

# 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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**“Purity is a gift of God: we can gain it and preserve it only by care and diligence in avoiding all that may prove an incentive to sin.” ~Saint Agatha**

**Monday, February 3 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time  
Saint Blaise, Bishop and Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 5:1-20** Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes. When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. In fact, he had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!” (He had been saying to him, “Unclean spirit, come out of the man!”) He asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “Legion is my name. There are many of us.” And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside. And they pleaded with him, “Send us into the swine. Let us enter them.” And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned. The swineherds ran away and reported the incident in the town and throughout the countryside. And people came out to see what had happened. As they approached Jesus, they caught sight of the man who had been possessed by Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were seized with fear. Those who witnessed the incident explained to them what had happened to the possessed man and to the swine. Then they began to beg him to leave their district. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed pleaded to remain with him. But Jesus would not permit him but told him instead, “Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you.” Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed.

**Meditation:** Jesus took pity on the man who was overtaken by a legion of evil spirits. The destructive force of these demons is evident for all who can see as they flee and destroy a herd of swine. After Jesus freed the demoniac the whole city came out to meet him. No one had demonstrated such power and authority against the forces of Satan as Jesus did. They feared Jesus as a result and begged him to leave them. Why would they not want Jesus to stay? Perhaps the price for such liberation from the power of evil and sin was more than they wanted to pay. Jesus is ready and willing to free us from anything that binds us and that keeps us from the love of God. Are you willing to part with such things?

**Prayer:** Hear, O Lord, the supplications your people make under the patronage of the Martyr Saint Blaise, and grant that they may rejoice in peace in this present life, and find help for life eternal. 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 legion is no small force — but an army 6,000 strong! For the people of Palestine, hemmed in by occupied forces, a legion, whether spiritual or human, struck terror! Legions at their wildest committed unmentionable atrocities. Our age has also witnessed untold crimes and mass destruction at the hands of possessed rulers and their armies. What is more remarkable — the destructive force of this driven and possessed man? Or the bended knee at Jesus' feet imploring mercy and release? God's word reminds us that no destructive force can keep anyone from the peace and safety which God offers to those who seek his help. “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you...Because you have made the Lord your refuge” (Psalm 91:7,9).

**About Saint Blaise:** Saint Blaise was a physician and Bishop of Sebaste, Armenia. He lived in a cave on Mount Argeus and was a healer of men and animals. According to legend, sick animals would come to him on their own for help, but would never disturb him at prayer. Agricola, governor of Cappadocia, came to Sebaste to persecute Christians. His huntsmen went into the forests of Argeus to find wild animals for the arena games, and found many waiting outside Blaise's cave. Discovered in prayer, Blaise was arrested, and Agricola tried to get him to recant his faith. While in prison, Blaise ministered to and healed fellow prisoners, including saving a child who was choking on a fish bone; this led to the blessing of throats on Blaise's feast day. Thrown into a lake to drown, Blaise stood on the surface and invited his persecutors to walk out and prove the power of their gods; they drowned. When he returned to land, he was martyred by being beaten, his flesh torn with wool combs (which led to his association with and patronage of those involved in the wool trade), and then beheading. Blaise has been extremely popular for centuries in both the Eastern and Western Churches and many cures were attributed to him, notably that of a child who was suffocating through a fish bone being caught in his throat. In 1222 the Council of Oxford prohibited servile labor in England on his feast. He is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. He is invoked for all throat afflictions, and on his feast two candles are blessed with a prayer that God will free from all such afflictions and every ill all those who receive this blessing.

## **Tuesday, February 4 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 5:21-43** When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea. One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward. Seeing him he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, "My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live." He went off with him and a large crowd followed him. There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured." Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched my clothes?" But his disciples said to him, "You see how the crowd is pressing upon you, and yet you ask, Who touched me?" And he looked around to see who had done it. The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction." While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official's house arrived and said, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?" Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. So he went in and said to them, "Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep." And they ridiculed him. Then he put them all out. He took along the child's father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. He took the child by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum" which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around. At that they were utterly astounded. He gave strict orders that no one should know this and said that she should be given something to eat.

**Meditation:** People in desperate or helpless circumstances were not disappointed when they sought Jesus out. What drew them to Jesus? Was it hope for a miracle or a word of comfort in their affliction? What did the elderly woman who had suffered greatly for twelve years expect Jesus to do for her? And what did a grieving father expect Jesus to do about his beloved lost daughter? Jesus gave hope where there seemed to be no human cause for it because his hope was directed to God. He spoke words of hope to the woman (Take heart, daughter!) to ignite the spark of faith in her (your faith has made you well!).

**Prayer:** Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of 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:** Saint Ephrem of Syria commented on this miracle: "Glory to you, hidden Son of God, because your healing power is proclaimed through the hidden suffering of the afflicted woman. Through this woman whom they could see, the witnesses were enabled to behold the divinity that cannot be seen. Through the Son's own healing power his divinity became known. Through the afflicted woman's being healed her faith was made manifest. She caused him to be proclaimed, and indeed was honored with him. For truth was being proclaimed together with its heralds. If she was a witness to his divinity, he in turn was a witness to her faith...He saw through to her hidden faith, and gave her a visible healing." In Jesus

we see the infinite love of God extending to each and every individual as he gives freely and wholly of himself to each person he meets. Do you approach the Lord with confident expectation that he will hear your request and act?

### **Wednesday, February 5 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Agatha, Virgin and Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 6:1-6** Jesus departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands! Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house." So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

**Meditation:** Jesus startled his familiar audience with a seeming rebuke that no prophet or servant of God can receive honor among his own people. The people of Nazareth took offense at Jesus and refused to listen to what he had to say. They despised his preaching because he was a mere workman, a carpenter, and a layman who had no formal training by a scholar or teacher. They also despised him because of his undistinguished family background. How familiarity can breed contempt. Jesus could do no mighty works in their midst because they were closed-minded and unbelieving towards him.

**Prayer:** May the Virgin Martyr Saint Agatha implore your compassion for us, O Lord, we pray, for she found favor with you by the courage of her martyrdom and the merit of her chastity. 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 word "gospel" literally means "good news." Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom to the afflicted who suffered from physical, mental, or spiritual oppression (see Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus came to set people free – not only from their physical, mental, and spiritual infirmities - but also from the worst affliction of all – the tyranny of slavery to sin, Satan, and the fear of losing one's life. God's power alone can save us from hopelessness, dejection, and emptiness of life. The gospel of salvation is "good news" for everyone who will receive it. Do you know, live and experience the joy and freedom of the gospel?

### **Thursday, February 6 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Paul Miki and Companions, Martyrs**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 6:7-13** Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick – no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." So they went off and preached repentance. The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

**Meditation:** Jesus gave his apostles both the power and the authority to speak and to act in his name. He commanded them to do the works which he did – to heal, to cast out evil spirits, and to speak the word of God – the Good News of the gospel which they received from Jesus. 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.

**Prayer:** O God, strength of all the Saints, who through the Cross were pleased to call the Martyrs Saint Paul Miki and companions to life, grant, we pray, that by their intercession we may hold with courage even until death to the faith that we profess. 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:** This traveling light provision which Jesus shared with his Apostles has solid purpose. This "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. The Lord entrusts each of us with his gifts and talents. Are you eager to place yourself at his service, to do whatever he asks you, and to live in witness his truth – *the only truth* – and saving power to whomever and whatever situation he sends you?

## Friday, February 7 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

**Holy Gospel: Mark 6:14-29** King Herod heard about Jesus, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; That is why mighty powers are at work in him." Others were saying, "He is Elijah"; still others, "He is a prophet like any of the prophets." But when Herod learned of it, he said, "It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up." Herod was the one who had John 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. Herodias 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. His 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?" Her mother 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:** When Herod heard the fame of Jesus he supposed that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had returned from the dead. Unfortunately for Herod, he could not rid himself of sin by ridding himself of the man who confronted him with his sin. Herod was a weak man. 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. The Lord gives grace to the humble, to those who acknowledge their sins and who seek God's mercy and pardon. His grace and pardon not only frees us from a guilty conscience, it enables us to pursue holiness in thought and action as well. God's grace enables us to fight fear with faith and to overcome the temptation to compromise goodness and truth with wrongdoing and falsehood.

**Prayer:** Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of 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:** Every person has at one time or another been haunted by a guilty conscience. King Herod, the most powerful and wealthy man in Judea, had everything he wanted – except a clear conscience and peace with God. 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 relationship with his brother's wife. John ended up in prison because of Herodias' jealousy. Herod, out of impulse and a desire to please his family and friends, had John beheaded. Now Herod's conscience is pricked when he hears that some think that the Baptist has risen. Do you rely on God's grace and help to choose his way of holiness and to reject whatever would compromise your faith and loyalty to Christ?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;  
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**In the Year 2020  
the Universal Church celebrates  
the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of  
*QUAMQUAM PLURIES*  
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII  
ON DEVOTION TO SAINT JOSEPH  
AND DECLARING SAINT JOSEPH  
PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH**

**Read on-line the encyclical *Quamquam Pluries*:** <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo13/13jos.htm>