers from the National SVDP 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.

This Quarters Set of Reflections

- I. Saint in Focus: Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati – July 4th
- II. Seeking the Lord amid a Stormy Sea
- III. Vincentian Virtues: Humility

Saintly Focus
July 4th – Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati

A reading from Matthew

(Mt. 11:25-30)

Jesus exclaimed: "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to little ones. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. ...Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves".

Biographical/Historical Context of Saint

Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati was born in 1901 in northern Italy, in the town of Turin, to a wealthy family. His mother largely imparted the faith to him through the regular reading of the Gospel. Moved by what he would hear and read in scripture, Pier Giorgio would focus his efforts on the "little ones" of life, ultimately joining the Society of St. Vincent de Paul when he was 17. Upon joining the Society, he remarked "*Jesus visits me every morning in Holy Communion. I repay him with my poor means, visiting the poor... Don't forget that even if the house you visit is very dirty, there you may find Jesus.*"¹ In his final months of life, he contracted polio and suffered heavily in his paralysis; and when he died, hundreds within the community poured out to pay their respects. Many of the townspeople would later come to petition for his Canonization and on May 20, 1990, he was canonized by Pope Saint John Paul II.

Short Reflection

In the life of Pier Giorgio Frassati we see there are no bounds to the love which God has for His people. When we take a deeper look at our lives in the light of Scripture, we can see the invitation which the Lord has for us and the life to which He has called us to live out. For many of us, as Vincentians, we are called to go out into the homes of our neighbors and be that presence of Christ to them, truly loving them in a world which dares not to truly love. We may come upon a home or a neighbor who shocks us by the very life they live, yet it is in those moments where we also hear our Lord call out to us, saying: "Do you love me?" or "I will give you rest". We may never fully know, see, or realize on even a small level the impact which our daily efforts of visiting our neighbors in need at their homes will have, yet, when we come to the end of our lives, we pray it will have been as true of a witness as that of Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati.

(Proceed to Reflection Questions)

Extended Reflection

When we dedicate our lives to humble service, we reflect a life centered upon God's own love for His people. It is a life which challenges us at our very core and makes us question who we are in this world, what we have to offer, and also how we can become something so much greater than we could ever imagine in life; it is also an

¹ The Manual, page 94.

invitation to invite the people we encounter as part of that journey to experience the same deepened understanding of their own lives.

The life of Bl. Pier Giorgio serves as a beacon to us because he captures a life completely centered upon a simple love for Christ. Being nourished by the words of Scripture as a child, Pier Giorgio came to know who Jesus was to him and the life to which he was being called to live out in humble service. His life centered upon the two ways in which Jesus makes Himself known to us most deeply – in the Word and the Eucharist – yet he began to slowly see the ways in which Jesus comes to show himself in those around us through that dedicated service of encounter. Despite his youth, Pier Giorgio came to see the very face of his Savior in the presence of every person he encountered, no matter what their situation was. Regardless of the life that someone lived, Pier Giorgio was able to be another Christ in their presence as well, seeing them with the eyes which the Lord sees someone. He invited them into a life of being loved and respected for who they were on their deepest level. How true this is of the Vincentian life – of our own home visits and encounters with neighbors – we are called in our work to do the same as Pier Giorgio did.

These ways of seeing and acting are not solely meant to be lived out in a given moment or when we encounter the life of a neighbor in need; rather they are meant to be brought into how we live our lives with all of those around us so that we may truly grow in that deepened, more personal relationship with Jesus. As a typical teen, Pier Giorgio did many of the same things that his friends were doing, such as going hiking and camping with friends or asking his parents for money – albeit he would give that money to those in need as he met them. The reality is that sainthood is not something “other”, it is a lived part of our lives and simply means that we have become the version of ourselves that God largely had in mind when He created us, that we are able to reflect something of His saving love into the world for others to encounter and potentially be transformed by, and that we do so for each individual on the road.

At times we will struggle and fall, yet this is honestly part of the life for one who is truly yoked to another, in being yoked to our neighbor we also know we are not alone when we hit the ground beneath our feet. The life yoked to God will always stand more firmly against the storms of life, finding the support needed to be picked up once more in the struggle to persevere in the storm which we are faced with, just as Pier Giorgio found strength in both the Lord and all those whom he loved like Christ until his final days. May we have the courage to yolk ourselves to the Lord in all things, to find that comfort and rest which will strengthen us for the road ahead, and may we come to see all those we encounter as a true face of Christ in the world today.

Reflection Questions

1. To take the yoke upon us with Christ is often a difficult task. How do you see yourself taking on the yoke each day? How do you come to find rest in the Lord?
2. What are some pieces of wisdom you have come to learn from your encounters with the “little ones” of God?

Seeking The Lord amid a Stormy Sea

A Reading from Luke

(Lk. 8:22-25; NRSV-CE)

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who this is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?"

Short Reflection

In a short span of time, our lives have been tossed around like a ship caught amid a stormy sea with a pandemic that doesn't end, and the start of a reality in parish life. The trials we have faced have been no easy task to overcome and persevere through, and once strong bastions of our lives have seemingly shifted in life. As Christians, we are invited to turn to the Lord in our times of need, not to bring the small problems or petty concerns which we may have, but to cry out from the depths of our hearts and place before Him our deepest concerns or anxieties, to ask that He intercede when we have grown most fearful of what will happen and cannot see the light ahead. Calling out to our Lord with such a deep voice breaks through the chains of the storm which normally bind us, freeing us from the grips of the sea and the wind to bring us into the calm sailing which Jesus brings about. Our concerns may not always be fully alleviated, but we do gain the respite we need if only we turn to our Lord with one voice, as one community in these trying times. May we have the humility and trust to cast our concerns upon the Lord and follow the pathways He calls us to.

(Proceed to Reflection Questions)

Extended Reflection:

Our Gospel passage calls to mind many images of the Christian life, and really of a deeply Vincentian life. Each day we enter a world that can seemingly feel like a boat being tossed side to side by each wave or gust of wind, not knowing where we will end up or if we will even be able to make it through the storm. In the moment, we may grow anxious and fearful of all the possibilities which are before us, becoming paralyzed, not knowing what the perfect response is in a given moment, or fearing what the next storm will be. Throughout all of this though, the disciples are an example to turn to as guides for our response. The disciples feel these same concerns and anxieties, yet they also know there is a person in their midst who can help them in some way, so they cry out to Jesus, our Lord, ever present with them. They cry out from the depths of their hearts to speak of the truest and most real needs they have in their life, bringing them before our Lord to ask that He do something, anything, to help them get through this trying time. How often can we relate to this?

Our lives have been in the grip of the storm that is a worldwide pandemic, which never seems to fully be resolved. Our lives are in the midst of great change brought on

by the rapid rise of inflation, housing, and gas costs which stretch every penny we have, and now the very rock of many of our faith lives, our parish community may also feel like it is about to go through change with Beacons of Light. How do we respond to this?

We are reminded, rather pointedly, that the Lord is with us in even the seemingly most trying of times, helping to calm the storms of the sea and wind which threaten us, yet we must also learn to trust. Each storm we face in life, no matter how prepared or grounded we might be, is an opportunity to truly trust in the Lord to guide us through. When we turn to Him with our truest needs, in humility, knowing we cannot tackle everything ourselves, showing Him the crosses we carry, He speaks the words of Truth and of Power, calming the storms – even just a bit – so we may carry on with our lives and discover the pathways which we need to walk upon. These are times of humility and, ironically, of great certainty because we are invited to join more deeply into that relationship with Jesus Christ and bring the beauty of that relationship into the lives of those around us in the often subtle, slumbering ways which are just waiting to be awoken.

As Vincentians, we also bring these truths of Jesus' presence into the lives of our neighbors in need, helping them to discover the calm once more within that sea of storms. They come to see that they are loved because we are able to reflect how much the Lord has loved us as well, how He has been with us in those storms which we have faced and cried out for help in, and how He simply wishes for us to reach out to Him, speaking the truth of our lived experience, inviting Him into that moment so He may also speak words of authority over the storms. When He speaks those words of authority, he breaks the tyrannical cycle of the moment and restores to us some of our strength and power, helping us to see a clear sky which reveals our deeper dignity and worth, offering the chance to see with the eyes by which He sees us.

Finally, we also come to trust in God through these experiences with our neighbors as we help guide and accompany them through the storms as that physical presence, as those hands and feet of Christ in the world, because we realize the humble love that our communities can have for one another when someone is in need – that we are never truly alone in this life. When there is assistance to be needed, we will often find another Christ in our midst who will step forward to assist, softly speaking words of authority to calm the storm.

May we come to know the peace and love of Jesus Christ more deeply each and every day, taking these stormy times to build our relationship with Him, trusting all will work out, for He is the one with the true authority and power, and if we center our lives upon Him, then we shall come to see the storms ease.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways have I been challenged to trust in life? Am I anxious or fearful about something in life or the road ahead? How might I invite the Lord into that storm?
2. In what ways do my encounters with our neighbors in need help me to see the face of Christ anew?

Vincentian Virtue Humility

A reading from Luke

(Lk.14:7-11)

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,; and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Short Reflection

We often experience the temptation to think of ourselves in certain ways, yet do we truly notice the gifts we have been given and which are often meant to be poured out in service to others? Our life as Vincentians is a constant pouring out of ourselves for the needs of our neighbors, and, in so doing, we become closer to seeing the face of Christ in all those whom we encounter. This can often mean we are brought to see our own imperfections, sometimes in stark ways. Yet, we are called not to focus only on the imperfections but instead to highlight how our Lord uses even our own frailties, our own shortcomings, to do wondrous things for His people. All that we do in our lives is a gift, one which continuously showcases the greatness of our Lord as well as the care and concern He has for each person. If we stay humble, recognizing the Lord for the great work which he does in our lives and keeping Him at the center of all we do, all we are, then perhaps we too will one day receive that invitation to be "Friend", taking our place in a seat higher than we had ever thought possible.

(Proceed to Reflection Questions)

Extended Reflection

Living out the Vincentian life is no easy task, as it requires a constant pouring out of ourselves in service to our Lord and to our neighbor, yet through that journeying out of our own selves we come to grow in our own humility, and by extension, our closeness with a truly humble Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Growing in genuine humility is often tested by competing ideas of what is humility and trying to keep a humble view which maintains our own sense of self-worth or dignity. Our rule defines this Vincentian virtue as "*accepting the truth about our frailties, gifts, talents and charism, yet knowing that all that God gives us is for others and that we can achieve nothing of eternal value without His Grace.*"²

On some level we know that we have been given certain gifts and skills in life with which help us to do great things, to build up those around us, but the central notion with humility is a question: Do we realize our work is to build up the Kingdom of

² The Rule (Part 1, Article 2.5.1)

God and help to make the presence of Christ known more clearly to ourselves and to others?

Humility is not the downplaying of the gifts we have been entrusted with; instead, it is more closely related to putting everything in its proper place, helping others to truly see what is a gift from God, and is distinct from anything we could do on our own. Humility recognizes at its deepest levels what belongs to God and what gives praise to Him, and then clears the path of all that which may block such a view.

Our blessed founder, Frederic Ozanam, once wrote about the great need in life to focus on building up lives of virtue and keeping the glory of God at the center of all we do, not focusing on that which is done by human hands or thinking but what is borne of the work brought by the workings of God's grace in our lives and efforts. Frederic wrote:

"It is not a fragile boat we should employ to travel the earth; they are wings, two wings which bear the angels up: faith and charity. Places which have fallen empty must be filled; in the place of genius which has failed us, grace must direct us; we must be courageous, persevering, loving unto death, fighting to the end. Let us not count on an easy victory: God has made it difficult for us so as to make our crowns more glorious."³

All that we do is ultimately meant to glorify God, even the small trials we face which help to refine the gifts which He has given to us serve as opportunities in which we may come to glorify our Lord, and, ever united in faith and charity, our work will come to know no bounds. In times of great need or upheaval, our humility helps to keep us grounded and know that together we will have the gifts we need to support one another through these changing times, supporting us in staying true to our vocational call. May our focus always remain on the love of God being poured out and see how He has entrusted gifts to each of us which help us to work together in building up the Kingdom in our time.

Reflection Questions

1. Have there been times in your own life where your "genius" guided you to an unfavorable outcome? How do you invite God's grace into those moments to keep you humble?
2. What is your definition of humility? How do you try to live it out? How can we, as a community and friends, support you in living that out?

³ P. 68 (Letter to Léonce Curnier) in Frederic Ozanam, *A Life in Letters* translated by Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M. (1986).

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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