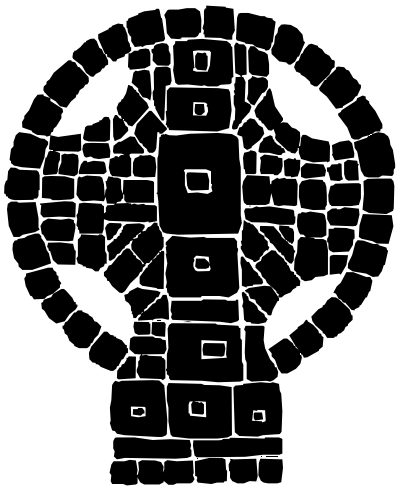
VINCENTIAN REFLECTIONS



Seek refuge in the name of the Lord.

Zep 3:12

Liturgical Year: **Cycle *A***

Fourth Quarter 2011

(October-November and December Cycle B)

Available on WWW.SVDPUSA.ORG (Spiritual Resources)

HOW TO LEAD THE VINCENTIAN REFLECTIONS IN A CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION:

Leader describes to the group the process, which is going to take place:

- Provide a copy for each member of your Conference for their personal reflection
- Stress that sharing is not compulsory and mention the need for confidentiality
- Ask, or assign, different members to read the different sections:
  - -Gospel reading
  - -Reflection
  - -Words of Founders

OPENING PRAYER/QUIETENING DOWN PERIOD

Leader invites group to:

- Become relaxed and aware of God's presence with us
- "Let Go" of distractions and quietly pray to the Holy Spirit

READING OF THE VINCENTIAN WEEKLY REFLECTION

- Each section is read aloud, slowly and prayerfully, by the different members
- Hearing different voices will allow different emphasis on words/phrases

QUIET PERIOD

Leader invites everyone:

- To quietly reflect on the readings and notice if anything strikes them
- Introduces the Discussion Question suggested in the Reflection
- Allows 2-3 minutes of quiet

SHARING

Leader invites members who wish to share on the Discussion Question, or on how the one of the readings struck them. Possibly not everyone will share, but time should be allowed for each person who wishes to share his/her thoughts.

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader closes the Prayer Reflection by beginning the Closing Prayer, and all answer the response(in bold).

(This entire process should take about 10-15 minutes)

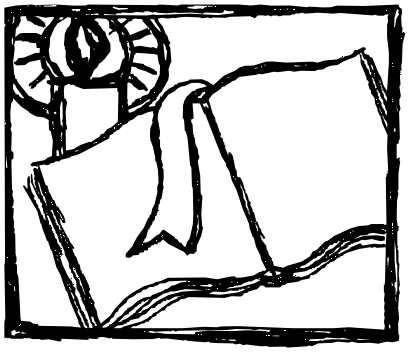
INTRODUCTION:

St. Vincent de Paul never wrote a book about his spiritual teachings. But we find the living voice of the saint in his letters and conferences in which he trained his followers for the mission of service to the poor.

The two fundamental sources of his teaching are the GOSPEL and LIFE. He wanted his followers to put the whole of the Gospel into the whole of their lives, and he never wearied of deepening both with all the faith that God had put into his heart. That is why all that Vincent says to us has the simplicity of our everyday life and the penetrating strength of the Word of God.

The Vincentian Weekly Reflections are therefore offered to all who strive to serve the poor in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. The prayer and reflections are based on the Sunday Gospel of the Liturgical Calendar, together with the feast days of some of the saints of our Vincentian Family. Each reflection offers a time for prayer, silence and discussion so that our everyday life, like Vincent, can become penetrated with the strength of the Word of God.

You may want to run copies for each member of your Conference so that they may take them home for personal reflection during the week.



LITURGICAL YEAR-Cycle A
4th Quarter 2011
October-November and December(Cycle B)

OCTOBER

October 2	**Twenty-seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time**
October 9	**Twenty-eight Sunday of Ordinary Time**
October 16	**Twenty-ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time**
October 23	**Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time**
October 30	**Thirty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time**

NOVEMBER

November 6	**Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
November 13	**Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time**
November 20	**Christ the King**
November 27	**First Sunday of Advent (Cycle B)**
November 27	***Feast of the Miraculous Medal***
November 28	***Feast of St. Catherine Laboure***

DECEMBER-Cycle B

December 4	**Second Sunday of Advent**
December 8	***The Feast of the Immaculate Conception***
December 11	**Third Sunday of Advent**
December 18	**Fourth Sunday of Advent**
December 25	***Christmas***
December 30	**Feast of the Holy Family**

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 2, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 21:33-34)

Jesus said, *"Here is another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard…When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned… Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?"* They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants…" Jesus said to them, *"Did you never read in the Scriptures: The Stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."*

Reflection:

The good news of this gospel is that the kingdom will survive no matter how the "tenants: act because the cornerstone is Christ. This provides a metaphor for our own living. No matter what shape the vineyard of our own lives is in--whether we need pruning or we seem to be in a dry desert--if we keep our eyes on Christ as the cornerstone of our own lives we will be fruitful. God cares for the vineyard of our lives: we are nurtured by God, fed at God's table, helped by the commandment of love. All we need to do is let God tend us and bring us to produce good fruit. All we need do is be faithful; God will take care of the rest. (Living Liturgy, p.248)

Vincentian Meditation:

"Do not be upset if things are not as you would want them to be for a long time to come. Do the little you can very peacefully and calmly so as to allow room for the guidance of God in your lives. Do not worry about the rest."- St. Louise de Marillac-
(Gibson and Kneaves, Praying with Louise, p.40)

Discussion: *(Share your thoughts after a moment of silence)*

What worries do you need rest from? Or put to rest?

Closing Prayer:

Those who walk with integrity proclaim the steadfast love of our God. In trust, we pray,
-walk with us, Lord.
Teach us to do what is right,
-and to speak the truth with courage.
Teach us to serve the poor,
-and to recognize the face of Christ. Amen

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Mt 21:42

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 9, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 22:1-10)

Jesus said: "*The Kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come. …The king then said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find'. The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, and the hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. The king said, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment? But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.' Many are invited, but few are chosen."*

Reflection:

It is incredible that the invited guests could refuse to come to such a significant and lavish banquet! But we are invited to a feast even more lavish and we, too, can fail to see its significance and fail to prepare ourselves. Our everyday living is not inconsequential- even the little things we do are helping us put on our own wedding garment. Our continual conversions from sin prepare us for the feast of heaven. (Living Liturgy, p. 252)

Vincentian Meditation:

"In our calling, we are patterned more closely to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who, it would seem, made it his principal task to assist and care for the poor: "He sent me to preach good news to the poor." If somebody asked Our Lord, "Why did you come on earth?" He would answer: "To assist the poor…" And so, are we not then the happiest of people to be part of the Mission for the very same reason that moved God to become one of us? –St. Vincent de Paul- (McKenna, Praying with Vincent, p. 54)

Discussion: *(Share your thoughts after a moment of silence)*

How have you come to realize that God has "called and chosen you" to serve the poor?

Closing Prayer:

"Called and chosen" as followers of Jesus, we stand with those struggling to embrace their dignity as children of God. For them we pray,
-God of mercy, hear our prayer.
For those who love without measure, yet feel unloved by others,
-God of mercy, hear our prayer.
For those who give to other, yet are deprived of basic needs.
-God of mercy, hear our prayer.
For those who strive for justice, yet endure persecution for their efforts.
- God of mercy, hear our prayer. Amen

Many are called, but few are chosen.

Mt 22:14

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 16, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 22:15-21)

The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him saying, "Teacher, we know that you a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, *"Why are you testing me, your hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax."* Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "*Whose image is this and whose inscription?"* They replied, "Caesar's." At that he said to them, "*Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."*

Reflection:

Jesus' answer puts things into perspective. There are different spheres of rule, and our loyalties are not either/or, but there are appropriate behavior belonging to both spheres. Christian living is being comfortable in all spheres, all having their just due, without compromising God's sovereignty. When God is truly the center of our lives there is no problem with giving others their due. Conversely, giving others their due doesn't necessarily compromise God as the center of our lives. Jesus shows that single-mindedness about God is even better expressed when we know clearly God's place and everyone else's place. (Living Liturgy, p.256)

Vincentian Meditation:

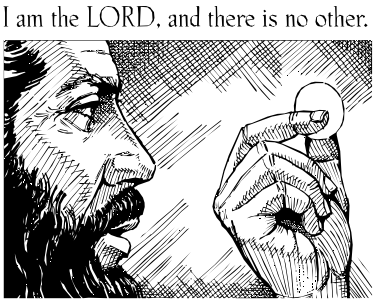
"Ah! My dear friend, what a troublous, but what an instructive time it is, through which we are passing! We may perish, but we must not regret having lived in it. Let us learn from it. Let us learn, first of all, to defend our belief without hating our adversaries, to appreciate those who do not think as we do, to recognize that there are Christians in every camp, and that God can be served now as always! Let us complain less of our times and more of ourselves. Let us not be discouraged, let us be better." –Bl. Frederic Ozanam- (Ramson, Praying with Frederic, p.51)

Discussion: *(Share your thoughts after a moment of silence)*

As in Frederic's day, we also are living in a "troublous but an instructive time." What are we learning…?

Closing Prayer:

Christ died to bring peace to the world. And so we pray:
-Lord Jesus, grant us peace.
For an end to bitterness and hatred, we pray,
-Lord Jesus, grant us peace.
For an end to divisions among races and religions, we pray,
-Lord Jesus, grant us peace.
For an end to hostility between nations, we pray,
-Lord Jesus, grant us peace. Amen



Is 45:6

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 23, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 22:34-40)

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law, tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to him, *"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."*

Reflection:

The love of God is central to our lives: love with all one's heart, soul, and mind. If the second commandment to love neighbor as self is like the first, then we might surmise that we must love our neighbor *in the same way* as we love God. Loving God isn't merely a matter of fervor in our hearts; it is expressed in doing good for the sake of others. (Living Liturgy, p.260)

Vincentian Meditation:

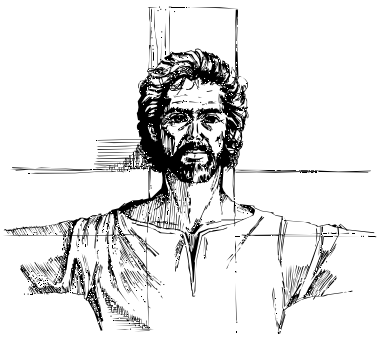
"Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God. But let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow." –St.Vincent de Paul-
(McKenna, Praying with Vincent, p.64)

Discussion: *(Share your thoughts after a moment of silence)*

As you pray the words of Vincent, picture instances when you did love God in actions of charity and justice. Recall two sincere attempts that you made to be helpful to someone, one of which worked and the other which did not. Share on any differences between the two acts of charity.

Closing Prayer:

We have given ourselves to the service of our sisters and brothers.
Mindful of our need for grace, we pray:
-Jesus, help us to "love God with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow."
So many are hungry and have no means of support,
-may we respond with generosity and availability.
The sick and the poor wait for healing,
-may we respond with generosity and availability.
To those who are saddened by the burdens of life,
-may we respond with generosity and availability.
For the grace to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul, and our neighbor as ourselves,
-may we respond with generosity and availability.
Amen



THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 30, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 23: 1-12)

Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, "*The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen…They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one earth father; you have one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."*

Reflection:

Jesus tells us that there is only one God-(one Father, one teacher, one master) and all our direction comes from keeping God central. When our focus is right, then our relationships are right. God as center leaves us servants-both of God and of one another. Keeping our focus on God doesn't allow us to seek honors and recognition. It allows us to serve God in one another. The surprise and good news is that when we keep our focus on God and serve one another, God exalts us! (Living Liturgy, p.268)

Vincentian Meditation:

"Let us stop saying, 'It is I who have done this work.' For every good thing ought to be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. God pours out his inexhaustible gifts on the humble, those who recognize that all the good done by them comes from God."
–St. Vincent de Paul- (McKenna, Praying with Vincent, p.74)

Discussion: *(Share your thoughts after a moment of silence)*

Share the times when you have found that God indeed "pours out his inexhaustible gifts on the humble".

Closing Prayer:

We celebrate the mystery of your presence in our lives.
Filled with joy, we pray:
-Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ!
There are those who do not know your presence,
-may our lives be a sign of faith for them.
There are those who do not know your presence,
-may our lives be a sign of hope for them.
There are those who do not experience your love,
-may our lives be a sign of love for them.
There are those who are poor and oppressed by others,
-may our lives be a sign of justice for them. Amen

THIRTY-SECOND WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME
November 6, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 25: 1-13)

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "*The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five of them were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps…. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!"… The foolish ones said to the wise,'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him…Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."*

Reflection:

Our readiness for the Bridegroom is something for which we prepare during our entire lives. The gospel suggests that our waiting and watching must also include *seeking.* We must go out to *meet* Christ. Waiting and keeping vigil without seeking for the Bridegroom might be metaphors for living our daily lives without paying attention to the times when God breaks in upon us. It might be closing our eyes to the need of another. It might be keeping ourselves so frenetic with activity that we never take time to look seriously at ourselves, the priorities of our lives, and how we are (or are not) growing spiritually. Seeking while waiting for the Bridegroom prepares us for his coming by helping us to see all the little decisions in our everyday lives as directly related to our being ready, the door being open, and our going into the feast. (Living Liturgy, p.272)

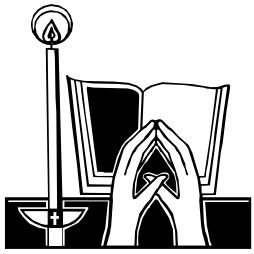
Vincentian Meditation:

For Vincent, true holiness meant that all of his decisions, plans, struggles, and actions had to revolve around the person of Jesus Christ. His own relationship with Jesus Christ developed in three stages. During his boyhood, his parents passed on their convictions about Jesus. Vincent believed, but not enough to move mountains. The second stage occurred in his twenties. A string of personal defeats and some sound spiritual direction caused Vincent to look deeply into himself. In was known only to Vincent and God, Vincent's encounter with Jesus moved him to rearrange the map of his life. Finally, as he became more involved in ministering to the poor, Vincent discovered Jesus Christ in the faces of these humble souls. Vincent's live then revolved around the person of Jesus, whom he encountered in the poor, sick and homeless people. (McKenna, Praying with Vincent, p.41-42)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*
How have you been *seeking* Jesus in your life's journey?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, give us the grace to seek you in our lives,
-so that all of our decisions, plans, struggles and actions revolve around you. Amen



Maintain justice,
and do what is right.
Is 56:1

THIRTY-THIRD WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME
November 13, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 25: 14-30)

Jesus told his disciples this parable: *"A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third one—each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money."*

Reflection:

The wealth of God has no limits; neither are there limits to what God shares with us. What a remarkable God! What kind of master entrusts his slaves with this kind of wealth? What kind of God shares divine life with adopted children? Ultimately this is what Jesus has been trying to tell us all these Sundays in these parable about the kingdom. God lavishes on us divine Life. God Life isn't a quantity to be measured, however, like talents. God's Life is a relationship that can never be exhausted. The curious thing about God's generosity with God's Life is that the richer in it we become, the more likely we are to be faithful in the small matters so we can grow in what we already have. The shock of this gospel is the extravagance of what is being given us. All we need do is be faithful in "small matters." The cost of fidelity has no comparison to the reward given. (Living Liturgy, p.276)

Vincentian Meditation:

A man appeared before Saint Peter, who asked him, "Where are your wounds?" The man replied, "I have no wounds." To which Peter rejoined, "Was there no passion in your life, no cause in which you spent and risked yourself that would invite scars?" Frederic had a passion in his life—the passion for truth. He had the scars to prove it—scars sustained because of the promise he had made to God to give his life to the service of the truth. Frederic's passion for truth manifested itself in his loving adherence to the Catholic faith; in his professional work of study, writing, and teaching; and in his ministry with other Vincentians to the needs of poor people. Frederic's passion and mission was for truth and the service of the poor. He believed the truths of his faith were absolutes, made clearer through prayer and study. Frederic wrote, "Truth has no need of me; but I have need of it." (Ramson, Praying with Frederic, p.43,46)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

What is the "passion in your life"?

Closing Prayer:

O God, give us the grace to have a "passion" in our life,
-so that we may use the talents you have given to us.
O God, give us the grace to be faithful Vincentians,
-walking in the footsteps of Vincent and Frederic. Amen

THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING
November 20, 2011

Gospel: (Matthew 25:31-46)

Jesus said to his disciples:… "*the king will say to those on his right, 'Come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' and the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me."*

Reflection:

Christ exercises his sovereignty, his kingship, in the right to judge. The basis for his judgment of us is whether we care for the least of our brothers and sisters. Growth in discipleship and living the paschal mystery is measured by the extent to which we look upon the other as Christ, loving that person as Christ, doing for that person as Christ. This is how we come to joy. This is how we "share in the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world." Think about it: from the first moment of creation, God planned for us to share in God's everlasting life and joy. (Living Liturgy, p. 280)

Vincentian Meditation:

Frederic wrote to Father Pendola of Tuscany, who had just started a Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, desiring that the young be introduced to the living reality of Christ in the world: "You have amongst your children many who are rich, Reverend Father-oh! What a salutary lesson, how strengthening for those soft young hearts, to show them the poor, to show them Jesus Christ, not in pictures painted by great masters or on altars resplendent with gold and light, but to show them Jesus Christ and His wounds in the person of the poor!" (Ramson, Praying with Frederic, p.96)

Discussion: *(Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How can we better "strengthen soft young hearts by showing them the poor and showing them Jesus Christ and His wounds in the person of the poor"-so that they will also hear the words "whatever you did to the least of mine, you did for me"?

Closing Prayer:

Let us pray to Christ our King, source of compassion and love,
-heal the sick, comfort the dying, and bring peace to all who have lost hope.
For the wisdom to recognize God's hand and holiness in each person and event,
-serving God in the least of my brothers and sisters.
That we may have the courage to work untiringly for peace and justice,
-may your kingdom come! Amen

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
November 27, 2011

Gospel: (Mark 13:33-37)

Jesus said to his disciples: "*Be watchful! Be alert. You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work; and he orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cock crow, or in the morning . May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all:Watch!"*

Reflection:

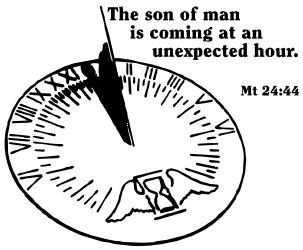
Advent symbolizes our human condition. We long. We hope. We rejoice in what we have. We yearn for what we have not. Even nature conspires during Advent time to make us feel our human incompleteness. As the darkness of winter descends, we long for the light. As cold numbs us, we yearn for the warmth of God's love. As plants and leaves die, sometimes with a final flash of brilliance, we hope for resurrection and new life. The Lord is about to create something new. Isaiah cherishes this theme. He repeats it again and again. "See, I am doing a new deed, even now it comes to light: Can you not see it? Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness, paths in the wilds." (Maloney, Seasons in Spirituality, p.49)

Words of Father Robert Maloney, C.M.

"I encourage all the members of the Vincentian Family to give themselves wholeheartedly to the Church's preferential option for the poor. Whatever choice in life others make, our is for the poor. Today, therefore, I ask each one to find the way to best touch the lives of the poor….we should honestly identify the way in which our life and works will have a real effect on the poor, the most abandoned, in society. Also, one of the signs of our trust in the Lord, and our self-gift to him, will be faithfulness to personal prayer daily, even in the midst of our multiple activities. We have a wonderful vocation! We are called to live among the poor as signs of boundless hope, with profound confidence in the Lord's presence, his love, his creative power. "Behold I make all things new". With you, in this Advent time, I pray that the Lord "when he comes may find us watching in prayer, our hearts filled with wonder and joy." (Maloney, Seasons in Spirituality, p. 50-51)

Discussion: *(Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How does Advent speak in your heart? What does Advent call you to do?



Closing Prayer:

Lord, you come to bring courage and hope,
-may we proclaim your coming with our lives.
You come as a visible sign of love,
-help us to serve the poor with compassion.
Strengthen us to the end by your grace,
-so that we may always be on guard, watching and alert. Amen.

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL
November 27

Gospel: (Luke 1:26-38)

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin named Mary. The angel said to her: "Hail full of grace! The Lord is with you…. Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus… The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." Mary said: " I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

Reflection:

On November 27, 1830 Mary appeared to St. Catherine Laboure in the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, in Paris The Blessed Mother was standing on a globe with streams of light coming from her hands. Around her were the words "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Sister Catherine was told that a medal was to be made of this picture. Soon, because of all the wonderful graces obtained by those who wore the medal, it was called the "Miraculous Medal." The Vincentian Family has always been rooted in a special devotion to Mary, and the Miraculous Medal is one of our treasured gifts.

Vincentian Meditation:

"I do not know how to find words for what I experienced and perceived, or for the beauty and the splendor of those magnificent rays (coming from the hands of the Blessed Virgin). Mary told me, "They are the symbol of the graces which I shed on those who ask me for them. Have a medal struck according to this model; all those who wear it, especially if they wear it around the neck, will receive great graces, and these graces will be abundant for those who wear it with confidence." (From St. Catherine Laboure's account of the apparitions, November 27,1830)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How do you share in the Vincentian devotion to Mary?

Closing Prayer:

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal intercede for us as we come to the foot of the altar with the cries of the world,
-Pray for us who have recourse to you.
In solidarity with those who cannot voice their own cries for healing, compassion, and strength, we say,
-Pray for us who have recourse to you.
Accompanying the oppressed peoples of the world, we say,
-Pray for us who have recourse to you.
Amen

FEAST OF SAINT CATHERINE LABOURE
November 28

Gospel: (Luke 12:32-34)

Jesus said to his disciples: *" Do not live in fear, little flock. It has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms. Get purses for yourselves that do not wear out, never-failing treasure with the Lord which no thief comes near nor any moth destroys. Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be."*

Reflection:

St. Catherine Laboure entered the Daughters of Charity in 1830. When she was a novice, Blessed Mother appeared to her several times in the Motherhouse Chapel asking that a medal be made in her honor. Although the Miraculous Medal became well known through out the world, Sister Catherine devoted her life to the service of the poor elderly in silence and humility for forty-six years. She is known as the saint of silence, as she kept her secret of being the one who saw Mary until her death. She was a woman of profound prayer and service, a true "mystic in action" as a Daughter of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. She is, in a special way, the patroness of the elderly.

Vincentian Meditation:

"Whenever I go to the chapel, I put myself in the presence of our good Lord, and I say to him, 'Lord I am here. Tell me what you would have me to do.' If he gives me some task, I am content and I thank him. If he gives me nothing, I still thank him since I do not deserve to receive anything more than that. And then, I tell God everything that is in my heart. I tell him about my pains and joys, and then I *listen*… If you listen, God will also speak to you, for with the good Lord, you have to both speak and listen. God always speaks to you when you approach him plainly and simply." (St. Catherine Laboure)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

In your prayer do you "speak and listen?" How has God directed you in your service to the poor- giving you a "task to do"?

Closing Prayer:

St. Catherine, servant of the sick and elderly poor,
-help us to grow in the virtue of humility.
St. Catherine, bearer of the Miraculous Medal,
-increase our devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary
St. Catherine, model of prayer and service,
-show us how to be contemplatives in action.
St. Catherine, woman of prayer
-give us the grace to approach God plainly and simply.
Amen

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 4, 2011

Gospel: (Mark 1:1-8)

As it is written in Isaiah, the prophet: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins…This is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection:

John knew the Advent secret: He focused his whole life on the coming of Jesus. He realized that his all-consuming vocation was to prepare the way of the Lord. Our own vocation is very similar. Saint Vincent tells us that the person of Jesus must be absolutely central in our lives, as it was for following Christ. We seek to share in his love and reverence for the Father and his compassionate and effective love for the poor. With him we trust in God's providence, which rules over all. For Vincentians, as for John the Baptist, there is nothing else but Jesus. (Maloney, Seasons in Spirituality, p. 47)

Words of Father Robert Maloney, C.M.

John the Baptist's life makes it very clear that the following of Christ involves a demanding asceticism. He knew how to focus attention not on himself but on the Lord whom he served. He knew humility, and the ground for enormous freedom that humility gives. The humble recognize, with Vincent, that "all good which is done by them comes from God." Power, prestigious positions, the praise of others, wealth-all these mean little to the humble. The humble recognize their own gifts and their own limitations. Saint Vincent described humility as a missionary virtue that was utterly necessary in the service of the poor, saying: "Let us work hard at acquiring virtue and principally humility, yes humility. Let us ask God constantly that he be pleased to give us this virtue" (Maloney, Seasons in Spirituality, p.45-46)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How do you see the virtue of humility alive in your Conference?

Closing Prayer:

Come Lord Jesus, give us the grace to "Make straight your paths"
-teach us humility recognizing "all good comes from God."
We so often lack power and human resources,
-deepen our trust in the power of your Spirit working in us.
With John the Baptist,
-may we prepare the way for the coming of Christ.
As we eagerly await your coming, come to all people
-especially the poor and the forgotten. Amen

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
December 8

Gospel: (Luke 1:26-38)

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And he said to her, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you…Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus…The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age…for nothing is impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

Reflection:

The dogma of Mary's being conceived without sin—what we refer to as the Immaculate Conception—was defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854.Mary is the model of holiness who calls us to be who we were meant to be: innocent before God. Mary's innocence and holiness were God's special favor to her. This solemnity reminds us that God's desire for each of us is to have the same innocence and holiness. Just as Mary and her divine Son said "yes" to God's will for them, so are we called through our baptismal commitment to do the same. But that doesn't mean that their example of holiness and fidelity is beyond us. Their lives were ordinary—wife and mother, son of a carpenter—but they lived the ordinary according to God's word. Our ordinary days—being wife or husband, mother or father, brother or sister, neighbor or friend, employer or employee—are to be lived as a "yes" to God. This is how we are holy too. (Living Liturgy, p.6)

Vincentian Meditation:

Frederic Ozanam had a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, from his youth to his death. Frederic was insistent that the Society take Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception as its patroness. The first members of the Society chose December 8th as their special Marian feast twenty years before the formal proclamation of the dogma in 1854 by Pope Blessed Pius IX and a year after Frederic's death! Vincentians implore Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, their patroness, to intercede for their Councils and Conferences, their lives and ministry. (SVDP Manual, p.34-35)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How does our Conference show devotion to Mary?

Closing Prayer:

Through Mary, conceived without sin,
-we ask for the grace of holiness.
Through Mary, and her Immaculate Conception,
-we ask for healing for those who are brokenhearted.
Through Mary, patroness of our Society.
-we ask for the grace of fidelity for all Vincentians. Amen

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 11, 2011

Gospel: (John 1:6-8)

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?" he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him…"Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord."

Reflection:

John knew how to die. He knew how to speak the truth even when it cost dearly. He knew how to engage in an active public ministry to which crowds flocked, but also how to withdraw into the desert for prayer and penance. John the Baptist makes it very clear that we will live genuinely for Christ only if we are willing to die for him. Only the person who is practiced in the art of daily dying will be able to hand himself over to God in an act of final resignation, as John did. Daily dying consists in pouring out one's energies in the service of the poor, in listening attentively, in praying faithfully, in living harmoniously with others, in seeking reconciliation, in doing penance, in renouncing anything that is an obstacle to the following of Christ. John the Baptist calls us to prepare the way of the Lord by eliminating from our lives whatever impedes his coming. (Maloney, Seasons in Spirituality, p.48)

Words of Father Robert Maloney, C.M.

"Let me suggest that today, for us members of the Vincentian Family, an asceticism like that of John the Baptist might take these forms especially: rising early to praise God and strengthen our brothers and sisters in daily prayer; employing moderation and a critical sense in using television and other media; withholding divisive words and negative criticism; being disciplined and balanced in what we eat and drink; working hard, as servants do, for our "lords and masters," the poor." (Maloney, Seasons in Spirituality, p.48)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

What form of John the Baptist's asceticism do you feel called to practice this Advent?

Closing Prayer:

As our Advent journey continues, we turn in hope to Christ and ask:
-Come, Lord Jesus, and do not delay.
Watch over all children, that they may know your love,
-Come, Lord Jesus, and do not delay.
Protect all who are abused and neglected,
-Come, Lord Jesus, and do not delay.
Strengthen all Vincentians in their efforts to reveal your love to others,
-Come, Lord Jesus, and do not delay. Amen

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 18, 2011

Gospel: (Luke 1:26-38)

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. He said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you… Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and shall name him Jesus…And Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age…for nothing is impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

Reflection:

Joseph receives little attention these days, even in Advent, but Joseph stands right beside Mary at the center of the stage. Joseph stands, with eager expectation, at the threshold of transcendence. From the darkness of his own limited understanding, he is continually peering into the mystery of God. Surely he cannot fathom the virginal conception of Jesus that the angel announces, but with loving compassion he bows in reverence to God's incomprehensible ways. Surely he does not understand how this child, who seems like any other, could be "God with us", but he abandons himself, in faith, to the task of loving the child and educating him. There is something very beautiful about Joseph's contact with the transcendent mystery of God. He was a carpenter and in the midst of his daily manual labor and family life, Joseph was surrounded by the mystery of God and he penetrated it with faith. He trusted in God's daily providence. (Maloney, Seasons of Spirituality, p.53)

Words of Father Robert Maloney, C.M.

"Imagine how Joseph felt as the birth of his mysterious son approached: puzzled, excited, awed. Deep faith was his light in the darkness. It enabled him to see the presence of God even where suffering, privation, and violence appeared to reign. Joseph knew the pain and embarrassment of poverty when there was no room in the inn. He witnessed violence when Herod unleashed his wrath against the children in Bethlehem. He felt persecution when he fled to Egypt. Yet he believed. He believed that God walked with him, that God is faithful to promises, that God is alive, and we can find God not only in the light but also in the darkness. He lived on the edge of mystery and was not afraid to gaze into it with courage in order to find God." (Maloney, Seasons of Spirituality, p.54)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How does Joseph speak to you this Advent?

Closing Prayer:

As we prepare for Christmas we pray for the grace to be like Joseph, so that:

For those who live in doubt,
-our lives will be a sign of faith.
For those who live in fear and oppression,
-our lives will be a sign of hope.
For those who do not experience God's love,
-our lives will be a sign of charity. Amen

CHRISTMAS
December 25

Gospel: (Luke 2:1-14)

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled… And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child and she gave birth to her firstborn Son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds living in the fields and keeping watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold I bring you good news of great joy…for a savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."…When the angels went away from them, the shepherds said to one another, "let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

Reflection:

The angel told the shepherds that the Savior was born and where to find him. How and when are we told? If we wait for the heavens to open and angels to speak to us, we will be waiting a lifetime. We are told in less spectacular ways of God's presence and saving activity on our behalf, but no less powerful or revealing. God does speak. God reveals divine presence in the smile of another, in someone's generous offer, in a plea for help, in the cry of the poor and the oppressed, in the child needing reassurance, in the aged needing a listening ear, in the sick needing a consoling hand. This is how we "make known the message": to reach out to another with God's compassion, mercy, forgiveness, healing, love. The mystery of Christmas in that God is incarnate. Today we see not a Baby in the manger, but a saving God working through and among us. (Living Liturgy, p.24)

Words of Vincent:

"Love is inventive, even to infinity." (McKenna, Praying with Vincent, p.103)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How have we seen our saving God working through and among us this Christmas?
In what ways has "Love been inventive, even to infinity?"

Closing Prayer:

On this day, joy was reborn into the world,
-may we share the joy of Christ with everyone today and always.
On this day, hope was reborn into the world,
-may we bring the hope of Christ to those who are most in need.
On this day, love was reborn into the world,
-may we bring the love of Christ to others in compassion,
On this day, peace was reborn into the world,
-may we bring the peace of Christ to our family and our world. Amen

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH
December 30, 2011

Gospel: (Luke 2:22-40)

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted-and you yourself a sword will pierce-so that the thoughts of many may be revealed."…When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Reflection:

All the wonderful gifts of grace bestowed on the Holy Family did not preserve this family from hardship and suffering. These simple parents surely had their own apprehensions- "you yourself a sword shall pierce." Yet they responded faithfully and obediently. This is the interface of our own modern families and the Holy Family: as they did, we too all face challenges in responding to God faithfully and obediently. The holiness of a family is not dependent upon perfection or an easy road. Whether we are a traditional family or a single parent, whether we have biological or adopted or foster children or no children, whether we live in an expensive home or a subsidized rental unit makes no difference for living as a holy family. What makes the difference is believing and trusting in God, responding to both hardships and God's wonderful gifts of grace in fidelity and obedience. Trust in God's ways. You, too, are a holy family. (Living Liturgy, p. 28)

Words of Frederic:

"…A new blessing has come to me, the greatest joy, probably, it is possible to experience here below! **I am a father!**… Ah! What a moment that was when I heard the first cry of my child; when I beheld that little creature, but that immortal creature, which God has confided to me, who brought me so many delights and so many duties…We have called her Marie, which is her mother's name, as well as that of the powerful protectress to whose intercession we attribute this happy birth…How could I dare teach her lessons that I did not practice? Could God have found a kinder way of instructing me, of correcting me, and setting my feet on the road to heaven?" (Ramson, Praying with Frederic, p. 70-71)

Discussion: (*Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)*

How has "God found the kindest way of instructing you, correcting you and setting your feet on the road to heaven" in your own "holy family", as Frederic's.

Closing Prayer:

With hopeful hearts we pray:
May our own "holy families" gather at the table of peace,
-to celebrate God's creative love in the human family
May the family of the Church gather at the table of the Eucharist,
-to celebrate our unity in the body and blood of Jesus
May the Vincentian Family gather at the table of the poor,
-to celebrate the presence of Christ among the lost and broken. Amen

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