

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)

“The limitless loving devotion to God, and the gift God makes of Himself to you, are the highest elevation of which the heart is capable; it is the highest degree of prayer. The souls that have reached this point are truly the heart of the Church.” ~SAINT TERESA BENEDICTA OF THE CROSS (EDITH STEIN)

Monday, August 5 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time Dedication of Saint Mary Major

Holy Gospel: Luke 11:27-28 While Jesus was speaking, a woman from the crowd called out and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed." He replied, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

Meditation: When an admirer wished to compliment Jesus by praising his mother, Jesus did not deny the truth of the blessing she pronounced. Her “beatitude” (which means “blessedness”) recalls Mary's canticle: “All generations will call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). Jesus adds to her words by pointing to the source of all true blessedness – union with God in heart, mind, and will. Mary humbly submitted herself to the miraculous plan of God for the incarnation of His only begotten Son – the Word of God made flesh in her womb, by declaring: “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Mary heard the word spoken to her by the angel and she believed it.

Prayer: Pardon the faults of your servants, we pray, O Lord, that we, who cannot please you by our own deeds, may be saved through the intercession of the Mother of your Son and our Lord. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: It is one thing to “hear” the word of God. But what happens next is entirely up to us. Do we then find ourselves opening our minds and hearts to let the word of God inspire us to change our way of life? To align our minds and our hearts more closely to that of Jesus Christ? To enlighten us about the path that we are to take so that God’s plan unfolds in our lives? To teach us right living from sinful ways? To humbly submit to doing the will of God? Or do we “hear” the word of God and find ourselves doing little or nothing about it – in one ear and out the other, perhaps. As St. James reminds us, we are to “Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” By hearing the word of God and observing it – putting the word of God and the teachings of Christ into action – we become blessed in the eyes of the Lord. We become true, authentic disciples. So where do you find yourself when you hear the word of God?

About this Memorial: We celebrate today the dedication of one of the four most illustrious churches of Rome. While each diocese and parish keeps its own dedication anniversary, the Church universal commemorates the consecration of the four great Roman basilicas, the mother churches, we may call them, of Christendom, viz., St. John Lateran, St. Peter, St. Paul Outside the Walls, and St. Mary Major. By means of these feasts the Church seeks to link all Christians with the Holy See. This feast commemorates the miracle of the snowfall that occurred during the night of August 4-5 in the year 358 on the site where the basilica now stands. According to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared in a dream to two faithful Roman Christians, the patrician John and his wife, as well as to Pope Liberius (352-366), asking that a church be built in her honor on the site where snow would fall on the night of August 4-5. Pope Liberius traced the outlines of the church in the snow and the first basilica was built on that site. It was completed about a century later by Pope Sixtus III (432-440), after the Council of Ephesus in 431 during which Mary was declared to be the Mother of God. St. Mary Major is important to Christendom for three reasons:

(a) **It stands as a venerable monument to the Council of Ephesus** (431), at which the dogma of Mary's divine Motherhood was solemnly defined; the definition of the Council occasioned a most notable increase in the veneration paid to Mary.

(b) **The basilica is Rome's "church of the crib,"** a kind of Bethlehem within the Eternal City; it also is a celebrated station church, serving, for instance, as the center for Rome's liturgy for the first Mass on Christmas. In some measure every picture of Mary with the divine Child is traceable to this church.

(c) **St. Mary Major is Christendom's first Marian shrine for pilgrims.** It set the precedent for the countless shrines where pilgrims gather to honor our Blessed Mother throughout the world. Here was introduced an authentic expression of popular piety that has been the source of untold blessings and graces for Christianity in the past as in the present.

Tuesday, August 6 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:28b-36 Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up a mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

Meditation: What is the significance of this glorious event? Jesus went to the mountain knowing full well what awaited him in Jerusalem – his betrayal, rejection and crucifixion. Jesus very likely discussed this momentous decision to go to the cross with Moses and Elijah. God the Father also spoke with Jesus and gave his approval: This is my beloved Son; listen to him. The Father glorified his son because he obeyed. The cloud which overshadowed Jesus and his apostles fulfilled the dream of the Jews that when the Messiah came the cloud of God's presence would fill the temple again (ref. Exodus 16:10, 19:9, 33:9; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Maccabees 2:8). The Lord Jesus not only wants us to see his glory – he wants to share this glory with us. And Jesus shows us the way to the Father's glory – "follow me" – listen to me and obey my words, my teachings – take the path I have chosen for you and you will receive the blessings of my Father's kingdom – your name will be written in heaven. Do you "listen to him" as God instructs each of us to do, and that you may follow him?

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of your Only Begotten Son confirmed the mysteries of faith by the witness of the Fathers and wonderfully prefigured our full adoption to sonship, grant, we pray, to your servants, that, listening to the voice of your beloved Son, we may merit to become co-heirs with him. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Origen, the great 3rd century Bible scholar, shows us how the Transfiguration can change our lives: "When he is transfigured, his face also shines as the sun that he may be manifested to the children of light who have put off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, and are no longer the children of darkness or night but have become the sons of day, and walk honestly as in the day. Being manifest, he will shine unto them not simply as the sun, but as demonstrated to be the sun of righteousness."

Wednesday, August 7 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saints Sixtus II, Pope and Martyr , and Companions, Martyrs

Holy Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28 At that time Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did him homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

Meditation: What did Jesus mean by the expression "throwing bread to the dogs?" The Jews often spoke of the Gentiles with arrogance and insolence as "unclean dogs" since the Gentiles were excluded from God's covenant and favor with Israel. For the Greeks the "dog" was a symbol of dishonor and was used to

describe a shameless and audacious woman. Matthew 7:6 records the expression: "do not give dogs what is holy." Jesus, no doubt, spoke with a smile rather than with an insult because this woman immediately responds with wit and faith – "even the dogs eat the crumbs."

Prayer: By the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray, almighty God, make us docile in believing the faith and courageous in confessing it, just as you granted Saint Sixtus and his companions that they might lay down their lives for the sake of your word and in witness to Jesus. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Contemplation: Notice how Jesus praises a Gentile woman for her faith and for her love. She made the misery of her child her own and she was willing to suffer rebuff in order to obtain healing for her loved one. She also had indomitable persistence. Her faith grew in contact with the person of Jesus. She began with a request and she ended on her knees in worshipful prayer to the living God. No one who ever sought Jesus with faith – whether Jew or Gentile – was refused his help. Do you seek Jesus with expectant faith?

Thursday, August 8 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Dominic, Priest; Founder, Order of Preachers

Holy Gospel: Matthew 16:13-23 Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Meditation: When Jesus told his disciples that he must suffer many things, be rejected by the religious authorities in Jerusalem, and then be put to death, he also prophesied that he would be raised on the third day. Peter, always quick to respond, rejected the notion that the Messiah must suffer and be killed. This wasn't the kind of Messiah that Peter and the Jews expected. They didn't understand that the prophet Isaiah, some 700 hundred years before Christ's birth, foretold that God's Anointed One would come as the Suffering Servant who would be despised, rejected, and put to death to atone for the sins of the world [see Isaiah 52:13-15; Isaiah 53:1-12] . Jesus saw in Peter's rejection a temptation to avoid the way of the cross which involved obedience and trust in God's will, and voluntary suffering and sacrifice for the sake of others. Jesus rebuked not only Peter but Satan, the greatest of angels who disobeyed and refused to serve his Lord and Creator. Are you ready to follow the Lord Jesus, to suffer and die for him, that you may also share in his glory and resurrection?

Prayer: May Saint Dominic come to the help of your Church by his merits and teaching, O Lord, and may he, who was an outstanding preacher of your truth, be a devoted intercessor on our behalf. 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 question that Jesus asks his disciples is one that Jesus also asks each one of us: Who do *YOU* say that I am? And so, who is Jesus for you? If you truly believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, sent by God to redeem us, sent by God to show us the way, the truth and the life that we are to follow, how do we respond by our individual and collective actions to Jesus' question "*Who do YOU say that I am?*" Actions speak louder than words; your response to this question is not only important, but can also be a life-changing moment for you. Think about your response; do something about it!

Friday, August 9 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Virgin and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 16:24-28 Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his

angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay each according to his conduct. Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."

Meditation: Without God we are nothing. Everything we have is an outright gift from God. We owe him everything, including our very lives. Every gift, talent, and ability we have we owe to God. It's possible to give God our money, but not ourselves; it's possible to give God lip-service, but not our hearts. Many do this each and every day of their lives. But a true disciple gladly gives up all that he or she has in exchange for an unending life of joy and happiness with God. God gives without measure. The joy he offers no sadness or loss can diminish. The cross of Christ leads to victory and freedom from sin, despair, and death. What is the cross which Jesus Christ commands me to take up each day? When my will crosses with his will, then his will must be done.

Prayer: God of our Fathers, who brought the Martyr Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross to know your crucified Son and to imitate him even until death, grant, through her intercession, that the whole human race may acknowledge Christ as its Savior and through him come to behold you for eternity. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: What is the most important investment you can make with your life? Jesus poses some probing questions to challenge our assumptions about what is most profitable and worthwhile. In every decision of life we are forming ourselves into a certain kind of person. The kind of person we are, our character, determines to a large extent the kind of future we will face and live. It is possible that some can gain all the things they set their heart on, only to wake up suddenly and discover that they missed the most important things of all in this earthly life. Of what value are material things if they don't help you gain what truly lasts in eternity? Neither money nor possessions can buy heaven, mend a broken heart, or cheer a lonely person. Which is why we need to give today's Gospel some serious thought as to how we live our lives, and what is most important in our lives. Perhaps this "prayer of surrender" composed by St. Ignatius of Loyola may be helpful: "Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more."

About Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross: A brilliant philosopher who stopped believing in God when she was fourteen, Edith Stein was so captivated by reading the autobiography of Teresa of Avila that she began a spiritual journey that led to her Baptism in 1922. Twelve years later she imitated Teresa by becoming a Carmelite, taking the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Born into a prominent Jewish family in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland), Edith abandoned Judaism in her teens. As a student at the University of Gottingen, she became fascinated by phenomenology, an approach to philosophy. Excelling as a protégé of Edmund Husserl, one of the leading phenomenologists, Edith earned a doctorate in philosophy in 1916. She continued as a university teacher until 1922 when she moved to a Dominican school in Speyer; her appointment as lecturer at the Educational Institute of Munich ended under pressure from the Nazis. After living in the Cologne Carmel (1934-1938), she moved to the Carmelite monastery in Echt, Netherlands. The Nazis occupied that country in 1940. In retaliation for being denounced by the Dutch bishops, the Nazis arrested all Dutch Jews who had become Christians. Teresa Benedicta and her sister Rosa, also a Catholic, died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz on August 9, 1942. Pope John Paul II beatified Teresa Benedicta in 1987 and canonized her in 1998.

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