

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)

“Almighty God, give me wisdom to perceive You, intelligence to understand You, diligence to seek You, patience to wait for You, eyes to behold You, a heart to meditate upon You and life to proclaim You, through the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.” ~A PRAYER OF SAINT BENEDICT

Monday, July 8 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:18-26 While Jesus was speaking, an official came forward, knelt down before him, and said, “My daughter has just died. But come, lay your hand on her, and she will live.” Jesus rose and followed him, and so did his disciples. A woman suffering hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. She said to herself, “If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured.” Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, “Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you.” And from that hour the woman was cured. When Jesus arrived at the official’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd who were making a commotion, he said, “Go away! The girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they ridiculed him. When the crowd was put out, he came and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose. And news of this spread throughout all that land.

Meditation: From time to time we need to pause and reflect on how we respond to challenges or troubles in our lives. Do you take your troubles to the Lord with expectant faith and confidence in his help? Or is an afternoon talk show host, or a self-help book your source of knowledge and guidance when you have a problem? People in desperate or helpless circumstances were not disappointed when they sought Jesus out. What drew them to Jesus? Was it hope for a miracle or a word of comfort in their affliction? What did the elderly woman who had suffered greatly for twelve years expect Jesus to do for her? And what did a grieving father expect Jesus to do about his lost beloved daughter? Jesus gave hope where there seemed to be no human cause for it because his hope was directed to God. He spoke words of hope to the woman (Take heart, daughter!) to ignite the spark of faith in her (your faith has made you well!). And he also gave divine hope to a father who had just lost a beloved child.

Prayer: O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness. 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: It took considerable courage and risk for the ruler of a synagogue to openly go to Jesus, for in doing so he invited the public scorn of his neighbors and kin. Even the hired mourners laughed at him in scorn. Their grief was devoid of any hope. Nonetheless, Jesus took the girl by the hand and delivered her from the grasp of death. In both instances we see Jesus' personal concern for the needs of others and his readiness to heal and restore life. In Jesus we see the infinite love of God extending to each and every individual as he gives freely and wholly of himself to each person he meets. Do you approach the Lord with confident expectation that he will hear your request and act? Seek him, find him, pray to him, for he alone is available to you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Why would anyone seek the advice of a talk show host or a self-help book when Jesus is the only when who can help you anytime, anywhere, in your hour of need.

Tuesday, July 9 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Saint Augustine Zhao Rong, Priest and Martyr, and companions, Martyrs

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:32-38 A demoniac who could not speak was brought to Jesus, and when the demon was driven out the mute man spoke. The crowds were amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “He drives out demons by the prince of demons.” Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the

Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

Meditation: We often wonder what kind of help or level of hope can we give to someone who has chronic distress or an incurable disease of mind or body? Spiritual, emotional, and physical suffering often go hand in hand. Jesus was well acquainted with individuals who suffered intolerable affliction - whether physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. A "demoniac" was brought to Jesus by his friends with the hope that Jesus would set him free. These neighbors, no doubt, took pity on this man who had a double impediment. He had not only lost his ability to speak, but was also greatly disturbed in mind and spirit. This was no doubt due to the influence of evil spirits who tormented him day and night with thoughts of despair and hopeless abandonment by God. Jesus immediately set him free from the demon who tormented him and restored his ability to speak at the same time.

Prayer: O God, who in your wonderful providence have strengthened your Church through the confession of the Martyrs Saint Augustine Zhao and companions, grant that your people, faithful to the mission entrusted to it, may enjoy ever greater freedom and witness to the truth before the world. 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: How could Jesus' miracles cause both scorn and wonder at the same time from those who professed faith in God? Don't we often encounter the same reaction today, even in ourselves! The crowds looked with awe at the wonderful works which Jesus did, but the religious leaders attributed this same work to the power of the devil. They disbelieved because they refused to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Their idea of religion was too narrow and closed to accept Jesus as the Anointed One sent by the Father. They were too set in their own ways to change and they were too proud to submit to Jesus. What about you?

Wednesday, July 10 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:1-7 Jesus summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. The names of the Twelve Apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Meditation: Have you ever come to really know and/or experience the power of the gospel in your life? Each of us must come to realize that the core of the gospel message is a simple one: the kingdom of God is imminent! What is the kingdom of God? It is that society of men and women who submit to Jesus Christ and who honor him and him alone as their only King and Lord. In the *Lord's Prayer* we pray for God to reign in our lives and in our world: May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus' preaching of God's kingdom was accompanied by signs and wonders. People were healed not only spiritually, but physically as well. Jesus' words are just as relevant today, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. We cannot buy heaven; but those who know the love and mercy of Jesus already possess heaven in their hearts!

Prayer: O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness. 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: We need not look too closely to see that in the choice of the twelve apostles there is a characteristic feature of God's work: Jesus chose very ordinary people. They were non-professionals, had no wealth or position. They were chosen from the common people who did ordinary things, had no special education, and no social advantages. Jesus wanted ordinary people who could take an assignment and do it extraordinarily well. He chose these men, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power. Remember that the Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. Do you believe that God wants to work through and in you for his glory? Do you believe in the power of God's kingdom? Are you exercising this power properly and regularly?

Thursday, July 11 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Benedict, Abbott; Founder, Order of Saint Benedict

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:7-15 Jesus said to his Apostles: "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick. The laborer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave. As you enter a house, wish it peace. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you. Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words, go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town." Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Meditation: Jesus gave his disciples a two-fold commission: to speak in his name and to act with his power. The core of the gospel message is quite simple: the kingdom (or reign) of God is imminent! What is the kingdom of God? It is that society of men and women who freely submit to God and who honor him as their Lord and King. In the *Lord's Prayer* we pray for God to reign in our lives and in our world: May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus also commissioned his disciples to carry on the works which he did -- bringing the healing power of God to the weary and oppressed. The gospel has power to set people free from harmful and sinful desires, and from fear, oppression, and sickness, whether spiritual, emotional, or physical. The Lord will free us from anything that keeps us from loving him and our neighbor with joy and confidence.

Prayer: O God, who made the Abbot Saint Benedict an outstanding master in the school of divine service, grant, we pray, that, putting nothing before love of you, we may hasten with a loving heart in the way of your commands. 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: One of the messages in today's Gospel is that the people of God must never fail in their duty to give the worker of God what he or she needs to sustain themselves in the Lord's service. Do you pray for the work of the gospel and do you support the Church with your material and financial resources? Jesus ends his instructions with a warning: If people reject God's invitation and refuse his word, then they bring judgment and condemnation on themselves. When God gives us his word there comes with it the great responsibility to respond. Indifference will not do. We are either for or against God in how we respond to his word. God gives us his word that we may have life abundant life in him. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. God shares his word with us and he commissions us to speak it boldly and simply to others. Are you a living witness to the truths and joy of the gospel by word and example to those around you?

About Saint Benedict: (*Medal of Saint Benedict on the right*) Born in Nursia, Italy, he was educated in Rome, was repelled by the vices of the city, and in about 500 fled to Enfide, 30 miles away. He decided to live the life of a hermit and settled at mountainous Subiaco, where he lived in a cave for three years, fed by a monk named Romanus. Despite Benedict's desire for solitude, his holiness and austerities became known and he was asked to be their abbot by a community of monks at Vicovaro. He accepted, but when the monks resisted his strict rule and tried to poison him, he returned to Subiaco and soon attracted great numbers of disciples. He organized them into twelve monasteries under individual priors he appointed, made manual work part of the program, and soon Subiaco became a center of spirituality and learning. He left suddenly, reportedly because of the efforts of a neighboring priest, Florentius, to undermine his work, and in about 525 settled at Monte Cassino. He destroyed a pagan temple to Apollo on its crest, brought the people of the neighboring area back to Christianity, and in about 530 began to build the monastery that was to be the birthplace of Western monasticism. Soon disciples again flocked to him as his reputation for holiness, wisdom, and miracles spread far



and wide. He organized the monks into a single monastic community and wrote his famous rule prescribing common sense, a life of moderate asceticism, prayer, study, and work, and community life under one superior. It stressed obedience, stability, zeal, and had the Divine Office as the center of monastic life; it was to affect spiritual and monastic life in the West for centuries to come. While ruling his monks he counseled rulers and Popes, ministered to the poor and destitute about him, and tried to repair the ravages of the Lombard Totila's invasion. He died at Monte Cassino on March 21.

Friday, July 12 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:16-23 Jesus said to his Apostles: "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

Meditation: What does Jesus mean when he tells his disciples that they must be sheep in the midst of wolves? The prophet Isaiah foretold a time when wolves and lambs will dwell in peace (ref. Isaiah 11:6 and 65:25). This certainly refers to the second coming of Christ when all will be united under the Lordship of Jesus after he has put down his enemies and established the reign of God over the heavens and the earth. Until that time, the disciples must expect opposition and persecution from those who oppose the gospel. Jesus never hesitated to tell his disciples what they might expect if they followed him. And the message that Jesus gave to his disciples then is just as pertinent today, for many of us have felt like lambs among the wolves when we discuss or practice living out our faith. Simple practices such as asking the Lord to bless our food before a meal while in a public restaurant can often draw stares from people, let alone standing up for what is right and truthful – protection of human life by speaking out against abortion; preserving the institution of marriage as designed by God, versus same-sex marriage. Jesus never said that proclaiming God's word and answering his call to "follow me" would be an easy one. Jesus suffered and died on the cross as a result of proclaiming God's word! Are we willing to be faithful to Christ recognizing we may suffer? Remember what Christ said in today's gospel: "You will be hated by all because of my name, and whoever endures to the end will be saved." What is more important – being popular among people in this earthly life, or being loved by Jesus Christ for being a true disciple? The answer is clear, but we must decide for ourselves which path we must take – and the result of our decision puts nothing less than our chances of obtaining eternal life at stake. Don't be fooled by others, or fool yourself; make the right decision by following the way of Christ first, foremost and always.

Prayer: O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness. 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 Jesus is telling us in today's gospel comes down to this: *This is my task for you at its grimmest and worst; do you accept it?* This offering means a lot of blood, toil, sweat, tears, and heartache. We tend not to think of this when Jesus our Lord and Savior commissions us in his service. Nonetheless, our privilege is to follow in the footsteps of the Master who laid down his life for us. Recall what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: "The way of Christ 'leads to life'; a contrary way 'leads to destruction.'" (CCC #1696) Now, once more, are you willing to accept hardship and suffering in following in the footsteps of Jesus our Lord – footsteps which lead to a simpler, less complex life on earth while leading us on the path to eternal life? Or are you looking to be popular with the people of this earth – "get along" for the sake of getting along, while turning your back on the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ? Will you deny him as Peter did? Or will you stand up and stand firm against the tide of all that is contrary to the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ? It's your call – make the right one! God's laws and Christ's teachings are timeless. Can we say that about anything else on this earth?

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.