

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)

“Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to God's heart. You must speak to Jesus not only with your lips, but with your heart. In fact on certain occasions you should only speak to Him with your heart.” ~ SAINT PIO OF PIETRELCINA (PADRE PIO)

**Monday, September 23 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Pio of Pietrelcina (*Padre Pio*)**

Holy Gospel: Luke 8:16-18 Jesus said to the crowd: “No one who lights a lamp conceals it with a vessel or sets it under a bed; rather, he places it on a lampstand so that those who enter may see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care, then, how you hear. To anyone who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away.”

Meditation: What does the image of light and a lamp tell us about God's kingdom? Lamps in the ancient world served a vital function, much like they do today. They enable people to see and work in the dark and to avoid stumbling. The Jews also understood "light" as an expression of the inner beauty, truth, and goodness of God. In his light we see light (Psalm 36:9). His word is a lamp that guides our steps (Psalm 119:105). God's grace not only illumines the darkness in our lives, but it also fills us with spiritual light, joy, and peace. Jesus used the image of a lamp to describe how his disciples are to live in the light of his truth and love. Just as natural light illumines the darkness and enables one to see visually, so the light of Christ shines in the hearts of believers and enables us to see the heavenly reality of God's kingdom. In fact, our mission is to be light-bearers of Christ so that others may see the truth of the gospel and be freed from the blindness of sin and deception.

Prayer: O God, who, by a singular grace, gave the priest Saint Pio a share in the Cross of your Son and, by means of his ministry, renewed the wonders of your mercy, grant that through his intercession we may be united constantly to the sufferings of Christ, and so brought happily to the glory of the resurrection. 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 remarks that nothing can remain hidden or secret. We can try to hide things from others, from ourselves, and from God. How tempting to shut our eyes from the consequences of our sinful ways and bad habits, even when we know what those consequences are. And how tempting to hide them from others and even from God. But, nonetheless, everything is known to God who sees all. There is great freedom and joy for those who live in God's light and who seek his truth. Those who listen to God and heed his voice will receive more from him — abundance of wisdom, guidance, peace, and blessing. Do you know the joy and freedom of living in God's light?

About Saint Padre Pio: Born to a southern Italian farm family, the son of Grazio, a shepherd. At age 15 he entered the novitiate of the Capuchin Friars in Morcone, and joined the order at age 19. He suffered several health problems, and at one point his family thought he had tuberculosis. He was ordained at age 22 on 10 August 1910. While praying before a cross on September 20, 1918, Padre Pio received the stigmata. He is the first priest ever to be so blessed. As word spread, especially after American soldiers brought home stories of Padre Pio following WWII, the priest himself became a point of pilgrimage for both the pious and the curious. He would hear confessions by the hour, reportedly able to read the consciences of those who held back. He was reportedly able to bi-locate, levitate, and heal by touch. In 1956 he founded the House for the Relief of Suffering, a hospital that serves 60,000 a year. Padre Pio died on September 23, 1968 at age 81. Today there are over 400,000 members worldwide in prayer groups begun by Padre Pio in the 1920's. His canonization miracle involved the cure of Matteo Pio Colella, age 7, the son of a doctor who works in the House for Relief of Suffering, the hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo. On the night of June 20, 2000, Matteo was admitted to the intensive care unit of the hospital with

meningitis. By morning doctors had lost hope for him as nine of the boy's internal organs had ceased to give signs of life. That night, during a prayer vigil attended by Matteo's mother and some Capuchin friars of Padre Pio's monastery, the child's condition improved suddenly. When he awoke from the coma, Matteo said that he had seen an elderly man with a white beard and a long, brown habit, who said to him: "Don't worry, you will soon be cured." The miracle was approved by the Congregation and Pope John Paul II on 20 December 2001.

Tuesday, September 24 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 8:19-21 The mother of Jesus and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him because of the crowd. He was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you." He said to them in reply, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it."

Meditation: Have you given any thought to the real meaning of what it means to be Christian? While being a Christian involves doctrine, precepts, and commandments, it is first and foremost a relationship – a relationship with Christ built on trust, affection, commitment, loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion, mercy, helpfulness, encouragement, support, strength, protection, and so many other qualities that bind people together in mutual love and unity. God offers us the greatest of relationships – union of heart, mind, and spirit with himself, the very author and source of love (ref. 1 John 4:8,16). God's love never fails, never forgets, never compromises, never lies, never lets us down nor disappoints us. His love is consistent, unwavering, unconditional, and unstoppable. Nothing can deter him from ever leaving us, ignoring us, or treating us unkindly. God wants all of our relationships to be rooted in his love. Jesus is God's love incarnate – God's love made visible in human flesh (ref. 1 John 4:9-10). That is why Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and the shepherd who seeks out the sheep who have strayed and lost their way. God is like the father who yearns for his prodigal son to return home and then throws a great party for his son when he has a change of heart and comes back (ref. Luke 15:11-32). Jesus offered up his life on the cross for our sake, so that we could be forgiven and restored to unity and friendship with God. It is through Jesus that we become the adopted children of God – his own sons and daughters. That is why Jesus told his disciples that they would have many new friends and family relationships in his kingdom. Whoever does the will of God – "those who hear the word of God and act on it" – is a friend of God and a member of his family – his sons and daughters who have been ransomed by the precious blood of Christ.

Prayer: O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbor, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. 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: Ask yourself a very fundamental question: Who do you love and cherish the most? God did not intend for us to be alone, but to be with others. He gives us many opportunities for developing relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Why does Jesus seem to ignore his own relatives when they pressed to see him? His love and respect for his mother and his relatives is unquestionable. Jesus never lost an opportunity to teach his disciples a spiritual lesson and truth about the kingdom of God. On this occasion when many gathered to hear Jesus he pointed to another higher reality of relationships, namely our relationship with God and with those who belong to God.

Wednesday, September 25 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:1-6 Jesus summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and let no one take a second tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from there. And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them." Then they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Meditation: Why does Jesus tell the apostles to "travel light" with little or no provision? "Poverty of spirit" frees us from greed and preoccupation with possessions and makes ample room for God's provision. The Lord wants his disciples to be dependent on him and not on themselves. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. Are you ready to handle the power and authority which God wishes you to exercise on his behalf? The Lord entrusts us with his gifts and talents. Are you eager to place yourself at

his service, to do whatever he bids you, and to witness his truth and saving power to whomever he sends you?

Prayer: O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbor, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. 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 people use the phrase "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" as a crutch to say that they do not have the ability or the capacity to change their lives, they are shortchanging themselves, the power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the transformative words and teachings of Jesus Christ. God's word has power to change and transform our lives. Do you recognize the power and authority which God has entrusted to you as his son or daughter? Jesus gave his apostles both power and authority to speak and to act in his name – to cast out evil spirits, to heal, and to speak the word of God. When Jesus spoke of power and authority he did something unheard of. He wedded power and authority with love and humility. The "world" and the "flesh" seek power for selfish gain. Jesus teaches us to use it for the good of our neighbor.

Thursday September 26 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time Saints Cosmas and Damian, Martyrs

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:7-9 Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was greatly perplexed because some were saying, "John has been raised from the dead"; others were saying, "Elijah has appeared"; still others, "One of the ancient prophets has arisen." But Herod said, "John I beheaded. Who then is this about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see him.

Meditation: As you watch the news, read a book, or interact with people, whom do you most admire? People with power, influence, fame or wealth? Scripture warns us of such danger (ref. Proverbs 23:1-2). King Herod had respected and feared John the Baptist as a great prophet and servant of God. John, however did not fear to rebuke Herod for his adulterous affair with his brother's wife. Herod, however, was more of a people pleaser than a God pleaser. Herod not only imprisoned John to silence him, but he also beheaded him simply to please his family and friends. Now when reports of Jesus' miracles and teaching reach Herod's court, Herod becomes very troubled in conscience. He thinks that John the Baptist has risen from the dead! Herod sought to meet Jesus more out of curiosity and fear than out of a sincere desire to know God's wisdom and truth.

Prayer: May you be magnified, O Lord, by the revered memory of your Saints Cosmas and Damian, for with providence beyond words you have conferred on them everlasting glory, and on us, your unfailing help. 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 who is the most influential in your life? And who do you most want to be like? We naturally look up to other people we want to imitate. If we truly want to be like God and to live as his sons and daughters, then it greatly helps us to have models and examples of holy people – Christ-like persons who follow in his footsteps – who show us how to live in the power of God's love and holiness. God's grace frees us from the tyranny of fear and the pressure to please others rather than to please God. Do you allow God's grace to fill you with faith and courage to choose what is good and pleasing to him and to reject whatever would keep you from embracing his love and will for your daily life?

About Saints Cosmas and Damian: This is one of the most ancient feasts of the Church, and these two martyrs have been honored in the East and West in many ways, including the building of churches in their honor in Rome and Constantinople. Along with St. Luke, they are the patron saints of doctors. Little is known of their true history, but the legend that has come down to us is of very early origin. Sts. Cosmas and Damian were venerated in the East as the "moneyless ones" because they practiced medicine gratis. According to the legend, they were twin brothers, born in Arabia, who studied in Syria and became skilled physicians. They were supposed to have lived on the Bay of Alexandretta in Cilicia, in what is now Turkey. Since they were prominent Christians, they were among the first arrested when the great persecution under Diocletian began. Lysias, the governor of Cilicia, ordered their arrest, and they were beheaded. Their bodies, it was said, were carried to Syria and buried at Cyrrhus. What is certain is that they were venerated very early and became patrons of medicine, known for their miracles of healing. The Emperor Justinian was cured by their intercession and paid special honor to the city of Cyrrhus where their relics were enshrined. Their basilica in Rome, adorned with lovely mosaics, was dedicated in the year 530. They are named in the Roman Martyrology and in the Canon of the Mass, testifying to the antiquity of their

feast day. The great honor in which they are held and the antiquity of their veneration indicate some historical memory among the early Christians who came out of the great persecutions with a new cult of Christian heroes. Cosmas and Damian were not only ideal Christians by their practice of medicine without fee, they also symbolized God's blessing upon the art of healing and that respect for every form of science, which is an important part of Christian tradition.

Friday, September 27 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Vincent de Paul, Priest

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:18-22 Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'" Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said in reply, "The Christ of God." He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."

Meditation: Through humiliation, suffering, and death on the cross Jesus broke the powers of sin and death and won for us eternal life and freedom from the slavery of sin and from the oppression of our enemy, Satan, the father of lies and the deceiver of humankind. If we want to share in Christ's victory, then we must also take up our cross and follow him where he leads us. What is the "cross" that you and I and everyone on this earth must take up each day? When my will crosses with God's will, then his will must be done. To know Jesus Christ is to know the power of his victory on the cross and his resurrection. The Holy Spirit gives each of us the gifts and strength we need to live as sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit gives us faith to know the Lord Jesus personally as our Redeemer, and the power to live the gospel faithfully, and the courage to witness to others the joy, truth, and freedom of the gospel. Who do you say that Jesus is? How do you support your response with your thoughts, words, and actions?

Prayer: O God, who for the relief of the poor and the formation of the clergy endowed the Priest Saint Vincent de Paul with apostolic virtues, grant, we pray, that, afire with that same spirit, we may love what he loved and put into practice what he taught. 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 fundamental, yet critical question for each one of us: Who is Jesus for you? Many in Israel recognized Jesus as a mighty man of God, even comparing him with the greatest of the prophets. Peter, always quick to respond whenever Jesus spoke, professed that Jesus was truly the Christ of God. No mortal being could have revealed this to Peter, but only God. Through the eyes of faith Peter grasped who Jesus truly was. He was the first apostle to publicly recognize Jesus as the Anointed One whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world as Lord and Savior (ref. Luke 2:11, Acts 2:36). Christ is the Greek word for *Messiah*, the Hebrew word which is also translated as the *Anointed One*.

About Saint Vincent de Paul: Saint Vincent de Paul was a great apostle of charity, and brought a great revival of the priesthood in the 17th century. He was born near Dax in the Landes (France) in 1581. As a young priest he was captured by Moorish pirates who carried him to Africa. He was sold into slavery, but freed in 1607 when he converted his owner. Having returned to France, he became successively a parish priest and chaplain to the galley-slaves. He founded a religious Congregation under the title of Priests of the Mission or Lazarists (now known as Vincentians), and he bound them by a special way to undertake the apostolic work of charity; he sent them to preach missions, especially to the ignorant peasants of that time, and to establish seminaries. In order to help poor girls, invalids, and the insane, sick and unemployed, he and St. Louise de Marillac founded the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity, now better known as the Sisters of St. Vincent. St. Vincent worked tirelessly to help those in need: the impoverished, the sick, the enslaved, the abandoned, the ignored. He died in 1660 at St. Lazarus's house, Paris. His motto: "God sees you."

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