

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 glorious Saint Peter Chanel, thy reliance on our Most Blessed Mother makes thee a perfect model of Marian simplicity. Inspire me to work humbly for others and to care for them with love that, through me, they may experience our Holy Father's love and care. Amen.” ~PRAYER TO SAINT PETER CHANEL

Monday, April 27 ~ Third Week in the Season of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 6:22-29 After Jesus had fed the five thousand men, his disciples saw him walking on the sea.] The next day, the crowd that remained across the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not gone along with his disciples in the boat, but only his disciples had left. Other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread when the Lord gave thanks. When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus answered them and said, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.” So they said to him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.”

Meditation: What do you hunger most for in life? Is it health, wealth, power, titles, fame, love, truth, life? Jesus addressed this issue with those who sought him after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. Were they simply hungry for things which satisfy the body or for that which satisfies the heart and soul? Jesus echoes the question posed in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaiah: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy” (Isaiah 55:2)? There are two kinds of hunger -- physical and spiritual. Only God can satisfy the spiritual hunger in our heart and soul -- the hunger for truth, for life, and for love. Jesus also spoke about the works of God and what we must do to be doing the works of God, namely to believe in God's Son whom he has sent into the world.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, putting off our old self with all its ways, we may live as Christ did, for through the healing paschal remedies you have conformed us to his nature. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Jesus offers a new relationship with God which issues in a new kind of life – in fact the only *real* life. It is a life of love and service, and the forgiveness of others which corresponds to God's mercy and kindness; a life of holiness and purity which corresponds to God's holiness; and a life of submission and trust which corresponds to the wisdom of God. This is the work which Jesus directs us to and enables us to perform in the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you hunger for the bread which comes down from heaven and thirst for the words of everlasting life? Find this hunger, and fulfill it with Christ!

Tuesday, April 28 ~ Third Week in the Season of Easter

Saint Peter Chanel, Priest and Martyr; Saint Louis Mary de Montfort, Priest

Holy Gospel: John 6:30-35 The crowd said to Jesus: “What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: *He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*” So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” So they said to Jesus, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”

Meditation: Do you have a true and genuine hunger for the bread of life? The Jewish people had always regarded the manna in the wilderness as the bread of God (Psalm 78:24, Exodus 16:15). There was a strong Rabbinic belief that when the Messiah came he would give manna from heaven. This was the supreme work of Moses. Now the Jewish leaders were demanding that Jesus produce manna from heaven as proof to his claim to be the Messiah. Jesus responds by telling them that it was not Moses who gave the manna, but God. And the manna given to Moses and the people was not the real bread from heaven, but only a symbol of the bread to come. Jesus then makes the claim which only God can make: I am the bread of life. The bread which Jesus offers is none else than the very life of God. This is the one true bread which can truly satisfy the hunger in our hearts. So the question becomes for each of us: Do you hunger for God and for the food which produces everlasting life?

Prayer: O God, who open wide the gates of the heavenly Kingdom to those reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, pour out on your servants an increase of the grace you have bestowed, that, having been purged of all sins, they may lack nothing that in your kindness you have promised. 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.

Prayer (Saint Peter Chanel): O God, who for the spreading of your Church crowned Saint Peter Chanel with martyrdom, grant that, in these days of paschal joy, we may so celebrate the mysteries of Christ's Death and Resurrection as to bear worthy witness to newness 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.

Prayer (Saint Louise Mary de Montfort): O God, who willed to direct the steps of the Priest Saint Louis along the way of salvation and of the love of Christ, in the company of the Blessed Virgin, grant us, by his example, that, meditating on the mysteries of your love, we may strive tirelessly for the building up of your Church. 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: Have you tasted the bread of life? Have you come to Jesus? Or are you trying to cram other things in your life, instead of the only thing that will give you meaning, direction – life itself?! So what do you have to do to receive this great treasure - this "pearl of great price" we hear in scripture - this living bread? You have to sell all you have; your desires to go your own way instead of God's way; your desire to have power or fame. You have to put everything else behind God and seek Him and his righteousness first and all else will be given to you. This is never easy, and it will cost you a great deal. But what you get in return will be worth the price. So, seize this opportunity. Taste the bread that Jesus offers. Saint Augustine wrote a prayer to express his gratitude to God for giving us the bread of life: *You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised; great is your power and your wisdom is immeasurable. Man, a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you, a human being bearing mortality with him, carrying with him the witness of his sin and the witness that you resist the proud. Nevertheless, to praise you is the desire of man, a little piece of your creation. You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. Amen.*

Wednesday, April 29 ~ Third Week in the Season of Easter Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: John 6:35-40 Jesus said to the crowds, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I told you that although you have seen me, you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him on the last day."

Meditation: For us to understand who Jesus is, we need to understand why he called himself the "bread of life." The Jews understood that God promised them manna from heaven to sustain them on their journey to the promised land. Bread is the very staple of life. We could not live without food for very long. Bread sustains us. But what, then, is life? Jesus clearly meant something more than mere physical existence. The life Jesus refers to is connected with God, the author of life. Real life is a relationship with the living God – a relationship based on trust, love and obedience. This is what Jesus makes possible for us -- a loving relationship with the God who created us for love with Him. Apart from Jesus no one can enter that kind of life and relationship.

Prayer: Be present to your family, O Lord, we pray, and graciously ensure those you have endowed with the grace of faith an eternal share in the Resurrection 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.

Prayer (Saint Catherine of Siena): O God, who set Saint Catherine of Siena on fire with divine love in her contemplation of the Lord's Passion and her service to your Church, grant, through her intercession, that your people, participating in the mystery of Christ, may ever exult in the revelation of his glory. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, on God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Ask yourself: are you satisfied with mere physical existence, or do you hunger for real life? Jesus makes three claims here. First he offers himself as spiritual food which produces the very life of God within us. Second, he promises unbroken friendship and freedom from the fear of being forsaken or cut off from God. Third, he offers us the hope of sharing in his resurrection. Those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior will be raised up to immortal life with Jesus when he comes again on the last day. Remember, our earthly journey is just that – a journey. And where our journey leads us is up to us as to whom we follow – is it Christ our shepherd and guide? Or is it someone or something else? Jesus leads us to eternal life, everything else leads to a dead end – literally! Knowing this, why would anyone choose to follow anyone or anything but Christ on our earthly journey?

Thursday, April 30 ~ Third Week in the Season of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 6:44-51 Jesus said to the crowds: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: *They shall all be taught by God.* Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world."

Meditation: God offers us, his people, abundant life. But we can miss it. What is the bread of life which Jesus offers? It is first of all the life of God himself -- life which sustains us not only now in this age but also in the age to come. The Rabbis said that the generation in the wilderness have no part in the life to come. In the Book of Numbers it is recorded that the people who refused to brave the dangers of the Promised Land were condemned to wander in the wilderness until they died. The Rabbis believed that the father who missed the promised land also missed the life to come. When Jesus offers us real life he brings us into a new relationship with God, a relationship of trust, love, and obedience. And he offers us real life which last forever, a life of love, fellowship, communion, and union with the One who made us in love to be with him forever. To refuse Jesus is to refuse eternal life, unending life with the Heavenly Father. To accept Jesus as the bread of heaven is not only life and spiritual nourishment for this world but glory in the world to come. Do you truly accept Jesus as the bread of life?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, let us feel your compassion more readily during these days when, by your gift, we have known it more fully, so that those you have freed from the darkness of error may cling more firmly to the teachings of your truth. 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: Saint Bonaventure wrote this prayer to Jesus, the bread of life: "Grant that my soul may hunger after Thee, the bread of angels, the refreshment of holy souls, our daily and super substantial bread, having all sweetness and savor and every delight of taste; let my heart ever hunger after and feed upon Thee, upon whom the angels desire to look, and may my inmost soul be filled with the sweetness of Thy savor; may it ever thirst after Thee, the fountain of life, the fountain of wisdom and knowledge, the fountain of eternal light, the torrent of pleasure, the richness of the house of God. May it ever compass Thee, seek Thee, find Thee, run to Thee, attain Thee, meditate upon Thee, speak of Thee, and do all things to the praise and glory of Thy name, with humility and discretion, with love and delight, with ease and affection, and with perseverance unto the end."

Friday, May 1 ~ Third Week in the Season of Easter Saint Joseph the Worker

Holy Gospel: John 6:52-59 The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his Flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink his Blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has

eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my Flesh is true food, and my Blood is true drink. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Meditation: Why did Jesus offer himself as "food and drink"? The Jews were scandalized and the disciples were divided when Jesus said "unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you." What a hard saying, unless you understand who Jesus is and why he calls himself the bread of life. The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, when Jesus said the blessing, broke and distributed the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigured the superabundance of the unique bread of the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper. The Gospel of John has no account of the Last Supper meal (just the foot washing ceremony and Jesus' farewell discourse). Instead, John quotes extensively from Jesus' teaching on the bread of life. In the Old Covenant bread and wine were offered in sacrifice as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to their Creator. Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine, who was both priest and king (Genesis 14:18), prefigured the offering made by Jesus, our high priest and king. The remembrance of the manna in the wilderness recalled to Israel that it lives by the bread of the Word of God (Deuteronomy 8:3). When at the Last Supper Jesus described his blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28), he was explaining his coming crucifixion as a sacrifice for sins. His death on the cross fulfilled the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. That is why John the Baptist called him the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Jesus made himself an offering and sacrifice, a gift that was truly pleasing to the Father. He "offered himself without blemish to God" (Hebrews 9:14) and "gave himself as a sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2).

Prayer: O God, Creator of all things, who laid down for the human race the law of work, graciously grant that by the example of Saint Joseph and under his patronage we may complete the works you set us to do and attain the rewards you promise. 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.

Prayer to Saint Joseph for Employment: Dear Saint Joseph, you were yourself once faced with the responsibility of providing the necessities of life for Jesus and Mary. Look down with fatherly compassion upon me in my anxiety with my present inability to support my family. Please help me find gainful employment very soon, so that this great burden of concern will be lifted from my heart and that I am soon able to provide for those whom God has entrusted to my care. Help me guard against discouragement, so that I may emerge from this trial spiritually enriched and with even greater blessings from God. Amen.

Contemplation (in relation to today's feast): Do you find yourself in need of prayer looking for work these days? The Prayer to Saint Joseph for Employment (above) is presented today in the hope it might provide some relief and comfort to those who find themselves in this situation. Do not despair! Seek this great Saint's help in carrying the vexing and at times quite bitter cross of being out of work, remembering always that you always have great worth in the eyes of God no matter what your situation may be.

About today's Feast: "May Day" has long been dedicated to labor and the working man. It falls on the first day of the month that is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Pope Pius XII expressed the hope that this feast would accentuate the dignity of labor and would bring a spiritual dimension to labor unions. It is eminently fitting that Saint Joseph, a working man who became the foster-father of Christ and patron of the universal Church, should be honored on this day. The texts of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours provide a catechetical synthesis of the significance of human labor seen in the light of faith. The Opening Prayer states that God, the creator and ruler of the universe, has called men and women in every age to develop and use their talents for the good of others. Then, in the second part of the Opening Prayer, we ask that we may do the work that God has asked of us and come to the rewards he has promised. The liturgy for this feast vindicates the right to work, and this is a message that needs to be heard and heeded in our modern society. In many of the documents issued by Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, the Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II, reference is made to the Christian spirit that should permeate one's work, after the example of Saint Joseph.

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.