

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)

“Today the liturgy invites us to contemplate Mary, taken up body and soul into heaven. By a special privilege, she was enriched by divine grace from the moment of her conception, and Christ, who ascended to the right hand of the Father, opened the doors of his kingdom to her, first among human creatures. Now from heaven, where the Queen of the angels and saints is crowned, the Mother of God and of the Church is close to the Christian people before whom she shines as the “new and immaculate woman (who) mediated for the guilt of the first woman.”

~EXCERPTED FROM A HOMILY GIVEN BY POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II ON THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY

Monday, August 12 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, Religious

Holy Gospel: Matthew 17:22-27 As Jesus and his disciples were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.” And they were overwhelmed with grief. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax approached Peter and said, “Does not your teacher pay the temple tax?” “Yes,” he said. When he came into the house, before he had time to speak, Jesus asked him, “What is your opinion, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take tolls or census tax? From their subjects or from foreigners?” When he said, “From foreigners,” Jesus said to him, “Then the subjects are exempt. But that we may not offend them, go to the sea, drop in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. Open its mouth and you will find a coin worth twice the temple tax. Give that to them for me and for you.”

Meditation: On three different occasions the Gospels record that Jesus’ prediction that he would endure great suffering through betrayal, rejection, and the punishment of a cruel death. The Jews resorted to stoning and the Romans to crucifixion – the most painful and humiliating death they could devise for criminals they wanted to eliminate. No wonder the apostles were greatly distressed at such a prediction! If Jesus their Master were put to death, then they would likely receive the same treatment by their enemies. Jesus called himself the “Son of Man” because this was a common Jewish title for the “Messiah.” So why must the Messiah be rejected and killed? Did not God promise that his Anointed One would deliver his people from their oppression and establish a kingdom of peace and justice? The prophet Isaiah had foretold that it was God’s will that the “Suffering Servant” make atonement for sins through his suffering and death. Jesus paid the price for our redemption with his blood. Slavery to sin is to want the wrong things (those include anything against the ten commandments, and anything contrary to the truths of sacred scripture) and to be in bondage to destructive desires. The ransom Jesus paid sets us free from the worst tyranny possible – the tyranny of sin and the fear of death. Jesus’ victory did not end with death but triumphed over the tomb. Jesus defeated the powers of death through his resurrection.

Prayer: O God, who made Saint Jane Frances de Chantal radiant with outstanding merits in different walks of life, grant us, through her intercession, that walking faithfully in our vocation, we may constantly be examples of shining light. 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: No one is overly fond of paying taxes, especially when one thinks they might be unreasonable or unjust. And yet taxes provide much in the way of necessary services. Jesus and his disciples were confronted by tax collectors on the issue of tax evasion. When questioned about paying the temple tax, Jesus replied to his disciples: We must pay so as not to cause bad example. In fact, we must go beyond our duty in order that we may show others what they ought to do. The scriptural expression to “give no offense” doesn’t refer to insult or annoyance; rather it means to put no stumbling block in the

way of another that would cause them to trip or fall. Jesus would not allow himself anything which might possibly be a bad example to someone else. Do you evade unpleasant responsibilities or obligations?

Tuesday, August 13 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Saints Pontian, Pope and Martyr and Hippolytus, Priest and Martyr**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14 The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost."

Meditation: Do you find yourself somewhat surprised to see the disciples discussing with Jesus who is the greatest? Have each of us not done the same thing at some point in our lives? The appetite for glory and greatness seems to be inbred in us on one level or another. Even the Psalms speak about the glory God has destined for us: "you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor." (ref. Psalm 8:6). Jesus made a dramatic gesture by placing a child next to himself to show his disciples who really is the greatest in the kingdom of God. What can a little child possibly teach us about greatness? Children in the ancient world had no rights, position, or privileges of their own. They were socially at the "bottom of the rung" and at the service of their parents, much like the household staff and domestic servants. What is the significance of Jesus' gesture? Jesus elevated a little child in the presence of his disciples by placing the child in a privileged position of honor at his right side.

Prayer: May the precious long-suffering of the just, O Lord, we pray, bring us a great increase of love for you and always prompt in our hearts constancy in the holy faith. 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: So, then, who is the greatest in God's kingdom? The one who is humble of heart, who instead of asserting their rights willingly, empties themselves of pride and self-seeking glory by taking the lowly position of a servant or child – and they do so by imitating Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity. Remember the words of Saint Benedict: "The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience, which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all."

Wednesday, August 14 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe, Priest and Martyr**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the Church. If he refuses to listen even to the Church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Meditation: We've all been wronged by someone. When we are in that situation, Jesus says the first step is to speak directly but privately to the individual who has done the harm. One of the worst things we can do is brood over our grievance. This can poison the mind and heart and, thus "spin us up" and make it more difficult to go directly to the person who caused the damage. If we truly want to settle a difference with someone, we need to do it face to face. If this fails in its purpose, then the second step is to bring another person or persons, someone who is wise and gracious rather than someone who is hot-tempered or judgmental. The goal is not so much to put the offender on trial, but to persuade the offender to see the wrong and to be reconciled.

Prayer: O God, who filled the Priest and Martyr Saint Maximilian Kolbe with a burning love for the Immaculate Virgin Mary and with zeal for souls and love of neighbor, graciously grant, through his intercession, that striving for your glory by eagerly serving others, we may be conformed, even until

death, to your Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Saint Augustine had this to say about today's Gospel: "If someone has done you injury and you have suffered, what should be done? You have heard the answer already in today's scripture: 'If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.' If you fail to do so, you are worse than he is. He has done someone harm, and by doing harm he has stricken himself with a grievous wound. Will you then completely disregard your brother's wound? Will you simply watch him stumble and fall down? Will you disregard his predicament? If so, you are worse in your silence than he in his abuse. Therefore, when any one sins against us, let us take great care, but not merely for ourselves. For it is a glorious thing to forget injuries. Just set aside your own injury, but do not neglect your brother's wound." So what's holding you back from doing as Christ instructed? Not human pride!

Thursday, August 15 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time
Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
~ A Holy Day of Obligation ~

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:39-56 Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, and has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever." Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Meditation: What enabled Mary to grow in faith and to persevere in hope in the face of obstacles and trials? The Gospel of Luke reveals the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in Mary's life. When Elizabeth and Mary greeted one another they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with a joyful anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promise to give a Savior. John the Baptist, even before the birth of the Messiah, pointed to his coming and leapt for joy in the womb of his mother as the Holy Spirit revealed to him the presence of the King to be born. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to enable us to know and experience the indwelling presence of God and the power of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the way in which God reigns within each of us. Mary accepted her mission with uncompromising faith and obedience. She acted with unwavering trust and faith because she believed that God would fulfill the word he had spoken. Her great hymn of praise echoes the song of Hannah (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10) and proclaims the favor of the Lord: God exalts the lowly and he fills the hungry. The Holy Spirit is ever ready to renew your faith and hope in God's promises and to make you strong in love for God and your neighbor. Do you live in the joy and confidence of God's indwelling presence with you through his Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who assumed the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the Mother of your Son, body and soul into heavenly glory, grant we pray, that, always attentive to the things that are above, we may merit to be sharers of her glory. 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 strong is your hope in the promises of God? Mary is a model of faith and hope for us. And she is among "the first-fruits" of "all those who belong to Jesus" and who share in his triumph (1 Corinthians 15:20-24). There is a venerable tradition dating back to the early church which marks Mary's "falling asleep" (the "Feast of Dormition" in many Eastern churches) and her heavenly birthday when she was received into heaven. Her reception into heaven is seen as a sign to all believing Christians of the promise Jesus made that we too would be received into paradise. At the last supper Jesus told his disciples that he would prepare a place for them in his Father's house. "And when I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3).

Friday, August 16 ~ Nineteen Week in Ordinary Time Saint Stephen of Hungary

Holy Gospel: Matthew 19:3-12 Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery." His disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

Meditation: What is God's intention for our state in life, whether married or single? Jesus deals with the issue of divorce by taking his hearers back to the beginning of creation and to God's plan for the human race. In Genesis 2:23-24 we see God's intention and ideal that two people who marry should become so indissolubly one that they are one flesh. That ideal is found in the unbreakable union of Adam and Eve. They were created for each other and for no one else. They are the pattern and symbol for all who were to come. Jesus explains that Moses permitted divorce as a concession in view of a lost ideal. Jesus sets the high ideal of the married state before those who are willing to accept his commands. Jesus likewise sets the high ideal for those who freely renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer: Grant your Church, we pray, almighty God, that she may have Saint Stephen of Hungary, who fostered her growth while a king on earth, as her glorious defender in heaven. 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: Both marriage and celibacy are calls from God to live a consecrated life – that is to live as married couples (marriage between one man and one woman) or as singles who belong not to themselves but to God. Despite what we may think, our lives are not our own; they belong to God. He gives the grace and power to those who seek to follow in his way of holiness in their state of life. Do you seek Christ and his grace for your state of life?

About Saint Stephen: Saint Stephen was the first Christian king of Hungary. He was born in 975 at Gran, the son of Prince Geisa, and was baptized in 985 by Saint Adalbert. While courting Gisela, the sister of Emperor Saint Henry II, he was promised her hand in marriage provided that he remain firm in the Christian faith and lead the pagan Hungarians to Christianity. He kept his word though it cost him dearly. From the hands of Pope Sylvester II (999-1003) he received the royal crown and was solemnly enthroned at Gran on the feast of Mary's Assumption, 1001. Stephen was one of the wisest princes of his time. His royal generosity is shown in the establishment of the archbishopric of Gran and ten Hungarian bishoprics, and in his love toward the poor. Because he visited them in their houses and washed their feet, his right hand has remained incorrupt. Great was his zeal in prayer and meditation. From his marriage came a saintly son, the devout Emeric, an angel of purity, who died seven years before his father. By prayer and fasting Stephen sought the conversion of all Hungary; rightfully is he called the apostle of his nation. He chose the Mother of God as the patroness of Hungary.

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
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