

# Lectio Divina

## SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

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“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)

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***“A Christian is: a mind through which Christ thinks, a heart through which Christ loves, a voice through which Christ speaks, and a hand through which Christ helps.”***

~ SAINT AUGUSTINE

### Monday, August 24 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time Saint Bartholomew, Apostle

**Holy Gospel: John 1:45-51** Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.” But Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him.” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” And he said to him, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

**Meditation:** What is the significance of Jesus’ revelation of seeing Nathanael (known as Bartholomew in Matthew 10:3 and Luke 6:14) “under the fig tree?” For the people of Israel, the fig tree was a symbol of God’s peace and blessing (1 Kings 4:24b-25, Micah 4:4). It provided shade from the midday sun and a cool refreshing place to retreat, pray, meditate and reflect on God’s word. Rabbis often gathered their disciples under the shade of the fig to teach them the wisdom and revelation of God from the Scriptures. The rabbis had an expression for comparing the fig tree to being nourished with God’s word in Scripture, “He who tends the fig tree will eat its fruit.” And thus we see the importance of meditating on Sacred Scripture, but then “living” what we have learned as “doers of the word, not hearers only” (James 1:22) so that these sacred teachings can bear fruit in our daily lives.

**Prayer:** Strengthen in us, O Lord, the faith, by which the blessed Apostle Bartholomew clung wholeheartedly to your Son, and grant that through the help of his prayers your Church may become for all the nations the sacrament of salvation. 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’ death on the cross, where he defeated sin and won new life for us through his resurrection, opens the way for each of us to come into a new relationship with God as his adopted sons and daughters. The Lord Jesus opens the way for each one of us to “ascend to heaven” and to bring “heaven to earth” in the daily circumstances of our lives. God’s kingdom is present in those who seek him and who strive to do his will. Through the gift of faith God opens a door for each one of us to the heavenly reality of his kingdom. And so we might contemplate on asking ourselves: Do you see with the “eyes of faith” what the Lord Jesus has done for us?

**About Saint Bartholomew:** In St. John’s Gospel, Bartholomew is known by the name Nathaniel (the liturgy does not always seem aware of this identity). He hailed from Cana in Galilee, was one of the first disciples called by the Lord. On that initial meeting Jesus uttered the glorious compliment: “Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile!” After the Resurrection he was favored by becoming one of the few apostles who witnessed the appearance of the risen Savior on the sea of Galilee (John 21:2). Following the Ascension he is said to have preached in Greater Armenia and to have been martyred there. While still alive, his skin was torn from his body. The Armenians honor him as the apostle of their nation. Concerning the fate of his relics, the Martyrology says: “His holy body was first taken to the island of Lipari (north of Sicily), then to Benevento, and finally to Rome on an island in the Tiber where it is honored by the faithful with pious devotion.” The Church of Armenia has a national tradition that St. Jude

Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew visited the Armenians early in the first century and introduced Christianity among the worshippers of the god Ahura Mazda. The new faith spread throughout the land, and in 302 A.D., St. Gregory the Illuminator baptized the king of Armenia, Dertad the Great, along with many of his followers. Since Dertad was probably the first ruler to embrace Christianity for his nation, the Armenians proudly claim they were the first Christian State.

## **Tuesday, August 25 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time Saint Louis of France, King; Saint Joseph Calasanz, Priest**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:23-26** Jesus said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean."

**Meditation:** Jesus went to the heart of the matter when he called the religious leaders of his day *blind* Pharisees and *hypocrites*! A hypocrite is an actor or imposter who says one thing but does the opposite or who puts on an outward appearance of doing good while inwardly clinging to wrong attitudes, selfish desires and ambitions, or bad intentions. Many scribes and Pharisees had made it a regular practice to publicly put on a good show of outward zeal and piety with the intention of winning greater honors, privileges, and favors among the people. Jesus had a very good reason for severely rebuking the scribes and Pharisees, the religious teachers and leaders, for misleading people and neglecting the heart and essence of God's law – love God above all things, and love your neighbor as yourself.

**Prayer ~ Saint Louis:** O God, who brought Saint Louis from the cares of earthly rule to the glory of a heavenly realm, grant, we pray, through his intercession, that, by fulfilling our duties on earth, we may seek out your eternal 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.

**Prayer ~ Saint Joseph Calasanz:** O God, who adorned the Priest Saint Joseph Calasanz with such charity and patience that he labored tirelessly to educate children and endow them with every virtue, grant, we pray, that we, who venerate him as a teacher of wisdom, may constantly imitate him, for he was a co-worker 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:** The essence of God's commandments is rooted in love – love God above all things, and love your neighbor as yourself – righteousness (justice and goodness), and mercy. God is love and everything he does, including his justice and goodness, flows from his love for us. True love is costly and sacrificial - it both embraces and lifts the burdens of others. And so we might ask ourselves today: Do you allow the love of God to shape and transform the way you live your daily life, especially in the way you think of others, speak of them, and treat them? If not, now is an opportunity to let the transformative grace of God work in and through you so that you may imitate Christ in thought, word and deed.

## **Wednesday, August 26 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:27-32** Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood.' Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out!"

**Meditation:** Outward appearances can be deceptive. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would *not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth* (Isaiah 11:3-4). The heart reveals the true intentions and attitudes that form the way we think of others and treat them. Jesus used strong language to warn the religious leaders and teachers about the vanity of outward appearance and pretense - wearing a mask that hides the true intentions and thoughts of the heart. This warning applies to all persons who identify themselves as disciples and followers of Christ, and so we must meditate on what authentic discipleship in

Christ really means. It is not mere show, but an authentic way of life, in all aspects of life, day in and day out.

**Prayer:** O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found. 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 warns that what truly corrupts a person is not external ritual impurity but the impurity of wrong and sinful attitudes that come from within a person's mind and heart – pride, greed, sloth, envy, hatred, gluttony, and lust. These are what produce sinful habits (vices) and ways of speaking, acting, judging, and treating others. That is why every good deed is beautiful in God's sight and every wrong or sinful deed is ugly in his sight. The scribes and Pharisees were intensely religious in their outward observances, but their outward show didn't match the inner reality of the state of their minds and hearts. True beauty, goodness, and piety come from within, an interior motivation from a heart that is set on pleasing God and a mind that is set on hearing and obeying God's word, and thus the importance of having an authentic interior life rooted in Christ. Jesus came to set us free from slavery to sin and harmful habits and addictions that lead us into wrong and sinful ways of thinking, acting, and relating to others. Only the humble of heart can receive from God true wisdom and understanding, pardon and healing. The Holy Spirit is ever ready to renew our minds and hearts and to lead us in God's way of love and holiness. Pray that the Holy Spirit will purify your heart and mind and to fill you with the power of God's love and goodness, and thus integrate this wisdom and love into your daily life. Such integration will lead to a balanced way of life. Therefore, cultivating our interior life is a means of finding that balance. Trappist monk Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO, contextualizes this more richly in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*: "This then is what it means to seek God perfectly: to withdraw from illusion and pleasure, from worldly anxieties and desires, from the works that God does not want, from a glory that is only human display; to keep my mind free from confusion in order that my liberty may be always at the disposal of His will; to entertain silence in my heart and listen for the voice of God; to cultivate an intellectual freedom from the images of created things in order to receive the secret contact of God in obscure love; to love all men as myself." This book is a must read for those who wish to cultivate their interior life so that one may enter into a more fruitful, prayerful dialogue with God.

## **Thursday, August 27 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time Saint Monica**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 24:42-51** Jesus said to his disciples: "Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come. "Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household to distribute to them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so. Amen, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is long delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."

**Meditation:** When God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world it was to rescue us from ourselves, from the tyranny of sin, Satan, and death. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and his triumphant victory over the grave won pardon for us and reconciliation with our heavenly Father, and the promise of everlasting life and joy in his kingdom. The Lord Jesus told his disciples on a number of occasions that he would return again at the end of this present age, not simply to rescue us again from our enemies, but as a victor King and Lord who will vindicate all who have believed in him, How? By releasing us from the curse of death and condemnation and restoring for us the plan he had from the beginning of creation – a new heaven and a new earth for a people perfectly united with God in peace, joy, and harmony forever. This is the background to Jesus parable in today's Gospel about the householder and the thief in the night. When the Lord Jesus returns, he doesn't want to find us flirting with the enemy or worse joining forces with enemies who are opposed to God and his kingdom. He wants to see us fully aligned with him, and invites us constantly to do so when Jesus says "follow me."

**Prayer:** O God, who console the sorrowful and who mercifully accepted the motherly tears of Saint Monica for the conversion of her son Augustine, grant us, through the intercession of them both, that we may

bitterly regret our sins and find the grace of your pardon. 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:** And so Jesus invites us to follow him, time and time again. But ask yourself: Do I take up Jesus on his invitation? If I do follow him, I am truly attentive to his teachings by embracing them and living them, so that I am ready to meet him when he calls each of us to himself. The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit so that we may have the wisdom, help, and strength we need to turn away from sin to embrace God's way of love, justice, and holiness. The Lord's warning of judgment causes dismay for those who are unprepared, but it brings joyful hope to those who eagerly wait for his return in glory. God's judgment is good news for those who are ready to meet him. Their reward is God himself, the source of all truth, beauty, goodness, love and everlasting life.

## **Friday, August 28 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time Saint Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 25:1-13** Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

**Meditation:** Jesus warns us that there are consequences for being unprepared. There are certain things you cannot obtain at the last moment. For example, students cannot prepare for their exams when the day of testing is already upon them. A person cannot get the right kind of character, strength, and skill required for a task at hand unless they already possess it, such as a captain with courage and nautical skills who must steer a ship through a dangerous storm at sea. When the Lord Jesus comes to lead you to his heavenly banquet will you be ready to hear his voice and follow? Our eternal welfare depends on our hearing his voice, the call of the Good Shepherd, above all others. How can we meet the Lord, face to face, when he calls us on the day of judgment, unless we listen to him today. The Lord invites us to feast at his heavenly banquet table. Are you ready?

**Prayer:** Renew in your Church, we pray, O Lord, that spirit with which you endowed your Bishop Saint Augustine that, filled with the same spirit, we may thirst for you, the sole fount of true wisdom, and seek you, the author of heavenly love. 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 is your ultimate goal, and what are you doing to attain it? If your ultimate goal is to graduate from Harvard, have a six-figure salary, live in a mansion and drive an expensive car, you've missed the boat. Those might be short-term goals, but our ultimate goal should be to get to heaven; there is only one way to get there, and that is through Jesus Christ. Knowing this, now, what are you going to change in your life in order to achieve this ultimate goal? There is no time like the present to change from our former ways of life to newness of life in Christ. Start now!

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