

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 will of God is manifested to the Christian above all in the commandment to love. Jesus Christ our Lord said to His disciples in the most solemn of all His discourses that those who would love Him would keep His commandments to love one another as He has loved us.” ~EXCERPTED FROM “LIFE AND HOLINESS” BY FR. THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

**Monday, December 14 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent
Saint John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 21:23-27 When Jesus had come into the temple area, the chief priests and the elders of the people approached him as he was teaching and said, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” Jesus said to them in reply, “I shall ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I shall tell you by what authority I do these things. Where was John’s baptism from? Was it of heavenly or of human origin?” They discussed this among themselves and said, “If we say ‘Of heavenly origin,’ he will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we fear the crowd, for they all regard John as a prophet.” So they said to Jesus in reply, “We do not know.” He himself said to them, “Neither shall I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Meditation: From the beginning Jesus met resistance, opposition, and fierce hostility from the religious rulers as well (just the God’s prophets faced rejection in the Old Testament). The question is always why? Why did the religious leaders oppose Jesus and reject his claim to divine authority? Because their view of religion did not match with God’s word because their hearts were set on personal gain rather than truth and submission to God’s plan and design for their lives. They openly questioned Jesus to discredit his claim to be the Messiah. If Jesus says his authority is divine they will charge him with blasphemy. If he has done this on his own authority they might well arrest him as a mad zealot before he could do more damage. Notice how Jesus, seeing through their trap, poses a question to them and makes their answer a condition for his answer. Did they accept the work of John the Baptist as divine or human? If they accepted John’s work as divine, they would be compelled to accept Jesus as the Messiah. They dodged the question because they were unwilling to face the truth. They did not accept John the Baptist and they would not accept Jesus as their Messiah.

Prayer: O God, who gave the Priest Saint John an outstanding dedication to perfect self-denial and love of the Cross, grant that, by imitating him closely at all times, we may come to contemplate eternally your glory. 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: Despite our all-too-human opinions, there can be no compromise with Jesus’ authority - Jesus is the Word incarnate, Jesus is Truth incarnate. The coming of God’s kingdom or reign on the earth inevitably leads to conflict - a conflict of allegiance to God’s will or my own will, God’s justice or the world’s way of playing fair, God’s standard of absolute moral truth or the relative truth to what I want to believe is good and useful to justify what I choose to do and not to do. So how do you respond to Jesus’ claim to be not only the Messiah, but the source of everlasting life and truth as well? Do you submit to the timeless truths of Jesus - his words and teachings - in order to guide your earthly life? Jesus promises that those who seek to live according to God’s truth will find true joy, freedom, and happiness both now and forever. Remember, there are a lot of people in our world who offer fleeting, empty happiness and who invite us to follow them. But there is only one Lord, one Savior and one Redeemer who invites us to follow him - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah - and he offers us true joy, true peace, and true happiness, and eternal life in heaven. Why would you settle for anyone less?

Tuesday, December 15 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32 Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' The son said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."

Mediation: Time to wipe off the make-up, time to peel away the veneer of righteousness, time to toss out the "I'm okay, you're okay, it's okay to do whatever I want" mentality, time to recognize that our baptism (which cleansed us from original sin) did not give us a license to sin for the rest of our lives thinking that we're "saved" from baptism and therefore do not need to make a series of good confessions of our sins for the rest of our lives. Tax collectors and prostitutes – in other words people who recognized their sinful ways – too to hear John the Baptist's proclaiming repentance, but those who deemed themselves "righteous" thought they were fine and therefore were in no need of repentance. Wrong! We are all sinners, we are all in need of repentance, and Jesus Christ gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to cleanse ourselves from sin when we approach the confessional with a truly humble and contrite heart. Don't let human stubbornness, pride, ego, or the "I'm okay" attitude keep you out of the confessional. All of us are in need of the compassion, mercy and forgiveness of God the Father and his son, Jesus Christ, available to us in this most wonderful sacrament. A humble and contrite heart he will not spurn.

Prayer: O God, who through your Only Begotten Son have made us a new creation, look kindly, we pray, on the handiwork of your mercy, and at your Son's coming cleanse us from every stain of the old way of 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: We are all guilty of getting caught up in thinking that my way is best, no matter what anyone else thinks or says, including God and Jesus. We justify our sinful actions because we think that sacred scripture is old fashioned, or that we simply know better, or that "this doesn't apply to me because (fill in the blank)..." Many find themselves clinging to the rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court (comprised of human thought) to justify what they want, versus following the divine words and teachings of the Supreme Being – God our Father and Creator, who loves us more than we can imagine. Theologian, writer and Trappist monk Fr. Thomas Merton once wrote: "The basic sin, for Christianity, is rejecting others in order to choose oneself, deciding *against* others and deciding *for* oneself. Why is this sin so basic? Because the idea that you can choose yourself, approve yourself, and then offer yourself (fully 'chosen' and 'approved') to God, applies the assertion of yourself over against God. From this root of error come all the sour leafage and fruitage of a life of self-examination, interminable problems and unending decisions, always making right choices, walking on the razor edge of an impossibly subtle ethic (with and equally subtle psychology to take care of the unconscious). All this implies the frenzied conviction that one can be his own light and his own justification, and that God is there for a purpose: to issue the stamp of confirmation upon my own rightness. In such a religion the Cross becomes meaningless except as the (blasphemous) certification that because you suffer, because you are misunderstood, you are justified twice over – you are a martyr. *Martyr* means *witness*. You are then a witness? To what? To your own infallible light and your own justice, which you have chosen? This is the exact opposite of everything Jesus ever did or taught." (excerpted from *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, p. 172)

Wednesday, December 16 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:18b-23 At that time, John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" When the men came to the Lord, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?'" At that time Jesus cured many of their diseases, sufferings, and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind. And Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

Meditation: The miracles which Jesus performed and the message he proclaimed about the coming of God's kingdom in his person was a direct fulfillment of what the prophets had foretold many centuries before (see Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1). Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom and new life for all who were oppressed by afflictions, infirmities, sin and guilt, and demonic spirits (read Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus came in the power of God's kingdom to release those bound up by sin, fear, and hopelessness. His miracles and exorcisms are direct signs of God's power and presence and they confirm that the Father has sent his only begotten Son to be our Messiah (which means the Anointed One) and Savior.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that the coming solemnity of your Son may bestow healing upon us in this present life and bring us the rewards of 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: When Jesus says "Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me..." what does that mean to you? Do you take offense at what Jesus teaches? Do you allow yourself to be challenged by the Gospel in order to align your mind and heart to that of Christ? Do you humble yourself and embrace Jesus' teachings over the ways of the world? Never forget that Jesus loves you. He suffered and died on the cross for you, and for every man, woman and child, past, present and future. Don't take offense at Jesus's teachings and ways – instead embrace them fully with every fiber of your being. Following in the footsteps of Christ will lead all of us to eternal life with him in heaven.

Thursday, December 17 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:1-17 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king.

David became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile.

After the Babylonian exile, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ.

Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations.

Meditation: Genealogies have become very popular in recent years, and are very important as they give us our roots and help us to understand our heritage. Today's Gospel gives us the genealogy of Jesus and traces his lineage from Abraham, the father of God's chosen people, through the line of David, King of Israel. Jesus the Messiah is the direct descent of Abraham and David, and the rightful heir to David's throne. God in his mercy fulfilled his promises to Abraham and to David that he would send a Savior and a King to rule over the house of Israel and to deliver them from their enemies.

Prayer: O God, Creator and Redeemer of human nature, who willed that your Word should take flesh in an ever-virgin womb, look with favor on our prayers, that your Only Begotten Son, having taken to himself our humanity, may be pleased to grant us a share in his divinity. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: God our Father went to great length to send us his son, Jesus Christ – our Lord, our Savior and our Redeemer. Last week we celebrated the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary whereby we recognize the sinless mother of God the Son being conceived, bringing about our salvation. Later Mary would be visited by the angel Gabriel who would spell out God's plan for

her as the mother of Jesus. And today we see this wonderful genealogy. Today is a day to give thanks to God for loving us as our Father, sending us his son to bring salvation to you, to me, and to all men and women who believe in Christ and follow him as he invites us to do.

Friday, December 18 ~ Third Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

Meditation: Mary had to face an enormous challenge to her faith and trust in God and to the faith of her family and Joseph, the man she chose to marry. She was asked to assume a burden of tremendous responsibility. It had never been heard of before that a child could be born without a natural father. Mary was asked to accept this miraculous exception to the laws of nature. That required faith and trust in God and in his promises. Second, Mary was not yet married; fornication – sexual relations outside of marriage – was a major sin then just as it is today. Mary was only espoused to Joseph, and such an engagement had to last for a whole year. She was asked to assume a great risk. She could have been rejected by Joseph, by her family, by all her own people. Mary knew that Joseph and her family would not understand without revelation from God. She nonetheless believed and trusted in God's promises. Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish his espoused wife, Mary when he discovered that she was pregnant. To all appearances she had broken their solemn pledge to be faithful and chaste to one another. Joseph, no doubt took this troubling matter to God in prayer. He was not hasty to judge or to react with hurt and anger. God rewarded him not only with guidance and consolation, but with the divine assurance that he had indeed called Joseph to be the husband of Mary and to assume a mission that would require the utmost faith, confidence, and trust in Almighty God. Joseph believed in the divine message to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that we, who are weighed down from of old by slavery beneath the yoke of sin, may be set free by the newness of the long-awaited Nativity of your Only Begotten Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: God had a plan for Mary and for Joseph, who are models of faith for us. Both are faithful witnesses and servants of God's unfolding plan of redemption. God also has a plan for all of his children – including you and me. Are you ready to follow God's plan in your life? Even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems? God always gives us the graces to comply with his plan – he never abandons us, even though life does have its struggles and challenges at times. God has brought us his only begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us celebrate Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, with joyful hearts and let us renew our faith and hope and trust in God and in the redeeming work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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