

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)

“O Mary, we entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick, who at the cross took part in Jesus’ pain, keeping your faith firm. Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin.” ~PRAYER OF POPE FRANCIS

Monday, March 30 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:1-11 Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

Meditation: This incident conveys to us a great deal about Jesus’ attitude toward the sinner. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus with the religious and civil authorities. That is why they brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. Jesus turned the challenge towards his accusers. In effect he said: Go ahead and stone her! But let the man who is without sin be the first to cast a stone. The Lord leaves the matter to their own consciences. When the adulterous woman is left alone with Jesus, he both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again. The scribes wished to condemn, Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge involved a choice – either go back to your former way of sin and death, or reach out to the new way of life and happiness with him. Jesus gave her pardon and a new start on life. God’s grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is – unfaithfulness to God, and to turn back to God with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for God’s mercy and forgiveness. Do you know the joy of repentance and a clean heart and mind?

Prayer: O God, by whose wondrous grace we are enriched with every blessing, grant us so to pass from former ways to newness of life, that we may be made ready for the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. 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: In your heart of hearts, do you desire to be changed and transformed in Christ-like holiness? God never withholds his grace from us. His steadfast love and mercy is new every day (ref. Lamentations 3:22-23). Through the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit we can be changed and made new in Christ. He can set us free from our unruly desires and passions. Let us pray as St. Augustine prayed: “God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you love, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Tuesday, March 31 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:21-30 Jesus said to the Pharisees: “I am going away and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come.” So the Jews said, “He is not going to kill

himself, is he, because he said, 'Where I am going you cannot come'?" He said to them, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "What I told you from the beginning. I have much to say about you in condemnation. But the one who sent me is true, and what I heard from him I tell the world." They did not realize that he was speaking to them of the Father. So Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him." Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him.

Meditation: To "sin" literally means to *miss the mark* or *to be off target*. The essence of sin is that we, through our choice, separate ourselves from the love of God and from our true purpose in life – to know the source of all truth and beauty which is God himself and to be united with God in everlasting joy. When Adam and Eve first sinned, they hid themselves from God (Genesis 3:8-10). That is what sin does; it separates us from the One who is all loving, all-wise, and all-just. Jesus went on to explain that if people could not recognize him in his word, they would have the opportunity to recognize him when he is "lifted upon the cross of Calvary. Jesus pointed to the atoning sacrifice of his life on the cross as the true source of healing and victory over the sin of the world. The sacrifice of Christ's life on the cross for our sins is the ultimate proof of God's love for us. God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). To fail to recognize Jesus and where he came from is to remain in spiritual darkness; to believe Jesus and his words is to walk in the joy and light of God's truth. There are certain opportunities in life that come and do not return. Each of us is given the opportunity to know and to accept Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior. But that opportunity can be rejected and lost. Life here is limited and short, but how we live it has everlasting consequences. Do you take advantage of the present time to make room for God so that your life will count for eternity?

Prayer: Grant us, we pray, O Lord, perseverance in obeying your will, that in our days the people dedicated to your service may grow in both merit and number. 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: Do you know the healing power of the cross of Christ? When the people of Israel were afflicted with serpents in the wilderness because of their sin, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (ref. Numbers 21:8). The bronze serpent points to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe. The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising and exaltation to the Father's right hand in heaven, is our "new birth in the Spirit" and adoption as sons and daughters of God. God not only redeems us, but he fills us with his own divine life and power that we might share in his glory. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit that we may have power to be his witnesses and to spread and defend the gospel by word and action, and to never be ashamed of Christ's Cross. Are you ready to live your life as a witness the truth and joy of the Gospel to those around you?

Wednesday, April 1 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:31-42 Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if the Son frees you, then you will truly be free. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father." They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father!" So they said to him, "We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me."

Meditation: The world presents us with a false notion of truth and freedom – "truth is relative so I choose my own criteria for what is true" and freedom means "I can do whatever I want to do – regardless of what God or others might think..." and the ever-popular "don't tell me what to do." This confusion only gets compounded when civil laws make legal many things which are contrary to the laws of God, and the Gospel teachings of Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church – abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage,

to name a few. This is really a mask for slavery to one's passions and desires – to do what "me, myself and I" will to do versus humbly and lovingly submitting ourselves to live our lives according to the will of God. Jesus offers his disciples true freedom – freedom from slavery to pride and arrogance – disbelief and ignorance – selfishness and greed – hatred and revenge – fear and anxiety – despair and depression – and a host of many other hurtful desires and addictions which cripple our lives.

Prayer: Enlighten, O God of compassion, the hearts of your children, sanctified by penance, and in your kindness grant those you stir to a sense of devotion a gracious hearing when they cry out 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.

Contemplation: The good news is that Jesus Christ has truly set us free from sin and its destructive force in our lives. How is this possible? Through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit we can choose to renounce sin, we choose to live up to the challenges put forth to us by Christ in the Gospel, and in doing so we can yield to God's grace which enables us to walk each day and each moment in Christ's way of love and holiness. A disciple is a follower and a listener. If we want to be a true follower of Christ and live as his disciples, then we must listen to the words of Jesus, with a humble and teachable spirit, and put Jesus' words into action in our daily lives. As we listen with faith and obey with trust, Christ himself gives us grace – the enabling power of his Holy Spirit – to live, think, and act in the truth of his word. Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to change your life and to set you free to walk in Christ's way of love and holiness?

Thursday, April 2 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:51-59 Jesus said to the Jews: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." So the Jews said to him, "Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.

Meditation: When the Jews asked Jesus "Who do you claim to be?" Jesus answered, "before Abraham was, I AM." Jesus claims to be timeless and there is only one in the universe who is timeless, namely God. Scripture tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus was not just a man who came, lived, died, and then rose again. He is the immortal timeless One, who always was and always will be. In Jesus we see the eternal God in visible flesh. His death and rising make it possible for us to share in his eternal life. Do you live in the hope and joy of the resurrection?

Prayer: O God, who reward the merits of the just and offer pardon to sinners who do penance, have mercy, we pray, on those who call upon you, that the admission of our guilt may serve to obtain your pardon for our sins. 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: Do you thirst and hunger to know God fully – to know him personally, and to know the transforming power of his love and wisdom for your life? God made us to know him and he gives us the gift of faith and understanding to grow in our knowledge of him. Jesus challenged the people of Israel to accept his word as the revelation of God. His claims challenged the very foundation of their belief and understanding of God. Jesus made a series of claims which are the very foundation of his life and mission. What are these claims? First, Jesus claims unique knowledge of God as the only begotten Son of the Father in heaven. Since he claims to be in direct personal communion with his Father in heaven, he knows everything about the Father. Jesus claims that the only way to full knowledge of the mind and heart of God is through himself. Jesus also claims unique obedience to God the Father. He thinks, lives and acts in the knowledge of his Father's word. To look at his life is to see how God wishes me to live. In Jesus alone we see what God wants us to know and what he wants us to be.

Friday, April 3 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 10:31-42 The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?" The Jews

answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, You are gods'?" If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and Scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried again to arrest him; but he escaped from their power. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. Many came to him and said, "John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true." And many there began to believe in him.

Meditation: Why were the religious leaders so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill him? They charged him with blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God. Jesus made two claims in his response: He was consecrated by the Father to a special task and he was sent into the world to carry out his Father's mission. Jesus challenged his opponents to accept his works if they could not accept his words. One can argue with words, but deeds are beyond argument. Jesus is the perfect teacher in that he does not base his claims on what he says but on what he does. The word of God is life and power to those who believe.

Prayer: Pardon the offenses of your peoples, we pray, O Lord, and in your goodness set us free from the bonds of the sins we have committed in our weakness. 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: Is your life consecrated to God? The scriptural understanding of "consecration" is to make "holy for God" – to be given over as a free-will offering and sacrifice for God. Jesus made himself a sin-offering for us, to ransom us from condemnation and slavery to sin. He spoke of his Father consecrating him for this mission of salvation. Jesus shows us the way to walk the path of truth and holiness. And he anoints us with his power to live the gospel with joy and to be his witnesses in the world – even during these challenging times of the coronavirus. Are you a doer of God's word, or a hearer only, failing to put into action that which is taught to us in the sacred scriptures so that we may live in the light of Christ, despite our challenges? God wants others to see the light of Christ in us as witnesses to the joy of the Gospel. As we approach Holy Week – the holiest week of the year in the Christian world – let's make sure that we keep the "holy" in Holy Week by the way we live our faith. Let us live this week illuminated with the light of Christ, so that his light shines through each of us. Let us set aside this one week of the year for added prayer, scripture reading and meditation, daily Mass, the Stations of the Cross. Have you been to confession lately? Have you been to confession? Remember most of all to thank Christ for his suffering the Passion and death on the cross, with the weight and pain of the cross being our own sinfulness.

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 Stuhlmüller, 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.

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A Prayer for Our Times

Heavenly Father, loving and merciful God, we worship and adore You. In faith, we come before You asking for mercy and forgiveness for our sins against You and Your creation. In this time of anxiety and distress, we lift up to You the COVID-19 situation throughout the world. Abba Father, we beg You to halt the spread of this disease and to grant healing and comfort to those afflicted. Please cover everyone with the Precious Blood of Your Son, Jesus and protect all of us, especially those in the medical field, from any infection and harm. Lord Jesus, we beseech You to grace government leaders and medical experts with wisdom and knowledge to combat the spread of COVID-19 and to find a cure for it. Holy Spirit Lord, please breathe peace and new life into everyone. May You grace us with a strong sense of social responsibility to do the necessary, and to be prudent and considerate in our actions. Bless all people to work together as one family of God and to be compassionate to one another. Most Holy Trinity, we believe in You and we place all our hope in You. You are our strength and our shield; in You our hearts trust; so we are helped, and our hearts exult, and with our song we give thanks to You. (Psalm 28:7) Immaculate Conception, Mary our Mother, we seek your intercession for us, our loved ones, our communities and everyone in this world. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, our Messiah and King, we trust in You (say three times). Amen.