

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)

“To love God as He ought to be loved, we must be detached from all temporal love. We must love nothing but Him, or if we love anything else, we must love it only for His sake.” ~SAINT PETER CLAVER

Monday, September 7 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time
~ Labor Day ~

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:6-11 On a certain sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees watched him closely to see if he would cure on the sabbath so that they might discover a reason to accuse him. But he realized their intentions and said to the man with the withered hand, “Come up and stand before us.” And he rose and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?” Looking around at them all, he then said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so and his hand was restored. But they became enraged and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.

Meditation: There go the scribes and Pharisees again with their legalistic approach to life. Here we see Jesus coming upon a man “whose right hand was withered.” Jesus having the ability to cure the ill and infirm did just that, even though it was the sabbath. Jesus, out of love for the man, cured him; this was not an act of work, but an act of love. But the scribes and Pharisees were foolish to try, yet again, to “discover a reason and accuse him.” Sunday is the sabbath for us. Would we refuse to help someone in need on Sunday simply because it is the Lord’s day? I hope not! Doing work that is unnecessary on Sunday is one matter, but to ignore the needs of someone whom we can help is altogether a different situation.

Prayer: O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters, that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance. 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: Why do Christians celebrate Sunday as the *Lord’s Day*? Most importantly, we celebrate it to commemorate God’s work of redemption in Jesus Christ and the new work of creation accomplished through Christ’s death and resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:17). God’s action is a model for us. If God “rested and was refreshed” on the seventh day, we, too, ought to take our sabbath rest as a way of expressing honor to God for all that he has done for us. Such “rest” however does not exempt us from our love for our neighbor. If we truly love the Lord above all else, then the love of God will overflow to love of neighbor as well. Saint Augustine of Hippo once said: “The charity of truth seeks holy leisure; the necessity of charity accepts just work.” But how can we make Sunday a day holy to the Lord? First, by attending Mass, giving fitting praise and worship to God our Father and to be nourished in both word and sacrament. Second, refrain from unnecessary work and from activities that hinder the worship we owe to God. We can also perform works of mercy, such as humble service of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. And we ought to seek appropriate relaxation of mind and body as well. The joy of the Lord’s Day is a great gift to refresh and strengthen us in our love of God and of neighbor (Nehemiah 8:10). Do you know the joy of the Lord and do you find rest and refreshment in celebrating the Lord’s Day? If you’re too busy doing any number of things on Sunday, cut back and enjoy God’s day of rest.

Tuesday, September 8 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time
Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23 The Book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah

and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse, Jesse the father of David the king. **David** became the father of Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asaph. Asaph became the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amos, Amos the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the Babylonian exile. **After the Babylonian exile**, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok became the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. **Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about.** When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us."

Meditation: People often ask about the significance of Matthew's genealogy, listing names of many unfamiliar people. This genealogy is arranged in three sections portraying three great stages in the spiritual history of the people of the old covenant. The first stage begins with Abraham, the father of the chosen people, and ends with David, God's anointed King. The second stage takes us to the exile of God's people in Babylon. This is the period of Israel's shame and disaster due to her unfaithfulness. The third stage takes us to Jesus, God's anointed Messiah. Jesus the Messiah is the direct descent of Abraham and David, and the rightful heir to David's throne. God in his mercy fulfilled his promises to Abraham and to David that he would send a Savior and a King to rule over the house of Israel and to deliver them from their enemies.

Prayer: Impart to your servants, we pray, O Lord, the gift of heavenly grace, that the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin may bring deeper peace to those for whom the birth of her Son was the dawning 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: On this Feast we are called to remember that Mary was asked to assume in faith a burden of tremendous responsibility. It had never been heard of before that a child could be born without a natural father. Mary was asked to accept this miraculous exception to the laws of nature. That required faith and trust. Second, Mary was not yet married. Pregnancy outside of wedlock was not tolerated in those days. Mary was only espoused to Joseph, and such an engagement had to last for a whole year. She was asked to assume a great risk. She could have been rejected by Joseph, by her family, by all her own people. Mary knew that Joseph and her family would not understand without revelation from God. She nonetheless believed and trusted in God's promises. Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, believed the message given to him to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah. Like Mary, Joseph is a model of faith for us. He is a faithful witness and servant of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Are you willing to trust and obey the Lord on the same level and in the same manner that Mary and Joseph did? If not, why not?

Wednesday, September 9 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time Saint Peter Claver, Priest

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:20-26 Raising his eyes toward his disciples Jesus said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. But woe

to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.”

Meditation: Luke’s version of *The Beatitudes* is less familiar than that of Matthew (Mt 5:1-12a) but the message remains the same. When you encounter misfortune, grief, or tragic loss, how do you respond? With fear or with faith? With passive resignation or with patient hope and trust in God? We know from experience that no one can escape all of the inevitable trials of life - pain, suffering, sickness, and death. When Jesus began to teach his disciples he gave them a "way of happiness" that transcends every difficulty and trouble that can weigh us down with grief and despair. Jesus began his sermon on the mount by addressing the issue of where true happiness can be found. The word *beatitude* literally means *happiness* or *blessedness*. Jesus' way of happiness, however, demands a transformation from within - a conversion of heart and mind which can only come about through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit. At some point in our lives we come to recognize that true happiness can only be fulfilled through God and his Son, Jesus Christ. But in relation to today’s Gospel, how can one possibly find happiness in poverty, hunger, mourning, and persecution? If we want to be filled with the joy and happiness of heaven, then we must empty ourselves of all that would shut God out of our hearts. Poverty of spirit finds ample room and joy in possessing God alone as the greatest treasure possible. Hunger of the spirit seeks nourishment and strength in God's word and Spirit. Sorrow and mourning over wasted life and sin leads to joyful freedom from the burden of guilt and oppression.

Prayer: O God, who made Saint Peter Claver a slave of slaves and strengthened him with wonder charity and patience as he came to their help, grant, through his intercession, that, seeking the things of Jesus Christ, we may love our neighbor in deeds and in 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: God reveals to the humble of heart the true source of abundant life and happiness. Jesus promises his disciples that the joys of heaven will more than compensate for the troubles and hardships they can expect in this world. Saint Thomas Aquinas once said: “*No person can live without joy. That is why someone deprived of spiritual joy goes after carnal pleasures.*” Do you know the joy and happiness of hungering and thirsting for God, and God alone? Explore this, and you will discover a life of true joy, peace and happiness.

Thursday, September 10 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:27-38 Jesus said to his disciples: “To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful. “Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

Meditation: What makes Christians different and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is *grace* – treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated, with love, kindness, compassion, mercy and forgiveness. God is good to the unjust as well as the just. His love embraces saint and sinner alike. God seeks our highest good and teaches us to seek the greatest good of others, even those who hate and abuse us. Our love for others, even those who are ungrateful and selfish towards us, must be marked by the same kindness and mercy which God has shown to us. It is easier to show kindness and mercy when we can expect to benefit from doing so. How much harder when we can expect nothing in return.

Prayer: O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, help us to imitate your Son, Jesus Christ, so that we may show love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness to others as he shows to us. 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: Saint Augustine of Hippo describes in a sermon Jesus double precept to *give and forgive* as two essential wings of prayer: "*Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given you.* These are the two wings of prayer on which it flies to God. Pardon the offender what has been committed, and give to the person in need. Let us graciously and fervently perform these two types of almsgiving, that is, giving and forgiving, for we in turn pray the Lord to give us things and not to repay our evil deeds."

**Friday, September 11 ~ Twenty-Third Week in Ordinary Time
~ Anniversary of 9/11~**

ETERNAL REST GRANT UNTO THEM, O LORD. AND LET PERPETUAL LIGHT SHINE UPON THEM.

MAY THE SOULS OF ALL THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED, THROUGH THE MERCY OF GOD, REST IN PEACE.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30 At that time Jesus answered; "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Prayer of then-Pope John Paul II for the Victims of 9/11: Almighty Father, we commend the victims of this shocking tragedy to Your eternal love. We implore Your comfort upon the injured, the families and friends involved, and all who are doing their utmost to rescue survivors and help those affected. We ask You, Father, to grant the American people the strength and courage they need at this time of sorrow and trial. We beg you, Jesus, to send Your legions of heavenly Angels, led by Saint Michael the Archangel, to protect the United States from additional attempts of destruction. If supernatural means are required to foil these plots, we humbly implore you to suspend natural laws to save innocent lives and souls. Holy Spirit, we are a sinful nation, and we beg you to send us Your authentic spirit of repentance. We are also a nation capable of great charity and justice, so look not on our sins, Heavenly Spirit of Mercy, but upon our sorrow and resolve to turn from evil, to fight evil, and procure victory over evil. Illuminate the minds and souls of our citizens and especially our leaders so we can see the error of our ways, and give us the sweet grace required to turn to God with pure hearts. Immaculate Mary, Humble Virgin, Mother of our Church, and protectress of our nation, we ask you to go before the Throne of the Holy Trinity and intercede for the United States at this critical juncture in our history. Gently place your mantle upon our land, upon our people, upon our allies, upon our fighting men and women, as you once wrapped our Savior in swaddling clothes in a manger. We have no words that rightly express what we on earth cannot understand or ever truly fathom, the Love of God, so we turn with childlike faith to the words that Jesus Himself taught us to pray: "Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen!"

Saint Michael the Archangel, *protect us!*

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas, *pray for us.*

Saint Katharine Drexel and Saint Elizabeth Anne Seton, *pray for us.*

Saint Thomas More, Patron of Politicians, *pray for us.*

Saint Joseph, *pray for us.*

Immaculate Mary, Patroness of the United States, *pray for us.*

Jesus Christ, King of Kings, *have mercy on us!*

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.

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