

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)

“Be brave and try to detach your heart from worldly things. Do your utmost to banish darkness from your mind and come to understand what true, selfless piety is. Through confession, endeavor to purify your heart of anything which may still taint it. Enliven your faith, which is essential to understand and achieve piety.” ~SAINT JOHN BOSCO

**Monday, January 27 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Angela Merici, Virgin**

Holy Gospel: Mark 3:22-30 The scribes who had come from Jerusalem said of Jesus, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “By the prince of demons he drives out demons.” Summoning them, he began to speak to them in parables, “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; that is the end of him. But no one can enter a strong man’s house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house. Amen, I say to you, all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin.” For they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Meditation: Our foe and the arch-enemy of God – Satan – is stronger than any of us. Unless we are clothed in God's strength and constantly wear the armor of Christ, we cannot withstand Satan with our own human strength. What does Satan wish to take from us? Our faith, our beliefs, our confidence in God, and our allegiance to recognize the supremacy of God's laws and commandments and follow them to the letter. Satan is a rebel and a liar. Satan can only have power or dominion over us if we listen to his lies and succumb to his will which is contrary to the will of God. Jesus makes it clear that there are no neutral parties in this world. We are either for Jesus or against him, for the kingdom of God or against it – there is no room for compromise. There are two kingdoms in opposition to one another – the kingdom of God's light and truth and the kingdom of darkness and deception under the rule of Satan. If we disobey God's word, we open the door to the power of sin and Satan's influence in our lives. If we want to live in true freedom from the power of sin and Satan, then our "house" – our mind and heart and whatever we allow to control our appetites and desires – must be occupied and ruled by Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Prayer: May the Virgin Saint Angela never fail to commend us to your compassion, O Lord, we pray, that, following the lessons of her charity and prudence, and express it in what we do. 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 knows that his disciples will be tested and he assures them that the Holy Spirit will give them whatever grace and help they need in their time of adversity. He warns them, however, that it's possible to spurn the grace of God and to fall into apostasy (giving up the faith) out of cowardice, disbelief, or simply going with the tide of what may be popular in society. Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit reprehensible? Blasphemy consists in uttering against God, inwardly or outwardly, words of hatred, reproach, or defiance. It's contrary to the respect due God and his holy name. Jesus speaks of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as the unforgivable sin. Jesus spoke about this sin immediately after the scribes and Pharisees had attributed his miracles to the work of the devil instead of to God. A sin can only be unforgivable if repentance is impossible. If someone repeatedly closes their eyes to God, shuts their ears to his voice, and reject his word, they bring themselves to a point where they can no longer recognize God when he can be seen and heard. They become spiritually blind-sighted and speak of "evil as good and good as evil" (Isaiah 5:20). To fear such a state of sin and spiritual blindness, however, signals that one is not dead to God and is conscious of the need for God's grace, mercy, and help. There are no

limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who refuses to acknowledge and confess their sins and to ask God for forgiveness, spurns God's generous offer of mercy, pardon, grace, and healing. Through their own stubborn human pride and willfulness, they reject God, refuse his grace and help to turn away from sin, and reject the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to heal and restore them to wholeness. God always gives sufficient grace and help to all who humbly call upon him. Giving up on God and refusing to turn away from sin and disbelief results from pride and the loss of hope in God. What is the basis of our hope and confidence in God? Through Jesus' death on the cross and his victory over the grave when he rose again on the third day, Satan has been defeated and death has been overcome. We now share in Christ's victory over sin and Satan and receive adoption as God's sons and daughters. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord enables us to live a new life of love and freedom from slavery to sin. The Lord Jesus is our refuge and strength because he makes his home with us (ref. John 15:4) and gives us the power and help of the Holy Spirit. Do you take refuge in the Lord and allow him to be the Lord of your life? Do you take up Christ's invitation when he says "follow me" through this earthly life? Christ and Christ alone, who is truth, leads us to eternal life. Thus beware of false prophets, activist groups, special-interest groups, and so many others (even some groups who claim to be "Catholic" but are far from being authentically Catholic) who spin half-truths and create allurements in an effort to lead the faithful astray.

Tuesday, January 28 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time **Saint Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor of the Church**

Holy Gospel: Mark 3:31-35 The mother of Jesus and his brothers arrived at the house. Standing outside, they sent word to Jesus and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers and your sisters are outside asking for you." But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Meditation: Jesus is God's love incarnate – God's love made visible in human flesh (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 (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 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 made Saint Thomas Aquinas outstanding in his zeal for holiness and his study of sacred doctrine, grant us, we pray, that we may understand what he taught and imitate what he accomplished. 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: One of the early martyrs of the Church, Lucian of Antioch, once said: "a Christian's only relatives are the saints" – namely those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and adopted as sons and daughters of God. Those who have been baptized into Jesus Christ and who live as his disciples enter into a new family, a family of "saints" here on earth and in heaven. Jesus changes the order of relationships and shows that true kinship is not just a matter of flesh and blood. Our adoption as sons and daughters of God transforms all of our relationships and requires a new order of loyalty to God first and to his kingdom of righteousness and peace. Do you want to grow in love and friendship? Allow God's Holy Spirit to transform your heart, mind, and will to enable you to love freely and generously as he loves.

Wednesday, January 29 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 4:1-20 On another occasion, Jesus began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land. And he taught them at length in parables, and in the course of his instruction he said to them, "Hear this! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." He added, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." And when he was alone, those present along with the Twelve

questioned him about the parables. He answered them, "The mystery of the Kingdom of God has been granted to you. But to those outside everything comes in parables, so that they may look and see but not perceive, and hear and listen but not understand, in order that they may not be converted and be forgiven." Jesus said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand any of the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown. As soon as they hear, Satan comes at once and takes away the word sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground who, when they hear the word, receive it at once with joy. But they have no roots; they last only for a time. Then when tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Those sown among thorns are another sort. They are the people who hear the word, but worldly anxiety, the lure of riches, and the craving for other things intrude and choke the word, and it bears no fruit. But those sown on rich soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

Meditation: Jesus' parable of the sower is aimed at the hearers of his word. There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear. Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else. Another type of hearer is the person who has many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word. Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it. Do you hunger for God's word?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works. 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: What does the parable about seeds and roots say to us about the kingdom of God? Any farmer will attest to the importance of good soil for supplying nutrients for growth. And how does a plant get the necessary food and water it needs except by its roots? The scriptures frequently use the image of fruit-bearing plants or trees to convey the principle of spiritual life and death. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8; see also Psalm 1:3)

Thursday, January 30 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 4:21-25 Jesus said to his disciples, "Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not to be placed on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light. Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear." He also told them, "Take care what you hear. The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you, and still more will be given to you. To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Meditation: Lamps in the ancient world served a vital function, much like they do today. They enable people to see and work and function in the dark. 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: Almighty ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works. 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, who hears all, who knows all. There is great freedom and joy for those who live in God's light and who seek this truth. Those who listen to God and heed his voice will receive more from him. Do you know the joy and freedom of living in God's light, and letting his light illuminate what is right and good and true?

Friday, January 31 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time
Saint John Bosco, Priest, and
Founder, Society of Saint Francis de Sales (Salesians)

Holy Gospel: Mark 4:26-34 Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the Kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come." He said, "To what shall we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

Meditation: What can mustard seeds teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to be a tree which attracted numerous birds because they loved the little black mustard seed it produced. God's kingdom works in a similar fashion. It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within. Just as a seed has no power to change itself until it is planted in the ground, so we cannot change our lives to be like God until God gives us the power of his Holy Spirit.

Prayer: O God, who raised up the Priest Saint John Bosco as a father and teacher of the young, grant we pray, that, aflame with the same fire of love, we may seek out souls and serve you alone. 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 Lord of the Universe is always ready to transform us by the power of his Spirit. Are you ready to let God change you by his grace and power? The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers. When we yield to Jesus Christ, our lives are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Paul the Apostle says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

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.

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In the Year 2020
the Universal Church celebrates
the 150th anniversary of
QUAMQUAM PLURIES
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII
ON DEVOTION TO SAINT JOSEPH
AND DECLARING SAINT JOSEPH
PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Daily Morning Prayer to Saint Joseph: Blessed Saint Joseph, husband of Mary, be with us this day. You defended the Virgin, loving the Child Jesus as your son; you rescued Him from danger of death. Defend the Church, the household of God, purchased by the blood of Christ. Guardian of the Holy Family, be with us in our trials, may your prayers obtain for us the grace to flee from error and wrestle with the powers of corruption, so that in life we may grow in holiness and in death rejoice in the Crown of Victory. Amen.

Read the article: "Who was Saint Joseph?" at www.catholicstraightanswers.com/who-was-st-joseph/