

Spiritual Advisor Toolkit

Quarterly Reflection Series

April – May – June



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Cincinnati District Council

2023

Introduction

Enclosed are a series of reflections created to serve as a tool to guide the Spiritual Advisor, and/or President, as Vincentians strive towards deeper bonds of faith and fellowship in our work of serving our neighbors in need. The enclosed reflections for use at your Conference meetings are 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 offered for each accompanying reflection set 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/private reflection if participants desire. The second question, as well as any others, are oriented more towards facilitating group discussion. Facilitators are free to develop their own questions if desired.

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 and is included in this packet.

Reflections For This Quarter

- I. An Easter Reflection on our Vincentian Life
- II. Feast of St. Louise de Marillac (May 9, 2023)
- III. Safeguarding the Sacred Heart

An Easter Reflection on our Vincentian Life

A Reading from John

(Jn. 20:1-9)

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him."

So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in.

When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

Reflection

Gone are the days of fasting and penance; now is the time for great rejoicing! Our Lenten sacrifices have given way to the bounty of new life and the joy found only in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are once more freed of the shackles which have bound us, able to venture forth into the world bringing that joyful, life-giving love which Christ has poured out for each and every one of us. In some ways, we become like Mary of Magdala, in shock and bewilderment that the tomb has been emptied and our Lord is gone. We may become like Simon Peter and the disciple who wonder if this can really be true, afraid to enter into the tomb – we know in our hearts what this moment could mean. Our Lord has truly risen to new life and all that was promised has finally come to pass; we too have a chance at a new way of life rooted in deep union with God.

We see in Christ's generous giving of Himself for our sake the lengths to which God will go to bring His people to new life. No cost is ever truly too great for our Lord when the lives and souls of our brothers and sisters are on the line. The same is true in many ways for us as Vincentians – we constantly yearn to give nourishment to those who are seeking after the precious gift of life, and there is a part of us who wishes to give all that we have to help the person that is before us reaching out for a loving hand.

Our lives as Vincentians are often spent hidden, out of the spotlight that so often characterizes our world today, because we ultimately seek after the heart of every person we encounter. We desire to reveal to them that deeper love and dignity which Jesus reveals to us in the Resurrection and to which He invites us into. In our scripture passage today, we – and our neighbors – see an opportunity come out of our own tombs into a newness of life. Our worries are not so much about the passing momentary need of someone, but instead realizing their deeper dignity and looking upon the presence of Christ standing before us. When we give

ourselves brief moments to truly encounter the Lord, like those gathered in the garden with the tomb, we come to see the many small ways in which God brings about all that is truly needed for our flourishing – often from places we never quite expected.

Emerging from Lent into our new lives, we come to realize as well that nothing which is freely given to the Lord is ever really lost; rather, it is multiplied hundreds of times over in ways that we could never even think of. When we put those gifts to the service of our neighbors, we come to find that the hand of Divine Providence truly builds upon each of those natural opportunities we experience to love and be loved.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** As we move from Lent into Easter, do you identify more with the one who enters the tomb, or the one who stands outside in wonder/fear? In what ways might you be called to experience the joy of the resurrection this Easter?

2. **(Group Discussion Question)** Reflecting on the Easter season, what are some ways you can bring the joy of Christ's resurrection into your encounters with neighbors? With fellow Vincentians?

3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Divine Providence can often feel a bit elusive. We wish it happened on our timeline, yet it often builds upon the moments that seem to naturally fall into place. Have you ever seen Divine Providence appear in your work with a neighbor? What happened, and how might it have helped you live out that call to love more deeply?

Feast of St. Louise de Marillac (May 9, 2023)

A Reading from John

(Jn. 14:27-31a)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me tell you, 'I am going away and I will come back to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe. I will no longer speak much with you, for the ruler of the world is coming. He has no power over me, but the world must know that I love the Father and that I do just as the Father has commanded me."

Reflection

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you", Jesus' words to us from the Gospel cut straight to the heart of our Vincentian lives, for we know the only true rest and peace in life ultimately comes from the Lord, in whom all our needs are ultimately taken care of. When we go out into the homes or onto the streets of our neighborhoods, we do not pretend to bring the passing peace of the world which can easily disappear in a split moment; instead, we aim to bring the deep love of our Lord and help connect our neighbor to the One who loves them infinitely more than can ever be truly expressed. We go out into the lives of our neighbors, in many ways, because we have come to recognize the deep love that Christ has shown to us first and to be the messenger of that love in the world, to be an advocate of God's love and Spirit.

St. Louise de Marillac, whose feast day we honor, was someone passionately after the love of Jesus in her own life. This was a love which compelled her to seek a life dedicated to God from an early age, completely obedient to the promptings which God sent to her – even when those desires of our Lord conflicted with the desires of St. Louise's own heart at times. Her initial rejection from entering religious life would turn into a life of deeply devoted motherhood, caring for her son's specialized needs, and helping her more intimately understand the needs of those she would come to serve in her future Vincentian life. She found the true peace which Christ had offered her and channeled it into the work she did around her community, helping bring stability and peace to others whose lives had been greatly challenged by their own encounters with poverty and rejection.

As we remember St. Louise, a woman with such peace in her own heart, we see someone following the promptings of the Lord even when they take winding turns. We come to realize all good things in life are ultimately taken care of by our loving God. even if we have a hard time seeing the straightened path through those crooked lines. No experience we have is ever wasted if we are following the one who has the true power and authority, the one who has been sent by the Father to advocate for us and sanctify our world in ways great and small. The Lord gave St. Louise the clarity which she desperately sought and the reassurance that her time as a mother would come to bear much fruit, that she would one day live out the vows of her heart to serve in a life of poverty and have a community at her side doing the same. The

vision she experienced deep within the stirring of her soul, prompted her to seek after Christ's peace and invite those around her into that world, eventually taking on ministry to the most neglected of her community so they could know true love and peace.

May the coming weeks and months be times where we fully allow the peace of Christ to grow in our own hearts, as well as in the hearts of those we encounter. May our visits into the very heart of our neighbors' lives – into their homes – be a chance for life-changing peace within all who dwell in this world with us, and may the life of St. Louise de Marillac continue to be a reminder of the call to invite all we meet into the loving embrace of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** As a Vincentian, we often experience many competing desires of the heart to help our neighbors. Where do you find your connection to Jesus strongest? How does it help you maintain your inner peace in the world, or do you feel you need help sometimes? How can your fellow Vincentians help you with this?

2. **(Group Discussion Question)** God is often said to draw straight with crooked lines. How have you seen this occur within your own life, or within the work you go about with our neighbors and fellow Vincentians?

3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Nothing is ever wasted when it is united with God. All of our experiences have influence in how we assist our neighbors. How have your own previous life experiences been surprisingly helpful as a Vincentian? Are there experiences you wish you had earlier, or need to have?

Safeguarding the Sacred Heart

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 11:25-30)

At that time 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. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.

"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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Reflection

As Vincentians, we strive to love with the love of Christ. We see that love as more than simple material assistance, and more as a deeper, more peaceful, and restful presence for those who labor and are burdened.

Our neighbors often work ceaselessly to protect their lives – making sure their families have food to eat, clothing to wear, and a home to shelter them. We see these efforts revealed in the moment neighbors give us a call, or when we meet them on a Home Visit. Our neighbors, however, are searching for much more than just the material help. They are hoping for a caring neighbor who will help them create and ensure a safe environment for their families – physically, spiritually, and emotionally. They come to us acknowledging that they are vulnerable. They trust us to help them through, shepherding them to a life more alive and with their dignity more respected.

Jesus urged St. Margaret Mary Alacoque¹ to promote a devotion to his Sacred Heart. He offered the world, through St. Margaret Mary, his heart – the resting place of which our Gospel speaks and an opportunity to unite our heart to his own. St. Margaret Mary herself was a victim of financial abuse. After her father's death, a relative took over her family's finances and refused to provide for Margaret's family. Her family suffered years of poverty. During this time,

¹ St. Margaret Mary Alacoque's last name is pronounced like ah-la-coke.

she was consoled by the Eucharist, by the love of Christ made manifest. Our neighbors hope for the same consolation, to experience the true and pure love of the Sacred Heart.

Safeguarding the dignity and rights of all persons and empowering vulnerable individuals and communities is loving as Christ has loved. Christ offers a powerful statement in his reason for his offer of rest, “for I am meek and humble of heart”. These virtues may seem opposed to protection and provision, yet Christ knows that they are exactly what we need. Safeguarding is loving meekly and humbly. Loving with humility means acknowledging when we might be placing people in vulnerable situations and working to prevent that. Loving meekly means listening to and understanding our neighbors before we attempt to problem solve.

May we take a moment to let ourselves rest in the love of the Sacred Heart, then to share that love with those around us.


Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** The Sacred Heart of Jesus has long been a Vincentian devotion. It speaks to that pure love of Christ and the desire for each soul to be loved. In what ways have you felt deeply and personally loved by Christ in your life as a Vincentian?

2. **(Group Discussion Question)** Each of us is called to honor and protect the dignity of others, especially those who are vulnerable – including children, elderly, those experiencing poverty, etc. Who do you see and understand to be the most vulnerable around you? Are there some who may be vulnerable yet hidden amongst us?


3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Continuing from the previous question, what are some little ways you try to honor and show the dignity of our neighbors, or others, when you encounter them?

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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