

Lectio Divina

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

"Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more."

~THE "PRAYER OF SURRENDER" OF SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Monday, July 27 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:31-35 Jesus proposed a parable to the crowds. "The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'" He spoke to them another parable. "The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: *I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.*

Meditation: What can mustard seeds and leaven teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to be a tree which attracted numerous birds because they loved the little black mustard seed it produced. God's kingdom works in a similar fashion. It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within. Leaven is another powerful agent of change. A lump of dough left to itself remains just what it is, a lump of dough. But when the leaven is added to it a transformation takes place which produces rich and wholesome bread when heated — the staple of life for humans. The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers.

Prayer: O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure. 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 we yield our lives to Jesus Christ and allow his word to take root in our heart, we are transformed and made holy by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Paul the Apostle says: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us: (2 Corinthians 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?"

Tuesday, July 28 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:36-43 Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom. The weeds are the children of the Evil One, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

Meditation: There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and turns a deaf ear to what they don't want to hear. Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else. Another type of hearer is the person who has

many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is forever too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate and pray on God's word. He or she may work so hard that they are too tired to even think of anything else but their work. Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it. The "evil one" refers to Satan who also tempts us with sowing his evil seed in our hearts and minds. The evil one can also refer to those among us who promote ways that are contrary to that of Christ – those who embrace contrary ways of living, far from the way that God has commanded and Christ has taught. Do you embrace the laws of God and the teachings of Christ and His Church? Or do you embrace the ways of the evil one, public opinion, the politically correct, that which may be popular, that which may be civilly legal yet immoral in the eyes of God, and anything that is contrary to the truths of sacred scripture?

Prayer: O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure. 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: Don't be naive. An enemy exists who seeks to destroy the good seed of His word before it can bear fruit. Both good and evil can be sown in our hearts like tiny seeds which germinate, and in due time yield a harvest of good or bad fruit. We must stand guard lest evil take root in our hearts and corrupt us. In the day of judgment each will reap what he or she has sown in this life. Those who sow good will shine in the kingdom of their Father. They will radiate with the beauty, joy, and fullness of God's love.

Wednesday, July 29 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Martha, Virgin

Holy Gospel: John 11:19-27 Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother [Lazarus, who had died]. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

Meditation: The loss of a loved one naturally produces grief and anguish of heart. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming to pay respects for the loss of Lazarus, she immediately went out to meet him before he could get to her house. What compelled her to seek Jesus out? Was it simply the companionship and consolation of a friend who loved her brother deeply? Or did she recognize in Jesus the hope that God would restore life? Martha, like many Orthodox Jews, believed in the life to come. The loss of her brother did not diminish her hope in the resurrection. She even gently chides Jesus for not coming soon enough to save Lazarus from an untimely death. Jesus does something unexpected and remarkable both to strengthen her faith and hope in the life to come and to give her a sign of what he was to accomplish through his own death and resurrection. Jesus gave to her belief a new and profound meaning: He came from the Father to defeat sin and death for us and to restore life to those who believe in him.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, whose Son was pleased to be welcomed in Saint Martha's house as a guest, grant, we pray, that through her intercession, serving Christ faithfully in our brothers and sisters, we may merit to be received by you in the halls of heaven. 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: Jesus states in today's Gospel and in many other places in the New Testament that he is the Resurrection and the Life. The life he offers is abundant life – life which issues from God himself. And eternal life – the fullness of life which knows no end. Do you seek the abundant life which Jesus offers to those who believe in him?

About Saint Martha: Martha was born of noble and wealthy parents, but she is still more illustrious for the hospitality she gave to Christ our Lord. After His Ascension into heaven, she was seized by the Jews, together with her brother and sister, Marcella her handmaid, and Maximin, one of the 72 disciples of our Lord, who had baptized the whole family, and many other Christians. They were put on board a ship without sails or oars, and left helpless on the open sea, exposed to certain shipwreck. But God guided the

ship and they all arrived safely at what is today Marseilles, France. This miracle, together with their preaching, brought the people of Marseilles, of Aix, and of the neighborhood to believe in Christ. Martha, after having won the love and admiration of the people of Marseilles by the sanctity of her life and her wonderful charity, withdrew in the company of several virtuous women to a spot remote from men, where she lived for a long time, greatly renowned for her piety and prudence.

Thursday, July 30 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Peter Chrysologus, Bishop and Doctor of the Church
Blessed Solanus Casey, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:47-53 Jesus said to the disciples: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old." When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there.

Meditation: What can a story of a dragnet and a great catch of fish tell us about God's kingdom? The two most common ways of fishing in Jesus' time was with a casting-net (or hand-net) which was thrown from the shore and the drag-net or trawl which was let down or cast into the waters from a boat. As the boat moved through the waters the drag-net was drawn into the shape of a great cone which indiscriminately took in all kinds of fish and flotsam and jetsam swept in its path. It usually took several men to haul such a net to shore. What is Jesus' point here? Just as a drag-net catches every kind of fish in the sea, so the church acts as God's instrument for gathering in all who will come. Just as the drag-net does not or cannot discriminate, so the church does not discriminate between the good and the bad, the useless and the useful. God's kingdom is open to all who will accept and believe. But there will come a time of separation, at the close of the age, when the angels will send the good and the bad to their respective destinations.

Prayer ~ Saint Peter Chrysologus: O God, who made the Bishop Saint Peter Chrysologus an outstanding preacher of your incarnate Word, grant, through his intercession, that we may constantly ponder in our hearts the mysteries of your salvation and faithfully express them in what we do. 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 ~ Blessed Solanus Casey: Blessed Solanus Casey, you once wrote that detachment from earthly affections is a first step toward growing in holiness. Pray today that the earthly desires of my heart may be replaced with a burning desire to pursue God alone. Amen.

Visit the Solanus Casey Center: <https://solanuscasy.org/>

Contemplation: What is our duty in all of this? Our duty is rather simple – to gather in all who will come. God, in the end, will give the good and the bad the reward they deserve. God offers the treasure of his kingdom to all who believe. Do you hunger for God and his kingdom?

Friday, July 31 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Priest; Founder, Society of Jesus

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:54-58 Jesus came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, "Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is he not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not his sisters all with us? Where did this man get all this?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house." And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

Meditation: Are you critical towards others, especially those who are close to you? The most severe critics are often people very familiar to us, a member of our family, a relative, neighbor, student, or worker we rub shoulders with on a regular basis. Jesus faced a severe testing when he returned to his home town, not simply as the carpenter's son, but now as a rabbi with disciples. But it was of not matter, as the people of Nazareth took offense at him and refused to listen to what he had to say. They despised his preaching because he was a carpenter from the working class, and a mere layman untrained by religious scholars. They also despised him because of his family background. After all, Joseph was a tradesman as well and Mary had no special social distinctions.

Prayer: O God, who raised up Saint Ignatius of Loyola in your Church to further the greater glory of your name, grant that by his help we may imitate him in fighting the good fight on earth and merit to receive with him a crown in heaven. 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 easily familiarity breeds contempt. Jesus could do no mighty works in his hometown because the people who were familiar with him were closed-minded and despised his claim to speak and act in the name of God. The Lord Jesus offers us freedom from sin, prejudice, contempt, and fear. His love and grace sets us free to love others with the same grace and mercy which he has shown to us. Only Jesus can truly set us free from the worst tyranny possible — slavery to sin and the fear of death. His victory on the cross brings us pardon and healing, and the grace to live holy lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you know the joy and freedom which Christ's love brings to our hearts?

Saturday, August 1 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

St. Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop, Doctor of the Church; Founder, Redemptorists

Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:1-12 Herod the tetrarch heard of the reputation of Jesus and said to his servants, "This man is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him." Now Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet. But at a birthday celebration for Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the guests and delighted Herod so much that he swore to give her whatever she might ask for. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests who were present, he ordered that it be given, and he had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him; and they went and told Jesus.

Meditation: We've all felt haunted by a past failure or a guilty conscience. King Herod, the most powerful and wealthy man in Judea, had everything he wanted, except a clear conscience and peace with God. Herod had respected and feared John the Baptist as a great prophet and servant of God. John, however did not fear to rebuke Herod for his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. He ended up in prison because of Herodias' jealousy. Herod, out of impulse and a desire to please his family and friends, had John beheaded. Now his conscience is pricked when he hears that all the people are going to Jesus to hear his message of repentance and to see his mighty works. Herod is now haunted by the thought that the prophet he murdered might now be raised from the dead!

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, who made the Priest Saint John Vianney wonderful in his pastoral zeal, grant, we pray, that through his intercession and example we may in charity win brothers and sisters for Christ and attain with them eternal 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: Herod's power and influence was badly flawed. He could take a strong stand on the wrong things when he knew the right. Such a stand, however, was a sign of weakness and cowardice. Where do you get the strength of will and heart to choose what is right and to reject what is bad? The Lord gives grace and help to the humble, to those who acknowledge their weaknesses and their sinfulness, and who look to God for his mercy and pardon, wisdom and strength. His grace and pardon not only frees us from a guilty conscience, it enables us to pursue holiness in every area of our lives, in our thoughts and intentions as well as our words and actions. God's grace enables us to fight fear with faith and to overcome the temptation to compromise good with evil. Do you rely on God's grace and help to choose his way of holiness and to reject whatever would weaken your faith and loyalty to Christ?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
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