

Lectio Divina

SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

“What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?” ~Saint Benedict, from the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (73:3)

“Be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head.” ~SAINT CHARLES BORROMEIO

Monday, November 4 ~ Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time Saint Charles Borromeo, Bishop

Holy Gospel: Luke 14:12-14 On a Sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees. He said to the host who invited him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or sisters or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Meditation: Who do you honor at your table? The Lord is always ready to receive us at his table. As far as we can tell from the gospel accounts, Jesus never refused a dinner invitation! Why, in this particular instance, does Jesus lecture his host on who he should or shouldn't invite to dinner? Did his host expect some favor or reward from Jesus? Did he want to impress his neighbors with the honor of hosting the "miracle worker" from Galilee? Jesus probes our hearts as well. Do you show favor and generosity to those who will repay you in kind? What about those who do not have the means to repay you — the poor, the sick, and the disadvantaged? Generosity demands a measure of self-sacrifice. It doesn't impoverish, but rather enriches the soul of the giver. True generosity springs from a heart full of mercy and compassion. God loved us first, and our love is a response of gratitude to his great mercy and kindness towards us. We cannot outgive God in his generosity towards us. Do you give freely as Jesus gives without expectation for personal gain or reward?

Prayer: Preserve in the midst of your people, we ask, O Lord, the spirit with which you filled the Bishop Saint Charles Borromeo, that your Church may be constantly renewed and, by conforming herself to the likeness of Christ, may show his face to the world. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Contemplation: The Jewish leaders were indignant that Jesus would perform such a miraculous work on the Sabbath, the holy day of rest. They were so caught up in their ritual observance of the Sabbath that they lost sight of God's mercy and goodness. Jesus healed on the Sabbath because God does not rest from showing his mercy and love, ever. God's word has power to change us, spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Is there anything that keeps you bound up or that weighs you down? Let the Lord speak his word to you and give you freedom.

About Saint Charles Borromeo: Charles Borromeo, the bishop of Milan, came from a wealthy, aristocratic Italian family. He was born in the family castle, and lived a rather lavish life, entertaining sumptuously as befit a Renaissance court. He personally enjoyed athletics, music, art, and the fine dining that went along with lifestyles of the rich and famous of the sixteenth century. His maternal uncle, from the powerful Medici family, was pope. As was typical of the times, his uncle-pope made him a cardinal-deacon at age twenty-three and bestowed on him numerous offices. He was appointed papal legate to Bologna, the Low Countries, and the cantons of Switzerland, and to the religious orders of St. Francis, the Carmelites, the Knights of Malta, and others. When Count Frederick Borromeo passed away, many people thought Charles would give up the clerical life and marry now that he had become head of the Borromeo family. But he did not. He deferred to another uncle and became a priest. Shortly thereafter he was appointed bishop of Milan, a city that had not had a resident bishop for over eighty years. Although raised to the grand life, Borromeo spent much of his time dealing with hardship and suffering. The famine of

1570 required him to bring in food to feed three thousand people a day for three months. Six years later a two-year plague swept through the region. Borromeo mobilized priests, religious, and lay volunteers to feed and care for the sixty thousand to seventy thousand people living in the Alpine villages of his district. He personally cared for many who were sick and dying. In the process, Borromeo ran up huge debts, depleting his resources in order to feed, clothe, administer medical care, and build shelters for thousands of plague-stricken people. As if the natural disasters facing Borromeo were not enough, a disgruntled priest from a religious order falling out of favor with Church authorities attempted to assassinate him. As Charles knelt in prayer before the altar, the would-be assassin pulled a gun and shot him. At first, Charles thought he was dying, but the bullet never passed through the thick vestments he was wearing. It only bruised him. Borromeo combined the love of the good life with the self-sacrificing zeal one would expect of a Renaissance churchman. Once when he was playing billiards, someone asked what he would do if he knew he only had fifteen more minutes to live. "Keep playing billiards," he replied. He died at age forty-six, not at the billiard table but quietly in bed.

Tuesday, November 5 ~ Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 14:15-24 One of those at table with Jesus said to him, "Blessed is the one who will dine in the Kingdom of God." He replied to him, "A man gave a great dinner to which he invited many. When the time for the dinner came, he dispatched his servant to say to those invited, 'Come, everything is now ready.' But one by one, they all began to excuse themselves. The first said to him, 'I have purchased a field and must go to examine it; I ask you, consider me excused.' And another said, 'I have purchased five yoke of oxen and am on my way to evaluate them; I ask you, consider me excused.' And another said, 'I have just married a woman, and therefore I cannot come.' The servant went and reported this to his master. Then the master of the house in a rage commanded his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame.' The servant reported, 'Sir, your orders have been carried out and still there is room.' The master then ordered the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in that my home may be filled. For, I tell you, none of those men who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

Meditation: In the ancient world, the most notable sign of favor and intimate friendship was the invitation to "share bread" at the dinner table – "break bread" as we know it today. Who you ate with showed who you valued and trusted as your friends. A great banquet would involve a lavish meal of several courses and a large company of notable guests and friends. One of the most beautiful images of heaven in the scriptures is the royal wedding celebration and banquet given by the King for his son and close friends. We, in fact, have been invited to the most important banquet of all! The last book in the bible ends with an invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb and his Bride, the church: The Spirit and the Bride say, Come! (Rev. 22:17). The 'Lamb of God' is the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride is the people he has redeemed by his own precious blood which was shed upon the cross for our salvation.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, by whose gift your faithful offer you right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray, that we may hasten without stumbling to receive the things you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Notice how Jesus probes the reasons why people make excuses to God's great invitation to "eat bread" with him at his banquet table. The first excuse allows the claims of one's business to take precedence over God's claim. Do you allow any task or endeavor to absorb you so much that it keeps you from the thought of God? The second excuse allows material things and possessions to come before God. Do you allow the media or other diversions to crowd out time for God in daily prayer and worship? The third excuse puts home and family ahead of God. God never meant for our home and relationships to be used selfishly. We serve God best when we invite him into our work, our homes, and our personal lives and when we share our possessions with others.

Wednesday, November 6 ~ Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 14:25-33 Great crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and addressed them, "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, 'This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.' Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down

and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. In the same way, everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

Meditation: What does the parable of the tower builder and a ruler on a war campaign have in common? Both risk serious loss if they don't carefully plan ahead. In a shame and honor culture people want to avoid at all costs being mocked by their community for failing to complete a task they began in earnest. This double parable echoes the instruction of Proverbs: "By wisdom a house is built" and "by wise guidance you can wage a war" to ensure victory (Proverbs 24:3-6). Every landowner who could afford it walled in his orchard as a protection from intruders who might steal or harm his produce. A tower was usually built in a corner of the wall and a guard posted especially during harvest time when thieves would likely try to make off with the goods. Starting a building-project, like a watchtower, and leaving it unfinished because of poor planning would invite the scorn of the whole village. Likewise a king who decided to wage a war against an opponent who was much stronger, would be considered foolish if he did not come up with a plan that had a decent chance of success. Jesus tells his would-be disciples that they, too, must count the cost if they want to succeed as his disciples. Jesus assures success for those willing to pay the price. All it cost is everything! What does Jesus have to offer that's worth giving up everything else? More than we can imagine! Jesus offers the gift of abundant life and everlasting peace and happiness with God.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, by whose gift your faithful offer you right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray, that we may hasten without stumbling to receive the things you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The love of God compels us to choose who or what will be first in our lives. To place any relationship or any possession above God is a form of idolatry. Jesus challenges his disciples to examine who they love first and foremost. Jesus' way to glory and power is opposite the world's way of glory and power. The choice is ours, but the Lord does not leave us alone if we choose to follow him. Does the love of Christ compel you to put God first in all you do (read 2 Corinthians 5)?

Thursday, November 7 ~ Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 15:1-10 The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus addressed this parable to them. "What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance. Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.' In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Meditation: Shepherds normally counted their sheep at the end of the day to make sure all were accounted for. Since sheep by their very nature are very social, an isolated sheep can quickly become bewildered and even neurotic. The shepherd's grief and anxiety is turned to joy when he finds the lost sheep and restores it to the fold. The housewife who lost a coin faced something of an economic disaster, since the value of the coin would be equivalent to her husband's daily wage. What would she say to her husband when he returned home from work? They were poor and would suffer greatly because of the loss. Her grief and anxiety turn to joy when she finds the coin. Both the shepherd and the housewife "search until what they have lost is found". Their persistence pays off. They both instinctively share their joy with the whole community. The poor are particularly good at sharing in one another's sorrows and joys. What was new in Jesus' teaching was the insistence that sinners must be sought out and not merely mourned for. God does not rejoice in the loss of anyone, but desires that all be saved and restored to fellowship with him. That is why the whole community of heaven rejoices when one sinner is found and restored to fellowship with God. Seekers of the lost are much needed today. Do you persistently pray and seek after those you know who have lost their way to God?

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, by whose gift your faithful offer you right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray, that we may hasten without stumbling to receive the things you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The scribes and Pharisees took great offense at Jesus because, among other things, he associated with sinners and treated them graciously. The Pharisees had strict regulations about how they were to keep away from sinners, lest they incur ritual defilement. They were not to entrust money to them or have any business dealings with them, nor trust them with a secret, nor entrust orphans to their care, nor accompany them on a journey, nor give their daughter in marriage to any of their sons, nor invite them as guests or be their guests. They were shocked with the way in which Jesus freely received sinners and ate with them. Sinners, nonetheless, were drawn to Jesus to hear him speak about the mercy of God. Jesus characteristically answered the Pharisees' charge with a parable or lesson drawn from everyday life.

Friday, November 8 ~ Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 16:1-8 Jesus said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.' He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' Then to another he said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.' And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than the children of light."

Meditation: Notice how the dishonest steward is commended not for mishandling his master's wealth, but for his shrewd provision in averting personal disaster and in securing his future livelihood. The original meaning of "shrewdness" is "foresight". A shrewd person grasps a critical situation with resolution, foresight, and the determination to avoid serious loss or disaster. Jesus is concerned here with something more critical than a financial or economic crisis. His concern is that we avert spiritual crisis and personal moral disaster through the exercise of faith and foresight. If Christians would only expend as much foresight and energy to spiritual matters which have eternal consequences as much as they do to earthly matters which have temporal consequences, then they would be truly better off, both in this life and in the age to come.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, by whose gift your faithful offer you right and praiseworthy service, grant, we pray, that we may hasten without stumbling to receive the things you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Contemplation: Saint Ambrose once said: "The bosoms of the poor, the houses of widows, the mouths of children are the barns which last forever." So, thus, true wealth consists not in what we keep but in what we give away. Possessions are a great responsibility. The Lord expects us to use them honestly and responsibly and to put them at his service and the service of others. We belong to God and all that we have is his as well. He expects us to make a good return on what he gives us. God loves generosity and he gives liberally to those who share his gifts with others. The Pharisees, however, had no room for God or others in their hearts. The gospel says they were lovers of money (Luke 16:14). Love of money and wealth crowd out love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus makes clear that our hearts must either be possessed by God's love or our hearts will be possessed by the love of something else. What do you most treasure in your heart?

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