

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)

“To do the will of God, man must despise his own; the more he dies to himself, the more he will live to God.” ~SAINT PETER CLAVER

**Monday, September 9 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Peter Claver, Priest**

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:6-11 On a certain Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees watched him closely to see if he would cure on the Sabbath so that they might discover a reason to accuse him. But he realized their intentions and said to the man with the withered hand, “Come up and stand before us.” And he rose and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?” Looking around at them all, he then said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so and his hand was restored. But they became enraged and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.

Meditation: What is God's intention for the commandment “Keep holy the Sabbath” (ref. Exodus 20:8; Deut. 5:12)? The scribes and Pharisees wanted to catch Jesus in the act of breaking the Sabbath ritual so they might accuse him of breaking God's law. Jesus knew their thoughts. The scribes and Pharisees were filled with fury and contempt for Jesus because they put their own thoughts of right and wrong above God. They were caught up in their own legalism because they did not understand or see the purpose of God. Jesus shows their fallacy by pointing to God's intention for the Sabbath: to do good and to save human life rather than do evil or destroy human life.

Prayer: O God, who made Saint Peter Claver a slave of slaves and strengthened him with wonder charity and patience as he came to their help, grant, through his intercession, that, seeking the things of Jesus Christ, we may love our neighbor in deeds and in truth. 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 Sabbath for Catholics (and all Christians for that matter) is celebrated on Sunday as the “Lord's Day” to commemorate God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ and the new work of creation accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection (ref. 2 Corinthians 5:17). God's action is a model for us. If God “rested and was refreshed” on the seventh day, we, too, ought to “rest” and let others, especially the poor, “be refreshed” (ref. Exodus 31:17; 23:12). Taking “our Sabbath rest” is a way of expressing honor to God for all that he has done for us. Such “rest” however does not exempt us from our love for our neighbor. If we truly love the Lord above all else, then the love of God will overflow to love of neighbor as well. Saint Augustine once said: “The charity of truth seeks holy leisure; the necessity of charity accepts just work.” How can we make Sunday a day holy to the Lord? First, by refraining from unnecessary work and from activities that hinder the worship we owe to God. We can also perform works of mercy, such as humble service of the sick, the infirmed, and the elderly. And we ought to seek appropriate relaxation of mind and body as well. The joy of the Lord's Day is a great gift to refresh and strengthen us in our love of God and of neighbor (ref. Nehemiah 8:10). Let's think about how we can make every Sunday – the Lord's Day – a day of rest, and rest in the arms of the Lord.

About Saint Peter Claver: Peter was born of a distinguished family in Catalonia, Spain in 1581. He joined the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), and after his novitiate in Taragona was sent to the college of Montesion in Majorca. There he met Brother Alphonse Rodriguez (also a saint), the humble porter of the convent. Alphonse set Peter's soul on fire to save the souls of the African slaves — thousands being lost because there was no one to minister to them. His superiors finally sent Peter to New Granada in April of 1610. He was never to return to his native Spain. By 1615 Peter finished his studies and was ordained a priest in Cartagena. When he made his final vows, he added a personal one: Peter, slave of the slaves for ever. Here in this busy seaport city, in a hot, humid, tropical climate, Father Claver spent most of his

priestly life. Cartagena was the principal slave market for the New World. Thousands of blacks were brought there, herded into warehouses and auctioned to the highest bidder. Captured in Africa, these slaves were chained in groups of six and crammed into the lower holds of ships designed to hold 100-200, but holding 600-800 humans. Their treatment was so inhumane that 1/3 of the slaves died in the sea journey. It was to these people that Peter would minister. He would meet each slave ship as it arrived. Peter would go to the warehouses and bring them food, water, medicine and clothing, for, as he said "We must speak to them with our hands, before we try to speak to them with our lips." But most of all, he brought them God. While nursing them back to health, he would teach them of Christ, explain to them that they were loved by God more than they were abused by man, and that evil outraged God. He offered their only consolation: hope in the promises of God. Nearly three hundred thousand of them received baptism at his hands. After twenty-seven years of devotion to the black slaves, St. Peter Claver died at Cartagena on September 8, 1654. Pope Leo XIII canonized him on January 15, 1888, proclaiming him special patron and protector of the negroes. St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, porter of the college, who inspired Peter to become a missionary for the slaves was canonized at the same time.

Tuesday, September 10 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:12-19 Jesus departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called a Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. And he came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured. Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.

Meditation: When Jesus embarked on his mission he chose twelve men to be his friends and apostles. In the choice of the twelve, we see a characteristic feature of God's work: Jesus chose very ordinary people. They were non-professionals, who 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. When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not shrug back because we think that we have little or nothing to offer. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. Is there anything holding you back from giving yourself unreservedly to God?

Prayer: O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters, that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance. 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: Wherever Jesus went the people came to him because they had heard all the things he did. They were hungry for God and desired healing from their afflictions. In faith they pressed upon Jesus to touch him. As they did so power came from Jesus and they were healed. Even demons trembled in the presence of Jesus and left at his rebuke. Jesus offers freedom from the power of sin and oppression to all who seek him with expectant faith. When you hear God's word and consider all that Jesus did, how do you respond? With doubt or with expectant faith? With skepticism or with confident trust? Pray to Jesus; while in prayer, ask him to increase your faith in his saving power and grace.

Wednesday, September 11 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time ~ Anniversary of 9/11 ~

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:20-26 Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. But woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

Meditation: How can one possibly find happiness in poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution? If we want to be filled with the joy and happiness of heaven, then we must empty ourselves of all that would shut God out of our hearts. Poverty of spirit finds ample room and joy in possessing God alone as the greatest treasure possible. Hunger of the spirit seeks nourishment and strength in God's word and Spirit. Sorrow and mourning over wasted life and sin leads to joyful freedom from the burden of guilt and oppression. God reveals to the humble of heart the true source of abundant life and happiness. Jesus promises his disciples that the joys of heaven will more than compensate for the troubles and hardships they can expect in this world. Thomas Aquinas said: "No person can live without joy. That is why someone deprived of spiritual joy goes after carnal pleasures." Do you know the joy and happiness of hungering and thirsting for God alone?

Prayer: O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters, that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance. 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 encounter misfortune, grief, or tragic loss, do you respond with fear or with faith? With passive resignation or with patient hope and trust in God? We know from experience that no one can escape all of the inevitable trials of life — pain, suffering, sickness, and death. When Jesus began to teach his disciples he gave them a "way of happiness" that transcends every difficulty and trouble that can weigh us down with grief and despair. Jesus began his sermon on the mount by addressing the issue of where true happiness can be found. The word beatitude literally means happiness or blessedness. Jesus' way of happiness, however, demands a transformation from within — a conversion of heart and mind which can only come about through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer of Pope Saint John Paul II ~ Anniversary of 9/11: Since the inhumane terrorist attacks that occurred in different parts of the United States of America, we again recommend to the eternal mercy of the God of our Fathers the numerous innocent victims. We ask for consolation and comfort for their family and relatives, burdened by pain; we invoke strength and courage for the many who continue their work in the places struck by this terrible disaster; we implore for tenacity and perseverance by all men of goodwill continuing on the paths of justice and peace. May the Lord remove from the heart of man every trace of resentment, of hostility and of hate, and open him to reconciliation, to solidarity, and to peace. Let us pray, so that the "culture of love" may be established all over the world . . . O God, Almighty and Merciful Father, he who sows discord cannot understand You; he who loves violence cannot welcome You: watch over us in our painful human condition tried by the brutal acts of terrorism and death. Comfort your children and open our hearts to hope, that our time may again know days of serenity and peace, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday September 12 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time Most Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:39-47 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Meditation: How can each of us grow in faith and to persevere in hope in the face of life's obstacles and trials, just as Mary did? 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. Knowing this, do you live in the joy and confidence of God's indwelling presence with you through his Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, for all who celebrate the glorious Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she may obtain your merciful favor. 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: Mary received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. Her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away. Do you know the joy of a life given over to God in faith and trust?

About the Holy Name of Mary: The Hebrew name of Mary, Miryām, (in Latin Domina) means "lady" or "sovereign;" this Mary is in virtue of her Son's sovereign authority as Lord of the World. We call Mary "our Lady" as we call Jesus "our Lord," and when we pronounce her name we implore her aid and place ourselves under her protection. On this day dedicated to the Holy Name of Mary let us repeat that wonderful prayer of Saint Bernard, responding to Pope Benedict XVI's invitation to "invite everyone to become a trusting child before Mary, even as the Son of God did. Saint Bernard says, and we say with him: 'Look to the star of the sea, call upon Mary ... in danger, in distress, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. May her name never be far from your lips, or far from your heart ... If you follow her, you will not stray; if you pray to her, you will not despair; if you turn your thoughts to her, you will not err. If she holds you, you will not fall; if she protects you, you need not fear; if she is your guide, you will not tire; if she is gracious to you, you will surely reach your destination'" (Pope Benedict XVI, September 9, 2007).

Friday, September 13 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time Saint John Chrysostom, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:39-42 Jesus told his disciples a parable: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye."

Meditation: Have you wondered why is judgmentalism and a critical mind and spirit so rampant today, even among persons of faith? Part of it is due to the number of "talking heads" on television programs who "spin" their views into their "reporting" on issues and news events – journalists have made note of this disturbing trend which influences how we, then, conduct ourselves. Of course blogs and people who feel compelled to vent and post their negative comments and viewpoints on their Facebook pages don't help. As difficult as it may be at times, we must strive to "think the best of other people" if we, ourselves, wish to grow in love. The Lord knows our faults and he sees all – even the imperfections and sins of the heart which we cannot recognize in ourselves. Ask the Lord to flood your heart with his loving-kindness and mercy that you may only have room for charity and forbearance towards your neighbor.

Prayer: O God, strength of those who hope in you, who willed that the Bishop Saint John Chrysostom should be illustrious by his wonderful eloquence and his experience of suffering, grant us, we pray, that, instructed by his teachings, we may be strengthened through the example of his invincible patience. 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: A true disciple of Christ is one who listens to the voice of their Master and who submits to the skillful help of the Divine Physician for treating and removing the cancer of sin in our lives. If we are to be guides and teachers for others, then we need clear vision, both spiritual and moral vision, and a map that shows us the right destination for our life's journey. If our ultimate destination is heaven, then there is only one way to get there and that way is through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the cross of Christ sin is pardoned and the sinner is made whole, darkness and corruption give way to light and truth, death is defeated and new life restored. The cross of Christ frees us from condemnation and guilt and shows us the way of perfect love.

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.