

Spiritual Readings for the month of December 2022

Please choose a reading and questions for reflection.

On Accepting His Will: A Spiritual Refection for this Advent

“(Elizabeth said), Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken by the Lord would be fulfilled.” (Luke 1:45); “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5.6)

Frederic Ozanam’s thoughts and life mirrored the governing principles of the Catholic Social Teachings (CTS), long before 1891 when Pope Leo XIII initiated the process of measuring how Catholics have progressed in their thinking as it relates to those principles. The first two – and key – CTS’s principles relate to the dignity of the human person and respect for human life. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul’s founder was concerned about treating those in need with full respect and his visits to those in poverty made him openly aware of many people leading a life of degradation. His moral vision of “a network of charity” radiated well beyond France with his words: “God has made our work His and wanted it to spread throughout the world by filling it with blessings.”

Reflection Questions

1. Pope Francis writes, “True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.” In this season of giving, how do you become a joyful bearer of the Lord’s message of Incarnation – the Word made flesh, then foreknown and now fulfilled?
2. How do your actions reflect the grace to surrender to His purpose? How is being instructed in His way different from following yours? Have you experienced the deep reality of God’s life within your life? What might He be asking of you at this time and for a concrete purpose during the Advent season and beyond?
3. How do you share in Frederic Ozanam’s vision? What has this vision taught you so far about your own experiences and life?
4. In what ways do you become aware of situations where others’ inherent dignity is ignored, denied or trampled? How does this discernment allow you to promote social justice in your own way?
5. Benedict XVI declares “closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God.” How do you see God’s vision in the lives of those in need and marginalized?

Let us pray... Lord, keep us attentive, accepting and faithful to the mystery of Incarnation which unites You with our humanity, following the fidelity Mary of Nazareth and Frederic Ozanam exemplified. May You cast off our inequities and lead us to commit to the inviolable, sacred value of every human being. May we be generous with our gifts of compassion, reconciliation, vigilance, openness and welcome not only during this Advent season but at every opportunity. Amen.

- Vincentian Bro. Jose I. Torres, St. John of the Cross, Conference, Peel North PC

“In Exile: Those who persevere in doing good will reap a harvest”,

October 29, 2012 (www.wcr.ab.ca/Columns/Columns/entryid/3107)

The following text is an excerpt from the Western Catholic Register Columns by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

“There is a Norwegian proverb that reads: Heroism consists of hanging on one minute longer. When I was a child in elementary school one of the stories assigned to us in our textbook for literature had that title and it told the story of a young boy who had fallen through the ice while skating and was left clinging, cold and alone, to the edge of the ice with no help in sight. As he hung on in this seemingly hopeless situation he was tempted many times to simply let go since no one was going to come along to rescue him. But he held on. Finally, when everything seemed beyond hope, he clung on one minute longer and, after that extra minute, help arrived. The story was simple and its moral was simple: This young boy lived because he had the courage and strength to hang on one minute longer. Rescue comes just after you have given up on it, so extend your courage and wait one minute longer. This is a tale of physical heroism and it makes its point clearly, heroism often consists in staying the course long enough, of hanging on when it seems hopeless, of suffering cold and aloneness while waiting for a new day.”

“Scriptures teaches the same thing about moral heroism: In his Second Letter to Thessalonians, Paul ends a long, challenging admonition by stating: You must never grow weary of doing what is right. And in his letter to the Galatians, Paul virtually repeats the Norwegian proverb: Let us not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Reflection: How can we compare our lives or the lives of marginalized people to the boy in the story?

For starters, we know that it often takes courage and strength to hold on and live among the tensions of one's life, to not give up and to wait for help. For the past few years especially, it seems the world has been ‘holding on’ each day as it confronts all its perils- multiple pandemic waves and health restrictions, climate change and natural disasters, global economic strife and rising costs, racism, hatred, and armed conflict, and tensions within church or state. On top of all that, some people are stretched to the limit by personal tensions that exist all around them - financial need, food insufficiency, physical and mental health issues, or interpersonal conflict at work or among friends and family. As Vincentians we too may feel we are on “the edge of the ice” some days, growing weary of the increasing needs of others or feeling disillusioned by a sense of our limited impact. As with the boy in the story, we are faced with the choice of hanging on or letting go. We can argue and complain about it or even withdraw from the situation altogether. Or we can find our ‘moral heroism’ and not give up. Ultimately, we will find our heroism through our connections to God and our desire to emulate the forbearance, patience, respect and love that Jesus showed. When we persevere and have faith, God's help will reach us.

Meditation:

As Paul referred to in his letter to the Galatians, what will be our ‘harvest if we do not give up’ as Vincentians?

What actions can we take to help us persevere?

Prayer: Father, help us to walk with respect, patience and forbearance and endure all things in love as we carry on the work of our patron, St. Vincent de Paul. Amen

- Vincentian Sr. Rosemary Carey, St. Leo's Conference, Etobicoke PC