VINCENTIAN REFLECTIONS
Fourth Quarter 2021

Liturgical Year: B/C
(October—November—December 2021)

Available on SVdPUSA.org
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
  - Vincentian Meditation

OPENING PRAYER/QUIETING 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 – don’t hurry this. God speaks to us in the silence.

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. It is important that you resist the urge either to prod members to share, or to try to “fill the silence” with your own 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 B

Fourth Quarter - 2021

OCTOBER
October  3  Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 10  Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 17  Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 24  Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 31  Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

NOVEMBER
November  1  All Saints Day
November  2  All Souls Day
November  7  Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 14  Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 21  Feast of Christ the King
November 27  Miraculous Medal
November 28  First Sunday of Advent (Start of Year C)
November 28  St. Catherine Laboure

DECEMBER
December  5  Second Sunday of Advent
December  8  Immaculate Conception
December 12  Our Lady of Guadalupe
December 12  Third Sunday of Advent
December 19  Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 25  Feast of the Nativity of the Lord
December 26  Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus Mary and Joseph
TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 3, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 10:2-16)
People were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hand on them.

Reflection:
The disciples had been with Jesus and heard his teaching for quite some time, but they developed a hardness of heart, and so Jesus became indignant. This gospel is about human hardness of hearts and about to whom the kingdom of God belongs; not to those with hard hearts, but to the innocent ones who keep themselves turned toward God. Jesus illustrates this by saying “accept the kingdom of God like a child.” Anything else he might have said to his disciples was not recorded; but we might surmise that he was saying we must lose our hardness of hearts by being open and accepting like little children, by being innocent like children, by being trusting like children, by not picking up the sinful baggage that develops as we grow into and live adulthood. We must lose our schema of things so we can find God’s intention. Lose the hardness of heart. Find the kingdom. Our embracing the kingdom embodies our being embraced by Jesus. (Living Liturgy, p.220)

Vincentian Meditation:
Simplicity “is the virtue I love most.” In St. Vincent’s eyes, Jesus is utterly simple—like a child. He speaks the truth. He says things as they are. His intentions are pure, referring all things in life to God. To St. Vincent, simplicity meant genuineness and transparency. Vincent always knew that all good comes from God and he acknowledge his own limitedness and sinfulness. Vincent lived with an exuberant confidence in God’s forgiveness and love.” (Maloney, Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent, p. 131-132)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
Has a “hardness of heart” crept into our lives of service?

Closing Prayer:
Those who walk with simplicity proclaim the steadfast love of our God. In trust, we pray,
-Lord, give us genuine and transparent hearts.
Make us open and trusting like children,
-Lord, heal our “hardness of heart.”
Teach us to let go of the baggage that has developed in our lives,
- Lord, help us to live with confidence in your forgiveness.
Give us the joy and openness of a child,
-Lord, may we find you in our service to those who are poor.
Amen
TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 10, 1018

Gospel: (Mark 10: 17-30)
As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.” He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Reflection:
In reply to the man’s profession that he has kept the commandments, Jesus lovingly says to him, “You are lacking in one thing.” This suggests that, flowing from an undivided heart, dispossessing oneself and following Jesus are one and the same thing. To turn this around: if one is to follow Jesus one must come empty-handed. This doesn’t mean that we literally sell everything; we all have family and social obligations that make having things a necessity. Jesus is saying that we can’t let possessions (or anything else, for that matter) divide our hearts. Too often possessions possess us; we must let go so only God can possess us. It is hard to enter the kingdom of God because too often our hearts are divided—we want to let go and follow Jesus at the same time we want to hang onto our possessions and, indeed our very lives! Divided hearts just won’t do. God wants our all so God can give all in return. (Living Liturgy, p. 224)

Vincentian Meditation:
“Did the young man tend to rely too much on negative goodness? He had not broken the commandments, but how much good had he done for others? Was Our Lord saying to him: “With all your possessions, with all your wealth, with all that you could give away, what positive good have you done to others? Have you gone out of your way to help and comfort and strengthen others as you might have done?” Perhaps Our Lord was saying to him: “Stop looking at goodness as consisting in not doing things. Take yourself: take all that you have and spend yourself and your possessions on others. Then you will find true happiness in time and in eternity.” (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p. 715)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
What “possessions”- time, money, talent-are you called to give to the poor?

Closing Prayer:
For the grace to let go of my possessions,
-God of mercy, hear my prayer.
For the grace to have an undivided heart,
-God of mercy, hear my prayer. Amen
TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 17, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 10:35-45)
Jesus said to the disciples, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Reflection:
Jesus responded to his disciples by saying that leadership isn’t about power—“lording it over them” or making their authority felt. Leadership is about servanthood, even when it entails suffering and giving one’s life. The only way to glory is by self-emptying, serving, giving one’s life. Much of our doing for others is simply part of our everyday life, for example, parents taking care of children, spouses doing thoughtful things for each other, a co-worker cooperating with others in the office. Being a “slave” of all, as Jesus says, isn’t always something extra or big; most of the time it is simply doing our everyday tasks and keeping in mind that others are the body of Christ. It is doing our everyday tasks with loving care. (Living Liturgy, p. 228)

Vincentian Meditation:
People are not looking for leaders who can solve all their problems or answer all their questions. Often they know the answers already or they know their problem has no immediate solution. More than anything else people look to us who minister to them for our presence of loving, caring and forgiving others. They want our help in their efforts to handle pain and frustration. They look to us for understanding; they seek a sensitive and consoling response to their hurt feelings; they need the spiritual comfort we can bring through our ministry. They want someone who will pray with them, whose presence will remind them that no matter what their difficulties might be, God really loves and cares for them. They want assurance that God will never abandon them. This is the leadership that we are called to live. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p. 310-quoting Cardinal Bernadin)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How do we in our “servanthood” manifest the presence of a loving, caring and forgiving people? Or how do we not?

Closing Prayer:
Christ calls us to be servants to each other, and so we pray,
-Lord, help us to be loving, caring and forgiving.
For the grace to help others in their pain and frustration,
-Lord, help us to be understanding and sensitive.
For the grace to bring peace and healing to others,
-Lord, help us to give the “assurance to the poor that God will never abandon them.” Amen
THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 24, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 10:46-52)
As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples, Bartimaeus, a blind man, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, “Son of David, have pity on me.” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage; get up. Jesus is calling you.” He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

Reflection:
The dynamic between Bartimaeus and Jesus is a perfect description of what faith is: Bartimaeus heard Jesus, cried out to him, persisted in his prayer, came to Jesus when he called, and spoke boldly of his need. All these actions: hearing, crying out, coming, speaking describe our Christian discipleship. We must let our faith lead us to Jesus and then we must follow him. Without persistence in prayer it will be impossible for us to follow Jesus faithfully on the road of self-giving. The encounter with Jesus in prayer keeps our relationship with God healthy and strong. The prayer of petition reminds us that disciples can do nothing on their own without Jesus’ help. At times we are doing our faith by reaching out to those around us in need; at other times we are being our faith by taking time to let our God be present to us in prayer. (Living Liturgy, p.232)

Vincentian Meditation:
Our Lord wants us to persevere in prayer and not be discouraged because God seems slow in answering our prayers. Perhaps the reason we become discouraged in prayer is that we feel in a vague way that God is not taking us seriously. The truth is that it is not God who fails to take us seriously when we pray to Him, but rather we fail to take God seriously. Sometimes in our heart of hearts we pray without full confidence that He is going to give us what we ask. I wonder if God is slow in answering our prayers at times in order to perfect the confidence which He wishes us to have in Him who is our Father. Sometimes the reason of God’s delay in answering our prayers is that He wants to make us ready to accept what He desires to give us. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p. 142-3)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
When have you found that sometimes God seems slow in answering your prayers?

Closing Prayer:
For the sick and the poor who wait for healing,
-Lord, hear our prayer.
For the grace to persevere in prayer and trust in God,
-Lord, hear our prayer. Amen
Gospel: (Mark 12: 28-34)
One of the scribes came up to Jesus, and asked him, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” Jesus replied: “This is the first: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And this is the second, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Reflection:
In this gospel a scribe approaches Jesus with the question, one about which of the 613 Jewish precepts is greatest. Jesus gets to the heart of things, and does more that just answer the scribe’s question; he brings to explicit statement the whole underlying meaning of his ministry and what discipleship and inaugurating the kingdom of God is all about. Knowing the law and even keeping the law are not enough—what is required is whole-hearted love of God and neighbor. Jesus in addition to the commandment to love God above all else, tells his listeners to “love your neighbor as yourself.” What links our relationship to God, neighbor, and self is love. Law is not kept for its own sake; ideally, law sustains and protects relationships in a loving way. (Living Liturgy, p.242)

Vincentian Meditation:
The spiritual genius of St. Vincent lies in the success he had in marrying the two great commandments of the law. The historian, Bremond, tells us: “It is not his love of mankind which led Vincent de Paul to sanctity, but it is rather that sanctity made him truly and efficaciously charitable. It is not the poor who gave him to God, but God who gave him to the poor.” The dynamism, the energy, the love which St. Vincent manifested to the poor did not come from any doctrinaire views on politics or sociology. The source of his energy and the clarity of his spiritual vision came from his contemplation of the words and actions of Jesus Christ in the pages of the Gospel and from his daily contact with Jesus Christ in the quietness of prayer. He became convinced that, once men and women are made new through their personal dedication to Jesus Christ, a new world will follow. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p. 4688)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How have you found the truth that “It is not the poor who give us to God, but God who gives us to the poor.”

Closing Prayer:
O Lord, teach us how to love God with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength,
-and our neighbor as ourselves. Amen
FEAST OF ALL SAINTS
November 1

Gospel: (Matthew 5:1-9)
Jesus went up the mountain, and he began to teach them saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Reflection:
This solemnity of All Saints is a reminder and promise that through our baptism we already share in the glory of the saints whom we honor. The saints stand out as models who have been faithful to their baptismal commitment and give us courage and strength that we, too, can be faithful. We know some of the saints who have been canonized by name. And there are also countless other saints, our deceased relatives and friends among them, whom we also know by name. This multitude of faithful followers of Christ beckons us to hear what Jesus teaches in the gospel: “Blessed are you…” (Living Liturgy, p.240)

Vincentian Meditation:
The Beatitudes are a new scale of values. We might say that the Beatitudes are an invasion of God’s madness into the world of what humanity considers to be good sense. Have you ever tried to make a list of what you would consider your eight beatitudes? This could be very revealing and might show a very deep chasm between the values of our Lord and those by which we daily live. Do you feel comfortable with our Lord’s Beatitudes? Or has it been your experience, as it has been mine, that when you start to think or talk about one beatitude, you prefer to drop it because of its difficulty, and move on to another which you would consider more simple and easy? The beatitude that makes you feel most uncomfortable is probably the one that is most relevant to you personally. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.739)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
Who is your favorite “Saint” canonized formally or informally?

Closing Prayer:
May we work together to build up the kingdom of God,
-Saints of God, intercede for us.
May our desire for God draw us more deeply into prayer,
-Saints of God, intercede for us.
May we comfort the broken hearted in their sorrow,
-Saints of God, intercede for us.
May we feed the hungry and bring mercy to the poor,
-Saints of God, intercede for us.
May we be peacemakers,
-Saints of God, intercede for us. Amen

Take hold of the eternal life.
COMMEMORATION OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED
November 2

Gospel: (John 6: 37-40)
Jesus said to the crowds: “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day.”

Reflection:
This feast day reminds us that God is faithful to God’s promise to save and that the victory of salvation is possible for all. We begin our lives by belonging to the Father who wills that not one of us be lost. God’s will that we gain everlasting life is so strong that God sent his only-begotten Son to unite with us in our weak humanity so that we can be raised to a share in divine life. But temptations abound; we make choices selfishly to serve ourselves rather than gracefully serve others and God. Truly, there is a choice to be made and the choice to live in grace is a constant one. Each choice we make, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant, truly does take us either closer to God and each other or farther away. The gospel invites us to think of our everyday choices as having consequences—eternal life. (Living Liturgy, p.238)

Vincentian Meditation:
Frederic wrote: “I commit my soul to Jesus Christ, my Saviour...I die in the bosom of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church. I’ve known the misgivings of the present age, but all my life has convinced me that there is no rest for the mind and the heart except in the faith of the Church and under her authority...I implore the prayers of all my friends of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, let not your zeal be slackened by those who say, ‘he is in heaven.’ Pray unceasingly for one who loved you all much, but who has sinned much. Aided by your supplications, dear kind friends, I shall leave this world with less fear. I firmly trust that we shall not be separated and that I shall remain in the midst of you until you rejoin me. May the blessing of God, the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit rest upon you all. Amen” (Derum, Apostle in a Top Hat, p 265)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How do we continue to share the stories of and pray for the deceased members of the Society?

Closing Prayer:
Let us remember the members of the our Conference who have died,
may they celebrate now in the feast of heaven.
Let us remember all the poor who have gone before us,
may they receive the wine of peace and the bread of life.
Amen

All will be made alive in Christ.
1 Cor 15:22
THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
November 7, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 12:38-44)
Taking a seat opposite the treasury, Jesus observed the crowd putting money into the collection box. Many of the wealthy put in sizable amounts; but one poor widow came and put in two small copper coins worth about a cent. He called his disciples over and told them: “I want you to observe that this poor widow contributed more than all the others who donated to the treasury. They gave from their surplus wealth, but she gave from her want, all that she had to live on.”

Reflection:
The widow is described as poor; she contributes “all she had.” Surprisingly, the “large sums” given by the “rich people” pale in comparison to the widow's far greater gift of “two small coins.” She gives her all, her whole livelihood, “from her want.” It is not the size of the gift which measures its value but the depth of the self-gift from which it comes. This is the kind of giving of which Jesus takes note. The widow in the gospel is the model for the radical demand of discipleship: she gives her all. Discipleship doesn’t mean that we necessarily do big and heroic things. It does mean that we do everything and meet whatever challenges come our way with hearts set right—we give of ourselves for the good of others. (Living Liturgy, p.246)

Vincentian Meditation:
In the movie Monsieur Vincent, there is a scene where Queen Anne of Austria, is talking to Vincent towards the end of his life. She is listing some of his great achievements. He listens pensively and then mutters: “I have done nothing.” She continues to catalogue the works he has initiated and again Vincent mutters: “I have done nothing.” The Queen becomes a little impatient with him and says: “Monsieur Vincent, if you say you have done nothing, what must we do if we are to save our souls?” Monsieur Vincent slowly raises his head and with his piercing black eyes looks at the Queen and utters one word:
“More.” (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.467)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
What “More” can we do?

Closing Prayer
Jesus, our guide,
- give us the generosity to give “from our want.”
Jesus, our life,
- give us loving hearts.
Jesus, our light,
- give us the grace to do “More.” Amen
THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
November 14, 2021

Gospel: (Mark 13:24-32)
Jesus said: "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky. Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you will know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates…Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Reflection:
Conformity with Jesus’ words means that we hear the teachings of Jesus and live them out. We have to live now to create a future for ourselves that we want and that God wants for us. When we live in conformity to the Word, hearing Jesus’ words and living them out, the future holds no fear for us. Rather than fear, we anticipate our future with joyful expectation. On this second-to-last Sunday of the liturgical year, we realize that we have been faced with a choice throughout our journey during this past liturgical year: to be rooted in this world or in the words of Jesus. Our choices do make a difference. (Living Liturgy, p.246)

Vincentian Meditation:
"On the journey of life, we must make choices. Our instincts, our selfishness, our pride will often suggest to us to follow them. It is an easier road. But Christ, His Church and our consciences suggest another way. To follow that road, we must say no to our natural instincts. It may be difficult and demand much effort, but that effort will bring with it a peace and contentment that money will not buy. Do we take the easy, downhill road in every choice we make? Sometimes we need to apply the brakes to downhill movements in our lives and try to change direction and to change gears. We do that by allowing Jesus to have a greater say in our lives, in our decisions, and in our thoughts." (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p. 589-90)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
Where do we need to allow Jesus to have a greater say in our lives, in our decisions, in our thoughts, and in our choices?

Closing Prayer:
Jesus, our light,
-guide us in our decisions.
Jesus, our joy,
-guard us in our choices.
Jesus, our life,
-root us in your words. Amen
THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING
November 21, 2021

Gospel: (John 18:33-37)
Pilate said to Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?” Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here.” So Pilate said to him, “Then you are a King?” Jesus answered, “You say I am a King. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Reflection:
Living the paschal mystery means that we see the victorious Christ even in the everyday trials and difficulties that we face. Living the paschal mystery means that we are ever faithful to the rhythm of dying and rising as it unfolds every day—in our prayer, work, leisure. Living the paschal mystery means that we are mediators for those whom we meet—that we are the body of Christ leading others to holier and happier lives. If someone should then ask us, “What have you done?” our answer would come quickly and surely—we have served our King. (Living Liturgy, p. 250)

Vincentian Meditation:
As you serve Christ your King, be an open door that is fully open to others, especially the poor. Be an open door to the members in your Conference, that is, be honest, truthful and simple in your relationships with one another. Be an open door to all: allow people to use you, to pass through you. Allow people to take you for granted. Be an open door by being humble. An open door does not discriminate, allowing some to pass and some not. Open the door of your heart widely to those who claim a little more understanding from you. Open the door of your heart so widely that you can belong to the truth and listen to the voice of Jesus. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.113)

Discussion: (Share thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
- How can you become more of an “open door”?

Closing Prayer:
Let us pray to Christ our King, source of compassion and love,
- may we bring peace to all who have lost hope.
For the wisdom to listen to God’s voice,
- may we become an open door to all.
For the courage to work untiringly for peace and justice,
- may your kingdom come! 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, 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:
Sr. Catherine wrote, “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
FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT  
November 28, 2021

Jesus said to his disciples: “There will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish, distraught at the roaring of the sea and the waves. Men will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the earth. The powers in the heavens will be shaken. After that, men will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with great power and glory. When these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, for your ransom is near at hand. Be on guard… The great day will suddenly close in on you like a trap. The day I speak of will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth, so be on the watch. Pray constantly for the strength to escape whatever is in prospect, and to stand secure before the Son of Man.”

Reflection:
This time of year is filled with anticipation and waiting! The important questions for us are, “What do we anticipate?” and “How do we await?” Stores are filled with Christmas things. Lights and decorations have sprung up. Christmas music on the radio is another harbinger of the day for which we wait. Our work of preparation is busied with card-sending, party-planning and attending, and gift-shopping. The First Sunday of Advent, the Church’s New Year, ushers in a different way of waiting, of heightened anticipation. We Christians don’t wait for a what, but for a Whom. And that changes the character of our waiting! If the followers of Christ are vigilant and have lives “blameless in holiness,” then when Christ comes they can “stand erect” without fear but with joyful anticipation of their redemption. This is the Whom and what of our waiting! (Living Liturgy, p. 2)

Vincentian Meditation:
Waiting in joyful anticipation...if we are to rejoice in the grace of God, we must have eyes that see and ears that hear. That in turn demands a reflecting heart, the sort of heart which Our Lady had and with which, she “pondered all things in her heart.” Our Lady has a marvelous capacity for wonder. There can be no wonder in our lives without silence. We are called to the service of the poor, but our service must come from a heart which resembles that of Our Lady who knew how to be silent, who knew how to wonder, who knew who to marvel at the grace of God, without which we can do nothing. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p. 56)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How will you “await” in joyful anticipation, silence and wonder for Christmas this Advent?

Closing Prayer:
Lord, as we wait the fulfillment of your promise,
-give us a heart that knows how to be silent.
You come as a visible sign of love,
-give us a heart that knows how to wonder.
Strengthen us by your grace,
-give us a heart that lives in joyful anticipation. 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, the 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 throughout 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:
Sr. Catherine wrote: “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, visionary 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
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:
This festival in honor of Mary celebrates her innocence from the very moment of her conception in her mother’s womb. Mary enjoyed a singular intimacy with God, for it was she who conceived by the Holy Spirit and carried in her womb for nine months the very Son of God. Her body—conceived in innocence and kept free from the stain of sin throughout her life—was a fitting temple to nurture the human life of the divine Son. Like Mary, we must respond to God’s offer of graceful innocence with our own “Behold, I am the handmaid (servant) of the Lord.” Then, like Mary, we too, bear the Son of God within us. She is the model for God-like innocence. She is our Mother and helps us attain for ourselves the fruits of her great privilege-Emmanuel, God is with us! (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 your 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 now lift our hearts and say,
-Holy God, hear our prayer.
Through Mary, queen of all saints,
-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 in the world.
Amen
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 5, 2021

Gospel: (Luke 3:1-6)
The word of God was spoken to John in the desert. He went about the entire region of the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance which led to the forgiveness of sins, as is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A herald's voice in the desert, crying, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be leveled. The windings shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth, and all mankind shall see the salvation of God.”

Reflection:
John the Baptist urges us to “Prepare the way of the Lord.” Our culture tells us to prepare for the birth of a Baby, an event that evokes wonderful feelings of warmth and happiness. But John's message of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” suggests that we must examine our lives in light of the salvation we seek. It is difficult to orient our lives, anticipation, and preparation with balance and vision toward a glorious Christ who is yet to come. It is far easier to prepare for a Jesus who is a sweet, innocent Baby. The gospel challenges us to take the real events of our everyday lives—all the suffering and pain, all the anxiety and hopelessness, all the joy and peace—and see them as means to recognize the presence of Christ to us. This is what Advent is all about—recognizing the presence of Christ in our lives as salvation already come. (Living Liturgy, p. 10)

Vincentian Meditation:
God speaks to us in all sorts of ways: through Scriptures, through his Church, but also through all the events, great and small, that happen to us. Since most of our lives are made up of very ordinary tasks which we must do each day, it is in these especially that the voice of the Lord is to be heard. We make the mistake so often of expecting God to speak to us through some great event or happening when, in fact, all the time He is speaking to us in all the small events of each day. Sometimes in life we don’t know what to do. God lead us even when our path changes radically, ends abruptly or is surrounded in darkness. By sitting patiently and trustingly in prayer, we gradually see or feel his presence and guidance. It is also true that God often uses the people and the happenings in our daily life to teach us and lead us on the way we should go. Advent tells us to be attentive, to listen in patience and peace.

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How has Advent been a time of recognizing and finding the presence of Christ in your life?

Closing Prayer:
Come Lord Jesus, give us the grace to,
- trust in your loving presence and guidance.
Come Lord Jesus, give us the grace to,
- “Make ready the way of the Lord.”
As we eagerly await your coming, come to all people
- especially the poor and the forgotten. Amen

Regard the patience of our Lord.
2 Pt 3:18
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 12, 2021

Gospel: (Luke 3:10-18)
The crowds asked John the Baptist, “What should we do?” He answered, “Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.”... Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached the good news to the people.

Reflection:
The “good news” is a message of a topsy-turvy world. John baptizes and preaches to the crowds, the “common folk”, and in answer to the question “What should we do?” he answers to the effect, “more than you would wish to do or that can be expected of you”— share what you have with those who have not. John’s good news is that of a totally different way of seeing life. The question, “What should we do?” is asked three times in today’s gospel, and the answer is invariable: reach out to the marginalized with whatever you have and they need. This is the good news of John, and it is identical to the good news Jesus preached. John directs our attention to Jesus and the inauguration of his ministry to the poor and those in need. And so we ask, “What should we do?” (Living Liturgy, p. 14)

Vincentian Meditation:
Sr. Rosalie said: “One night I dreamed that I stood at the judgment seat of God. He received me with great severity and was about to pronounce my sentence to perdition, when suddenly I was surrounded by an immense throng of persons carrying old shoes, hats, and clothing which they showed to God and said, ‘She gave us all these things!’ Then God looked at me and said, ‘Because you gave all these old clothes in My Name, I open heaven to you. Enter, for all eternity!’” (White Wings and Barricades, p.161)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
If we looked at Jesus and asked, “What should we do?” what answer would he give to us?

Closing Prayer:
As our Advent journey continues, we turn in hope to Christ and ask,
-Lord Jesus, what should we do?
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,
-Come, Lord Jesus, and do not delay. Amen

Rejoice in the Lord always.
Th 1:46
FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
December 12

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:
On a December morning in 1531, the Virgin Mary appeared in Mexico to Juan Diego, an indigenous Mexican farmer. During that first sacred encounter and in several more apparitions over the next few days, Mary spoke to Juan Diego in his native, Aztec language and asked him to petition the bishop to build a church. She instructed him to bring roses to the bishop, and when he opened his cloak to drop the flowers before the bishop’s feet, all those present were stunned to see Our Lady’s image painted on his cloak. Why did Mary appear to Juan Diego rather than to the bishop himself, or someone else who was more powerful? Mary’s action is a sign of solidarity with those who might not be considered the most prestigious or powerful by society’s standards. She shows that even a humble farmer has important contributions to make.

Vincentian Meditation:
Frederic Ozanam had a strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, from his youth to his death. And so with a Vincentian heart we respond to the US Catholic Bishops request encouraging Catholic to mark the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe by praying in solidarity with migrants and refugees everywhere. As the patron of the Americans, she gives us a model for how we too might reach out to and welcome those who seek better lives here in our land. Our Lady of Guadalupe’s Feast takes place in Advent, when we recall how Mary journeyed to Bethlehem with Joseph and gave birth to Jesus in a manger. Throughout Advent we ask Mary’s intercession for the safety and well-being of her fellow traveler—especially migrants and refugees—and we pray that her witness inspires us to stand in greater solidarity with them.

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How does our Conference show devotion to Mary?

Closing Prayer:
Through Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe, we now lift our hearts and say,
- bring healing for those who are brokenhearted and protect all migrants and refugees.

Through Mary, patroness of our Society,
- we ask for the grace of a Vincentian heart. Amen
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
December 19, 2021

Gospel: (Luke 1:39-45)
Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

Reflection:
The gospel for this Fourth Sunday of Advent presents us with the meeting of two pregnant women, one older but no wiser about such things than the other quite young mother-to-be, for this was the first child for both. Such a meeting! The infant in Elizabeth’s womb gave a mighty kick when Mary greeted her, and Elizabeth recognized the baby of Mary’s womb as her Lord. Jesus, the Son of God Most High, became incarnate—took on human flesh—as a necessary step to salvation. Jesus’s body was “prepared” as the fruit of Mary’s womb. He came to “do God’s will.” Mary believed and it was fulfilled. She didn’t count the cost. Neither can we. (Living Liturgy, p.18)

Vincentian Meditation:
The mystery of the Incarnation was the permanent inspiration of St. Vincent’s life. It must be ours, too. We shall only fully see Christ in the poor when we have fully seen God in Christ. That is why all that we do and say will have meaning only if it is born of our relationship with Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man. What we bring to the poor must be more than a program for the betterment of their material and economic condition. We must bring something of the peace, the joy and the spiritual freedom which we ourselves have experienced from being present to Jesus Christ through prayer and the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance. I hope that through giving some time this Christmas to the poor and lonely—often a listening heart is of more value than money— you will have enriched the lives of some of those millions of people who have so much less to eat than we have, and so much less to live for. (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p.49-50)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How have we brought peace and joy to the poor this Advent?

Closing Prayer:
As we prepare for Christmas we pray for those who live in doubt,
- may our lives be a sign of faith.
We pray for those who live in fear and oppression,
- may our lives be a sign of hope.
We pray for those who do not experience God’s love,
- may our lives be a sign of charity. Amen

The LORD is with you.
2 Sam 7:3
CHRISTMAS  
December 25

Gospel: (Luke 2:1-14)  
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.” And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Reflection:  
Why do we wish each other “Merry Christmas”? Surely, not because Jesus was born into a perfect world and not because we have a perfect world or perfect families today. “Merry Christmas”? Perhaps not for all. But because of Jesus, all of us can celebrate a Christmas that is joyful and blessed. The Savior of the world was born during the night of the year when darkness is the longest. Jesus comes for the people in dark places. The real, lasting, and deep joy is that the Light shines there. That is why we can say to each other “Merry Christmas”! (Living Liturgy, p.24)

Vincentian Meditation:  
In working to restore all things in Christ we are not alone. God is with us: Emmanuel. His poor also are close to us. May we never forget that the ultimate source of hope and joy for the poor lies in our sharing with them our own deep personal conviction, born of prayer, that with the birth of Christ the Kingdom of God has come; a kingdom of justice, of love and of peace. May your celebration of Christmas be a joyful one! (McCullen, Deep Down Things, p. 366)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)  
In what ways have we shared with the poor our own deep personal conviction of the kingdom of God?

Closing Prayer:  
On this day, joy was reborn into the world,  
-may we share the joy of Christ with everyone.  
On this day, hope was reborn into the world,  
-may we bring the hope of Christ to those who are poor.  
On this day, love was reborn into the world,  
--may we bring the love of Christ to our family and our world.  

Amen  

(Imaginary logo of a stained glass window with the words "Prince of Peace")
THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH
December 26, 2021

Gospel: (Luke 2:41-52)
The parents of Jesus used to go every year to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover... and as they were returning at the end of the feast, the child Jesus remained behind unknown to his parents. Thinking he was in the party, they continued their journey for a day, looking for him among their relatives. Not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem in search of him. On the third day they came upon him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him were amazed at his intelligence and his answers. His Mother said to him “Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow.” He said to them: “Why did you search for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?” But they did not grasp what he said to them.

Reflection:
Parenting is a great entry into the paschal mystery! Good parents spend their children’s growing up years emptying themselves of their own desires for the sake of the well-being of their children, endlessly and willingly sacrificing for them. Then, when the children are adults, parents must be willing to “let go” so that the children can be about their own business. By letting go, parents can help their children know their true identity is that they really belong to God. Thus can they find their real place in the world. Family is about relationships. A holy family is one in which their relationships include God at the center. (Living Liturgy, p.30)

Vincentian Meditation:
In his great joy Frederic wrote about his first-born, Marie, his observations proclaiming the unconscious apostolate of children, which, in God’s providence is to make parents richer and stronger spiritually. “We will begin her education early,” wrote Frederic, “and at the same time, she will begin ours; for I perceive that Heaven has sent her to us to teach us a great deal, and to make us better. I cannot look upon that face, so full of innocence and purity, without seeing the sacred impression of the Creator...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, of setting my feet on the road to heaven?” (Frederic Ozanam: Derum, Apostle in a Top Hat, p.186)

Discussion: (Share your thoughts on the readings after a moment of silence)
How have you found that children do “teach us a great deal and make us better?”

Closing Prayer:
Jesus, thank you for the children who have touched our lives,
- may they grow in age, wisdom and grace.
Jesus, thank you especially for grandchildren,
- may they grow in age, wisdom and grace.
Jesus, thank you for “instructing and correcting us” through children,
- may we all grow in age, wisdom and grace. Amen