

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)

“The secret of spiritual fortitude is for us to abandon ourselves to Christ, the power of God, and then He Himself will overcome evil and deliver us from forces that we would never be capable of resisting by ourselves. This is the fortitude of faith. Christ lives in the world in those who take Him for their light, their strength and their protection. It is for them that He came into the world in His Incarnation.”

~EXCERPTED FROM “SEASONS OF CELEBRATION” BY FR. THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

**Monday, December 7 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent
Saint Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor of the Church**

Holy Gospel: Luke 5:17-26 One day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there, and the power of the Lord was with him for healing. And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set him in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “As for you, your sins are forgiven.” Then the scribes and Pharisees began to ask themselves, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who but God alone can forgive sins?” Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them in reply, “What are you thinking in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”– he said to the one who was paralyzed, “I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.” He stood up immediately before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. Then astonishment seized them all and they glorified God, and, struck with awe, they said, “We have seen incredible things today.”

Meditation: Jesus' treatment of sinners upset the religious teachers of the day. When a cripple was brought to Jesus because of the faith of his friends, Jesus did the unthinkable. He first forgave the man his sins. The scribes regarded this as blasphemy because they understood that only God had authority to forgive sins and to unbind a man or woman from their burden of guilt. Jesus claimed an authority which only God could rightfully give. Jesus not only proved that his authority came from God, he showed the great power of God's redeeming love and mercy by healing the cripple of his physical ailment. This man had been crippled not only physically, but spiritually as well. Jesus freed him from his burden of guilt and restored his body as well. The Lord is ever ready to bring us healing of body, mind, and soul. His grace brings us freedom from the power of sin and from bondage to harmful desires and addictions. Do you allow anything to keep you from Jesus' healing power?

Prayer: O God, who made the Bishop Saint Ambrose a teacher of the Catholic faith and a model of apostolic courage, raise up in your Church men after your own heart to govern her with courage and wisdom. 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 Old Testament prophets foretold that when the Messiah came to usher in God's kingdom the blind would see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk (Isaiah 35:5-6). Jesus not only brought physical healing, but healing of mind, heart, and soul as well. Jesus came to bring us the abundant life of God's kingdom (John 10:10). Do you know someone who is in need of healing physically or spiritually? The next bi-monthly Healing Mass and Healing Service at Saint Joseph Cathedral will take place on Monday, January 18, at 6:30 p.m. All are invited. Looking at this on another level, that new life and transformation that we all seek can be stifled by unbelief, indifference, and sinful pride. Sin can cripple us far more than any physical ailment can. Sin is the work of the kingdom of darkness and holds us in captivity and bondage. There is only one solution and that is the healing, cleansing power of Jesus' mercy, compassion and forgiveness available to us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As we begin

tomorrow the Extraordinary Year of Mercy promulgated by Pope Francis, and in our preparation for the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, let's make sure that we make a good confession in the Season of Advent. And whenever we are in a state of serious sin, let's not wait for a penance service in Advent or Lent, as Christ's mercy and compassion and forgiveness are available to us whenever we have a contrite heart and approach a priest working *in persona Christi* – in the person of Christ – in the confessional and say, "Bless me father, for I have sinned..."

Tuesday, December 8 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Patronal Feast Day of the United States of America
~ A HOLY DAY OF OBLIGATION ~

Holy Gospel: Luke 1: 26-38 The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation: The angel Gabriel salutes Mary as "full of grace." To become the mother of the Savior, Mary was enriched by God with gifts to enable her to assume this awesome role. There is a venerable tradition among many Christians, dating back to the early church, for honoring Mary as the spotless virgin who bore the Son of God in her womb. A number of early church fathers link Mary's obedience to this singular grace of God, including Saint Irenaeus who said: "Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race... The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith."

Prayer: O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. 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: God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heart-felt trust as Mary did. When God commands us he also gives us the grace, strength, and means to respond to him. And so we might ask ourselves, when God commands us to do something, or when his son, Jesus Christ, teaches us to do something, do we respond with love, willingness, faith and obedience as Mary did? Or do we push back in way or another, on one level or another, because we think we know better, or think that "I have a better way." Really? A better way than God or Jesus? If we really love God above all things, then our faith and our obedience to God and to Jesus Christ will prove this to be the case day-in and day-out, in every situation, before all people. Is this true for you? If the ways of the world have slowly crept into your life that, upon an introspective examination, you now see that the ways of the world have taken over your life, this Season of Advent is the perfect time to undergo a radical transformation of mind and heart so that, like Mary, you can say "May it be done to me according to your word" – according to God's word and according to Jesus' word, where we find true joy, peace and happiness.

Wednesday, December 9 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent
Saint Juan Diego

Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said to the crowds: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Meditation: What kind of yoke does the Lord Jesus have in mind for each one of us? And how can it be good for us? The Jewish people used the image of a yoke to express their submission to God. They spoke of the yoke of the law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the kingdom, the yoke of God, and so forth. Jesus says his yoke is "easy." The Greek word for "easy" can also mean "well-fitting." Yokes – the collar worn around oxen used for labor – were tailor-made to fit the oxen well. We are commanded to put on the "sweet yoke of Jesus" and to live the "heavenly way of life and happiness." Oxen were yoked two by two. Jesus invites each one of us to be yoked with him, to unite our life with him, conform our will with his will, our desires with his desires, our heart with his sacred heart, our lives with his life. Jesus also says his "burden is light." No burden is too heavy when it's given in love and carried in love. When we yoke our lives with Jesus, he also carries our burdens with us and gives us his strength to follow in his way of love.

Prayer: O God, who by means of Saint Juan Diego showed the love of the most holy Virgin Mary for your people, grant, through his intercession, that, by following the counsels our Mother gave at Guadalupe, we may be ever constant in fulfilling your will. 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: During this Season of Advent we celebrate the coming of the Messiah King who ushers in the reign of God. The Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would establish God's kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy. Those who put their trust in God and in the coming of his kingdom receive the blessings of that kingdom – peace with God and strength for living his way of love, truth, and holiness (Isaiah 40). Jesus fulfills all the Messianic hopes and promises of God's kingdom. That is why he taught his disciples to pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). In his kingdom our sins are not only forgiven but removed sacramentally with mercy and compassion, and eternal life is poured out for all its citizens. This is not a political kingdom, but a spiritual one. Sometimes we get caught up in politics and the rhetoric of our political parties and affiliations – none of which will get us to heaven. There is only one Savior, the son of God, who was sent into this world out of love by God to save us from ourselves and to redeem us from our sins. Take the yoke of Christ upon you, let Jesus guide you as only he, our Good Shepherd, can, and let his light illuminate the one path that leads to eternal life with him in heaven.

Thursday, December 10 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:11-15 Jesus said to the crowds: "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force. All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

Meditation: Throughout the history of the Church we have seen where God chose certain persons to be martyrs – some we know of, many more we do not – to be witnesses to their faith in Jesus Christ. It was not that long ago in the Middle East that the radical group ISIS was beheading and crucifying Christians who choose to be steadfast in their faith rather to renounce it and embrace the Muslim faith. We pray for those modern martyrs who have been steadfast in their faith. But day-in and day-out most of us are called to be "dry martyrs" – bloodless martyrs who bear witness to the teachings of Christ versus falling prey to the way of the world, for instance following the Wisdom (capital "W") of God the supreme being instead of the wisdom (small 'w') of the human beings who make up our U.S. Supreme Court (whose rulings often are in conflict with God's teachings and commands and the teachings of Jesus Christ). We are called to live in testimony to the joy of the Gospel in the midst of daily challenges, contradictions, temptations and adversities which come our way as we follow the Lord Jesus. What attracts others to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? When they see Christians loving their enemies, being joyful in suffering, patient in adversity, pardoning injuries, and showing comfort and compassion to the hopeless and the helpless. Jesus tells us that we do not need to fear our adversaries. He will fill us with the power of his Holy Spirit and give us sufficient grace, strength, and wisdom to face any trial and to answer any challenge to our faith. Are you eager to live your life in witness to the teaching and commands of God and to the teachings of Jesus Christ, illustrating the joy and freedom of the Gospel?

Prayer: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the paths of your Only Begotten Son, that through his coming, we may be found worthy to serve you with minds made pure. 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: John the Baptist suffered violence for announcing that the kingdom of God was near. He was thrown into prison and later beheaded as a "gift." Since John's martyrdom to the present times there

has been violence and persecution at the hands of violent persons who, basically, feel threatened by his teachings. The blood of the martyrs throughout the ages bears witness to this fact. The martyrs witness to the truth - the truth and love of Jesus Christ who shed his blood to redeem us from slavery to sin and Satan and the fear of death. The Lord Jesus gives us the power of his Holy Spirit to overcome fear with faith, despair with hope, and every form of hatred, violence, jealousy, and prejudice with love and charity towards all - even those who seek to destroy and kill.

Friday, December 11 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent Saint Damasus I, Pope

Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19 Jesus said to the crowds: "To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by her works."

Meditation: Jesus parable about a group of disappointed musicians and their stubborn friends who refuse to sing or dance at the appropriate occasion challenge us to examine whether we are selective to only hear and do what we want to hear. The young music players in Jesus' parable react with great dismay because they cannot get anyone to follow their instruction. They complain that if they play their music at weddings, no one will join in their festive song and dance; and if they play mournful tunes and songs at funerals, no one will join in at all. This parable echoes the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 3:4 - "there is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." And so are you in tune with the message of God's kingdom? Do you heed God's words of wisdom and truth and those of Jesus Christ as if your life depended on it? Your very life does depend on it, in case you forgot!

Prayer: Grant, we pray, O Lord, that we may constantly exalt the merits of your Martyrs, whom Pope Saint Damasus so venerated and loved. 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 can make us spiritually dull and slow to hear God's voice? Anything that we let get in-between our relationship with God and his son, Jesus Christ. Let's do this. What is the definition of a noun? A person, place or thing. Do you let any person, place or thing take a place of prominence in your life over God or Jesus? Your job? Your political views? Your personal relationships? Any advocacy groups you may belong to or support? Do you have friends or family members who actually lead you away from following Christ and living a life in witness to Christ? Like the generation of Jesus' time, there are many aspects of our age and time that are marked by indifference and contempt, especially in regards to God, Jesus, the Church, and the things of heaven. Indifference dulls our ears to God's voice and to the Good News of the Gospel. Only the humble of heart can find joy and favor in God's sight. And so ask yourself - and be honest in your answer - is your life in tune with Jesus' message of hope and salvation? In this Season of Advent, now is the time to undertake a radical conversion of mind and heart, turn away from the ways of the world, and turn back to Christ. This first step usually begins with making a good confession. No time like the present!

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