

Spiritual Advisor Toolkit

Quarterly Reflection Series

July – August – September



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. **The required Safeguard Reflection to fulfill the ongoing education requirement is noted below explicitly and has a star next to it.**

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 reading 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, which is included in this packet.

Reflections For This Quarter

I. **Feast of Sts. Louis and Zelig Martin** (July 12)



II. **Feast of the Transfiguration** (August 6) – Quarterly Safeguarding Reflection

III. **Feast of Bl. Frederic Ozanam** (Sept. 9)

Feast of Sts. Louis and Zelig Martin (July 12, Parents of St. Therese of Lisieux)

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 10:1-7)

Jesus summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. The names of the Twelve Apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus.

Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Reflection

Many of us spend our entire lives wondering about our vocation and whether we are truly called to a particular way of life, yet in our Gospel passage, Christ specifically calls out to each disciple and reveals the path that He has for each person – even going so far as to grant them His authority when necessary. This call to discipleship comes with a great sense of humility when given authority, yet what is given to them is not so clearly understood at first. The power the disciples receive upon entering their vocation is not the power to command others; instead, it is the ability to bring about genuine healing in the lives of those they meet in their faithful witnessing of their vocation. When we think of our work as Vincentians, we strive to also be ministers of reconciliation – to bring Christ's healing and hope into the lives of each neighbor we speak with, as well as within the lives of our fellow Vincentians. Our work is to seek out the person that is in our midst, who may sometimes feel estranged or lost, similar to the "lost sheep" wandering in search of a place to rest or call home in safety once more. When our neighbor is truly found – when they are seen for who they are and not their situation – they come to hear the fateful words of Christ spoken to them: "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand", not in judgement, but in a moment of deep hope and love.

These words which are offered by our ministry – that the Kingdom is finally at hand – come into the picture in many ways. It can be in a simple glance or a kind word, such as when our neighbor hears that there will be help coming their way to tide them over during this difficulty, or it can be in simply helping them discern a pathway forward for themselves and their family for what is coming next. In these moments of deep uncertainty, the Vincentian brings the Christian message of hope and love into the darkest reaches, casting out the fears which pollute the heart and mind, and allows the person to be completely transformed by this seemingly chance encounter – all because they listened to the words of the Spirit guiding them

in that moment and allowed themselves to be part of the gifts which the Spirit used to reach out in compassion and love.

The call to share genuine love with those around us and seek out a ministry of true healing is also part of why we honor the parents of St. Therese of Lisieux: Sts. Louis and Zelig Martin. These two saints' lives were ones completely dedicated to discipleship grounded in the love and healing of Jesus; to being those ministers of healing and discernment for their own neighbors as well as one another – especially in the modern era. The saintly Martins were quietly connected to the work of the Vincentian family, and met while earnestly seeking after the Lord in their lives. Louis was a lifelong member of the Society and continually reached out by assisting his neighbors in need through his local Conference, and one day, as he was walking along the road, he crossed a bridge at the same time as Zelig. For her part, Zelig found herself walking over this bridge after having applied to the local Daughters of Charity convent and being turned away. As she passed Louis, Zelig heard within her a voice saying “*Behold the one I have prepared for you*”. Three months later, the two were married and their love brought about saintly children who continue to inspire others nearly two centuries on, bringing Christ’s healing presence to many who feel wounded or hurt in life – true Vincentians hidden in our midst.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** St. Zelig’s account of meeting her future husband is grounded in the words “*Behold the one I have prepared for you*”. What has been a sign that helped you see a fuller picture of the vocation you’ve been called to?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** Christ gives the disciples the authority to cast out that which is unclean – the things which keep a person from living their best lives rooted in God’s presence. As a Vincentian, in what ways do you help our neighbors, or each other, clear a path closer to God in the visit?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Have you ever experienced a moment of healing for yourself or others as part of your Vincentian life? How do you and others come to see that “the Kingdom of heaven is at hand”?



Feast of the Transfiguration:
Seeing our Neighbors Experience with New Eye
(August 6)

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 1:18-23)

Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother, John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Reflection

As we reflect in our gathering, we reflect upon what it means to truly understand who someone is in this world, since appearances can often hide the truth at times. The Transfiguration does not change who Jesus is; it reveals Himself more fully. Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus most often in His humanity. We see a man who was born into experiences of poverty, who hungered and thirsted, who experienced the joys of friendship and the sorrow of abandonment, and who ultimately died on the Cross. Amidst all of this, the true nature of who Christ is was slowly revealed over time, and even then, only to those whom He trusted most. The account of the Transfiguration reveals to Peter, James, and John (as well as to us) Christ's divinity. The same Jesus who is the suffering servant is also the "beloved Son" of the Holy Trinity. The Transfiguration, however, does change how Peter, James, and John perceive Jesus.

In a similar way, our actions have the power to "transfigure" the way we see others. The way we come to an experience and what we come to recognize within those moments can radically shape our perception of the person sitting before us. Each person has an immense, inherent dignity that cannot be taken away. Unfortunately, that dignity can often be hidden or even ignored. Many of the neighbors we encounter live with repeated experiences of ignored dignity, of seemingly being hidden from all those around them and perhaps, invisible to the world. In each conversation, we can choose to reorient our words, our thoughts, and our



actions to focus more deeply on the dignity of the person with whom we are interacting – truly seeing the real person before us, not simply their situation or a handful of experiences which veil the person’s true depth and dignity.

When Peter experiences the Transfiguration, he recognizes that, “It is good that we are here.” When we take each opportunity to say these simple words, think through them, and show them in our actions, we can go about uplifting our neighbors by recognizing their dignity. When we act with respect for that dignity, we are offering our fellow neighbors the chance to live out an experience of their own dignity, which gives life and renewal to them. While the transfiguration we witness may not physically appear as a bright light, our neighbor may leave their time with us – whether that was in a conversation, phone call, pantry visit, or home visit – a little more transformed because they have a new recognition of their dignity.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** Jesus reveals a deeper part of who He is and tells those with Him to not be afraid, yet it takes time to reveal deeper parts of ourselves. Is there someone whom you can be truly open with? If so, how did they come to be that person? Is there a “*fear*” which sometimes keeps you from fully expressing yourself with others?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** As the cloud lifts and emerges to show Jesus, the Lord asks the disciples not to immediately tell anyone what they have seen; likewise, as Vincentians, we often have privileged insights into the lives of our neighbors. How do you balance the need for confidentiality with the needs of our neighbor?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** If the Transfiguration invites the disciples to see with new eyes the deeper dignity of the Lord. How has your time as a Vincentian invited you to see our neighbors’ dignity different? In what ways has this changed over time?

Feast of Bl. Frederic Ozanam

(September 9)

A Reading from Luke

(Lk. 10:25-37)

“And who is my neighbor? Jesus replied: “There was a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell in with robbers. They stripped him, beat him, and then went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road; he saw him but continued on. Likewise there was a Levite who came the same way; he saw him and went on. But a Samaritan who was journeying along came on him and was moved to pity at the sight. He approached him and dressed his wounds, pouring in oil and wine as a means to heal. He then hoisted him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, where he cared for him. The next day he took out two silver pieces and gave them to the innkeeper with the request: “Look after him, and if there is any further expense I will repay you on my way back.” Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the man who fell in with the robbers?” The answer came, “The one who treated him with compassion.” Jesus said to him, “Then go and do the same.”

Reflection

From our first memories, we have constantly spent our lives searching for who we are and where we ought to be going in this life. Sometimes that journey can leave us hurt and broken on the side of a road, yet Jesus provides a rather clear vision of who we are and where we can find Him – in the lives of those around us, in our bonds as one body. We find Him in the Eucharist which nourishes us each week at Mass, in humble bread offered on our behalf to the Lord which is brought back to us as He cares for our wounds, our needs, our hopes and desires. As with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus does not count the cost when He comes to us nor does he pay mind to the societal pressures of His time. Instead, he seeks to meet the deeper need of the person before him in each moment – offering to heal their wounds if they will let Him into their lives.

In many ways, Blessed Frederic understood this reality in his own day and tries to remind each of us of it. As he worked to spread the Society, he repeatedly spoke to early Vincentians that they must “*climb the stairs to the poor man’s garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him...*” For Frederic, Vincentians go out into the community to accompany our neighbor and walk alongside them in all the ways in which they may be hurting – not solely for helping with financial or material means. The Vincentian, he hoped, would look at our neighbors one day with the same eyes as Christ does and invite Jesus to make His presence known within this moment on the streets or in a neighbor’s home. A Vincentian seeks to find the true pains of the heart and allow the weary soul to find a moment of respite so they, too, may once again find their source of hope.

When it came to assessing their work, to counting the cost, the earliest Vincentians did not judge the success of their efforts solely by the amount of funds given, food offered, or even firewood delivered to people's homes; instead, they looked towards the needs of the soul counting the number of marriages saved and the number of people receiving Christ into their lives at baptism or returning to the faith. All which these Vincentians provided had no true cost for them, it was all given for God's love and greater glory. The same can be true for us as we go about our Home Visits in the same spirit as Bl. Frederic, aiming to aid with what hurts not just the body, but also the mind and soul even if that means connecting them to another who is more resourced to assist. Our calling as Vincentians is to be that steady presence for along our neighbor's journey.

To live out the Vincentian life is no small task, and each day can sometimes seem more difficult than the last as we enter the homes and suffering of others. We constantly will ask ourselves who really is our neighbor, who is the one whom we absolutely need to serve, shouldn't we simply live our faith in Christ and not worry about the needs of so many? When faced with such questions we come to see the words that Bl. Rosalie once gave to Frederic ring true anew: "*Our Lord comes to us hidden behind the rags of those in need.*" Our vocation as Vincentians calls us to seek out the Lord hidden in our midst and bring compassionate healing to their lives, to live out the words of our Gospel to "*Go and do likewise*"; we have been called to go to the streets and are answering!

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** If a Vincentian is called to see Christ in those we meet, and to look with the eyes of the Lord through "the rags", how do you come to notice Jesus in your midst with a neighbor? Is it always clear in the moment, or does He reveal himself over time as you later reflect?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** As a Vincentian, the question of "*who is our neighbor*" comes up often and there are many ways to describe it; how do you describe who our neighbors are?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Frederic often said we needed to climb the garret, to enter our neighbors experiences. How do you strive to enter our neighbors' experiences in their homes? Are there other ways?

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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