

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)

“If I seek my maker, I find God alone. If I seek the material from which He made me, I find absolutely nothing. From this you can conclude that whatever is in me was made by God and wholly belongs to God. If I ask about my nature, I find that I am the image of God. If I ask about my end, I find God himself, who is my supreme and total good. Therefore, I will recognize that I have a great bond with and need for God, as He alone is my creator, my maker, my Father, my exemplar, my happiness, my all. And if I understand this, what can happen except that I seek Him ardently, that I think of Him, that I yearn for Him, desire to see and embrace Him? Should I not be horrified at the dense darkness of my heart which for so long has considered, desired, and sought anything other than God, who alone is my all?” ~SAINT ROBERT BELLARMIN

Monday, September 14 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Holy Gospel: John 3:13-17 Jesus said to Nicodemus: “No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Meditation: Moses lifted high the image of a bronze serpent fixed to the wood of the pole, which resembled a cross. Those who put their faith in God by repenting of their disobedience were healed and restored to wholeness of life. In today’s Gospel Jesus links his victory on the cross with Moses’ act of deliverance in the wilderness with his own impending sacrificial death when he will be “lifted up” on the wood of the cross at Calvary. Unlike Moses’ deliverance in the wilderness which only resulted in temporary relief for the people, Jesus’ atoning death on the cross brought decisive victory over sin, Satan, and death. Jesus’ victory on the cross cancels the debt of our sin, and releases us from guilt and condemnation. His death and victory brings us new life - the new abundant life in his Holy Spirit which lasts forever. Jesus’ victory on the cross also brought about his glorious bodily resurrection to new unending life and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father in heaven, where he now rules and intercedes for us. The result of Jesus “being lifted up on the cross” and his rising and ascending to the Father’s right hand in heaven is our “new birth in the Spirit” and adoption as sons and daughters of God. God not only has redeemed us from sin in Christ, he also fills us with his own divine life through the gift of his Spirit that we might share in his own glory. Indeed, “Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaimed, till all the world adores his sacred name” (Lyrics from the hymn “Lift High the Cross”).

Prayer: O God, who willed that your Only Begotten Son should undergo the Cross to save the human race, grant, we pray, that we, who have known his mystery on earth, may merit the grace of his redemption 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: There is no greater proof of God’s love for us than the sending of his Son to become one with us in our humanity and to lay down his life for us -- “To ransom a slave God gave his Son.” God sent his Son to free us from the worst of tyrannies -- slavery to sin and the curse of death. Jesus’ sacrificial death was an act of total love through self-giving. Jesus gave himself completely out of love for his Father. And he willingly laid down his life out of selfless love for our sake and for our salvation. His death on the cross was both a total offering to God and the perfect sacrifice of atonement for our sin and the sin of the world. John tells us that God’s love cannot be limited because it is boundless and encompasses all of

creation (John 3:16). His love is not limited to a single nation or a few chosen friends. His love is limitless because it embraces the whole world and every individual created in His image and likeness. God is a persistent loving Father who cannot rest until all of his wandering children have returned home to him. Saint Augustine says, "God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love." God gives us the freedom to choose whom and what we will love and not love. We can love the darkness of sin and unbelief, or we can choose to love the light of God's truth, goodness, and mercy. If our love is guided by truth, goodness, and that which is truly beautiful, then we will choose for God and love him above all else. What we love shows what we prefer. Ask yourself: Do you love God who is the supreme good above all else, all things, all people?

Tuesday, September 15 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows

Holy Gospel: John 19:25-27 Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Meditation: Does suffering or sorrow weigh you down? Suffering affects all of us on one level or another, in one way or another. But the cross is different – the cross brings us face to face with Jesus' suffering. He was alone. All his disciples had deserted him except for his mother and three women along with John, the beloved disciple. The apostles had fled in fear. But Mary, the mother of Jesus and three other women who loved him were present at the cross. They demonstrate the power of love for overcoming fear (1 John 4:18) in the face of horrific challenge.

Prayer: O God, who willed that, when your Son was lifted high on the Cross, his Mother should stand close by and share his suffering, grant that your Church, participating with the Virgin Mary in the Passion of Christ, may merit a share in his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer to Mary in Honor of Her Seven Sorrows: O Mary, Mother of Sorrows, I beseech Thee, by the bitter agony thou didst endure at the foot of the Cross offer to the Eternal Father, in my name, thy Beloved Son, Jesus, all covered with Blood and Wounds, in satisfaction for my sins, for the needs of Holy Church, the conversion of sinners, the relief of the Souls in Purgatory and for the special grace I now implore. (*Mention your request at this point in the prayer*). Amen.

Contemplation: This is a day to pray the Stations of the Cross. Don't wait for the Season of Lent or for Holy Week; today is also a day to read and contemplate the words of the *Stabat Mater* – "At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping, close to Jesus to the last." The entire text can be found via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops web page (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/0915-memorial-our-lady-sorrows.cfm>). You might also want to read the seven sorrows of Mary in Sacred Scripture; the Biblical references are listed below.

About the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows: This feast is dedicated to the spiritual martyrdom of Mary, Mother of God, and her compassion with the sufferings of her Divine Son, Jesus. In her suffering as co-redeemer, she reminds us of the tremendous evil of sin and shows us the way of true repentance. May the numerous tears of the Mother of God be conducive to our salvation, with which tears Thou, O God, art able to wash away the sins of the whole world. As Mary stood at the foot of the Cross on which Jesus hung, the sword of sorrow Simeon had foretold pierced her soul. Below are the seven sorrows of Mary:

1. The prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35);
2. The flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15);
3. Loss of the Child Jesus for three days (Luke 2:41-50);
4. Mary meets Jesus on his way to Calvary (Luke 23:27-31; John 19:17);
5. Crucifixion and Death of Jesus (John 19:25-30);
6. The body of Jesus being taken from the Cross (Psalm 130; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:31-37);
7. The burial of Jesus (Isaiah 53:8; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42; Mark 15:40-47).

Wednesday, September 16 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Cornelius, Pope and Martyr; and Saint Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:31-35 Jesus said to the crowds: "To what shall I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another,

'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a dirge, but you did not weep.' For John the Baptist came neither eating food nor drinking wine, and you said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by all her children."

Meditation: Jesus' message of the kingdom of God is a proclamation of good news that produces great joy and hope for those who will listen - but it is also a warning of disaster for those who refuse to accept God's gracious offer. Why did the message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus meet with resistance and deaf ears? It was out of jealousy and spiritual blindness that the scribes and Pharisees attributed John the Baptist's austerities to the devil and they attributed Jesus' table fellowship as evidence for pretending to be the Messiah. They succeeded in frustrating God's plan for their lives because they had closed their hearts to the message of John the Baptist and now they close their ears to Jesus, God's anointed Son sent to redeem us from bondage to sin and death.

Prayer: God our Father, in Saints Cornelius and Cyprian you have given your people an inspiring example of dedication to the pastoral ministry and constant witness to Christ in their suffering. May their prayers and faith give us courage to work for the unity of your Church. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Contemplation: What can make us spiritually dull and slow to hear God's voice? Like the generation of Jesus' time, our age is marked by indifference and contempt, especially in regards to the message of God's kingdom. Indifference dulls our ears to God's voice and to the good news of the Gospel. Only the humble of heart who are hungry for God can find true joy and happiness. And so we might ask ourselves today: Do you listen to God's word with expectant faith and the willingness to trust and obey?

Thursday, September 17 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Robert Bellarmine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:36-50 A certain Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven." He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Meditation: Why did a woman with a bad reputation approach Jesus and anoint him with her tears and costly perfume at the risk of ridicule and abuse by others? The woman's action was motivated by one thing, and one thing only, namely, her love for Jesus - she loved greatly out of gratitude for the kindness and forgiveness she had received from Jesus. She did something a Jewish woman would never do in public. She loosened her hair and anointed Jesus with her tears. It was customary for a woman on her wedding day to bind her hair. For a married woman to loosen her hair in public was a sign of grave immodesty. This woman was oblivious to everyone and everything around her; she was totally focused on Jesus. She also did something which only love can do. She took the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus. Her love was not calculated but extravagant. In a spirit of humility and heart-felt repentance, she lavishly served the one who showed her the mercy and kindness of God. Jesus, in his customary fashion, never lost the opportunity to draw a lesson from such a deed.

Prayer: O God, who adorned the Bishop Saint Robert Bellarmine with wonderful learning and virtue to vindicate the faith of your Church, grant, through his intercession, that in the integrity of that same faith your people may always find joy. 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 makes clear that great love springs from a heart forgiven and cleansed. Peter the Apostle tells us that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). It was love that motivated the Father in heaven to send his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus, to offer up his life on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The woman's lavish expression of love was an offering of gratitude for the great forgiveness, kindness, and mercy Jesus had shown to her. The stark contrast of attitudes between Simon and the sinful woman demonstrates how we can either accept or reject God's mercy and forgiveness. Simon, who regarded himself as an upright Pharisee, felt no need for love or mercy – he never gave it a thought! His self-sufficiency kept him from acknowledging his need for God's grace – God's gracious gift of favor, help, and mercy. The woman, on the other hand, knew exactly what she needed from Jesus and sought it at all costs. Are you grateful for God's mercy and grace? Do you ever think of your need for God's mercy and grace?

Friday, September 18 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 8:1-3 Jesus journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

Meditation: During his three years of public ministry Jesus traveled widely. The Gospel records that a band of women accompanied Jesus and the twelve apostles. This was a diverse group of women; some came from rich and prominent families; some had been prostitutes, and others had been afflicted with mental and physical infirmities. No matter their backgrounds or “status” in life, these women served Jesus out of their own resources. We know that Mary Magdalene had lived a very troubled life before Jesus freed her from seven demons. She was privileged to be the first to see Jesus as the risen Lord. As the wife of King Herod's chief financial officer, Joanna was a wealthy lady of the court. It's unlikely that these two would have ever met under other circumstances. What brought them together and united them in a bond of friendship, service, and loyalty to Jesus? Certainly Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God had transformed them. Unlike the apostles, who took great pride in being the chosen twelve, these women did not seek position or demand special privileges. Jesus had touched them so deeply that they were grateful to do anything for him, even menial service. They brought their gifts and resources to Jesus to use as he saw fit.

Prayer: Look upon us, O God, Creator and ruler of all things, and, that we may feel the working of your mercy, grant that we may serve you with all our heart. 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: Our privilege as children of God and disciples of Jesus is to serve as Jesus served with humility, selfless love, generosity, joy, and a willingness to do whatever God asks of us. God, in his turn, gives us every good gift and grace we need to carry out our task and mission. God in his infinite power needs no one, but in his wisdom and love, he chooses to entrust his work through each one of us. His Holy Spirit equips us with all that we need to love and serve others. No one is unimportant or unnecessary in God's economy. The least in his kingdom find a home and a mission at Jesus' side. Do you know the joy of serving Jesus in company with others who love and serve him willingly?

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