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PEACE OUT

A Collection of Spiritual Reflections for Young People
ISSUE 4



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Introduction

This Collection of Spiritual Reflections is a resource for Vinnies Young Adult members, groups, conferences and volunteers. It is also for teachers to share with members of St Vincent de Paul Conferences, Social Justice Groups or Religious Education classes within their schools.

These reflections have been prepared for young people to take some time out to reflect on different areas of life and look at them from a Christian and particularly, a Vincentian viewpoint.

Each reflection is based around a theme and contains a reading and some discussion questions or activities based around that theme.

We hope you find this Collection of Spiritual Reflections a useful resource and that you take the opportunity to allow yourself and your group or students some 'time out.'

If you would like a version of this publication that would reproduce well on a photocopier, please visit www.vinnies.org.au/youth-resources-nsw.

Peace Out Issue 4

A Collection of Spiritual Reflections for Young People
St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, Youth and Young Adults
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www.vinnies.org.au

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Our Mission

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

Our Vision

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognized as a caring Catholic charity offering 'a hand up' to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.



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Embracing Imperfection



BEING HUMAN ISN'T ABOUT BEING PERFECT

My name is Sophie, I am 18 and I have a facial paralysis called Moebius Syndrome. I was born with this syndrome and have had many years of people staring at me and making cruel and nasty comments because of the way I look. Over the years, I have had to overcome many barriers because so many people think that because you look different to the way society says you should look, they treat you differently and unfairly.

Society has become really stereotypical in making us feel like that we have to look a certain way, feel a certain way when in actual fact we are all imperfect. None of us are physically perfect; none of us are emotionally perfect. We all have flaws, we all have set backs and I think that for me, being physically imperfect having Moebius has helped me realise that I have to accept my flaws, both physically and emotionally and I have to embrace them and accept these flaws. I have had to learn to love and work with my flaws everyday and I accept who I am. If I am able to accept who I am, then it may go towards others also being accepting of those who are different in the way they look, act or speak. I believe that we should focus on the things that we can change, instead of focusing on what we can't and we should try and make ourselves better people because we have to accept that we are not all perfect and sometimes we cannot change the physical things about a person but we should just accept each other for who we are. If we are able to do that, then it will make for a better and just society.

I have been fortunate that I have a loving family and group of friends who accept me for who I am, not what I look like. They look beyond my physical appearance and can see the young adult that I am. I have always been a shy person but now that I am doing a Bachelor in Arts at University, and have become part of a different community, I have grown so much in myself to further accept myself and will hopefully change the view of others to do the same.

– Sophie Rose, 18 years

REFLECTIONS

- What are your imperfections?
- How have you judged people in your Vinnies work?
- How can you build acceptance of difference in your community?



The inestimable worth of each human being

A man convinced of the inestimable worth of each human being, Frederic Ozanam served the poor of Paris drawing others into his work. Through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, his legacy continues to the present day.

In Paris he studied law at the University of Sorbonne. When certain professors there mocked Catholic teachings in their lectures, Frederic defended the Church.

A discussion club which Frederic organised sparked the turning point in his life. In this club Catholics, atheists and agnostics debated the issues of the day. Once, after Frederic spoke on Christianity's role in civilization, a club member said: "Let us be frank, Mr. Ozanam; let us also be very particular. What do you do besides talk to prove the faith you claim is in you?"

Frederic was stung by the question. He soon decided that his words needed grounding in action. Frederic is an outstanding model of putting

faith into action, especially in service of the poor. He proves that to be Vincentian is not about the clothes you wear or the title before your name. It is about serving those who are marginalised and experiencing disadvantage.

REFLECTIONS

- How do you/we define or value, the worth of each individual human being? Do you think that it is "inestimable"?
- Why do we [Australians] continue to place certain groups/individuals above others, in terms of their worth in our society? (think of marginalised groups across our nation, why do they remain outcast?)
- What do you, your community, your peers do "besides talk"? How are you serving our poor and disadvantaged?
- Can you think of positive examples of "faith in action"? Why are they outstanding? Are they Vincentian by nature?

Searching for oneself

*Good Shepherd, who finds the lost one.
The "me" I have known has disappeared.*

*Will I ever recover the person I have been?
Will I ever find and feel good about myself again?
Will I discover who I am and who I am becoming?*

*Protect me in this great vulnerability.
Assure me that I will come home to myself,
Even though "my self" may be different.
Silence my impatience.
Calm my worry.
Restore my joy.
Solace my distress.
Help me to befriend my new self
With tender hope and welcoming love.*

– **Joyce Rupp**, *Out of the Ordinary: Prayers, Poems and Reflections for Every Season*

REFLECTIONS

Sometimes we don't always feel like ourselves. Sometimes life feels stressful and busy but usually in these times it's more important that we take a second to do something we enjoy and come back to ourselves. If we stop trying to fix and control everything ourselves and instead put our trust in God he will look after things.

Matthew 6:35: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." God knows what you need even before you ask and he will provide for you, so don't worry. Mary MacKillop understood this message and took faith saying "God will provide."

The Lord's prayer – a conversation with God

"Our Father which art in heaven ..."

"Yes?"

"Don't interrupt me. I'm praying."

"But you called me."

"Called you? I didn't call you. I'm praying. Our Father which art in heaven ..."

"There ... you did it again."

"Did what?"

"Called me. You said, Our Father which art in heaven. Here I am. What's on your mind?"

"But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like getting a duty done."

"All right. Go on."

"Hallowed be thy name ..."

"Hold it! What do you mean by that?"

"By what?"

"By 'hallowed be thy name'?"

"It means ... it means ... good grief! I don't know what it means. How should I know? It's just a part of the prayer. By the way, what does it mean?"

"It means honored ... holy ... wonderful."

"Hey, that makes sense. I never thought about what 'hallowed' meant before. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

"Do you really mean that?"

"Sure, why not?"

"What are you doing about it?"

"Doing? Nothing, I guess! I just think it would be kind of neat if you got control of everything down here like you have up there."

"Have I got control of you?"

"Well ... I go to church."

"That isn't what I asked you. What about your bad temper? You've really got a problem there, you know. And then there's the way you spend your money ... all on yourself. And what about the kind of books you read?"

"Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of those people at the church."

"Excuse me. I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it ... like you, for example."

"Oh, all right. I guess I do have some hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I could probably name some others."

"So could I."

"I haven't thought about it very much until now, but I really would like to cut out some of those things. I would like to ... you know ... be really free."

"Good ... now we're getting somewhere! We'll work together, you and I. Some victories can truly be won. I'm proud of you."

"Look, Lord, I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does. Give us this day, our daily bread."

"You need to cut out the bread. You're overweight as it is."

"Hey, wait a minute! What is this ... 'Criticize me day?' Here I was doing my religious duty, and all of a sudden you break in and remind me of all my hang-ups."

"Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know. That's what I'm trying to get across to you. You called me, and here I am. It's too late to stop now. Keep praying. I'm interested in the next part of your prayer ... (pause). Well ... go on!"

"I'm scared to."

"Scared? Of what?"

"I know what You'll say."

"Try me and see."

"Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

"What about Ann?"

"See? I knew it! I knew you would bring her up! Why



Lord, she's told lies about me, spread stories about my family. She never paid back the debt she owes me. I've sworn to get even with her!"

"But your prayer? What about your prayer?"

"I didn't mean it."

"Well, at least you're honest. But it's not much fun carrying that load of bitterness around inside, is it?"

"No, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even. Boy, have I got some plans for that neighbor. She'll wish she had never moved into this neighborhood."

"You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you already are. But I can change all that."

"You can? How?"

"Forgive Ann. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be Ann's problem and not yours. You will have settled your heart."

"Oh, you're right. You always are. And more than I want to revenge Ann, I want to be right with you. Ann, I want to be right with you ... (pause) ... (sigh). Alright! Alright! I forgive her! Help her to find the right road in life, Lord. She's bound to be awfully miserable now that I think about it. Anybody who goes around doing the things she does to others has to be out of it. Someway, somehow, show her the right way."

"There now! Wonderful! How do you feel?"

"HmMMM ... well, not bad. Not bad at all. In fact, I feel pretty great! You know, I don't think I'll have to go to bed uptight tonight for the first time since I can remember. Maybe I won't be so tired from now on because I'm not getting enough rest."

"You're not through with your prayer. Go on."

"Oh, all right. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

"Good! Good! I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Don't turn on the TV when you know the laundry needs to be done and the house needs to be cleaned up. Also, about the time you spend having coffee with your friends ... if you can't influence the conversation to positive things, perhaps you should re-think the value of those friendships. Another thing, your neighbors and friends shouldn't be your standard for

"keeping up with." And please don't use me for an escape hatch."

"I don't understand the last part."

"Sure you do. You've done it a lot of times. You get caught in a bad situation. You get into trouble and then you come running to me."

"Lord, help me out of this mess, and I promise you I'll never do it again." You remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me?"

"Yes and I'm ashamed, Lord. I really am."

"Which bargain are you remembering?"

"Well, there was the night that Bill was gone and the children and I were home alone. The wind was blowing so hard I thought the roof would go any minute and tornado warnings were out. I remember praying, 'Oh God, if you spare us, I'll never skip my devotions again.'"

"I protected you, but you didn't keep your promise, did you?"

"I'm sorry, Lord. I really am. Up until now I thought that if I just prayed the Lord's Prayer every day, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen like it did."

"Go ahead and finish your prayer."

"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."

"Do you know what would bring me glory? What would really make me happy?"

"No, but I'd like to know. I now want to please you. I can see what a mess I've made of my life. And I can see how great it would be to really be one of your followers."

"You just answered the question."

"I did?"

"Yes. The thing that would bring me glory is to have people like you truly love me. And I see that happening between us. Now that some of these old sins are exposed and out of the way, well, there is no telling what we can do together."

"Lord, let's see what we can make of me, okay?"

"Yes, let's see."

Cited from John Mark Ministries by Rowland Croucher and others 2005

Parable of the Mustard Seed

MATTHEW 13:31-32

He proposed another parable to them. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.”

MATTHEW 17:19-20

The disciples approached Jesus in private and said, “Why could we not drive it out?” He said to them, “Because of your little faith. Amen, I say to you, if you have the faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

MARK 4:30-32

He said, “To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when sown in the ground, is the smallest of all seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade.”

LUKE 17:5-6

And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” The Lord replied, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

REFLECTIONS

- What is the primary point of the parable?
- According to each version, where is the mustard seed planted? What significance does this have?
- Which Gospel’s version of the parable do you like best? (i.e. which contains the most meaning for you?)
- Does this parable simply offer information? Does it supply any motivation? Does it have any application?
- Consider how God might be working around us in ways that seem small but will have a great impact.

We don’t need a lot of faith - just as much as a mustard seed - to provoke great results, because our God is an awesome God! We must believe in Him and not worry about what we can or can’t do. God will not ask us to do more than we can. He wants us to be willing to do His work. He’ll provide the rest.

His Word is “planted” in our hearts and minds and grows when you think and understand and learn about Him. You can “plant” more seeds when you share His Love with others. The parable of the mustard seed and yeast parables have a similar message. The kingdom of heaven ultimately produces consequences that are much more significant than what appears at first – the mustard seed produces extensive growth and the yeast provides intensive transformation. Jesus wants to teach us that seemingly small beginnings should not be scoffed at.

If the realm of God is like a mustard seed, we can have faith that whatever small things we do on God’s behalf will spread farther than we can ever tell.

And I think to myself, “Well I do have that much faith, I guess.” Not much, but surely at least as much as there is in a little mustard seed. And here God gives me the promise that if I can muster even that much faith, my prayers will be answered.



The Good Samaritan

LUKE 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveller who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight.

He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, 'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.'

Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbour to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."



REFLECTIONS

Blessed Frederic Ozanam once said, "Charity is the Samaritan who pours oil on the wounds of the traveler who has been attacked. It is justice's role to prevent the attack".

- How would you describe the difference between charity and justice?
- Which is more important, charity or justice?
- Is your work with Vinnies more related to charity or justice or both evenly?
- How might Vinnies be both the oil that soothes the wounds and also the prevention of the attack, for those who are disadvantaged and marginalised?

A PRAYER FROM “WHEN I TALK TO YOU: A CARTOONIST TALKS TO GOD”

By Michael Leunig.

Andrew McMeel Publishing, 2006.

Let us pray for wisdom. Let us pause from thinking and empty our mind. Let us stop the noise. In the silence let us listen to our heart. The heart which is buried alive. Let us be still and wait and listen carefully. A sound from the deep, from below. A faint cry. A weak tapping. Distant muffled feelings from within. The cry for help.

We shall rescue the entombed heart. We shall bring it to the surface, to the light and the air. We shall nurse it and listen respectfully to its story. The hearts story of pain and suffocation, of darkness and yearning. We shall help our feelings to live in the sun. Together again we shall find relief and joy.

REFLECTIONS

Take some time to reflect on the above prayer from Leunig.

- What is your heart telling you?
- Is there anything tapping? Making distant muffled noises?
- Write something down as you feel comfortable. If you are more of a drawing person then feel free to express through drawing / sketching.

“Listen and attend with the ear of your heart.”

– St. Benedict

God of all those who yearn for a glimmer of assurance on the long journey to you, come! Come with a vast storehouse of renewed dreams, hopes and peacefulness.

God of hope, come! Enter into my memory and remind me often of the yearning of the people in history. Stir up stories of how the ancestors hung on to your promises, how they stole hope from tiny glimmers about you, passed on from age to age. Help me to hear the loud, crying voices of the prophets who proclaimed that a new age would dawn.

God of hope, come! Enter into the heart of mine which often loses itself in self, missing the message of your encouragement because I am so entangled in the web of my own whirl of life. Enable me to not lose sight of the power of your presence or the truth of your consolation.

God of hope, come! Enter in the lives of those I hold dear, the ones whose lives are marked with pain, struggle and deep anxiety, those whose lives bear ongoing heartaches, those whose difficulties threaten to overwhelm them with helplessness and despair. Come and gift them with a deep belief about you and your never-ending faithfulness and companionship.

God of hope, come! Enter into every human heart that cries out for a glimpse of your love, for a sign of your welcoming presence, for a taste of your happiness. Be the one who calms the restless and gentles the ache of the human journey.

God of hope, come! Enter into this Advent season with the grace of joy and laughter. Fill the faces with smiles of delight and voices with sounds of pleasure. Let this gift come from deep within. Replenish all with the joyful blessings that only your peace can bring.

God of hope, come! Be the Morning Star in our midst, the Light that can never go out, the Beacon of Hope guiding our way to you. Come into our midst and make our lives a home, where your ever lasting goodness resonates with assuring love and vigorous hope.

– Joyce Rupp

The Starfish Story

Adapted from *The Star Thrower* by Loren Eiseley
Once upon a time, there was a wise man that used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work.

One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up.

As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean.

He came closer still and called out “Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?”

The young man paused, looked up, and replied “Throwing starfish into the ocean.”

“I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?” asked the somewhat startled wise man.

To this, the young man replied, “The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them in, they’ll die.”

Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, “But, young man, do you not realise that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can’t possibly make a difference!”

At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, he said, “It made a difference for that one.”

REFLECTIONS

Sometimes we feel like some issues are too big for us to make a difference. But in this story we see the impact of one act of kindness. People are often quick to comment, like the man in the story, about the negative aspects of what you are doing, because they can only see the big picture. But if we are able to see both the small and bigger picture, we can see value in the small things we do such as a kind word or helping someone. This story tells us that we can’t do everything, for example the boy couldn’t stop the starfish landing on the beach but he could throw them back in, letting them live another day.



A Love Letter from Jesus



Dear friend,

How are you? I just had to send you this letter to tell you how much I love and care about you. I saw you yesterday as you were walking with your friends. I waited all day, hoping you would talk to me also. As evening grew near, I gave you a sunset to close your day and a cool breeze to rest you, and I waited. You never came. Oh yes, it hurt me, but I still love you because I am your friend.

I saw you fall asleep last night, and I longed to touch your brow, so I spilled moonlight upon your pillow and face. Again I waited, wanting to rush down so we could talk. I have so many gifts for you.

You awakened late and rushed off for the day... my tears were in the rain. Today you looked so sad, so alone. It makes my heart ache because I understand. My friends let me down and hurt me many times too, but I love you. I try to tell you in the quiet green grass; I whisper it in the leaves and trees; breathe it in the colours of the flowers. I shout it to you in the mountain stream, and give the birds love songs to sing. I clothe you with warm sunshine and perfume the air. My love for you is deeper than oceans and bigger than the biggest want or need you have.

We will spend eternity together in heaven. I know how hard it is on this earth. I really know (because I was there) and I want to help you. My father wants to help you too. He's that way you know. Just call me, ask me, talk to me. It is your decision. I have chosen you and because of this, I will wait... because I love you.

Your friend,
Jesus

Source: Maury Web Pages Directory, author unknown



Poem Reflection

The most important single thing you can do in your life is to establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. If you do this, you will find joy and happiness now and forever.

Take a moment to think about the significance of Christ in your life. Are you happy with your relationship with him?

Read through these lyrics, play the song from utube, and think carefully what social justice issue he is referring to.

The song, Memory Lane, is written by Elliot Smith about his experience and struggle with mental health but it could also be about people experiencing homelessness, addiction or perhaps being bullied at school.

REFLECTIONS

- Are there times when you have felt isolated like the songwriter?
- Have you recognised when others might be feeling isolated and offered them some assistance?
- What can we do about these situations? Both in your Vinnies work and individually?

MEMORY LANE – ELLIOT SMITH

Lyrics acquired from CD, From a basement on a hill ANTI-Records, 2004.

This is the place you end up when you lose the chase

Where you're dragged against your will from a basement on the hill

And all anybody knows is you're not like them

*And they kick you in the head and send you back to bed
Isolation pulled you past a tunnel*

*To a bright world where you can make a place to stay
But everybody's scared of this place, they're staying away*

Your little house on Memory Lane

The mayor's name is fear

His force patrols the pier

From a mountain of cliché

That advances every day

The doctor spoke a cloud

He rained out loud

You'll keep your doors and windows shut

And swear you'll never show a soul again

But isolation pushes you 'til every muscle aches

Down the only road it ever takes

But everybody's scared of this place, they're staying away

Your little house on Memory Lane

If it's your decision to be open about yourself

Be careful or else

Be careful or else

I'm comfortable apart

It's all written on my chart

And I take what's given me

Most cooperatively

I do what people say and lie in bed all day

Absolutely horrified

I hope you're satisfied

Isolation pushes past self-hatred, guilt, and shame

To a place where suffering is just a game

But everybody's scared of this place, they're staying away

Your little house on Memory Lane

Your little house on Memory Lane

Christmas Presents or Presence?



Since the beginning of October, a Sydney bicycle shop has had a big countdown sign in the window “Only ... sleeps till Santa time” and in the weeks before December 25, every newspaper, magazine and television channel will remind us to “purchase, purchase, purchase” before the big day.

Receiving gifts is really not as important as giving them. The gift itself, no matter what its monetary value, is just an object without the presence or connection with the thoughts of the giver. Isn't that what the gifts are all about, to indicate the importance of other people in our lives and our wish to be in their presence?

Christmas celebrates the presence of God with us in the form of a child. It is a time when the love of God and of fellow men becomes more urgent than hatred and bitterness. It is a time when our thoughts, our deeds and our spirits make real the presence of God among us.

Christmas Gifts for:

your enemy	forgiveness
friends	your heart
customers	service
children	nurturing
yourself	respect

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, Wise men travelled for miles to bring you the first Christmas presents. So may we, too, remember with thankful hearts the love that comes with each present we open. We also thank you for the amazing love you have for each of us, and we thank you for the many gifts that you give us. We ask your particular care for those who do not experience the love and presence of dear ones.
Amen.*

Consumerism

One day, the father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the express purpose of showing him how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family. On their return trip, the father asked his son, "How was the trip? Did you learn anything about how poor people live?" His son replied, "Yeah the trip was great. I learnt so much! I learnt;

We have one dog and they have four.
We have a pool that reaches to the middle of the yard and they have a creek that has no end.
We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night.
Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon.
We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight.
We have servants but they serve others.
We buy our food and they grow theirs.
We have walls around our property to protect us and they have friends to protect them"

The boy's father was speechless. Then his son added, "Thanks Dad for showing me how poor we are."

REFLECTION

It is easy to forget just how blessed we are in this consumer driven age. Close your eyes and think of the wonderful blessings you have. Write them down if you'd like. Make a note to appreciate these more regularly.

PRAYER

*Lord, help me count my blessings.
When I get a glass of clean water from the tap,
When I curl up under my doona
Or spend time with friends.
There are many in the world
Who must continue without these.
It is for them I appreciate these-
The blessings that I have.
Amen.*

The Widow's Offering

MARK 12: 41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their abundance; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

REFLECTION

- Why did Jesus say the widow had put in more when the value of her contribution was not as large as the others? What is important about the distinction?
- Have there been times when you have provided more (time, money, etc) than you 'had spare'?

Learning Empathy from Dreaming: Rock and Tree

Phil Medlin relays a story retold by Mrs Maisie Cavanagh, a Wiradjuri woman from Cowra, now living in Western Sydney. This is a story about two people and their relationship with each other.



A long, long time ago, a place along the Hawkesbury River there was an area populated with trees. Every time it rained and the waters came down the mountain the trees were washed in to the river, one by one.

Every tree, except one little tree was washed in to the river. This little tree stood there alone. Right next to this little tree was a little rock which was just peeping out of the ground.

The little tree would say to the rock, “I am so worried about being washed into the river. I get so scared when the clouds gather in the sky. I think that this is the time the waters will come down the mountain and I will be washed in to the river, just like my family and friends before me. I get so worries about that.”

The little rock would answer, “Gee, I wish I could help but I do not know what to do.”

Tree and Rock would talk about their common concern – that Tree might get washed in to the river. One day the tree said to the rock, “Let’s call on the Aboriginal Spirits that live in the Land and see what they say.” So, the rock and tree called on the Aboriginal Spirits and they came and built a fire and sat in a circle around the rock and tree. The Aboriginal Spirits were empathetic to the rock and tree as they spoke.

The tree said to the Spirits, “Every time the clouds gather in the sky, I get concerned that it is going to rain and that the waters from the rain will come down the mountain side and wash me into the river.” And the rock said to the Spirits, “I do not know what I can do but I would like to help Tree.” Tree added, “If given the chance, I know that I could grow in to a big strong tree.”

The Spirits talked among themselves until one Spirit came to the rock and the tree and spoke for the other Spirits, “What we have decided is that with every sunrise, every dawn, you, Rock, will get a little bit bigger.”

So every time the sun came up, the rock got bigger and bigger. When it did rain the waters went around the rock. This gave the tree the protection it needed to send its roots deep in to Mother Earth. So, the tree grew in to a Port Jackson Fig – huge and strong, while the rock got bigger and bigger. The rock and the tree grew together.

One day, the rock said to the tree, “Every time it rains and the waters come down the mountainside, I feel my foundations moving. I think that it will not be long before I am washed into the river.” The tree said to the rock, “No! That will never happen. My roots are deep into the Earth. I will wrap my arms around you so that nothing will ever separate us.”

So, the tree started to wrap itself around the rock and, as the tree held the rock tightly but gently, it protected the rock from being washed into the river. Every time we Aboriginal People go to visit this Rock and tree we witness two people who care for each other - two people who support each other and listen with empathy to each other.

Source: Reflections in partnership with Aboriginal People, 1999, NSW/ACT Aboriginal Partnership and Development Advisory Committee, St Vincent de Paul Society.

Putting your arms around someone when they are feeling down or you are saying goodbye can do a lot for their emotional well being. Rock and tree supported each other during precarious times yet neither expected the other to help them out in return.

REFLECTION

- How do we as Vincentians support those we work with when they are feeling down?
- Do we always treat those we serve as equals, like the rock and the tree?



Four Candles



Four candles slowly burned.

The ambiance was so soft one could almost hear them talking.....

The first candle said: "I am Peace!"

"The world is full of anger and fighting. Nobody can keep me lit"

Then the flame of peace went out.

Then the second candle said: "I am Faith."

"I am no longer indispensable. It doesn't make sense that I stay lit another moment."

Just then a breeze softly blew out Faith's flame.

Sadly the third candle began to speak: "I am Love!"

"People don't understand my importance so they simply put me aside. They even forget to love those nearest them. I haven't the strength to stay lit."

And waiting no longer, love's flame went out.

Suddenly a child entered the room and saw the three unlit candles.

"Why aren't you burning? You are supposed to stay lit to the end!"

Saying this, the child began to cry. Then the fourth candle answered:

"Don't be afraid! I am Hope!"

"While I am still burning we can light the other candles."

With shining eyes the child took the candle of Hope and lit the other candles.

Adapted from the John Mark Ministries by Rowland Croucher and Others, 2006. Original author unknown.

Materialism: A Modern Dilemma?

"Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because your true life is not made up of the things you own, no matter how rich you may be."
Luke 12:15

The Philosophers have their say:
"Acquisition means life to miserable mortals."
Hesiod, 7th Century BC

"Oh, what a void there is in things."
Persius, 1st Century

"... the single minded pursuit of a trivial object can destroy a man..."
Geoffrey Chaucer, 14th Century

REFLECTION

- How would you define materialism?
- Do you think that we are more materialistic than the generations before us?
- Remember a time when you desired a new possession and couldn't get it. How did that make you feel? Why did you want the item so much? Did you obtain the item in the end? If so, what factors contributed to your enjoyment of the item?
- Is materialism truly a modern problem?
- It seems from the quotes above that this is a dilemma faced by humans over the ages. Certainly many of the teachings of Christ centre on the issue of money and material gain.
- How then are we as modern Christians to address this quandry?



What is Service?

What is Service...

1. An act of a helpful activity.
2. The performance of duties as a servant.
3. The serving of God by obedience, piety, etc.

Romans 12

Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another.

Then since the gifts that we have differ according to the grace that was given to each of us: if it is a gift of prophecy, we should prophesy as much as our faith tells us; if it is a gift of practical service, let us devote ourselves to serving; if it is teaching, to teaching; if it is encouraging, to encouraging. When you give, you should give generously from the heart; if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious; if you do works of mercy, let it be because you enjoy doing them.

New Jerusalem Bible

Some thoughts on service by Mother Teresa.

*It is not how much we do,
but how much love we put in the doing.
It is not how much we give,
but how much love we put in the giving.*

You and I, we are the Church, no? We have to share with our people. Suffering today is because people are hoarding, not giving, not sharing. Jesus made it very clear. Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me. Give a glass of water, you give it to me. Receive a little child, you receive me...

Love cannot remain by itself -- it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action, and that action is service

REFLECTIONS

Take a moment to consider your thoughts on service.

- How do you define service?
- Who are the people who serve you in your life?
- What are your gifts?
- How might you use those gifts in service to others?
- Can you remember a time when you were deeply affected by an act of service?

St Vincent de Paul's Spiritual Way

By Fr Kevin Canty

Saint Vincent de Paul did not develop 'spirituality' in the ordinary sense of the term. Rather, he followed the spirituality of the Church, and in order to make this spirituality available to all he developed what is now referred to as his "Way."

Vincent doesn't offer us spirituality, a teaching on prayer or the spiritual life. He offers us a Spiritual Way. He shows us how we can meet God in our everyday experiences; in the events, the persons, the circumstances of our life. His Way is the way of the Church, a way of experience, of faith, and of practical wisdom....all embraced in a spirit of love.

A Way of Charity

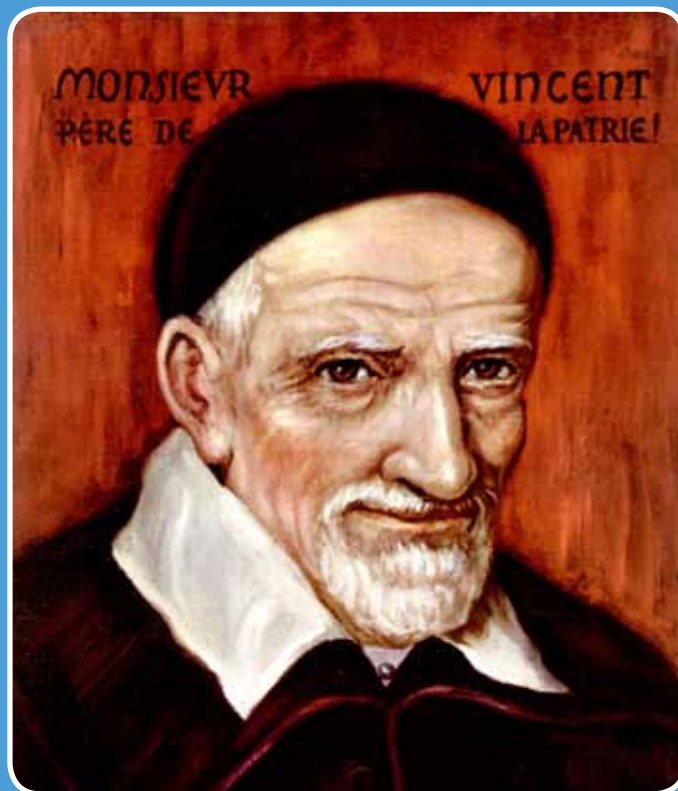
Vincent experienced true Charity- the Love that led God to send his Son among us... 'to bring the good news to the poor.' (Luke 4:18)

A Way of Mission

Vincent responded to God's love and call, and saw himself and his followers as being sent also 'to bring good news to the poor'.

A Way of Prayer in Action

For Vincent, Prayer was a way of developing and deepening a personal relationship with God, with Jesus Christ. Vincent experienced God in his life. He had a deep faith and trust in God's providential care for him and for all people, especially the poor. He encouraged his followers to share their faith, their experience of God in prayer and in their life experience. A tradition he left his priests and brothers, and his sisters the Daughters of Charity, was called 'Repetition of Prayer'. This was a simple sharing of the fruits, the insights, the experiences of God in one's own time of personal reflective prayer.



A Way of Practical Love

Vincent encouraged his followers to be contemplative in action, to respond to God and one's neighbours with a practical love, especially for the poor.

Vincent de Paul models the fullness of a Christian life that is prayerful active and actively prayerful.

He found God in everyone.

Vincent shows us balance between action and contemplation, organising good works and relying on divine providence, between intelligent activity and trusting surrender.

Litany of Remembrance



Litany of Remembrance

I remember the children of the world. As Jesus called to the children to come to him, so I gather in prayer the children of my world who are hurting. I embrace them with loving kindness and with a desire to mend the systems that bring such pain to their young lives.

I remember the children:

*...who go hungry today,
...whose parents are on drugs,
...who have no one to teach them to read,
...who are handicapped and unattended,
...who do not know love,
...who live in filth and degradation,
...who have no friends,
...who are not listened to,
...who have never been sung to or read to or taken
by the hand or experienced earth's mystery and
beauty,
...who do not have anyone to tuck them into bed at
night,
...who are shunned or mistreated because of their
colour, their religion, or the place where they live,
...who have no awareness of their inner goodness,
...who have stopped believing in love,
...who are filled with anger and hate,
...who are receiving a poor education,
...who are ill or in pain,
...who are grieving the death of a loved one,
...who are suffering from AIDS or drug-related
diseases,
...who feel lonely, desolate, and unloved,
...who are filled with fear for their lives,
...who hear only harsh words and hostile language,
...who have been bruised, beaten and mutilated,
...who are victims of incest, rape and pornography,
...who hide in fear from the sounds of war,
...who are ill and have no medical attention.*

*Yes, I pray for the children of my world today and
I pray for each man and woman of this world,
including myself, that we will do our part to create
better living conditions for these children. Show us
the way and prod us into action, God of justice and
compassion!*

**– Joyce Rupp, *Out of the Ordinary: Prayers, Poems
and Reflections for Every Season***



No Hands But Yours

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
No hands but yours, no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which Christ's
compassion looks out on the world,
Yours are the feet with which He is to go about
doing good,
And yours are the hands with which he is to bless
us now.*

– Teresa of Avila

REFLECTIONS

- Considering we are the hands, the feet, and the eyes of Christ on earth, how can we carry out our Vincentian work to our full potential?
- What do you feel called to do?





St Vincent de Paul Society
good works

PEACE OUT

A Collection of Spiritual Reflections for Young People

Every day the St Vincent de Paul Society helps many thousands of people through home visitation, migrant and refugee assistance, hospital visitation, prison visitation, retail centres, sheltered workcentres, hostels for homeless men, women and children, overseas relief, disaster recovery, budget counselling and youth programs.

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