

Spiritual Readings for the month of October 2022

Please choose a reading and questions for reflection.

St. Paul's Ethical Instruction (Gal. 6:22, NRSV)

(6:2) Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you fulfill the law of Christ.

St. Vincent de Paul appears to have this maxim in mind in his letter of 1658 to Sister Nicholas Haran in the French city of Nantes. As St. Vincent puts it, "I ask God only two things for you and your sisters; the first, is that He may give you a great desire for the salvation and comfort of the [hospital] patients; and the second, that He may give you the grace to love and bear with one another; because, if you have both these virtues, you will be practicing those which Our Lord has most strongly recommended to us, you will be a source of edification to all, and you will enjoy great peace."¹

Reflection

To be sure, each of us has distinct personalities, and invariably we bring varied facets of our personalities, our selves, to work that we do and to engagement with NINs and with one another. At times, we might not fully understand or appreciate the somewhat different ways in which our colleagues act or advice regarding home visitations. Can you think of some way, within or outside of the SSVP, in which a peer or colleague has suggested something which seemed novel or surprising, yet proved useful to you?

Prayer

Loving Father, you love us irrespective of the cultural, social and personality traits that characterize your children. May we emulate your love, discerning both the beauty that can come from diverse perspectives, and the one and holy light that stands behind each of your precious creations.

Submitted by Vincentian Bro. Alex Damm, St. Jerome's Conference, Peel North

¹ Letter 2512, in *Letters of St. Vincent de Paul*, Translated and edited by Joseph Leonard, with an introduction by Henri Bremond (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1937), pp. 482-483.

The Church: A Sign. An Interview with Professor Gilles Routhier [extract]

In this interview, Professor Routhier is asked about the place of Catholicism in Quebec in the 21st century. In his view, even if a certain image of Catholicism in Quebec is disappearing, the Catholic Church itself is not disappearing but is rather being challenged to renew itself. Although he focuses on Quebec, Routhier's words are equally applicable to other contexts in the rest of Canada — full interview can be read here: <https://jesuits.ca/stories/the-church-a-sign-an-interview-with-professor-gilles-routhier>

Does [the] contemporary Church in Quebec meet the needs of the people?

Underlying this question is the belief that religion must respond to a person's needs. So, we seem to be leaning toward a logic of the marketplace. It is not wrong, necessarily, but it's a rather utilitarian vision of religion, and I think that the Church's contribution can be more than that.

So, does the Church today offer instead a sense of community?

There is a lot of spiritual comfort-seeking going on right now, especially in this time of pandemic. If we can't afford therapy, we can have a beer or go to Mass. But this spiritual comfort is probably not the most valuable thing we have to offer.

So what can the Church offer? I will start with an analogy, which obviously has its limits. Have you seen the film *Of Gods and Men?* [2011] It is about Trappist monks who lived in Algeria, where Sunni Islam is the state religion. The monks could not explicitly proclaim the Gospel because it was forbidden, and therefore, they could not hope for conversion, which was also forbidden. Why then did they stay there? The answer given by the monks in Algeria is that they were there to offer a sign of reconciliation and to be a sign that living together is possible. In the midst of this population, they offered a sign of social friendship and a sign that it is possible to build a world where encounters can happen. They also showed that worshipping God is a priority. That's all they did! They offered something in the midst of society, something that was offered to all. And the people who were there took what they wanted. For example, I don't go to Mass simply for my own sake. It is not because it brings me something personally. It's a sign to society that adoration of God and sharing fraternal life — through Communion in the same bread — is a priority.

Reflection questions:

1. What do you think about Routhier's view of the Church? Do you agree that we are 'being challenged to renew ourselves'? Are there signs of renewal at the present time?
2. "they offered a sign of social friendship and a sign that it is possible to build a world where encounters can happen" — does our work as Vincentian reflect this vision or could we do more?
3. Do we act as though 'worshipping God is a priority' or is that a major difficulty for Christians today with our 'all due to my own efforts' culture?

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