

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)

“Faith in Jesus and in the power of His Holy Name is the greatest spiritual force in the world today. It is a source of joy and inspiration in our youth; of strength in our manhood, when only His Holy Name and His grace can enable us to overcome temptation; of hope, consolation, and confidence at the hour of our death, when more than ever before, we realize that the meaning of Jesus is ‘Lord, the Savior.’ We should bow in reverence to His Name and submission to His Holy Will.” ~BLESSED HENRY SUSO

Monday, December 30 ~ Sixth Day in the Octave of Christmas

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:26-30 There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Meditation: What do you hope for? The hope which God places in our heart is the desire for the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness. Hope grows with prayer and age. Anna was pre-eminently a woman of great hope and expectation that God would fulfill all his promises. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she was found daily in the house of the Lord, attending to the Lord in prayer and speaking prophetically to others about the Lord's promise to send a redeemer. She is a model of godliness to all believers as we advance in age. Advancing age and the disappointments of life can easily make us cynical and hopeless if we do not have our hope placed rightly. Anna's hope in God and his promises grew with age! She never ceased to worship God in faith and to pray with hope. Her hope and faith in God's promises fueled her indomitable zeal and fervor in prayer and service of God's people.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that the newness of the Nativity in the flesh of your Only Begotten Son may set us free, for ancient servitude holds us bound beneath the yoke of sin. 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: A logical question is how do we grow in hope? The answer is simple: by placing our trust in the promises of Jesus Christ and relying not on our own strength, but on the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. Does your hope and fervor for God grow with age?

Tuesday, December 31 ~ Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas Saint Sylvester I, Pope

Holy Gospel: John 1:1-18 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth.

John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

Meditation: Why does John the Evangelist begin his gospel with a description of the Word of God? The "word of God" was a common expression among the Jews. God's word in the Old Testament is an active, creative, and dynamic word. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made" (Psalm 33:6). "He sends forth his commands to the earth; his word runs swiftly" (Psalm 147:15). "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29)? John describes Jesus as God's creative, life-giving and light-giving word that has come to earth in human form. Jesus is the wisdom and power of God which created the world and sustains it who assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. Jesus became truly man while remaining truly God. "What he was, he remained, and what he was not he assumed" (from an early church antiphon for morning prayer). Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother. From the time of the Apostles the Christian faith has insisted on the incarnation of God's Son "who has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2).

Prayer: Come, O Lord, to the help of your people, sustained by the intercession of Pope Saint Sylvester, so that, running the course of this present life under your guidance we may happily attain life without end. 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: Saint Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great early Church fathers (330-395 AD) wrote: "Sick, our nature demanded to be healed; fallen, to be raised up; dead, to rise again. We had lost the possession of the good; it was necessary for it to be given back to us. Closed in darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?" If we are going to behold the glory of God, we will do so through Jesus Christ. Jesus became the partaker of our humanity so we could be partakers of his divinity (2 Peter 1:4). God's purpose for us, even from the beginning of his creation, is that we would be fully united with him when Jesus comes God is made known as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By our being united in Jesus, God becomes our Father and we become his sons and daughters.

Wednesday, January 1 ~ Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God
World Day of Peace
~ A Holy Day of Obligation ~

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:16-21 The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Meditation: What's the significance of a name? For the Jewish people the giving of a name had great importance. When a name was given it represented what that person should be in the future. An unknown name meant that someone could not be completely known. To not acknowledge someone's name meant both denial of the person, destruction of their personality, and change in their destiny. A person's name expressed the reality of his or her being at its deepest level. A Jewish child was named at the time of circumcision, eight days after birth. This rite was instituted by God as an outward sign to single out those who belonged to the chosen people. It was a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his posterity.

Prayer: O God, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary bestowed on the human race the grace of eternal salvation, grant, we pray, that we may experience the intercession of her, through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, 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: In fulfillment of this precept, Mary's newborn child is given the name Jesus on the eighth day according to the Jewish custom. Joseph and Mary gave the name Jesus because that is the name

given by God's messenger before Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb. This name signifies Jesus' identity and his mission. The literal Hebrew means the Lord saves. Since God alone can forgive sins, it is God who, in Jesus his eternal Son made man will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). In the birth and naming of this child we see the wondrous design and plan of God in giving us a Savior who would bring us grace, mercy, and freedom from the power of sin and the fear of death. The name "Jesus" signifies that the very name of God is present in the person of his Son who became man for our salvation. The very name of Jesus is at the heart of all Christian prayer. It is through and in Jesus that we pray to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians have died with one word on the lips, the name of Jesus. Do you exalt the name of Jesus and pray with confidence in his name? Do you revere his name?

About this Feast: On New Year's Day, the octave day of Christmas, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Holy Mother of God. The divine and virginal motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a singular salvific event: for Our Lady it was the foretaste and cause of her extraordinary glory; for us it is a source of grace and salvation because "through her we have received the Author of life" (127). The solemnity of 1 January, an eminently Marian feast, presents an excellent opportunity for liturgical piety to encounter popular piety: the first celebrates this event in a manner proper to it; the second, when duly catechized, lends joy and happiness to the various expressions of praise offered to Our Lady on the birth of her divine Son, to deepen our understanding of many prayers, beginning with that which says: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners." Since 1967, January 1 has been designated "World day for Peace." Popular piety has not been oblivious to this initiative of the Holy See. In the light of the new born Prince of Peace, it reserves this day for intense prayer for peace, education towards peace and those values inextricably linked with it, such as liberty, fraternal solidarity, the dignity of the human person, respect for nature, the right to work, the sacredness of human life, and the denunciation of injustices which trouble the conscience of man and threaten peace.

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi: Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.

Thursday, January 2 ~ Season of Christmas

Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops and Doctors of the Church

Holy Gospel: John 1:19-28 This is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?" He admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Meditation: John the Baptist bridges the Old and New Testaments. He is the last of the Old Testament Prophets who points the way to the Messiah. He is the first of the New Testament witnesses and martyrs. He is the herald who prepares the way for Jesus and who announces his mission to the people: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! John saw from a distance what the Messiah came to accomplish – our redemption from slavery to sin and our adoption as sons and daughters of God, our heavenly Father.

Prayer: O God, who were pleased to give light to your Church by the example and teaching of the Bishops, Saints Basil and Gregory, grant, we pray, that in humility we may learn your truth and practice it faithfully in charity. 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: John was the greatest of the prophets, yet he lived as a humble and faithful servant of God. He pointed others to Jesus, Messiah and Savior of the world. The Catholic Church from the earliest of times has given John many titles which signify his mission: *Witness of the Lord, Trumpet of Heaven, Herald of Christ, Voice of the Word, Precursor of Truth, Friend of the Bridegroom, Crown of the Prophets,*

Forerunner of the Redeemer, Preparer of Salvation, Light of the Martyrs, and Servant of the Word. By your life, by your faith, do you point others to Christ by your witness and example as John the Baptist did?

Friday, January 3 ~ Season of Christmas Most Holy Name of Jesus

Holy Gospel: John 1:29-34 John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.' I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel." John testified further, saying, "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

Meditation: John calls Jesus the *Lamb of God* and thus signifies Jesus' mission as the One who redeems us from our sins. The blood of the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12) delivered the Israelites in Egypt from death. The blood of Jesus, the true Passover Lamb who offered his life up for us on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Corinthians 5:7), delivers us from everlasting death and destruction. It is significant that John was the son of a priest, Zachariah, who participated in the daily sacrifice of a lamb in the temple for the sins of the people (Exodus 29). In Jesus he saw the true and only sacrifice which delivers us from sin.

Prayer: O God, who founded the salvation of the human race on the Incarnation of your Word, give your peoples the mercy they implore, so that all may know there is no other name to be invoked but the Name of your Only Begotten Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Saint Alphonsus Liguori once wrote: "God hath given Him a Name which is above all names. And He commands that this name should be adored by the Angels, by men, and by devils: That in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth. If, then, all creatures are to adore this great name, still more ought we sinners to adore it, since it was in our behalf that this name of Jesus; which signifies Savior, was given to Him; and for this end also He came down from Heaven, namely, to save sinners: 'For us men and for our salvation He came down from Heaven, and was made Man.' We ought to adore Him, and at the same time to thank God Who has given Him this name for our good; it is this name that consoles us, defends us, and makes us burn with love."

About this Feast: This feast marks no progress in the development of the Church year. It merely embellishes the occasion just observed when the Child received the Name Jesus as had been foretold by the angel. The feast is meant to impress on us Christians the dignity of the Holy Name. What did a name signify originally? The name should express the nature of a thing. Thus Adam in paradise gave the animals names in accordance with their being. Among the Jews, God's name expressed His essence, Yahweh, i.e., I (alone) am who am (and cause all else to be). The Jews had the highest respect for the name of God, a reverence that finds continuation in the Our Father: "Hallowed be Thy Name." Persons who played prominent roles in the history of salvation often received their names from God Himself. Adam — man of the earth; Eve — mother of all the living; Abraham — father of many nations; Peter — the rock. The Savior's precursor was given the name God assigned him. According to divine precedent, then, the name of the Redeemer should not be accidental, of human choosing, but given by God Himself. For His name should express His mission. We read in Sacred Scripture how the angel Gabriel revealed that name to Mary: "You shall call His name Jesus." And to St. Joseph the angel not merely revealed the name but explained its meaning: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." The Messiah should not only be the savior, but should be called Savior.

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