

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)

"It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world!"

~Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

Monday, June 17 ~ Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:38-42 Jesus said to his disciples: “You have heard that it was said, *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

Meditation: Jesus does something quite remarkable – He transforms the law of mercy with grace and loving kindness. Jesus also makes clear that there is no room for retaliation. We must not only avoid returning evil for evil, but we must seek the good of those who wish us ill. Do you accept insults, as Jesus did, with no resentment or malice? When you are compelled by others to do more than you think you deserve, do you insist on your rights, or do you respond with grace and cheerfulness? What makes a Christian different from everyone else? What makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is grace - treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated - with loving-kindness and mercy. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can free us from the tyranny of malice, hatred, revenge, and resentment and gives us the courage to return evil with good. Such love and grace has power to heal and to save from destruction. Do you know the power of Christ’s redeeming love and mercy?

Prayer: O God, strength of those who hope in you, graciously hear our pleas, and, since without you mortal frailty can do nothing, grant us always the help of your grace, that in following your commands we may please you by our resolve and our deeds. 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: If someone insults you or tries to take advantage of you, how do you respond? Do you repay in kind? Jesus approached the question of just retribution with a surprising revelation of God’s intention for how we should treat others, especially those who mistreat us. When Jesus spoke about God’s law, he did something no one had done before. He gave a new standard based not just on the requirements of justice (i.e. giving each their due), but based on the law of grace and love. Jesus knew the law and its intention better than any jurist or legal expert could imagine. He quoted from the oldest recorded law in the world: If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Exodus 21:23-25). Such a law today seems cruel, but it was meant to limit vengeance as a first step towards mercy. This law was not normally taken literally but served as a guide for a judge in a law court for assessing punishment and penalty (ref. Deuteronomy 19:18).

Tuesday, June 18 ~ Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus said to his disciples: “You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Meditation: Think about what Jesus was saying when He said that each of us must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. The original meaning of "perfect" in Aramaic is "completeness" or "wholeness – not lacking in what is essential." God gives us every good gift in Jesus Christ so that we may not lack anything we need to do his will and to live as his sons and daughters. He knows our weakness and sinfulness better than we do. And he assures us of his love, mercy, and grace to follow in his ways. Do you want to grow in your love for God and for your neighbor? Ask the Holy Spirit to change and transform you in the image of the Father that you may walk in the joy and freedom of the gospel.

Prayer: O God, strength of those who hope in you, graciously hear our pleas, and, since without you mortal frailty can do nothing, grant us always the help of your grace, that in following your commands we may please you by our resolve and our deeds. 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: What makes Christians different from others and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is grace – treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated – with loving-kindness and mercy. God is good to the unjust as well as the just. His love embraces saint and sinner alike. God seeks our highest good and teaches us to seek the greatest good of others, even those who hate and abuse us. Our love for others, even those who are ungrateful and selfish towards us, must be marked by the same kindness and mercy which God has shown to us. It is easier to show kindness and mercy when we can expect to benefit from doing so. How much harder when we can expect nothing in return. Our prayer for those who do us ill both breaks the power of revenge and releases the power of love to do good in the face of evil. How can we possibly love those who cause us harm or ill-will? With God all things are possible. He gives power and grace to those who believe and accept the gift of the Holy Spirit. His love conquers all, even our hurts, fears, prejudices and sorrows. Only the cross of Jesus Christ can free us from the tyranny of malice, hatred, revenge, and resentment and gives us the courage to return evil with good. Such love and grace has power to heal and to save from destruction. Do you know the power of Christ's redeeming love and mercy?

Wednesday, June 19 ~ Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time Saint Romuald, Abbott, Founder of the Camaldolese Order

Holy Gospel: 6:1-6,16-18 Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Meditation: This gospel passage should be familiar in that it is used on Ash Wednesday – the beginning of the Season of Lent. And yet we sometimes forget that what we learn about ourselves and our lifestyle during Lent should be carried out throughout our lifetime, not just during Lent. So why, then, did Jesus single out prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for his disciples? The Jewish people considered these three as the cardinal works of the religious life. These were seen as the key signs of a pious person, the three great pillars on which the good life was based. Jesus pointed to the heart of the matter. Why do you pray, fast, and give alms? To draw attention to yourself so that others may notice and think highly of you? Or to give glory to God? The Lord warns his disciples of self-seeking glory – the preoccupation with looking good and seeking praise from others. True piety is something more than feeling good or looking holy. True piety is loving devotion to God. It is an attitude of awe, reverence, worship and obedience. It is a gift and working of the Holy Spirit that enables us to devote our lives to God with a holy desire to please him in all things (ref. Isaiah 11:1-2).

Prayer: O God, who through Saint Romuald renewed the manner of life of hermits in your Church, grant that, denying ourselves and following Christ, we may merit to reach the heavenly realms on high. 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: What is the reward which Jesus points out to his disciples by living a life of regular prayer, fasting and almsgiving (as opposed to just 40 days a year)? It is communion with God our Father. In him alone we find the fullness of life and happiness, truth and beauty, love and joy. Saint Augustine wrote the following prayer in his *Confessions*: "When I am completely united to you, there will be no more sorrows or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete. The Lord rewards those who seek him with humble and repentant hearts. He renews us each day and he gives us new hearts of love and compassion that we may serve him and our neighbor with glad and generous hearts. Do you want to grow in your love for God and for your neighbor? Seek him expectantly in prayer, with fasting, and in generous giving to those in need."

About Saint Romuald: St. Romuald, the founder of the Camaldolese Order, could not decide for a considerable time whether to serve God in a religious life or to remain in the world. After his father killed a relative in a duel at which Romuald was forced to be present, he went to the monastery of St. Apollinaris, near Ravenna, and did penance for forty days. Later, he entered this same monastery as a monk. Then he became a follower of the hermit Marinus in Venice. In the course of time he founded an order of hermits which received its name after the most famous of his foundations, Camalduli in Tuscany. Romuald's was one of the strictest orders for men in the West (a branch of the Benedictine Order). Members live isolated in small huts, observing strict silence and perpetual fasting, constantly praying or engaged in manual labor. Our saint enjoyed the grace of bringing sinners, particularly those of rank and power, back to God. When he died, he was a little over seventy years; he had never used a bed, had always sought out ways of practicing severe penances. 15 years later his pupil, the holy doctor of the Church, St. Peter Damian, wrote his biography. "His greatness lies in the rigorous and austere character of his interpretation of monastic life-an approach that was quite singular and unique. In the deepest recesses of his being, Romuald was an ascetic, a monk; not perhaps, a monk of that serene peace and self-possession exemplified by St. Benedict in his life and described by him in his Rule. Nor was Romuald an organizer who through prudent legislation enabled his spirit to flourish and affect great numbers. He reminds us of the stolid figures inhabiting the Eastern deserts, men who by most rigorous mortification and severest self-inflicted penances gave a wanton world a living example of recollection and contemplation. Their very lives constituted the most powerful sermon. It is in company with men like these that St. Romuald continues to live." The saint loved to say, "Better to pray one psalm with devotion and compunction than a hundred with distraction."

Thursday, June 20 ~ Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:7-15 Jesus said to his disciples: "In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you are to pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

Meditation: It is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that we can know God personally and call him "Abba, Father" (ref. Romans 8:15). We can approach God our Father with confidence and boldness because Jesus Christ has opened the way to heaven for us through his death and resurrection. When we ask God the Father for help, he fortunately does not give us what we deserve. Instead, he responds with grace and favor and mercy. It is his nature to love generously and to forgive mercifully. When he gives he gives more than we need so we will have something to share with others in their need as well. God the Father is kind and forgiving towards us and he expects us to treat our neighbor the same. Do you treat others as they deserve, or do you treat them as the Lord would treat you with his grace and favor and mercy? Jesus' prayer includes an injunction that we must ask God to forgive us in proportion as we forgive those who have wronged us. Ask the Lord to free your heart of any anger, bitterness, resentment, selfishness, indifference, or coldness towards others. Let the Holy Spirit fill you with the fire of his burning love and compassion and with the river of his overflowing mercy and kindness.

Prayer: O God, strength of those who hope in you, graciously hear our pleas, and, since without you mortal frailty can do nothing, grant us always the help of your grace, that in following your commands we may please you by our resolve and our deeds. 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: When you pray, do you pray with joy and confidence? The Jewish people were noted for their devotion to prayer. Formal prayer was prescribed for three set times a day. And the rabbis had a prayer for every occasion. Jesus warns his disciples against formalism, making prayer something mechanical and devoid of meaning, with little thought for God. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray he gave them the disciple's prayer, what we call the *Our Father* or *Lord's Prayer*. This prayer of Jesus calls God "our Father" and boldly asks for the things we need to live as his sons and daughters.

Friday, June 21 ~ Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:19-23 Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be."

Meditation: Have you given thought to the kind of treasure and wealth you are searching for? Jesus offers a treasure of incomparable value and worth, but we need healthy eyes – good spiritual vision – to recognize it. What Jesus said about seeking treasure made perfect sense to his audience: keep what lasts! Aren't we all trying to find something we treasure in the hope that it will bring us happiness, peace, and security? Jesus contrasts two very different kinds of wealth – material wealth and spiritual wealth. Jesus urges his disciples to get rich by investing in wealth and treasure which truly lasts, not just for a life-time, but for all eternity as well. Jesus offers heavenly treasures which cannot lose their value by changing circumstances, such as diminishing currency, material degradation, lose, or physical destruction. The treasure which Jesus offers is kept safe and uncorrupted by God himself. What is this treasure which Jesus offers so freely and graciously? It is the treasure of God himself – the source and giver of every good gift and blessing in this life – and a kingdom that will endure forever. The treasure of God's kingdom produces unspeakable joy because it unites us with the source of all joy and blessings – God himself. God offers us the treasure of unending joy and friendship with himself and with all who are united with him in his heavenly kingdom.

Prayer: O God, giver of heavenly gifts, who in Saint Aloysius Gonzaga joined penitence to a wonderful innocence of life, grant through his merits and intercession, that, though we have failed to follow him in innocence, we may imitate him in penitence. 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: Our vision can be easily blinded or distorted as to what is true, good, lovely, pure, and eternal (ref. Philippians 4:8). Certainly prejudice, jealousy, and self-conceit can distort our judgment of ourselves and others and lead to moral blindness. Prejudice and self-conceit also destroys good judgment and blinds us to the facts and to their significance for us. Jealousy and envy make us despise others and mistrust them as enemies rather than friends. We need to fearlessly examine ourselves to see if we are living according to right judgment and sound principles or if we might be misguided by blind prejudice or some other conceit. Love is not jealous ...but rejoices with the truth (ref. 1 Corinthians 13:4-6). Do you live your life in the light of God's truth? If so, where do you direct your time and energy most often?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011;
information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of Catholic Culture.

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