

# 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)

---

***“Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten fast, is a day of happiness, a Christian feast. It cannot be otherwise, as it forms part of the great Easter cycle.”***

~Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO

## Monday, February 24 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

**Holy Gospel: Mark 9:14-29** As Jesus came down from the mountain with Peter, James, John and approached the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes arguing with them. Immediately on seeing him, the whole crowd was utterly amazed. They ran up to him and greeted him. He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I have brought to you my son possessed by a mute spirit. Wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they were unable to do so." He said to them in reply, "O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me." They brought the boy to him. And when he saw him, the spirit immediately threw the boy into convulsions. As he fell to the ground, he began to roll around and foam at the mouth. Then he questioned his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" He replied, "Since childhood. It has often thrown him into fire and into water to kill him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' Everything is possible to one who has faith." Then the boy's father cried out, "I do believe, help my unbelief!" Jesus, on seeing a crowd rapidly gathering, rebuked the unclean spirit and said to it, "Mute and deaf spirit, I command you: come out of him and never enter him again!" Shouting and throwing the boy into convulsions, it came out. He became like a corpse, which caused many to say, "He is dead!" But Jesus took him by the hand, raised him, and he stood up. When he entered the house, his disciples asked him in private, "Why could we not drive the spirit out?" He said to them, "This kind can only come out through prayer."

**Meditation:** The mighty works and signs which Jesus did demonstrate that the kingdom of God is present in him. These signs attest that the Father has sent him as the promised Messiah. They invite belief in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world. The coming of God's kingdom means defeat of Satan's kingdom. Jesus' exorcisms anticipate his great victory over "the ruler of this world" (ref. John 12:31). While Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and may cause grave injuries of a spiritual nature, and indirectly even of a physical nature, his power is nonetheless limited and permitted by divine providence (ref. Romans 8:28). Jesus offers freedom from bondage to sin and Satan. There is no affliction that he cannot deliver us from.

**Prayer:** Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. 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:** There have been times when each of us have caused disappointment to others. In this gospel incident the disciples of Jesus brought disappointment to a pleading father because they failed to heal his epileptic son. Jesus' response seemed stern; but it was really tempered with love and compassion. We see at once both Jesus' dismay with the disciples' lack of faith and his concern to meet the need of this troubled boy and his anguished father. Jesus recognized the weakness of the father's faith and at the same time challenged him to pray boldly with expectant faith: "All things are possible to him who believes!" Saint Augustine of Hippo reminds us that prayer and faith go together: "Where faith fails, prayer perishes. For who prays for that in which he does not believe? ... So then in order that we may pray, let us believe, and let us pray that this same faith by which we pray may not falter." The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit that we may have the confidence and boldness we need to ask our heavenly Father for his help and grace. Do you trust in God's love and care for you and pray with expectant faith?

## Tuesday, February 25 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

**Holy Gospel: Mark 9:30-37** Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. For they had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

**Meditation:** How ashamed the disciples must have been when Jesus overheard them arguing about who among them was the greatest! But aren't we like the disciples? We compare ourselves with others and desire their praise. The appetite for glory and greatness seems to be inbred in us. Who doesn't cherish the ambition to be "somebody" whom others admire rather than a "nobody"? Even the psalms speak about the glory God has destined for us. You have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor (ref. Psalm 8:5). Jesus made a dramatic gesture by embracing a child to show his disciples who really is the greatest in the kingdom of God. What can a little child possibly teach us about greatness? Children in the ancient world had no rights, position, or privileges of their own. They were socially at the "bottom of the rung" and at the service of their parents, much like the household staff and domestic servants. What is the significance of Jesus' gesture? Jesus elevated a little child in the presence of his disciples by placing the child in a privileged position of honor. It is customary, even today, to seat the guest of honor at the right side of the host. Who is the greatest in God's kingdom? The one who is humble and lowly of heart – who instead of asserting their rights willingly empty themselves of pride and self-seeking glory by taking the lowly position of a servant or child.

**Prayer:** Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. 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 might wonder why Jesus told his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod? To the Jewish person leaven was a sign of evil. It was a piece of dough left-over from a previous baking. In due course it fermented and this fermented dough became leaven. Fermentation was associated with decomposing rot. Jesus warned his disciples to avoid the evil influence of the Pharisees and of Herod who sought their own counsels rather than the will of God. As the apostles continued to worry about their lack of bread, Jesus reminded them of his miraculous provision of bread in the feeding of the four thousand. He then upbraided them for their lack of trust in God. "Do you still not understand?" It's easy to get preoccupied with the problems and needs of the present moment and to forget the most important reality of all – God's abiding presence with us and his abundant provision for our lives as well. Thus when you pray, do you pray with joyful confidence, "Father, give us this day our daily bread?"

## Wednesday, February 26 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

### Ash Wednesday ~ A Day of Fasting and Abstaining

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18** Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

**Meditation:** One might ask why Jesus singled out prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for his disciples. The Jews considered these three as the cardinal works of the religious life. These were seen as the key signs

of a pious person, the three great pillars on which the good life was based. Jesus pointed to the heart of the matter. Why do you pray, fast, and give alms? To draw attention to yourself so that others may notice and think highly of you? Or to give glory to God? The Lord warns his disciples of self-seeking glory – the preoccupation with looking good and seeking praise from others. True piety is something more than feeling good or looking holy. True piety is loving devotion to God. It is an attitude of awe, reverence, worship and obedience. It is a gift and working of the Holy Spirit that enables us to devote our lives to God with a holy desire to please him in all things (Isaiah 11:1-2). The forty days of Lent is the annual retreat of the people of God in imitation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. Forty is a significant number in the scriptures. Moses went to the mountain to seek the face of God for forty days in prayer and fasting. The people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years in preparation for their entry into the promised land. Elijah fasted for forty days as he journeyed in the wilderness to the mountain of God. We are called to journey with the Lord in this special season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and penitence as we prepare to celebrate the feast of Easter. The Lord gives us spiritual food and supernatural strength to seek his face and to prepare ourselves for spiritual combat and testing. We, too, must follow in the way of the cross in order to share in the victory of Christ's death and resurrection. As we begin this holy season of testing and preparation, let's ask the Lord for a fresh outpouring of his Holy Spirit that we may grow in faith, hope, and love and embrace his will more fully in our lives.

**Prayer:** Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint. 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 wants to set our hearts ablaze with the fire of his Holy Spirit that we may share in his holiness and radiate the joy of the gospel to those around us. St. Augustine tells us that there are two kinds of people and two kinds of love: "One is holy, the other is selfish. One is subject to God; the other endeavors to equal Him." We are what we love. God wants to free our hearts from all that would keep us captive to selfishness and sin. "Rend your hearts and not your garments" says the prophet Joel (Joel 2:12). Use this Season of Lent to the fullest – embrace the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Holy Catholic Church. Undergo a conversion of mind and heart. Conform your will to God's; don't ask God to conform his will to yours, as so many foolishly try to do. With the help of the Holy Spirit, become humble, transform your minds and hearts to be lead in God's way of truth and holiness.

### **Thursday, February 27 ~ The Day After Ash Wednesday**

**Holy Gospel: Luke 9:22-25** Jesus said to his disciples: "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." Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

**Meditation:** Quite simply, the cross of Jesus Christ leads to freedom and victory over sin and death. We then need to ask ourselves: "What is the cross which Christ commands me to take up each day as his disciple?" When my will crosses with his will, then his will must be done. The way of the cross involves sacrifice, the sacrifice of laying down my life each and every day for Jesus' sake. What makes such sacrifice possible and "sweet" is the love of God poured out for us in the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). We can never outdo God in giving, no matter how abundant we try. He always gives us more than we can expect or imagine. Are you ready to lose all for Christ in order to gain all with Christ?

**Prayer:** Turn our hearts to you, eternal Father, and grant that, seeking always the one thing necessary and carrying out works of charity, we may be dedicated to your worship. 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 need to ask ourselves: "What will I give to God in exchange for freedom and eternal life?" In thinking about this question, are you ready to part with anything that might keep you from following him and his perfect plan for your life? Jesus poses these questions to challenge our assumptions about what is most profitable and worthwhile in life. In every decision of life we are making ourselves a certain kind of person. It is possible that some can gain all the things they set their heart on, only to wake up suddenly and discover that they missed the most important things of all. A true disciple is ready to give up all that he or she has in exchange for happiness and life with God. The life which God offers is abundant, everlasting life. And the joy which God places in our hearts no sadness or loss can diminish.

## Friday, February 28 ~ The Friday After Ash Wednesday

**Holy Gospel: Mark 9:14-15** The disciples of John approached Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

**Meditation:** What kind of fasting is pleasing to God? Fasting can be done for a variety of reasons – to gain freedom from some bad habit, addiction, or vice, to share in the suffering of those who go without, or to grow in our hunger for God and for the things of heaven. Basil the Great wrote: "Take heed that you do not make fasting to consist only in abstinence from meats. True fasting is to refrain from vice. Shred to pieces all your unjust contracts. Pardon your neighbors. Forgive them their trespasses." Do you hunger for more of God and for his holiness and for the abundant life he has to offer you?

**Prayer:** Show gracious favor, O Lord, we pray, to the works of penance we have begun, that we may have strength to accomplish with sincerity the bodily observances we undertake. 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:** Always remember that hungering for God and fasting for his kingdom go hand in hand. When asked why he and his disciples did not fast Jesus used the vivid picture of a wedding celebration. In Jesus' time the newly wed celebrated their honeymoon at home for a whole week with all the guests! This was a time of great feasting and celebrating. Jesus points to himself as the bridegroom and his disciples as the bridegroom's friends. He alludes to the fact that God takes delight in his people as a groom delights in his bride (Isaiah 62:5). To be in God's presence is pure delight and happiness. But Jesus also reminds his followers that there is a time for fasting and for humbling oneself in preparation for the coming of God's kingdom and for the return of the Messianic King. The Lord's disciples must also bear the cross of affliction and purification. For the disciple there is both a time for rejoicing in the Lord's presence and celebrating his goodness and a time for seeking the Lord with humility, fasting, and mourning for sin. If we hunger for the Lord, he will not disappoint us. His grace draws us to his throne of mercy and favor. Do you seek the Lord with confident trust and allow his Holy Spirit to transform your life with his power and grace? If not, perhaps this is an area for you to work on during this Season of Lent.

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;  
some meditations and contemplations inspired by *Biblical Meditations for Lent* by Carroll Stuhlmueller

frlumpe:2020



**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**

*Our Lord and Our Lady were St. Joseph's secret treasure. By his devotion and self-sacrificing love, he was allowed to spend his years adoring Christ and His Virgin Mother in the peace of his own home and by the work of his simple craft. His poverty and obscurity brought him greater joy than all of Herod's wealth, and more power than all of Caesar's legions. These he kept close to himself, uniting his Most Chaste Heart to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He met the happiest end of any man: literally dying in their arms, with the promise that they would be united again very soon.*

*On this Ash Wednesday, let's take St. Joseph as our Lenten role-model. By denying ourselves worldly pleasures, may we learn to take our joy and strength from Christ and His Mother. In reading Scripture, we can draw closer to the person of Our Lord. By praying the Sorrowful Mysteries every day, we can share the dolor of His Mother on Good Friday. By dying of ourselves in their arms, we may awaken on Easter at the foot of the Heavenly throne, feasting with the saints and singing Hallelujah with the angels. St. Joseph, ora pro nobis!*

EXCERPTED FROM: *WHY WE SHOULD TAKE SAINT JOSEPH AS OUR ROLE MODEL THIS LENT*, BY MICHAEL WARREN DAVIS; CATHOLIC HERALD, 03/06/19