

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)

“Do not be led astray by winning words and clever arguments. The salvation in which we believe is not proved from clever reasoning, but from the Holy Scriptures.”

~SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

Monday, March 16 ~ Third Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: Luke 4:24-30 Jesus said to the people in the synagogue at Nazareth: “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

Meditation: Jesus’ statement that no prophet or servant of God can receive honor among his own people was quite startling to those in attendance. He then angered them when he complimented the gentiles who seemed to have shown more faith in God than the “chosen ones” of Israel. They regarded gentiles as “fuel for the fires of hell.” Jesus’ praise for “outsiders” caused them offence because they were blind-sighted to God’s mercy and plan of redemption for all nations. The word of warning and judgment spoken by Jesus was met with hostility by his own people. They forcibly threw him out of the city and would have done him harm had he not stopped them. The Lord offers us freedom and pardon and the grace to walk in his way of righteousness. His discipline is for our good that we may share his holiness (Hebrews 12:10). “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates reproof is stupid” (Proverbs 12:1). Do you seek the Lord for instruction and help so you can grow in holiness?

Prayer: May your unfailing compassion, O Lord, cleanse and protect your Church, and since without you she cannot stand secure, may she be always governed by your grace. 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: Have you ever thought of what limits God’s grace and power in our lives to undergo change and transformation of mind and heart? Our indifference and lack of faith for starters! The prophets confronted God’s people with their indifference and unbelief. God’s grace and mercy is offered freely to those who seek it with sincerity, repentance, and faith. When Naaman, a non-Jew went to Jerusalem to seek a cure, the prophet Elisha instructed him to bathe in the river. In faith he obeyed and was healed. Jesus did not hesitate to confront his own people with their indifference and unbelief. Have you looked at where your faith life is? Are you indifferent? Are you lukewarm about your faith, and how you live out your faith? If so, it’s time to set your faith on fire. But you need first to rid yourself of those things which hold you back – whatever they may be. Pray that you will rid yourself of these barriers. Then free from those things which hold us back, may our faith lives flourish and bear much fruit.

Tuesday, March 17 ~ Third Week in the Season of Lent **Saint Patrick of Ireland, Bishop and Confessor**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35 Peter approached Jesus and asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the Kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell

down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother from your heart."

Meditation: Think about it. There is not one person on this earth who would not be grateful to have someone release them from their debts. But can we really expect mercy and pardon when we owe someone a great deal? The prophet Amos speaks of God forgiving transgression three times, but warns that God may not revoke punishment for the fourth (see Amos 1:3-13; 2:1-6). When Peter posed the question of forgiveness, he characteristically offered an answer he thought Jesus would be pleased with. Why not forgive seven times! How unthinkable for Jesus to counter with the proposition that one must forgive seventy times that. Jesus made it clear that there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness. And he drove the lesson home with a parable about two very different kinds of debts. The first man owed an enormous sum of money – millions in our currency. In Jesus' time this amount was greater than the total revenue of a province – more than it would cost to ransom a king! The man who was forgiven such an incredible debt could not, however bring himself to forgive his neighbor a very small debt which was about one- hundred-thousandth of his own debt. The contrast could not have been greater!

Prayer: O God, who chose the Bishop Saint Patrick to preach your glory to the peoples of Ireland, grant, through his merits and intercession, that those who glory in the name of Christian may never cease to proclaim your wondrous deeds to all. 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 is no way we could repay God the debt we owed him because of our sins and offenses. Only his mercy and pardon could free us from such a debt. Despite how we may feel at times toward people in our lives, there is no offense our neighbor can do to us that can compare with our debt to God! If God has forgiven each of us our debt, we, too must forgive others the debt they owe us. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – which atoned for our sins – each one of us have been forgiven a debt beyond all reckoning. It cost God his very own Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to ransom us with the price of his blood. Jesus paid the price for us and won for us pardon for our sins and freedom from slavery to our unruly desires and sinful habits. God in his mercy offers us the grace and help of his Holy Spirit so we can love as he loves, pardon as he pardons, and treat others with the same mercy and kindness which he has shown to us. God has made his peace with us. Have you made your peace with God? Have you reconciled yourself with God? Especially during Lent we are called to reconcile ourselves with God and with one another. A healthy trip to the confessional to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a first and important start. Have you been to confession lately? If not, why not?

Wednesday, March 18 ~ Third Week in the Season of Lent Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:17-19 Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."

Meditation: Notice how Jesus consistently taught reverence for God's law – reverence for God himself, for the Lord's Day, reverence or respect for parents, respect for life, for property, for another person's good name, respect for oneself and for one's neighbor lest wrong or hurtful desires master us. Reverence and respect for God's commandments teach us the way of love – love of God and love of neighbor. What is impossible to men and women is possible to God and those who put their faith and trust in God. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit the Lord transforms us and makes us like himself. We are a new creation in Christ (ref. 2 Cor. 5:17) because "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy

Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). God gives us the grace to love as he loves, to forgive as he forgives, to think as he thinks, and to act as he acts. The Lord loves justice and goodness and he hates every form of wickedness and sin. He wants to set us free from our unruly desires and sinful habits, so that we can choose to live each day in the peace, joy, and righteousness of his Holy Spirit (ref. Romans 14: 17). To renounce sin is to turn away from what is harmful and destructive for our minds and hearts, and our very lives. As his followers we must love and respect his commandments and hate every form of sin. Do you love and revere the commands of the Lord?

Prayer: O God, who through the Bishop Saint Cyril of Jerusalem led your Church in a wonderful way to a deeper sense of the mysteries of salvation, grant us, through his intercession, that we may so acknowledge your Son as to have life ever more abundantly. 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: How do you look upon the laws of God? Negatively? Positively? Pick-and-choose whatever suits you (the "cafeteria Catholic" approach)? Jesus' attitude towards the law of God can be summed up in the great prayer of Psalm 119: "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." For the people of Israel the "law" could refer to the Ten Commandments or to the five Books of Moses, called the Pentateuch, which explain the commandments and ordinances of God for his people. The "law" also referred to the whole teaching or way of life which God gave to his people. The Jews in Jesus' time also used it as a description of the oral or scribal law. Needless to say, the scribes added many more things to the law than God intended. That is why Jesus often condemned the scribal law. It placed burdens on people which God had not intended. Jesus, however, made it very clear that the essence of God's law – his commandments and his way of life – must be fulfilled. So, once again, how do you view God's law? How do you put God's law into action and practice in your daily life?

Thursday, March 19 ~ Third Week in the Season of Lent
Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Patron of the Universal Church; Patron of the Cathedral of Columbus

This is the 150th Anniversary Year of Quamquam Pluries:
ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII ON DEVOTION TO SAINT JOSEPH
AND DECLARING SAINT JOSEPH PATRON OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. Now 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." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Meditation: Joseph's faith was put to the test when he discovered that his espoused wife was pregnant. Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish Mary. 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. Joseph was a worthy successor to the great patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He followed the call of God through the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the coming of Jesus. God entrusted this silent, humble man with the unique privilege of raising his only Son as a growing child. Joseph is a faithful witness and servant of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Are you ready to believe in the promises of God, even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems? God the Father has not left us alone, but has given us his only begotten



Son as our Savior. Where does your faith need to be strengthened? Ask the Lord to increase your faith and trust in his word.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that by Saint Joseph's intercession your Church may constantly watch over the unfolding of the mysteries of human salvation, whose beginnings you entrusted to his faithful care. 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: Ask yourself: Are you prepared to obey the Lord in everything? Everything?! Faith in God's word and obedience to his commands go hand in hand. Joseph, like Mary, is a model of faith and justice. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a "just man." St. John Chrysostom once wrote: "The concept of 'just' here signifies the man who possesses all the virtues. By 'justice' one at times understands only one virtue in particular, as in the phrase: the one who is not avaricious is just. But 'justice' also refers to virtue in general. And it is in this sense, above all, that scripture uses the word 'justice'. For example, it refers to: 'a just man and true' (cf. Job 1:1), or the two were just (cf. Luke 1:6). Joseph, then, being just, that is to say good and charitable..."

Friday, March 20 ~ Third Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: Mark 12:28-34 One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, He is One and there is no other than he. And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Meditation: The Pharisees prided themselves in the knowledge of the law and their ritual requirements. They made it a life-time practice to study the six hundred and thirteen precepts of the Old Testament along with the numerous rabbinic commentaries. They tested Jesus to see if he correctly understood the law as they did. Jesus startled them with his profound simplicity and mastery of the law of God and its purpose. What does God require of us? Simply that we love as he loves! God is love and everything he does flows from his love for us. God loved us first and our love for him is a response to his exceeding grace and kindness towards us. The love of God comes first and the love of neighbor is firmly grounded in the love of God. The more we know of God's love and truth the more we love what he loves and reject what is hateful and contrary to his will. What, then, makes our love for God and his commands grow in us? Faith in God and hope in his promises strengthens us in the love of God. They are essential for a good relationship with God, for being united with him. The more we know of God the more we love him and the more we love him the greater we believe and hope in his promises. The Lord, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, gives us a new freedom to love as he loves. Do you know the love which conquers all?

Prayer: Pour your grace into our hearts, we pray, O Lord, that we may be constantly drawn away from unruly desires and obey by your own gift the heavenly teaching you give us. 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 following prayer of Saint Anselm is worth contemplating today: "We love you, O our God; and we desire to love you more and more. Grant to us that we may love you as much as we desire, and as much as we ought. O dearest friend, who has so loved and saved us, the thought of whom is so sweet and always growing sweeter, come with Christ and dwell in our hearts; that you keep a watch over our lips, our steps, our deeds, and we shall not need to be anxious either for our souls or our bodies. Give us love, sweetest of all gifts, which knows no enemy. Give us in our hearts pure love, born of your love to us, that we may love others as you love us. O most loving Father of Jesus Christ, from whom flows all love, let our hearts, frozen in sin, cold to you and cold to others, be warmed by this divine fire. So help and bless us in your Son."

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Daily meditations and contemplations adapted from the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* web page and *Biblical Medications for Lent* by Rev. Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P.; prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011; information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.