

Spiritual Advisor Toolkit

Quarterly Reflection Series

October – November – December



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

- 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 if participants desire. The second question is oriented more towards 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. Renewing our Roots: Reflecting on our Founding Spirit
- II. Catholic Social Teaching: Subsidiarity
- III. Reflection on the Rule: Dedication to the Church

Renewing our Roots: Reflecting on our Founding Spirit

A reading from Matthew

(Mt. 26:6-13)

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Short Reflection

Our Lord invites each of us to reflect upon the heart we bring to our moments of ministry and encounter. When we encounter another person, ultimately, we are focused on the relationship we are being invited into with the person before us and with our Lord in their midst. Our call as Christians is most alive when we bring about a gift of ourselves – our own time and our talents, the gifts which God gave us to help build one another up in this life. If we are to truly aid our brothers and sisters in need, to truly see them as another Christ, we must also come to see our own selves reflected in Jesus. We must come with hearts after the Lord and seek not to cast doubt upon those before us. Blessed Frederic and St. Vincent, our spiritual and primary founder and patron, remind us of the call to truly know those we serve. If we are to ever hope to give the help which is truly needed in this world, we must not keep our eyes fixed on the "ointment", focusing on what was wasted, rather we look towards what has been gifted to us by their life. As we come to enter into our neighbors' experiences, we enter their journey as a companion, not a momentary pitstop, enabling us to more fully love them and see Christ grow more deeply into our lives as well.

Extended Reflection

As we reflect on our scripture today, we are invited to reflect more deeply upon those words of our Lord: "*Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.*" How often do we meditate upon these words, and our own lives as Vincentians in light of them?

Often it can seem like we constantly are encountering the same neighbors in need on a regular basis, with the same concerns each time – perhaps it is the same Duke Energy payment that is needed, or they once again are telling a story of a broken-down car in need of repair, perhaps they are still behind on rent payments. For us on the home visit, it can be rather frustrating, and in those moments we may end up turning to our neighbor with the question of the disciples: "Why this waste?" Yet, our Lord invites us to take a step back and reflect upon those moments more intimately, for

they are opportunities to see His face in another, to see His life and wounds in theirs. To put it another way, we are offered the chance to reflect more deeply on our call as Vincentians, walking with our neighbors for the long haul – in relationship and trust, in true accompaniment with one another.

Bl. Frederic often remarked that to truly understand and appreciate the unique gifts someone might have, we must spend time among them, in the same cold and drafty home or kneeling at the bedside of one who is sick. It is in those moments, of truly pouring ourselves out, and that emptying of self like the jar of oil in the woman's hands, where we pave the way for Christ to most fully be recognized in the other.

To walk with someone and truly give them what is needed, that help going beyond the immediate moment, which speaks to the soul, means to be an equal to them, to see them not as something other, but as the Lord sees – as part of Himself. Each of us have been uniquely crafted by God and this reality helps to unite us knowing that each of us is an intentional gift to this world by the Lord. As Christians, we are even more deeply united by our shared baptism into Christ through those cleansing waters of His love. How then, can we truly turn away from the Lord in these moments of invitation to encounter and see Him present before us.

St. Vincent de Paul, as one of the spiritual patrons of our Society, helps reveal that such a thing is possible. He often grew frustrated by what he saw on all sides – those looking to assist, and those in need of assistance. Despite this frustration, he never lost sight of the true need of the person before him and strived to love them in the way Christ would love them. St. Vincent understood that each person has their own path, their own way of the Cross, which sometimes needs another person to help them carry it for a bit. The core of the encounter, for him, was to simply be present to someone who was in need, regardless of what could be offered, and let the Lord bring what is needed most into that moment.

The love we are called to is not instantaneous – St. Vincent and Bl. Frederic knew this – yet much like our own love for Christ or one another, it builds slowly over repeated encounters – responding yes to that invitation to be there once more with them, to become that trusted friend who loves them without condition. We do not require our neighbor to love as we do; we simply hope, as Frederic and Vincent hoped, that our love may pierce through the darkness in their life and shine more brightly with the gift of Christ's presence.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do I count the “cost” with myself, with others, or even with Christ himself? What are my priorities, and what might be God's priority in my life right now?
2. Since we are all called to show the presence of Christ to our neighbors, how then do we also see Christ present in their lives and current situations? How have we seen Christ present in our fellow Vincentians?

Catholic Social Teaching **Subsidiarity**

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 16:13-19)

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, ... "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Catholic Social Teaching Insight¹

The core idea of subsidiarity is that local people and communities, not larger organizations and governments, should be the ones that are equipped to address their issues, and guide themselves in growing towards their own fulfillment.

Short Reflection

In our Vincentian lives, we often live out a life centered on subsidiarity without ever noticing. We see it with our neighbors when we help them to discover the power to affect their lives within themselves, or when the Conference entrusts the decision making over a particular neighbor's assistance to the member who visited; we know if we need help in meeting their needs, there is a bigger community behind us which will support us in helping one another to truly become who we were meant to be in life.

In our Gospel, Christ bestows upon Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. In so doing, Jesus entrusts Peter with the authority needed to provide for all in his care. As we listen to those closest to the issue, we too lean on one another to tackle what lies before us, and we will often find a better outcome for all slowly begin to emerge – one which respects each of our own gifts and identity, while also helping us to more fully live out the vision which God has for our lives. To truly have the greatest impact in someone's life, we know that the change must come from within and must be like a faithful partner and trusted friend, not a distant authority – we know true growth and lasting change is found in that sense of relationship and love with one another, formed by the meeting of two equals.

Expanded Reflection

Let us think about what we truly prefer: if we have the option, wouldn't it be nice if someone simply told us what to do, perhaps even all the steps to go about doing it, and have everything work out? On the surface this approach seems to be wonderful – after all, we don't bear the responsibility for when something goes wrong, nor do we need to

¹ Paragraph 79 in *Quadragesimo Anno (Forty Years)* by Pope Pius XI: https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html; Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1883.

spend much time and effort ourselves in tackling the problem before us; we simply do as we are told, and if it doesn't work out, then so be it. Yet, our Lord is giving almost the exact opposite response to Peter in our Gospel passage today.

In our reading, we see that Peter has been given the true authority from Heaven; what he (and thus the Church) decides is bound in Heaven as well as on Earth. It is a great responsibility to share in with our Lord, and in no way does it replace the Lord's ability to act in our lives; instead, it is a sign of the great trust that we have been given in the task of the building up of the Kingdom. We can tackle the problems of this world knowing our efforts will be respected by the "higher authority" and that our Lord will be there to support us. In many ways, this is what we mean when we dive into the idea of subsidiarity; our Lord has entrusted those who are closest to the issues of their day with the responsibility to tackle them as best we can, and for those issues which are much larger, we know there is one greater to whom we can turn to, spiritually and practically.

When our neighbor cries out to us in need, it is a local Vincentian who reaches out to shoulder the struggle alongside them, knowing there is not just one person helping, but an entire Conference and parish community that stands beside them in this effort, ready to assist in the ways seen as most prudent or effective for the need before them. The Conference trusts in the wisdom of the visiting Vincentian to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, listening carefully to the need to find the deeper, truer means of resolution. As they make their decision, the Conference bands together to offer its insight and ensure the resources are dedicated to the one in deepest need.

In approaching the circumstances of life in this way, we invite the Lord to shower His graces upon those who need it to bring about a lasting change which is true to the lives or experiences of those who need it most. It also spurs within us a drive to find creative solutions to meet the needs of our neighbors, and advocate more adequately on their behalf for lasting change. We do not give up our responsibility to assist one another lightly, and even when we invite a larger group to assist – whether that is through our District Council, a civic agency, or some non-profit/religious group – we do so as an active partner, never truly abdicating the voice we share with our neighbor in need.

May our efforts each and every day bring together those who are needed most to resolve the issues which plague our neighbors, and may we always be faithful to that bond of trust which the Lord has given to us when He bestowed the keys upon Peter.

Reflection Questions

1. Within my own life, what are some ways I show subsidiarity? How might that look as a spouse, a parent, a Vincentian, a parishioner, etc.? Are some ways easier than others?
2. How do we understand community and in what ways do we bring it together to offer lasting help? What are some creative ways we have tackled the needs of our neighbors in a just way?

Reflection on the Rule **Dedication to the Church**

(Part I, Articles 5.1-5.3)

A Reading from John

(Jn. 17: 20-23; NABRE)

“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.”

From the Manual

“The Church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ throughout the world and to make all people partakers in the redemption and salvation. All activities of the Society aim at extending the Reign of God, whether these activities relate to the spiritual growth and formation of the individual Vincentian, or to the corporate Body of the Society as such, or to the acts of mercy and justice performed in the name of Jesus Christ. Members of the Society are distinguished by loyalty to their Christian faith and to the discipline of Catholic Life. Vincentians are faithful to the Church and to its leadership... Vincentians always give witness to their faith and to Christ.”²

Short Reflection

Our calling as Catholics, and Vincentians especially, is to give witness to the world around us about the saving message of Jesus Christ – to respond to that invitation from Christ to be led into a life of holiness leading to Eternal Life. The ways we do this often take different shapes depending on where we find ourselves, yet it is always seen through how we live out our faith in the day to day. At other times, it may be seen most notably in our visiting with a neighbor in need or in gathering donations at the parish, or we may see it come forward in the simple conversations we have with a coworker or a person next to us at the store. Each encounter we have is an opportunity to get to know another person and to invite them into that relationship of love, to show them the love which Christ showed us first. We live lives which are deeply interconnected with one another, and it is through this mystical connection to our neighbor and to Christ where we come to see ourselves as part of this greater body – where we, hopefully, begin to see ourselves as the embodiment of Church, which is far more than just a building or space. It is a communal relationship with those around us.

In each moment, we show our dedication to Christ in living a life of hope which says to the world around us that we are not alone in this, and it is in our unity together as one Church, one Conference, one Society that we are able to make a most lasting change for our neighbors' lives, and, perhaps, our own, with the help of Jesus.

² The Manual, page 35.

Extended Reflection

What stands at the core of the Vincentian experience? In truth, it is the person of Jesus Christ, the one who offers us the greatest gift possible: eternal salvation! All He desires, above all else, is to bring as many people as possible into that deeper union with Himself, with God. We are invited into that work through our baptism, where we were adopted into God's "household", if you will, and forever linked to Jesus Christ by virtue of the sacraments we have received. With this unbreakable bond, we have the great ability to reveal, and be, Christ's presence to others when we meet them, when we go about gathering what is needed, or when advocating on someone's behalf.

In living out the gift of Christ's personal relationship with us, each of us speaks with a voice that is never fully just our own, for when we speak, we speak also with the voice of the Church in many ways because it, too, shares in that mystical voice of Christ, and speaks across the generations, calling out to every person with a sense of sure and certain hope. Standing united as one Church, one Society, as one body, we know that all things are possible because of the presence of Christ within us, and the relationship He has maintained across the history of the Church - always present with us as a faithful spouse, a loving parent, a wise brother.

Each day, we venture out into the society around us and into our neighborhoods to make known the love that Christ and His Church has for the world, for the seemingly lost and forgotten of society today; it is in the Vincentian approach where we stand firmly as a witness that no person is ever truly forgotten in this life - we remember their names, their faces, their dignity. When a call is made, it is the Vincentian who will answer, and behind them stands the Conference and the Society, and their Church. When the world looks at our faith and our Church, wondering "What good has your Church done lately?", the Vincentian can firmly respond: 'We have served our Lord and our master in feeding our neighbor, in offering a bed to sleep on, keeping the lights on, in assisting them with their medication; all done without thought to cost, all for the sake of Christ who loved me first.'

As we strive to remain united, to show our love and speak as one, we help to magnify the presence of the Lord at work in our own lives as well. We help our hearts and minds, indeed our very souls, to reflect upon the way the Lord is at work within us and to notice a deeper union. It can be difficult at times to remain dedicated to our Church its leaders, yet as part of a greater body, we must do so if we are to truly proclaim the message of Jesus to a hurting world. Through the hardships and difficulties we may experience we show how unconditional God's love is and how He wishes to share it with all.

May our voices cry out together in this world with one voice, proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that we are a part of His body, now and forever.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you see yourself as truly having been adopted by God?
2. How do you often see your dedication to Church, beyond just the ministries or organizations you are involved with, being lived out?

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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