

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)

“The most deadly poison of our time is indifference. And this happens, although the praise of God should know no limits. Let us strive, therefore, to praise him to the greatest extent of our powers.” ~ SAINT MAXIMILLIAN KOLBE

**Monday, August 10 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr**

Holy Gospel: John 12:24-36 Jesus said to his disciples: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.”

Meditation: The language of scripture may, at times, be confusing. For example, what does it mean to “die” to oneself? It certainly means that what is contrary to God’s will must be “crucified” or “put to death.” God gives us grace to say “yes” to his will and to reject whatever is contrary to his loving plan for our lives. Jesus also promises that we will bear much “fruit” for him, if we choose to deny ourselves for his sake. Jesus used forceful language to describe the kind of self-denial he had in mind for his disciples. What did he mean when he said that one must “hate” himself? The expression to “hate” something often meant to prefer less. Jesus says that nothing should get in the way of our preferring him and the will of our Father in heaven. Our hope is in Paul’s reminder that “*What is sown in the earth is subject to decay, what rises is incorruptible*” (1 Corinthians 15:42). Do you hope in the Lord and follow joyfully the path he has chosen for you?

Prayer: O God, giver of that ardor of love for you by which Saint Lawrence was outstandingly faithful in service and glorious in martyrdom, grant that we may love what he loved and put into practice what he taught. 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: What can a grain of wheat tell us about life and the kingdom of God? Jesus drew his parables from the common everyday circumstances of life. His audience, mostly rural folk in Palestine, could easily understand the principle of new life produced by dead seeds sown into the earth. What is the spiritual analogy which Jesus alludes to? Is this, perhaps, a veiled reference to his own impending death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day? Or does he have another kind of “death and rebirth” in mind for his disciples? Jesus, no doubt, had both meanings in mind for his disciples. The image of the grain of wheat dying in the earth in order to grow and bear a harvest can be seen as a metaphor of Jesus’ own death and burial in the tomb and his resurrection. Jesus knew that the only way to victory over the power of sin and death was through the cross. Jesus reversed the curse of our first parents’ (Adam and Eve) disobedience through his obedience to the Father’s will - his willingness to go to the cross to pay the just penalty for our sins and to defeat death once and for all. His obedience and death on the cross obtain for us freedom and new life in the Holy Spirit. His cross frees us from the tyranny of sin and death and shows us the way of perfect love. There is a great paradox here. Death leads to life. When we “die” to ourselves, we “rise” to new life in Jesus Christ.

**Tuesday, August 11 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Clare, Virgin**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:1-5,10,12-14 The disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes

humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost."

Meditation: This passage of the gospel is surprising to many. Who would have thought that the disciples would ever have an ego problem, let alone discuss with Jesus who is the greatest? Think about it – are we not guilty of having done the same thing at one or more times in our own lives? The appetite for glory and greatness seems to be inbred in us, and can raise its ugly head at times. Who doesn't cherish the ambition to be "somebody" whom others admire rather than a "nobody" who gets lost in the crowd? 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* (Psalm 8:5). And so we might meditate on what kind of glory do we seek. Jesus made a dramatic gesture by placing a child next to himself 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 at his right side. It is customary, even today, to seat the guest of honor at the right side of the host. And so who is the greatest in God's kingdom? The one who is humble and lowly of heart; the one who instead of asserting their rights willingly empty themselves of pride and self-seeking glory by taking the lowly position of a servant and child before God. The simple of heart know that they belong to God, for he is their father, teacher, and provider; he is the one who shows them the way of peace, joy, and life everlasting. They are content to recognize their total dependence on God who is the source of all goodness and every good gift.

Prayer: O God, who in your mercy led Saint Clare to a love of poverty, grant, through her intercession, that, following Christ in poverty of spirit, we may merit to contemplate you one day in 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: Jesus' story about a lost sheep tells us much about God and his kingdom. Shepherds normally counted their sheep at the end of the day to make sure all were accounted for. Since sheep by their very nature are very social, an isolated sheep can quickly become bewildered and even neurotic. The shepherd's grief and anxiety is turned to joy when he finds the lost sheep and restores it to the fold. What was new in Jesus' teaching was the insistence that sinners must be sought out and not merely mourned for. God does not rejoice in the loss of anyone, but desires that all be saved and restored to fellowship with him. That is why the whole community of heaven rejoices when one sinner is found and restored to fellowship with God (Luke 15:7). Those who seek after the lost are needed more than ever in today's "me, myself and I" world. Do you pray and seek after those you know who have lost their way to God?

Wednesday, August 12 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, Religious**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the Church. If he refuses to listen even to the Church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Meditation: What can we learn from Jesus' instructions today about how to mend a damaged relationship? If you feel you have been wronged by someone, Jesus says the first step is to speak directly but privately to the individual who has done the harm. One of the worst things we can do is brood over our grievance. This can poison our mind and heart and make it more difficult to go directly to the person who caused the damage. If we truly want to settle a difference with someone, we need to do it face to

face. If this fails in its purpose, then the second step is to bring another person or persons, someone who is wise and gracious rather than someone who is hot-tempered or judgmental. The goal is not so much to put the offender on trial, but to persuade the offender to see the wrong and to be reconciled. And if this fails, then we must still not give up, but seek the help of the Christian community. Note the emphasis here is on restoring a broken relationship by seeking the help of other Christians who hopefully will pray and seek a solution for reconciliation based on Christian love and wisdom, rather than relying on coercive force or threat of legal action, such as a lawsuit. Lastly, if even the Christian community fails to bring about reconciliation, what must we do? Jesus seems to say that we have the right to abandon stubborn and obdurate offenders and treat them like social outcasts. The tax-collectors and Gentiles were regarded as "unclean" by the religious-minded Jews and they resorted to shunning them. However we know from the Gospel accounts that Jesus often had fellowship with tax-collectors (as well as other public sinners), ate with them, and even praised them at times! Jesus refuses no one who is open to receive pardon, healing, and restoration. This is what it means to have compassion for someone, which can lead to healing.

Prayer: O God, who made Saint Jane Frances de Chantal radiant with outstanding merits in different walks of life, grant us, through her intercession, that walking faithfully in our vocation, we may constantly be examples of shining light. 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 Trappist monk Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO, once said: "Compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another." In our growing world of independence we walk around life at times with a belief that we are somehow separate from one another. This growing mindset of disconnection from God, other people, and so forth, often leads to a state of imbalance, which can bring about states of stress, anxiety, and depression, which can then lead to other problems and issues. What we fail to recognize is the fundamental belief that we are all connected with one another as children of God, and as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. And therefore recognizing this real dependence on God for everything and this interdependence on one another to help us walk side-by-side on this life's journey that God has given us is a reminder that we all make mistakes, we say things we should not have, we all support causes and beliefs that are wrong simply because we got caught up in the way of the world instead of embracing the way of God and his son, Jesus Christ. And so extending compassion to one another is a way of reaching out to help each other, to reconcile, to repair any damage, and to help restore one another to a life in Christ. Look back for a moment – in your waywardness in life (yes, we are all guilty of this!) how many times has someone reached out to you in compassion? Isn't it time for us to imitate Christ and reach out in compassion to someone who has strayed?

Thursday, August 13 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Saints Pontian, Pope and Martyr, and Hippolytus, Priest and Martyr**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:21-19:1 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 the fellow servant 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 his brother from his heart." When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan.

Meditation: Since God constantly has shown mercy to us in granting us pardon for our sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation then we, in turn, must show mercy and forgiveness towards every person who has offended us. The willingness to forgive those who offend us is a sacred duty. If we expect God to

pardon us and show us his mercy when we sin and disobey his commandments, then we must be willing to let go of any resentment, grievance, or ill-will we feel towards our neighbor. Jesus teaches us to pray daily for the grace and strength to forgive others in the same measure in which God has forgiven us (Matthew 6:12,14-15). If we do show mercy and forgiveness to our fellow human beings, how can we expect God to forgive us in turn? The Apostle James says that "*judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy*" (James 2:13).

Prayer: May the precious long-suffering of the just, O Lord, we pray, bring us a great increase of love for you and always prompt in our hearts constancy in the holy faith. 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: No offense our neighbor can do to us can compare with our own personal debt to God for offending him. We have been forgiven an enormous debt we could not repay on our own. That is why the Father in heaven sent his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who freely and willingly gave up his life for our sake to ransom us from slavery to sin, Satan, and death. Saint Paul says, "you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 7:23) and that price was Jesus' death on the cross. Through the shedding of his blood on the cross, Jesus not only brought forgiveness and pardon for our offenses, but release from our captivity to Satan and bondage to sin. If we want mercy shown to us – and we all do – then we must be ready to forgive others from the heart as God has forgiven us. Do you hold any grudge or resentment towards anyone? Ask the Lord to purify your heart that you may show mercy and loving-kindness to all – and especially to those who cause you grief and ill-will.

Friday, August 14 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Priest and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 19:3-12 Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery." His disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

Meditation: Jesus deals with the issue of divorce by taking his hearers back to the beginning of creation and to God's plan for the human race. In Genesis 2:23-24 we see God's intention and ideal that two people who marry should become so indissolubly one that they are one flesh. That ideal is found in the unbreakable union of Adam and Eve. They were created for each other and for no one else. They are the pattern and symbol for all who were to come. Jesus explains that Moses permitted divorce as a *concession* in view of a lost ideal. Jesus sets the high ideal of the married state before those who are willing to accept his commands.

Prayer: O God, who filled the Priest and Martyr Saint Maximilian Kolbe with a burning love for the Immaculate Virgin Mary and with zeal for souls and love of neighbor, graciously grant, through his intercession, that striving for your glory by eagerly serving others, we may be conformed, even until death, to your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Both marriage and the single life are calls from God to live a consecrated life, that is to live as married couples or as singles who belong not to themselves but to God. Despite what we may think or feel, our lives are not our own – they belong to God. He gives strength, joy, and blessing to those who seek to follow his way of holiness in their state of life.

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.

