

# Lectio Divina

## SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

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“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)

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***“What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”*** ~SAINT AUGUSTINE

### **Monday, August 26 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:13-22** Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the Kingdom of heaven before men. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.’ Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred? And you say, ‘If one swears by the altar, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, one is obligated.’ You blind ones, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? One who swears by the altar swears by it and all that is upon it; one who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it.”

**Meditation:** Jesus was angry with the religious leaders because they failed to listen to God's word and they misled the people they were supposed to teach and lead in the ways of God. Jesus gave a series of examples to show how misguided they were. In their zeal to win converts, they required unnecessary and burdensome rules which obscured the more important matters of religion, such as love of God and love of neighbor. They were leading people to “Pharisaism” rather than to God. They failed as religious leaders to teach others the way of God's kingdom because they failed to listen to and to understand the intention of God's word. Through their own pride and prejudice they blindly shut the door of their own hearts and minds to God's understanding of his kingdom.

**Prayer:** O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found. 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 can we shut the door of God's kingdom in our lives? By closing our ears to Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelations 17:14; 19:16), who speaks words of life and love, truth and freedom, hope and pardon. The Lord Jesus wants to dwell with us and to bring us his kingdom. He opens the way for each of us to “ascend to heaven” and to bring “heaven to earth” in the daily circumstances of our lives. God's kingdom is present in all who seek him and who do his will. Do you pray as Jesus taught, “May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10)?

### **Tuesday, August 27 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time** **Saint Monica**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:23-26** Jesus said: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean.”

**Meditation:** Jesus used the example of tithing to show how far they had missed the mark. God had commanded a tithe of the first fruits of one's labor as an expression of thanksgiving and honor for his

providential care for his people (Deuteronomy 14:22; Leviticus 27:30). The scribes, however, went to extreme lengths to tithe on insignificant things (such as tiny plants) with great mathematical accuracy. They were very attentive to minute matters of little importance, but they neglected to care for the needy and the weak. Jesus admonished them because their hearts were not right. They were filled with pride and contempt for others. They put unnecessary burdens on others while neglecting to show charity, especially to the weak and the poor. They meticulously went through the correct motions of conventional religion while forgetting the realities.

**Prayer:** O God, who console the sorrowful and who mercifully accepted the motherly tears of Saint Monica for the conversion of her son Augustine, grant us, through the intercession of them both, that we may bitterly regret our sins and find the grace of your pardon. 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 essence of God's commandments is love – love of God and love of neighbor. God is love and everything he does flows from his love for us. True love is unconditional, costly, and sacrificial – it both embraces and lifts the burdens of others. Do you allow the love of God to truly transform your whole life – including the way you think of others, speak of them, and treat them?

### **Wednesday, August 28 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time Saint Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:27-32** Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood.' Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out!"

**Meditation:** Jesus used strong language to warn the religious leaders about the vanity of appearance and pretense. In Palestine tombs were often placed by the sides of roads. They were painted white which made them glisten in the midday sun, especially around the time of the great feasts, so that people would not accidentally touch them and incur ritual impurity. Jesus warns that what truly corrupts a person is not ritual impurity but the impurity of sinful thoughts and attitudes – pride, greed, sloth, envy, hatred, gluttony, and lust - which lead to sinful behavior. The scribes and Pharisees were intensely religious in their outward observances, but their outward show didn't match the inner reality of the state of their hearts. They not only neglected the poor and the weak, but they were intolerant towards anyone who challenged their idea of religion. That is why so many of the prophets in past ages – who warned about tolerating evil desires and unjust behavior towards one neighbor – were persecuted and even killed by their own rulers and people.

**Prayer:** Renew in your Church, we pray, O Lord, that spirit with which you endowed your Bishop Saint Augustine that, filled with the same spirit, we may thirst for you, the sole fount of true wisdom, and seek you, the author of heavenly love. 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:** Jesus chastised the religious leaders for being double-minded and for demanding from others standards which they refused to satisfy. They professed admiration for the prophets by building their tombs while at the same time they opposed the prophets' message and closed their ears to the word of God. They shut themselves to heaven and they hindered others from understanding God's word. They rejected Jesus as their Messiah because their hearts were blinded and hardened to the voice of God. Only the humble of heart can receive from God true wisdom and understanding, pardon and healing. The Holy Spirit is ever ready to renew our minds and hearts and to teach us God's way of love and holiness. Ask the Holy Spirit to purify your heart and mind and to fill you with the wisdom and understanding of God's word.

**About Saint Augustine:** Augustine Aurelius was born on November 13, 354, in Tagaste, North Africa. His father was a pagan, his mother, St. Monica. Still unbaptized and burning for knowledge, he came under the influence of the Manicheans, which caused his mother intense sorrow. He left Africa for Rome, deceiving his mother, who was ever anxious to be near him. She prayed and wept. Yet the evil spirit drove him constantly deeper into moral degeneracy, capitalizing on his leaning toward pride and stubbornness. Grace was playing a waiting game; there still was time, and the greater the depths into which the evil spirit plunged its fledgling, the stronger would be the reaction. Augustine recognized this vacuum; he saw

how the human heart is created with a great abyss; the earthly satisfactions that can be thrown into it are no more than a handful of stones that hardly cover the bottom. And in that moment grace was able to break through: Restless is the heart until it rests in God. The tears of his mother, the sanctity of Milan's Bishop Ambrose, the book of St. Anthony the hermit, and the sacred Scriptures wrought his conversion, which was sealed by baptism on Easter night 387. Augustine's mother went to Milan with joy and witnessed her son's baptism. It was what it should have been, the greatest event of his life, his conversion — *metanoia*. Grace had conquered. Augustine accompanied his mother to Ostia, where she died. In 391 he was ordained priest at Hippo, in 394 made coadjutor to bishop Valerius, and then from 396 to 430 bishop of Hippo. Augustine, numbered among the four great Doctors of the Western Church, possessed one of the most penetrating minds of ancient Christendom. He was the most important Platonist of patristic times, the Church's most influential theologian, especially with regard to clarifying the dogmas of the Trinity, grace, and the Church. He was a great speaker, a prolific writer, a saint with an inexhaustible spirituality. His *Confessions*, a book appreciated in every age, describes a notable portion of his life (until 400), his errors, his battles, his profound religious observations. Famous too is his work *The City of God*, a worthy memorial to his genius, a philosophy of history. Most edifying are his homilies, especially those on the psalms and on the Gospel of St. John. As an emblem Christian art accords him a burning heart to symbolize the ardent love of God which permeates all his writings.

### **Thursday, August 29 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time Martyrdom of John the Baptist**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 6:17-29** Herod was the one who had John the Baptist arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married. John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill him but was unable to do so. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him. She had an opportunity one day when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, his military officers, and the leading men of Galilee. Herodias' own daughter came in and performed a dance that delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you." He even swore many things to her, "I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the Baptist." The girl hurried back to the king's presence and made her request, "I want you to give me at once on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was deeply distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests he did not wish to break his word to her. So he promptly dispatched an executioner with orders to bring back his head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison. He brought in the head on a platter and gave it to the girl. The girl in turn gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

**Meditation:** Are you prepared to be a witness, and if necessary, a martyr for Jesus Christ? John the Baptist bridged the Old and New Testaments. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets who pointed the way to the Messiah. He is the first of the New Testament witnesses and martyrs. Jesus equated the coming of his kingdom with violence. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force (Matthew 11:12). John suffered violence for announcing that the kingdom of God was near. He was thrown into prison and then beheaded. Why did Herod put John to death when he knew him to be a righteous and holy man? Herod was a weak ruler. He could take a strong stand on the wrong things when he knew the right. Such a stand, however, was a sign of weakness and cowardice. Unfortunately for Herod, he could not rid himself of sin by ridding himself of the man who confronted him with his sin.

**Prayer:** O God, who willed that Saint John the Baptist should go ahead of your Son both in his birth and in his death, grant that, as he died a Martyr for truth and justice, we, too, may fight hard for the confession of what you teach. 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:** Since John's martyrdom to the present times the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and persecution at the hands of violent people. The blood of Christian martyrs throughout the ages bear witness to this fact. Their testimony to the truth of the Gospel and their willingness to suffer and die for their faith prove victory rather than defeat for the kingdom of God. Through Christ's victory on the cross they obtain the glorious crown of victory and everlasting life with Jesus Christ. What gives us the power, boldness, and courage to witness to Jesus Christ and to the truth of the Gospel? The Holy Spirit fills us with courage, love, and boldness to make Jesus Christ known and loved. We do not need to fear

those who oppose the timeless truths of the Gospel, because the love of Jesus Christ is stronger than fear and death itself. His love conquers all – even our fears and timidity in the face of opposition and persecution. We can trust in his grace and help at all times. Are you ready to make Christ known and loved wherever and whenever, and if necessary to suffer for his sake and for the sake of the Gospel?

**About Saint John the Baptist:** There is no doubt that blessed John suffered imprisonment and chains as a witness to our Jesus our Savior and Redeemer, whose forerunner he was, and gave his life for him. His persecutor had demanded not that he should deny Christ, but only that he should keep silent about the truth. Nevertheless, he died for Christ. Does Christ not say: "I am the truth?" Therefore, because John shed his blood for the truth, he surely died for Christ. Through his birth, preaching and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering he showed that Christ also would suffer. Such was the quality and strength of the man who accepted the end of this present life by shedding his blood after the long imprisonment. He preached the freedom of heavenly peace, yet was thrown into irons by ungodly men. He was locked away in the darkness of prison, though he came bearing witness to the Light of life and deserved to be called a bright and shining lamp by that Light itself, which is Christ. To endure temporal agonies for the sake of the truth was not a heavy burden for such men as John; rather it was easily borne and even desirable, for he knew eternal joy would be his reward. Since death was ever near at hand, such men considered it a blessing to embrace it and thus gain the reward of eternal life by acknowledging Christ's name. Hence the apostle Paul rightly says: "You have been granted the privilege not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for his sake." He tells us why it is Christ's gift that his chosen ones should suffer for him: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us."

### Friday, August 30 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13** Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

**Meditation:** Jesus' story of ten single ladies waiting for a wedding procession in the middle of the night seem strange to us today. But Jesus' audience knew all too well how easily this could happen to them. To show up for a wedding party without proper attire and travel arrangements is like trying to get into a special event today that requires a prearranged permit or reservation. You just don't get in without the proper pass. Can you imagine the frustration travelers might experience when going abroad and finding out that they can't get into some country because they don't have the right visa or a valid passport?

**Prayer:** O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found. 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:** Jesus warns us that there are consequences for being unprepared. When the Lord Jesus comes to lead you to his heavenly banquet will you be ready to hear his voice and follow? Our eternal welfare depends on our hearing, and many have trained themselves to not hear. We will not be prepared to meet the Lord, face to face, when he calls us on the day of judgment, unless we listen to him today. The Lord invites us to feast at his heavenly banquet table. The question is, are you ready?

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