

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)

“On the last day, when the general examination takes place, there will be no question at all on the text of Aristotle, the aphorisms of Hippocrates, nor the paragraphs of Justinian. Charity will be the whole syllabus.” ~SAINT ROBERT BELLARMINE

Monday, September 16 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Cornelius, Pope and Martyr, and Saint Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:1-10 When Jesus had finished all his words to the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave who was ill and about to die, and he was valuable to him. When he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and save the life of his slave. They approached Jesus and strongly urged him to come, saying, “He deserves to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation and he built the synagogue for us.” And Jesus went with them, but when he was only a short distance from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not consider myself worthy to come to you; but say the word and let my servant be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, *Go*, and he goes; and to another, *Come here*, and he comes; and to my slave, *Do this*, and he does it.” When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him and, turning, said to the crowd following him, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” When the messengers returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Meditation: A Roman official boldly sought Jesus with a daring request. What made him confident was that Jesus would receive his request and act favorably towards him. Like a true soldier, he knew the power of command. And he saw in Jesus both the power and the mercy of God to heal and restore life. In the Roman world the position of centurion was very important. He was an officer in charge of a hundred soldiers. In a certain sense, he was the backbone of the Roman army, the cement which held the army together. Polybius, an ancient writer, describes what a centurion should be: “They must not be so much venturesome seekers after danger as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over-anxious to rush into the fight, but when hard pressed, they must be ready to hold their ground, and die at their posts.”

Prayer: O God, in Saints Cornelius and Cyprian you have given your people an inspiring example of dedication to the pastoral ministry and constant witness to Christ in their suffering. May their prayers and faith give us courage to work for the unity of your Church. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The centurion who approached Jesus was not only courageous, but faith-filled as well. He risked the ridicule of his cronies by seeking help from an itinerant preacher from Galilee, and well as mockery from the Jews. Nonetheless, he approached Jesus with confidence and humility. Augustine notes that the centurion regarded himself as unworthy to receive the Lord into his house: “Humility was the door through which the Lord entered to take full possession of one whom he already possessed.” Jesus commends him for his faith and immediately grants him his request. Are you willing to suffer ridicule in the practice of your faith? When you need help, do you approach the Lord Jesus with expectant faith?

Tuesday, September 17 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Robert Bellarmine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:11-17 Jesus journeyed to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd accompanied him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said, “Young man, I tell you, arise!” The dead man sat up

and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, "A great prophet has arisen in our midst," and "God has visited his people." This report about him spread through the whole of Judea and in all the surrounding region.

Meditation: The scriptures make clear that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (see Ezekiel 33:11); he desires life, not death. Jesus not only had heart-felt compassion for the widow who lost her only son, he also had extraordinary supernatural power – the ability to restore life and to make whole again. Jesus, however, as an observant Jew incurred grave risk by approaching the bier, since the Jews understood that contact with a dead body made oneself ritually impure. His physical touch, however, not only restored life but brought freedom and wholeness to soul as well as body. This miracle took place near the spot where the prophet Elisha raised another mother's son back to life again (see 2 Kings 4:18-37). Jesus claimed as his own one whom death had seized as its prey. By his word of power he restored life for a lad marked for death. Jesus is Lord not only of the living but of the dead as well. Jesus triumphed over the grave and he promises that because he lives (and will never die again), we also shall have abundant life with and in him both now and forever (John 14:19). Do you trust in the Lord Jesus to give you abundant life and everlasting hope in the face of life's trials, misfortunes, and moments of despair?

Prayer: O God, who adorned the Bishop Saint Robert Bellarmine with wonderful learning and virtue to vindicate the faith of your Church, grant, through his intercession, that in the integrity of that same faith your people may always find joy. 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 do you respond to the misfortunes of others? In a number of places the gospel records that Jesus was "moved to the depths of his heart" when he met with individuals and with groups of people. Our English word "compassion" doesn't fully convey the deeper meaning of the original Hebrew word which expresses heart-felt "sympathy" and personal identification with the suffering person's grief and physical condition. Why was Jesus so moved on this occasion when he met a widow and a crowded funeral procession on their way to the cemetery? Jesus not only grieved the untimely death of a young man, but he showed the depth of his concern for the woman who lost not only her husband, but here only child as well. When a member of the parish dies, how do you respond to the death of a member of the parish? What about the deceased's family members? Perhaps you may not know them well, but as a member of the parish community, should we not pray for the repose of the soul of the deceased, and extend heartfelt compassion and sympathy for the family? Of course we should. For this is an important aspect of community, of belonging to a parish, and what being a member of Christ body is all about.

Wednesday, September 18 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:31-35 Jesus said to the crowds: "To what shall I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a dirge, but you did not weep.' For John the Baptist came neither eating food nor drinking wine, and you said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by all her children."

Meditation: So, what do children's games have to do with the kingdom of God? The children in Jesus' parable react with disappointment because they cannot convince anyone to join in their musical medley. They complain that when they play their music at weddings, no one dances or sings; and when they play at funerals, it is the same dead response. This refrain echoes the words of Ecclesiastes 3:4 — there is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance. Jesus' message of the kingdom of God is a proclamation of good news and of great joy for those who will listen; but it is also a warning for those who refuse. Why did the message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus meet with resistance and deaf ears? It was out of jealousy and spiritual blindness that the scribes and Pharisees attributed John the Baptist's austerities to the devil and they attributed Jesus' table fellowship as evidence for messianic pretense. They succeeded in frustrating God's plan for their lives because they had closed their hearts to the message of John the Baptist and now to Jesus.

Prayer: Look upon us, O God, Creator and ruler of all things, and, that we may feel the working of your mercy, grant that we may serve you with all our heart. 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: Have you ever sat back and thought about those things that can make us spiritually dull and slow to hear God's voice? Like the generation of Jesus' time, our age is marked by indifference and contempt, especially in regards to the things of God's kingdom. Indifference dulls our ears to God's voice

and to the good news of the gospel. Only the humble of heart can find joy in God's grace and favor. Do you listen to God's word with faith and obedience?

Thursday, September 19 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint Januarius, Bishop and Martyr**

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:36-50 A certain Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven." He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Meditation: Why did the woman approach Jesus and anoint him at the risk of ridicule and abuse by others? Mary's action was motivated by one thing, and one thing only, namely, her love for Jesus and her gratitude for forgiveness. She did something, though, that a Jewish woman would never do in public. She loosed her hair and anointed Jesus with her tears. It was customary for a woman on her wedding day to bound her hair. Thus, for a married woman to loosen her hair in public was a sign of grave immodesty. It is obvious that the woman was oblivious to all around her, except for Jesus. She also did something which only love can do. She took the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus. Her love was not calculated but extravagant. In a spirit of humility and heart-felt repentance, she lavishly served the one who showed her the mercy and kindness of God. Jesus, in his customary fashion, never lost the opportunity to draw a lesson from such an incident.

Prayer: O God, who grant us to venerate the memory of the Martyr Saint Januarius, give us, we pray, the joy of his company in blessed happiness for all eternity. 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 who met Jesus could do so with indifference. They were either attracted to him or repelled by him. Why did a rabbi invite him to a nice dinner and then treat him discourteously by neglecting to give him the customary signs of respect and honor? Simon was very likely a collector of celebrities. He patronized Jesus because of his popularity with the crowds. Why did he criticize Jesus' compassionate treatment of a "sinful woman" — most likely a prostitute? The Pharisees shunned the company of "public sinners" and in so doing they neglected to give them the help they needed to find healing and wholeness. Jesus makes clear that great love springs from a heart forgiven and cleansed. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (ref. 1 Peter 4:8), "for love is of God" (ref. 1 John 4:7). The woman's lavish expression of love was proof that she had found favor with God. The stark contrast of attitudes between Simon and the woman of ill-repute, demonstrate how we can either accept or reject God's mercy.

Friday, September 20 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint Andrew Kim, Priest and Martyr;** **Saint Paul Chong, Martyr, and Companions, Martyrs**

Holy Gospel: Luke 8:1-3 Jesus journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

Meditation: Are you ready to serve the Lord and to support the work of the gospel with your personal resources? During his three years of public ministry Jesus traveled widely. The gospel records that a band

of women accompanied Jesus and the twelve apostles. This was a diverse group of women; some came from rich and prominent families; some had been prostitutes, and others had been afflicted with mental and physical infirmities. We know that Mary Magdalene had lived a very troubled life before Jesus freed her from seven demons. She was privileged to be the first to see Jesus as the risen Lord. As the wife of King Herod's chief financial officer, Joanna was a wealthy lady of the court. It's unlikely that these two would have ever met under other circumstances. What brought them together and united them in a bond of friendship, service, and loyalty to Jesus? Certainly Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God had transformed them. Unlike the apostles, who took great pride in being the chosen twelve, these women did not seek position or demand special privileges. Jesus had touched them so deeply that they were grateful to do anything for him, even menial service. They brought their gifts and resources to Jesus to use as he saw fit. Or are you more like the status-conscious apostles who were concerned for their position, or like the women who were content to serve Jesus quietly and generously with their personal resources? In our fallen state, our natural tendency is to want to be served and placed first and to avoid giving too much of ourselves to the service of others. And besides, who really prefers to take the lowly place of a servant who puts the needs of others before their own needs? Jesus is our best example who "came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom" for us (Matthew 20:28). The gospel honors these women who imitated Jesus in his selfless sacrificial love and humble service.

Prayer: O God, who have been pleased to increase your adopted children in all the world, and who made the blood of the Martyrs Saint Andrew Kim Tae-gon and his companions a most fruitful seed of Christians, grant that we may be defended by their help and profit always from their example. 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: Our privilege as children of God and disciples of Jesus is to serve as Jesus served with humility, selfless love, generosity, joy, and a willingness to do whatever God asks of us. God, in his turn, gives us every good gift and grace we need to carry out our task and mission. God in his infinite power needs no one, but in his wisdom and love, he chooses to entrust his work through each one of us. His Holy Spirit equips us with all that we need to love and serve others. No one is unimportant or unnecessary in God's economy. The least in his kingdom find a home and a mission at Jesus' side. Do you know the joy of serving Jesus in company with others who love and serve him willingly?

About St. Andrew Kim, St. Paul Chong, and Companions: This first native Korean priest was the son of Korean converts. His father, Ignatius Kim, was martyred during the persecution of 1839 and was beatified in 1925. Paul Chong Hasang was a lay apostle and a married man, age 45. Christianity came to Korea during the Japanese invasion in 1592 when some Koreans were baptized, probably by Christian Japanese soldiers. Evangelization was difficult because Korea refused all contact with the outside world except for an annual journey to Beijing to pay taxes. When Pope John Paul II visited Korea in 1984, he canonized Andrew, Paul, ninety-eight Koreans and three French missionaries who had been martyred between 1839 and 1867. Among them were bishops and priests, but for the most part they were laypersons: 47 women, 45 men. Among the martyrs in 1839 was Columba Kim, an unmarried woman of twenty-six. She was put in prison, pierced with hot awls and seared with burning coals. She and her sister Agnes were disrobed and kept for two days in a cell with condemned criminals, but were not molested. After Columba complained about the indignity, no more women were subjected to it. The two were beheaded. A boy of thirteen, Peter Ryou, had his flesh so badly torn that he could pull off pieces and throw them at the judges. He was killed by strangulation. Protase Chong, a forty-one-year-old noble, apostatized under torture and was freed. Later he came back, confessed his faith and was tortured to death. Today there are approximately four million Catholics in Korea.

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