

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 Month of October – a Marian Month – is dedicated to the Holy Rosary.

“For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.”

~SAINT THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS

Monday, September 28 ~ Twenty-Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Saint Wenceslaus, Martyr; Saint Lawrence Ruiz and Companions, Martyrs

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:46-50 An argument arose among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. Jesus realized the intention of their hearts and took a child and placed it by his side and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest.” Then John said in reply, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow in our company.” Jesus said to him, “Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you.”

Meditation: Today’s Gospel begs the question: what do we personally and collectively as a society tell us what it means to be *numero uno* in our culture? Our society and many popular media prize the contemporary world of drugs, sex and money. But Jesus says “Seek first the kingdom of God...” (Matthew 6:33). The more the world drifts away from God the less it recognizes what is truly great and comes first, and the more the world resembles the pathetic attitude of the disciples arguing on the road. The Church in her ministry reminds us what is truly great and comes first, reminds us that drugs, sex and money are not the ultimate goals of life, that the ultimate goal of life is to get to heaven by loving and serving God. We take our image and model and ideal of what is truly great from Jesus and His “good news” of the Gospel. We do not want to be contaminated by the world, but instead want to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and to show the world what comes first. We have many humans who show it is possible to live a life of service to others. Blessed Mother Teresa, for example, once said: “love begins at home, love your family and your neighbors. Share with the poor and needy around you your smile, your word, your time, your belongings. See God’s presence in the people you meet daily and treat them as children of God. Serve and love one person at a time. God does not want us to love crowds of people, that is an impossibility. He wants us to love Him in every single person we meet, when we meet that person.”

Prayer ~ Saint Wenceslaus: O God, who taught the Martyr Saint Wenceslaus to place the heavenly Kingdom before an earthly one, grant through his prayers that, denying ourselves, we may hold fast to 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.

Prayer ~ Saint Lawrence Ruiz and Companions: Grant us, we pray, Lord God, the same perseverance shown by your Martyrs Saint Lawrence Ruiz and his companions in serving you and their neighbor, since those persecuted for the sake of righteousness are blessed in your 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.

Contemplation: Remember in grade school when we were asked “who do you want to be like when you grow up?” Students generally responded with the names of sports figures, film stars and the like. And yet the response really should be “I want to be like Jesus.” Jesus, himself, really is the model for each of us. He came not to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28). Paul the Apostles states that Jesus “emptied himself and took the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). Jesus lowered himself (he whose place is at the right hand of God the Father) and took on our lowly human nature that he might raise us up and clothe us in his divine nature. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). If we want to

be filled with God's life and power, then we need to empty ourselves of everything which stands in the way - pride, envy, self-seeking glory, vanity, and possessiveness. God wants empty vessels so he can fill them with his own glory, power, and love (2 Corinthians 4:7). Are you ready to humble yourself and to serve as Jesus did? As a disciple of Jesus, don't we really want to be like him?

Tuesday, September 29 ~ Twenty-Sixth Week in Ordinary Time Feast of Saints Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, Archangels

Holy Gospel: John 1:47-51 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: Who are the angels and why do they intervene between heaven and earth? In short, Sacred Scripture tells us the angels are God's servants and messengers. "They are the mighty ones who do his word, hearkening to the voice of his word" (Psalm 103:20). The angels belong to Christ and were created for and through him (Colossians 1:16). The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the role of the angels in God's plan of salvation: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14) The angels are not only messengers but protectors and guardians as well. "For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways" (Psalm 91:11). We are not alone in our struggle against sin and evil in the world. The armies of heaven fight for us and with us in the spiritual battle for our hearts, minds, and wills.

Prayer: O God, who dispose in marvelous order ministries both angelic and human, graciously grant that our life on earth may be defended by those who watch over us as they minister perpetually to you 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: Saint John Paul II, while serving as Pope, provided a great deal of catechesis on the angels during his General Audiences beginning in July of 1986 (you can read these in their entirety via the Vatican web site: www.vatican.va). Worth contemplating today: "In the perfection of their spiritual nature the angels are called from the beginning, by virtue of their intelligence, to know the truth and to love the good which they know in truth in a more full and perfect way than is possible to man. This love is an act of a free will, and therefore for the angels also freedom implies a possibility of choice for or against the Good which they know, that is, God himself. It must be repeated here what we already mentioned earlier in regard to man: by creating free beings, God willed that there should be realized in the world true love which is possible only on the basis of freedom. He willed therefore that the creature, constituted in the image and likeness of his Creator, should be able in the greatest degree possible to render himself similar to God who "is love" (1 Jn 4:16). By creating the pure spirits as free beings, God in his Providence could not but foresee also the possibility of the angels' sin. But precisely because Providence is eternal wisdom which loves, God would have been able to draw from the history of this sin, incomparably more radical inasmuch as it was the sin of a pure spirit, the definitive good of the whole created cosmos."

Wednesday, September 30 ~ Twenty-Sixth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Jerome, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:57-62 As Jesus and his disciples were proceeding on their journey, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered him, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God." And another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." Jesus answered him, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Meditation: Today Jesus asks us a question that each of us must answer: Are you ready to follow Jesus wherever he may lead you, when and how he asks you? With the call the Lord gives the grace to respond and the strength to follow all the way to the end. Why does Jesus issue a challenge with the call? Jesus was utterly honest in telling people what it would cost to follow him. When a would-be disciple approached Jesus and said he was ready to follow, Jesus told him it would require sacrifice - the sacrifice of certain

creaturely comforts. Jesus appealed to this man's heart and told him to detach himself from whatever might hold him back. Spiritual detachment is a necessary step for following the Lord. It frees us to give ourselves without reserve to the Lord and his service. While many of us may not need to give up the comfort of our own home and bed to follow Jesus, each of us, nonetheless, must be willing to separate ourselves with anything that might stand in the way of doing God's will, in addition to doing it right then and there – not when it might be “convenient” for us.

Prayer: O God, who gave the Priest Saint Jerome a living and tender love for Sacred Scripture, grant that your people may be ever more fruitfully nourished by your Word and find in it the fount of life. 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: Another would-be disciple said he would follow as soon as he had buried his father. What he meant by this expression was that he felt the need to return to his home to take care of his father through old age until he died. The third had no obligation to return home, but simply wanted to go back and say good-bye. Jesus surprised these would-be disciples with the stark truth that nothing should hinder us from following the Lord. Was Jesus being harsh and rude to his would-be followers? Not really. We are free to decide whether we will take the path which Jesus offers. But if we choose to go, then the Lord wants us to count the cost and choose for it freely. What does the story of a plowman have to do with the journey? A plowman who looked back while plowing his field caused the line he cut into the soil to become crooked. One crooked line easily leads to another until the whole field is a mess. The plowman had to look straight ahead in order to keep the plow from going off course. Likewise, if we look back on what we have freely left behind to follow the Lord - whether that be some sort of distraction, attachment, or sinful habit which leads us away from doing God's will - our path will likely diverge and we will miss what God has for us. Notice how the Gospel does not record the response from these three would-be disciples. We are only left with the question which Jesus intends for us as well: Are you ready to take the path which the Lord Jesus offers? Remember, the Lord Jesus offers each of us a kingdom of lasting peace, unending joy, surpassing love, enduring friendship, and abundant life.

Thursday, October 1 ~ Twenty-Sixth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Luke 10:1-12 Jesus appointed seventy-two other disciples whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this household.’ If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment. Do not move about from one house to another. Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, ‘The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.’ Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, ‘The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.’ Yet know this: the Kingdom of God is at hand. I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town.”

Meditation: When Jesus commissioned seventy of his disciples to go on mission, he gave them a vision of a vast field that is ready to be harvested for the kingdom of God. Jesus frequently used the image of a harvest to convey the coming of God's reign on earth. The harvest is the fruition of much labor and growth, beginning with the sowing of seeds, then growth to maturity, and finally the reaping of fruit for the harvest. In like manner, the word of God is sown in the hearts of receptive men and women who hear his word and accept it with faith, trust and obedience, and then share the abundant fruit of God's word in their life with others. The harvest Jesus had in mind was not only the gathering in of the people of Israel, but all the peoples (and nations) of the world – including our corner of the world, wherever that may be.

Prayer: O God, who open your Kingdom to those who are humble and to little ones, lead us to follow trustingly in the little way of Saint Thérèse, so that through her intercession we may see your eternal glory revealed. 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 gave his disciples instructions for how they were to carry out their ministry. They must go and serve as people without guile, full of charity (selfless giving in love) and peace, and simplicity. They must give their full attention to the proclamation of God's kingdom and not be diverted by

other lesser things. They must travel light – take only what was essential and leave behind whatever would distract them – in order to focus time and attention on the task of speaking the word of the God. They must do their work, not for what they can get out of it, but for what they can give freely to others, without expecting reward or payment. God gives us his life-giving word that we may have abundant life in him. He wills to work in and through each of us for his glory. God shares his word with us and he commissions us to speak it boldly, plainly, and lovingly to others. And so in this day and age when “political correctness” is highly revered – often at the expense of the truth of the Gospel – you might ask yourself whether or not you witness the truth and joy of the Gospel by word and example.

Friday, October 2 ~ Twenty-Sixth Week in Ordinary Time Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:18-22 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 humbles himself 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.”

Meditation: Despite the fact that we may “feel” alone at times we are not. God dwells with every person and regards them with love and compassion. While we may turn our back on God, God never turns his back on us. His angels watch over us as guardians. “For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11). God has not left us alone in our struggle “to refuse evil and to choose good” (Isaiah 7:15). The angels are his “ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). Sacred Scripture is full of examples of how the angels serve as messengers and protectors. When Peter, for example, was chained in prison and kept under guard, an angel woke him in middle of the night, released his chains, and brought him safely out of prison, past several guards and through locked gates. When Peter realized he wasn’t dreaming, he exclaimed: “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me” (Acts 12:11).

Prayer: O God, who in your unfathomable providence are pleased to send your holy Angels to guard us, hear our supplication as we cry to you, that we may always be defended by their protection and rejoice eternally in their company. 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 to our Guardian Angel: Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day (or night), be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

Contemplation: Saint John Chrysostom, a Father of the Church and renowned preacher, compared the guardian angels to the troops garrisoned in cities on the frontiers of the empire to defend it from the enemy. Saint Basil the Great said, “Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.” Angels ministered to Jesus after his temptation in the wilderness and during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). The angels will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgment (Matthew 25:31). The angels show us that this universe which God created is not just that which we see, but also that which we cannot see – something we profess each Sunday during the Creed.

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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