

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)

“*Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.*’ There is here a particular reference to ourselves; we hold in our hearts one we have not seen in the flesh. We are included in these words, but only if we follow up our faith with good works. The true believer practices what he believes. But of those who pay only lip service to faith, Paul has this to say: ‘They profess to know God, but they deny him in their works.’ Therefore James says: ‘Faith without works is dead.’” ~POPE SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT

Monday, August 31 ~ Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 4:16-30 Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.* Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, “Is this not the son of Joseph?” He said to them, “Surely you will quote me this proverb, ‘Physician, cure yourself,’ and say, ‘Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.’” And he said, “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.

Meditation: The word “gospel” literally means “good news.” Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom to those oppressed by sin and evil (see Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus came to set people free from the worst tyranny possible – the tyranny of slavery to sin and the fear of death, and the destruction of both body and soul. God's power alone can save us from emptiness and poverty of spirit, from confusion and error, and from the fear of death and hopelessness. The Gospel of salvation is “good news” for us today, tomorrow, three weeks from today – every day of our lives. And so you might ask yourself today whether or not you have experienced true happiness, joy and freedom of the Gospel. The “good news” of Jesus Christ is truth from Truth personified – Jesus Christ, the source of all that is right and good and true. The “good news” of Christ's timeless truths can bring us nothing but authentic freedom from sin, and the joy of experiencing his unbounded love for each of us. As Pope Francis noted in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew” (EG 1).

Prayer: God of might, giver of every good gift, put into our hearts the love of your name, so that, by deepening our sense of reverence, and, by your watchful care, keep safe what you have nurtured. 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 relation to day's Gospel, additional contemplation on Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* is useful: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a

renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since 'no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord' (Pope Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*). The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: 'Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.' How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another 'seventy times seven' (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. May nothing inspire more than his life, which impels us onwards" (EG 3)!

Tuesday, September 1 ~ Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 4:31-37 Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town of Galilee. He taught them on the sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching because he spoke with authority. In the synagogue there was a man with the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out in a loud voice, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" Jesus rebuked him and said, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down in front of them and came out of him without doing him any harm. They were all amazed and said to one another, "What is there about his word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." And news of him spread everywhere in the surrounding region.

Meditation: When you listen to the word of the Lord in Sacred Scripture how do you respond? In one ear and out the other? Half-hearted while surrounded by various distractions? Or do you listen to the word of the Lord with the full assent of faith, a heart longing for his word, a desire to learn, embrace and live as a doer of his word and not simply a hearer of his word (ref. James 1:22)? When Jesus taught he spoke with authority. He spoke the word of God as no one had spoken it before. When the Rabbis taught they supported their statements with quotes from other authorities. The prophets spoke with delegated authority - *Thus says the Lord*. When Jesus spoke he needed no authorities to back his statements. He was word incarnate, authority incarnate - the Word of God made flesh. When he spoke, God spoke. When Jesus commanded even the demons obeyed!

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, whom, taught by the Holy Spirit, we dare to call our Father, bring, we pray, to perfection in our hearts the spirit of adoption as your sons and daughters, that we may merit to enter into the inheritance which 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.

Contemplation: Contemplating on today's Gospel from a different perspective, what if each of us – not as an unclean demon, but as a brother or sister in Christ Jesus – were to ask "What have you to do with me, Jesus of Nazareth?" Hopefully we would respond first recognizing who Jesus is – the Son of God, sent out of love by God to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world, and that each of us are part of the world whom Jesus wishes to redeem as our Savior. That's right, you, me, and every man, woman and child on this earth, past, present and future. Second, we need to understand that this can only occur if we invite Jesus into our lives and let him, as the Good Shepherd, to lead us and guide us through the often "dark valley of death" (Psalm 23) that we encounter in our various challenges in life, and be at our side to experience the joy and peace of being an authentic disciple of his. So, "what have you to do with me, Jesus of Nazareth?" Everything that truly matters – our salvation.

Wednesday, September 2 ~ Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 4:38-44 After Jesus left the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever, and they interceded with him about her. He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them. At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid his hands on each of them and cured them. And demons also came out from many, shouting, "You are the Son of God." But he rebuked them and did not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. At daybreak, Jesus left and went to a deserted place. The crowds went looking for him, and when they came to him, they tried to

prevent him from leaving them. But he said to them, "To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Meditation: Who do you take your troubles to? Dear Abbey? The self-help aisle at Barnes and Noble? Some blog or web page? Jesus' disciples freely brought their troubles to him because they found him ready and able to deal with any difficulty, affliction, or sickness which they encountered. We are invited to do the same in prayer – deep, from the heart prayer. When Simon Peter brought Jesus to his home for the Sabbath meal (right after Jesus preached in the synagogue in Capernaum), his mother-in-law was instantly healed because Jesus heard Simon's prayer. When is the last time you prayed – really prayed – when you were facing a challenge where you needed God's help and divine guidance? When is the last time you made a pilgrimage to a shrine – for example Our Lady of Consolation Shrine and Basilica in nearby Carey, Ohio (www.olcshrine.com) – seeking the Blessed Virgin Mary's intercession with Jesus on your behalf or someone important in your life? Go to someone who can actually help – Jesus!

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: We can never intrude upon God nor exhaust his love, compassion, generosity and kindness. He is ever ready to give to those who earnestly and faithfully seek him out. Do you allow Jesus to be the Lord and Healer in your personal life, family, work, parish, neighborhood and community? Approach him with expectant faith. God's healing power restores us not only to health but to active service and care of others. There is no trouble he does not want to help us with and there is no bondage he can't set us free from.

Thursday, September 3 ~ Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time Saint Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Luke 5:1-11 While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

Meditation: The miracle in today's Gospel shows us an important truth about how God works in and through each of us for his glory. God expects of us greater things than we can do by ourselves. When we cooperate in *his* works, we accomplish far beyond what we can do on our own. Saint Therese of Lisieux, a Carmelite nun who died of tuberculosis at the age of 24, once wrote: "Jesus has so incomprehensible a love for us that he wills that we have a share with him in the salvation of souls. He wills to do nothing without us. The Creator of the universe awaits the prayer of a poor little soul to save other souls redeemed like it at the price of all his Blood." When God's word is spoken his kingdom is revealed and his divine power is made shown. When people respond to God's word with faith and obedience they are changed and made "a new creation" in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Prayer: O God, who care for your people with gentleness and rule them in love, through the intercession of Pope Saint Gregory, endow, we pray, with a spirit of wisdom those to whom you have given authority to govern, that the flourishing of a holy flock may become the eternal joy of the shepherds. 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 apostles were not saints from the get-go – they were men who worked hard and played hard and, as Simon Peter admits, sinful persons. But Jesus did not condemn them. Rather Jesus said “do not be afraid” and so they followed him. God chooses ordinary people, like you and me, sinners all, and uses the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives and work situations to draw others into his kingdom. Jesus speaks the same message to us today: we will “catch people” for the kingdom of God if we allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine through us. God wants others to see the light of Christ in us in the way we live, speak, and witness the joy of the Gospel.

About Pope Saint Gregory the Great: St. Gregory was born at Rome in 540. He was successively senator and prefect of Rome before the age of 30. After five years he resigned and became a monk, transforming his own house into a Benedictine monastery, and founding six others. At the age of 50 he was elected pope, serving from 590 to 604. In 14 years he accomplished much for the Mystical Body of Christ. After seeing English children being sold as slaves in Rome, he sent 40 monks, including St. Augustine of Canterbury, from his own monastery to make “the Angles angels.” England owes her conversion to him. He watched over the holiness of the clergy and the maintenance of Church discipline, the temporal interests of his people of Rome and the spiritual interests of all Christendom. He removed unworthy priests from office, forbade taking money for many services, and emptied the papal treasury to ransom prisoners of the Lombards and to care for persecuted Jews and victims of plague and famine. These deeds and others made him, in the words of an antiphon in his office, “the Father of the City, the joy of the World.” Gregory reformed the liturgy, and it still contains several of his most beautiful prayers. The name “Gregorian chant” recalls this great Pope’s work in the development of the Church’s music. His commentaries on Holy Scripture exercised a considerable influence on Christian thought in the Middle Ages. Saint Gregory died on March 12, 604; his body lies at Saint Peter Basilica in Rome.

Friday, September 4 ~ Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 5:33-39 The scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, “The disciples of John the Baptist fast often and offer prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees do the same; but yours eat and drink.” Jesus answered them, “Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.” And he also told them a parable. “No one tears a piece from a new cloak to patch an old one. Otherwise, he will tear the new and the piece from it will not match the old cloak. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. And no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’”

Meditation: Are we to reject the old in place of the new? Just as there is a right place and a right time for fasting and for feasting, so there is a right place for the old as well as the new. Jesus says *the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old* (Matthew 13:52). A very common expression, dating back to the early beginnings of the Church, states that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New -- the two shed light on each other. The New Testament does not replace the Old, rather it unveils and brings into full light the hidden meaning and signs which foreshadow and point to God's plan of redemption which he would accomplish through his Son, Jesus Christ. How impoverished we would be if we only had the Old Testament or the New Testament, rather than both.

Prayer: O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness. 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 Lord Jesus gives us wisdom so we can make the best use of both the old and the new. He doesn't want us to hold rigidly to the past and to be resistant to the new action of his Holy Spirit in our lives. He wants our minds and hearts to be like the new wine skins, open and ready to receive the *new wine of the Holy Spirit*. Are you eager to grow in the knowledge and understanding of God's word and plan for your 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.