

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul Greater Toronto Central Council

Spiritual Readings for the month of September 2020

September 8th is the feast day of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. September 9th is the feast day of blessed Frederic Ozanam. I have given one scripture reading and four different options for responding to the scripture reading for reflection, followed by the same prayer for each reflection. I have given four options because during our spiritual sessions many of you suggested you wanted more options for each reading that I send out each month. The process here would be to read the reading from Scripture, choose one of the four options pray and discuss over one of these options, and then conclude with the closing prayer.

Friendship and community formed a large part of the life of Frederic Ozanam, his wife Amelie, the first Vincentians, and the neighbours they worked with and served.

In this time of epidemic, friendship and community are more than ever important. I have chosen the readings and reflections based on our need to deepen our friendship with God and one another in this time of stress and suffering.

Reading, Reflections and Concluding Prayer:

The reading from scripture is from the Gospel according to Saint John, chapter 15 verses: 14-15

"Jesus said, 'you are my friends if you do what I if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to everything that I have heard from my father.'"

I offer four options that you can choose from for discussion; whatever option you choose the concluding prayer is:

"I give thanks gracious God, for my friends, for connection and laughter, for comfort and strength, for encouragement and unity, for forgiveness and grace, for celebration and joy. They are so many things to me, such a rich tapestry of **blessing** through my life"

From: Woman's Day, Fourteen Prayers for a Friend...

Reflections follow...

Option A

Friendship in marriage and or with a close friend.

Read the above Scripture passage.

Frederic and Amelie Ozanam had a wonderful and loving marriage and relationship.

Just prior to their wedding Amelie, recalled, in a letter to Frederic, these words from the Song of Songs from the Bible:

"Come along come without fear. I believe at times that I hear you arrive in my heart and it beats so strong that it seems it will explode."

Not every person expresses their affection and love to another person in these poetic words. The sentiment I believe is true and powerful. Spend a few moments in silence and, if you wish, share with one another, respecting personal privacy and confidence, how you have benefitted from friendship in either marriage or with a partner or some other close personal relationship.

Discuss why you think each one of us is in need of friendship and wants to have a friend.

How has personal friendship or the longing for a friend helped in your work?

Be silent for one moment and then read the concluding prayer from above.

Option B

Friendship among Vincentians and with the Society and Conferences.

Read the scripture passage.

All the Vincentian founders stressed and wrote about how mutual friendship and support was necessary and sustained them in their work. Francois Lallier, Secretary General of the first society, wrote to Ozanam on March 1st, 1837:

" You know that one thing especially supports and sustains us in this world - it is the thought of having near us friends on whom we can rely for advice and example."

From Antoine Frederic Ozanam by Raymond L. Sickinger, p.182

Share, describe, and discuss with one another new friends you have made in the society and occasions when the advice, counsel, and wisdom of a fellow Vincentian has you made your work lighter and more joyful. How can you "contribute to making the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul a friendlier, kinder, more community oriented organization. Someone make a list of all the Vincentians in the room during the meeting and say their names and all respond, we pray to the Lord for . . .

Do it as a form of litany for all of us on the road to God.

Take one minute of silence and then read the closing prayer as above.

Option C

Friendship with our Neighbours in Need

When visiting those in need Frederic Ozanam "came as an equal not as an official or superior...He felt...that he was under a compliment to those who admitted him into what was their domestic sanctuary", however fouled or cramped their accommodations. These were friends and as Ozanam said "those who know the road to the poor man's house...never knock without a sentiment of respect." As one biographer Edward O'Connor comments "it was not as a relief officer that he came but as a friend".

From Antoine Frederic Ozanam by Raymond L. Sickinger p. 183

Discuss your relationships with our Neighbours in Need. Why do we sometimes find it easier to be patronizing then to treat our Neighbours in Need as our equals?

How do we treat our Neighbours in Need as our equals? We have different needs than our Neighbours in Need and still we share in the commonality of being human beings with needs.

What are the differences do you think between our needs and the needs of our Neighbours in Need?

What gift have you received or do you desire to receive from our Neighbours in Need? We are rendering service to our Neighbours in Need; what service are they rendering us?

Spend two minutes in silence and then say the concluding prayer from above.

Option D

Friendship with Jesus, the Ground of our Being

These reflections come from our tradition of Christianity and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. I would want to include those of you who work with us and who belong to other religious or no religious traditions. That is why I have used the expression "Ground of our Being;" it comes from a Protestant theologian Paul Tillich. Some times people use the phrase from AA, "your higher power". I prefer Ground of Being. Where the prayers I recite are prayed to Jesus, please place who or what is essential in your religious or philosophical tradition. I would especially appreciate feed back on differing traditions as to how you relate friendship to your God or Ground of Being

In the Christian tradition there is an old time religious hymn: "What a friend we have in Jesus." Great for campfire singing!

Discuss when and how you discovered Jesus was your friend.

What has your friendship from Jesus given you?

Where do you think Jesus has failed you?

What are you expecting from Jesus?

What do you think He is expecting from you?

Those in other religious or philosophical traditions please reword these question to respond to your traditions. I would like to hear from those different traditions as to how you resonate to friendship with your belief in God and/or your "Ground of Being".

Silence for two minutes, then concluding prayer from above or other traditions of friendship with God.