

Spiritual Advisor Toolkit

Quarterly Reflection Series

January – February – March



Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Cincinnati District Council

2024

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 Safeguarding Reflection to fulfill the ongoing education requirement is noted below and features 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 and interaction. Facilitators are free to develop their own questions or activities, as 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. A Vincentian version has been adapted by a Spiritual Advisor from a Conference in our District and has been made available as well.

Reflections For This Quarter

- I. **Saving the World** – Reflecting on the Feast of the Epiphany (January)
- II. **Called to Sacrifice** – Reflection for Lent (February)
- ★ III. **Solemnity of St. Joseph** – Reflecting on Protecting the Home and Dignity
Quarterly Safeguarding Reflection (March)
- IV. **Reflection on Strengthening our Foundations**

Saving the World **Reflecting on the Feast of the Epiphany** (January 7)

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 2:1-12)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, He inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: *And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.*" Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage." After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

Reflection

When we hear the word "Epiphany", we don't often think of three random strangers suddenly bursting into our homes with gifts to pay their respects to a king in our midst, yet in many ways, that is exactly what happens. The question we then are invited to ask is why? Why would someone take the initiative to journey such great distances just to meet briefly with someone in their home?

The visitation by the Magi marks for us a sudden realization that the call to loving salvation is not meant for just a handful of people; it is meant for each and every person, regardless of where they find themselves. The life and presence of Jesus invites all people into a deeper relationship with God, even in the most humble and hidden moments of life. No one was seeking the king of the universe in a manger at the time – even the prophetic words spoken of Bethlehem refer to its seeming lowliness yet it was in the smallest and most unexpected of places that the Magi went and came to find the presence of the Christ before them.

In many ways the same can be said for us as Vincentians. Each day that we come together at our Conference meeting or go out to the home of a neighbor, meet a person in line at the pantry, or even simply speak to someone on the phone is an opportunity to get to know the face of Jesus Christ hidden in our midst. Our Lord is ultimately someone focused on relationship and seeking out those who may often be hidden in society. He knows the feeling of being hidden, yet He also calls us out of that darkness to bring us more deeply into relationship with one another. Our role as Vincentians is to meet Him where He is at, to find Him in the lost and forgotten corners of our neighborhoods and homes, so that we may simply spend time in His presence. The gifts we bring are small in comparison to the gift He has for us, the salvation of the world and a deep, eternal relationship with Him.

As we go out into the homes of our neighbors, may we bring the light of Christ and His presence with us, inviting those around us to know the deeper love and compassion that God has for them, and may we never count the number of gifts we have to bring when the only true gift which matters is the presence of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** Part of the tale of the Magi visiting is a realization that each of us is called to share the message of Christ with the wider world. In what ways do you strive to share His message of hope and salvation with others? In what ways do you help give the gift of faith to someone else?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** Like the Magi, we are often called to visit Christ in the most unexpected places. Describe a time when you met the Christ in an unexpected (to you) way. What was it like, what stood out about that encounter?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** As Vincentians, we bring many different things with us to help our neighbors. Has there been a time when what you brought wasn't seemingly needed? Was there a time when you discovered a greater need was present than you thought? How did, or would, you handle such a moment?

Called to Sacrifice: Reflection for Lent

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"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

With Lent upon us, we come to a time during which we sacrifice in our own daily lives willingly so that we may come to grow and know Christ more deeply, in this life and the one after. It is also a time when we are asked to take a deeper look at how we view the various parts of our lives; what brings us closer to God, and what really what keeps us away from Him. The same can be said of how we view others around us or even ourselves – in what ways do we see the best in others or the worst? Lent is also a time when we are called to sacrifice those parts of our lives which ultimately hinder our ability to see the face of Jesus in each person and which leaves us where we have been, rather than where we need to be.

Our Gospel helps us to reflect upon the way that we live out the call to sacrifice, asking us to not draw attention to ourselves. In many ways, we as Vincentians have no difficulty with that, as our service often goes unspoken within our communities. What is spoken, however, is the way in which we meet with our neighbor or advocate on their behalf. We do so in silent and hidden ways which do not draw attention to ourselves, bringing light to the lives of those we are serving in our community. The way we speak with our neighbor, or about our neighbor, can challenge us in our beliefs or the ways we see the world around us. In some ways, that is a part of the core reason for a home visit; to shake us out of our blind spots or the narratives we can speak to ourselves and to instead refocus on the deeper reality in front of us. In visiting and walking with someone, we come to realize that the gift we have in taking on our own

sacrifices is much less about what we have given up; rather, it is in what we have seen come to grow within the lives of others – and in turn we find ourselves also growing as well.

To live out the call of sacrifice is never easy; it is part of why we come together every few weeks in our Conference meeting, because we know that the support of others in our journey is just as important as the work we do. The bond with our fellow Vincentians helps to form and shape us, bringing the rewards from God our Father which were hidden in our midst out into the open for all to rejoice in. While these few weeks may be times of difficulty and struggle, we know there is rejoicing on the other side if only we have the eyes to see and keep our hearts open to the call of the Lord. May the coming weeks of Lent be a time of true renewal, taking away the parts of ourselves which keep us from the Lord and one another, and instead be a time which helps us lift one another into who we are ultimately called to be.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** Lent is a time of letting go, of new beginnings, and of growing closer to God in many different ways. In what ways do I feel called to grow this Lenten season? In what ways would I like the support of my fellow Vincentians?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** When we have trouble, we may sometimes turn around and hide our struggle from others, yet there may also be times where those around us lift us to new heights. Describe a time when others helped you to overcome a difficult moment and, perhaps, find something that was hidden within yourself.
3. **(Group Activity – Notecards needed)** As we try to keep to our Lord's instruction to not highlight the good we are doing, we can sometimes feel that means we should never speak about the good that is happening. Take a moment to write down something which you have come to appreciate about each person in the room and share it with them.



Solemnity of St. Joseph: Reflecting on Protecting the Home and Dignity

Safeguarding Tips

People experiencing vulnerability, such as those we often visit, may be susceptible to forms of financial abuse by close family and friends, often without even knowing it. Common signs of financial abuse include forbidding the person to work or earn income, withholding money or excessive financial oversight, refusing to pay bills, or repurposing money, and/or benefits, provided for alternative purpose, among other issues.

A Reading from Matthew

(Mt. 1:16,18- 21, 24a)

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Reflection

When we think about St. Joseph, there is little to reflect on. He is the quiet and unassuming father figure to Jesus, and husband to Mary. He goes unnoticed throughout much of the early life of Jesus, and is hardly known to have spoken a word that has been recorded. In some ways. St. Joseph is like many of us, quietly working diligently on the task before us and simply seeking to do right by those around us – in fact one of his most common titles is “the Worker”. He knows the importance of crafting and building a life, of the deep sweat it takes to build up our homes, our families.

Perhaps then, this is part of the reason why the Church reminds us that St. Joseph is also a protector and an advocate – one who not only does right by those around him, he also seeks to safeguard those who are most vulnerable from the forces that seek to prey upon them. As a protector, he does so in his typical fashion, quietly following the guidance of the angel to take Jesus and Mary into a place of safety where those who would harm them can no longer reach them. When Jesus goes missing during their trip to Jerusalem, it is Joseph who rushes back to



the city and seeks out Jesus in the crowd at the Temple so that Mary may speak to her son and once more be at ease. Joseph felt the same great anxiety that any parent would have for their child – the desire to keep them safe and supported.

At the heart of the story of St. Joseph is the need to look out for those around us, to seek the protection of the most vulnerable in our midst, regardless of age or condition. When we meet with a neighbor, we to show the same care and concern that Christ has for all people, a desire to see each person flourish and have their dignity respected. Sometimes that dignity is also in need of a protector – one who recognizes where harm is occurring and can speak truth to the situation so the light may shine upon it and bring the long awaited healing at last.

As those who encounter and serve others in their most trying times, we do not look for issues to fix, yet we can recognize when something is out of the ordinary for the situation, and offer resources or invite our neighbor to an opportunity for further conversation. If we see something more concerning or complex, we can invite others into the encounter to evaluate and assist, those who are better equipped because, like St. Joseph, we know that we do not need to do this task alone. Each of us is part of a wider community building each person up. As we go out into our own neighborhoods may we look with the quiet, steadfast loving gaze of St. Joseph upon all those we meet, and bring light where it is needed.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** How would you define a father figure? What are some experiences of a father figure that you have had in your life? In what ways is St. Joseph similar or different?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** Many times we can feel a sense of hiddenness, trying to hide our shame or the ways we have managed our finances. What are some ways you encourage others to feel accepted, encouraged, and allow them to be fully open with you as well as their situation? How would you like to better foster that openness?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** Have you ever experienced a time with a neighbor where something seemed different, where the finances or their situation did not seem to align? How did you approach the situation with the neighbor?

Strengthening our Foundations

A key pillar of our District Council's *Better Together* Strategic Plan is strengthening the foundation of every Vincentian and Conference by empowering their leaders and members as we (Vincentians, volunteers, and staff) work together to meet each other's needs. This reflection is meant to help bring about deeper discussion on what our needs are, and how we can strengthen one another during this time.

A Reading from Luke

(Lk. 12:22-34)

He said to [his] disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing.

Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds! Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your lifespan? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest?

Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations of the world seek for these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these other things will be given you besides.

Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.

Reflection

As we move through our time as Vincentians, we are often encouraged to take stock of where we are. We are invited to reflect upon where our heart is truly being led, and to discover what it is that we truly need to grow in our lives as Vincentians, so we can both serve our neighbors better, and learn to trust deeply in the Lord as we grow in our relationship with Him.

Trusting in the Lord is never easy, and we may find ourselves comforting a fellow Vincentian or a neighbor without knowing how we are to respond, or how to discern the deeper need that we are being invited in to experience and lend comfort for. Yet, despite

this uncertainty at times, we trust that all things will work out in their own time and in their own way according to the Lord if we remain hopeful and trusting. As Vincentians, we believe in Divine Providence – that is, what is needed for the situation will arrive precisely when it is supposed to. It is why, in some ways, we can relate to our Gospel today and the reminder that we should not worry about our lives so much – we can trust and rely upon the Lord to be there and bring those we need together – we do so for our neighbors in their need, we must also let the Lord do it for us as well in our own.

Even as we strive to trust more deeply in the Lord's providence, to accept His timing for how something unfolds instead of us, we also must realize that we own part of this process to. We must always keep our minds fixed upon the Lord and act in ways which bring us closer to him, but we can never simply be passive towards our vocation. To truly grow and be ready for the ways in which the Lord seeks to meet us invites us to reflect more deeply on how we can strengthen ourselves, our own lives and vocation. Putting it another way, we must seek to constantly empower ourselves and those around us to more fully live the call we have received; a call to grow in love, to grow in trust, to grow in self and community. Our Lord comes to meet us where we are, yet He never leaves us there; if we have the eyes of faith to trust and see, to work together as one Body, then who knows the many wonders which might emerge feeding far more than just the body, but which also nourishes the soul.

Discussion Questions

1. **(Private Reflection Question)** What are some areas in which I feel I need to grow in my life? In my faith? In my vocation as a Vincentian or in the ways I serve?
2. **(Group Discussion Question)** What does it mean to me to be a Vincentian? Do I place more emphasis on the service being provided or the relationships which are formed? How does my sense of being a Vincentian influence this?
3. **(Group Discussion Question)** In what ways would I like support, guidance, or help in growing as a Vincentian within my Conference? How can, and should, we grow as a Conference Family with our nearby Vincentians?

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.



ARCHDIOCESE OF
CINCINNATI

A Vincentian Prayer for Beacons of Light

(Adapted from the *Radiate Christ* prayer of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati)

**Vincentian Prayer for
Beacons of Light**

Mary,

Mother of the Church and our Mother,

Patroness of our Society,

**we ask that you present our prayer
of thanksgiving to your Son.**

**Seek from Him the graces we need
to be faithful disciples,
and Vincentians, who follow
with enthusiasm and joy.**

**May our witness to the love of God
bear fruit in our archdiocese,
parishes, homes and hearts,
and here in our Conference.**

**Teach us to be God's joyful witnesses,
to radiate Christ in all we do,
so that all people, especially our neighbors,
might know, love, and follow your Son
through this life and into the next.**

Amen.

*Adapted from the prayer *Radiate Christ* of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati