

# 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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***“The man who loves truth can already find rest in the acknowledgement of his mistakes, for that is the beginning of truth. The first step toward finding God, Who is Truth, is to discover the truth about myself: and if I have been in error, this first step to truth is the discovery of my error.”***

EXCERPTED FROM “NO MAN IS AN ISLAND” BY FR. THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

**Monday, February 1 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time  
Saint Brigid of Kildare, Virgin**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 5:1-20** Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes. When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. In fact, he had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!” (He had been saying to him, “Unclean spirit, come out of the man!”) He asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “Legion is my name. There are many of us.” And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside. And they pleaded with him, “Send us into the swine. Let us enter them.” And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned. The swineherds ran away and reported the incident in the town and throughout the countryside. And people came out to see what had happened. As they approached Jesus, they caught sight of the man who had been possessed by Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were seized with fear. Those who witnessed the incident explained to them what had happened to the possessed man and to the swine. Then they began to beg him to leave their district. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed pleaded to remain with him. But Jesus would not permit him but told him instead, “Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you.” Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed.

**Meditation:** Jesus took pity on the man who was overtaken by a legion of evil spirits. The destructive force of these demons is evident for all who can see as they flee and destroy a herd of swine. After Jesus freed the demoniac the whole city came out to meet him. No one had demonstrated such power and authority against the forces of Satan as Jesus did. They feared Jesus as a result and begged him to leave them. Why would they not want Jesus to stay? Perhaps the price for such liberation from the power of evil and sin was more than they wanted to pay. Jesus is ready and willing to free us from anything that binds us and that keeps us from the love of God. Are you willing to part with anything that might keep you from his love and saving grace?

**Prayer:** Almighty ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works. 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:** Do you ever feel driven by forces beyond your strength? God's word reminds us that no destructive force can keep anyone from the peace and safety which God offers to those who seek his help. “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you...Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation” (Psalm 91:7,9).

## **Tuesday, February 2 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**

### **Feast of the Presentation of the Lord**

**Holy Gospel: Luke 2:22-40** When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

**Meditation:** Simeon was a just and devout man who was very much in tune with the Holy Spirit. He believed that the Lord would return to his temple and renew his chosen people. The Holy Spirit also revealed to him that the Messiah and King of Israel would also bring salvation to the Gentile nations. When Joseph and Mary presented the baby Jesus in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized this humble child of Bethlehem as the fulfillment of all the messianic prophecies, hopes, and prayers. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he prophesied that Jesus was to be "a revealing light to the Gentiles." Simeon then blessed Mary and Joseph and he prophesied to Mary about the destiny of this child and the suffering she would undergo for his sake. There is a certain paradox for those blessed by the Lord. Mary was given the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. She received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. But her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away.

**Prayer:** Almighty ever-living God, we humbly implore your majesty that, just as your Only Begotten Son was presented on this day in the Temple in the substance of our flesh, so, by your grace, we may be presented to you with minds made pure. 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:** Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord's presence in the temple. Anna, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit. She was found daily in the temple, attending to the Lord in prayer and speaking prophetically to others about God's promise to send a redeemer. Supernatural hope grows with prayer and age! Anna was pre-eminently a woman of great hope and expectation that God would fulfill all his promises. She is a model of godliness to all believers as we advance in age. Advancing age and the disappointments of life can easily make us cynical and hopeless if we do not have our hope placed rightly. Anna's hope in God and his promises grew with age. She never ceased to worship God in faith and to pray with hope. Her hope and faith in God's promises fueled her indomitable zeal and fervor in prayer and service of God's people.

## **Wednesday, February 3 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**

### **Saint Blaise, Bishop and Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18** Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues

and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

**Meditation:** Why did Jesus single out prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for his disciples? Because the Jews considered these three as the cardinal works of the religious life. These were seen as the key signs of a pious person, the three great pillars on which the good life was based. Jesus pointed to the heart of the matter. Why do you pray, fast, and give alms? To draw attention to yourself so that others may notice and think highly of you? Or to give glory to God? The Lord warns his disciples of self-seeking glory – the preoccupation with looking good, seeking praise from others, searching for the limelight or to gain notoriety for doing something. True piety is much more than feeling good or looking holy. True piety is loving devotion to God. It is an attitude of awe, reverence, worship and obedience.

**Prayer:** Hear, O Lord, the supplications your people make under the patronage of the Martyr Saint Blaise, and grant that they may rejoice in peace in this present life, and find help for life eternal. 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 wants to set our hearts ablaze with the fire of his Holy Spirit that we may share in his holiness and radiate the joy of the gospel to those around us. St. Augustine tells us that there are two kinds of people and two kinds of love: "One is holy, the other is selfish. One is subject to God; the other endeavors to equal Him." We are what we love. God wants to free our hearts from all that would keep us captive to selfishness and sin. "Rend your hearts and not your garments" says the prophet Joel (Joel 2:12). Use this Season of Lent to the fullest – embrace the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Holy Catholic Church. Undergo a conversion of mind and heart. Conform your will to God's will. With the help of the Holy Spirit, transform your minds and hearts to be led in God's way of truth and holiness – it's the one and only way! With Lent just around the corner (Ash Wednesday is February 17th), how might prayer, fasting, and almsgiving take on a new light in my own life?

## Thursday, February 4 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

**Holy Gospel: Mark 6:7-13** Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick – no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." So they went off and preached repentance. The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

**Meditation:** Jesus gave his apostles both the power and the authority to speak and to act in his name. He commanded them to do the works which he did – to heal, to cast out evil spirits, and to speak the word of God – the Good News of the gospel which they received from Jesus. When Jesus spoke of power and authority he did something unheard of. He wedded power and authority with love and humility. The "world" and the "flesh" seek power for selfish gain. Jesus teaches us to use it for the good of our neighbor.

**Prayer:** Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of 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:** This traveling light provision which Jesus shared with his Apostles has solid purpose. This "poverty of spirit" frees us from greed and preoccupation with possessions and makes ample room for God's provision. The Lord wants his disciples to be dependent on him and not on themselves. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. The Lord entrusts each of us with his gifts and talents. Are you eager to place yourself at his service, to do whatever he asks you, and to live in witness his truth – *the only truth* – and saving power to whomever and whatever situation he sends you?

## Friday, February 5 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary time Saint Agatha, Virgin and Martyr

**Holy Gospel: Mark 6:14-29** King Herod heard about Jesus, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him." Others were saying, "He is Elijah"; still others, "He is a prophet like any of the prophets." But when Herod learned of it, he said, "It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up." Herod was the one who had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married. John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill him but was unable to do so. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him. Herodias had an opportunity one day when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, his military officers, and the leading men of Galilee. His own daughter came in and performed a dance that delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you." He even swore many things to her, "I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" Her mother replied, "The head of John the Baptist." The girl hurried back to the king's presence and made her request, "I want you to give me at once on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was deeply distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests he did not wish to break his word to her. So he promptly dispatched an executioner with orders to bring back his head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison. He brought in the head on a platter and gave it to the girl. The girl in turn gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

**Meditation:** What better what to shut someone up permanently than to have them beheaded? Why have John the Baptist silenced? For telling the truth! The very truth which Herodias did not want to hear about the sinful relationship she was living. Herodias, the daughter of Aristobulus and Bernice, was first married to her uncle, her father's half-brother, Philip (Mark 6:17). While living in Rome, they had a daughter named Salome. Herodias later left Philip and married Herod Antipas, Philip's brother, thereby making her the wife of two of her uncles. Herod Antipas was the tetrarch of Galilee during the life of Jesus. John the Baptist, a fearless and righteous servant of God, did not shy away from proclaiming the truth – in this case publicly condemning the incestuous and adulterous behavior of the ruler of the land. For this John was arrested, and at the instigation of Herodias was beheaded.

**Prayer:** May the Virgin Martyr Saint Agatha implore your compassion for us, O Lord, we pray, for she found favor with you by the courage of her martyrdom and the merit of her chastity. 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:** How many times have we embraced the "politically correct" route in this world versus embracing the truths contained in sacred scripture? How many times have we let personal opinion ("here is what I think" or "here is how I see it") or personal feelings ("this is how I feel") trump any law of God, any teaching of Jesus Christ, or any teaching of the Catholic Church? In other words, am I just as guilty of turning away from the truth by turning a blind eye or a deaf ear to a situation in my own life or in the life of family members or friends – only so that I can be politically correct? Have I followed the route of Herodias and tried to have the truth silenced, just as she had John the Baptist silenced by having him beheaded? Or if not silenced, have I simply ignored the truth, or taken a sarcastic approach to the truth, or the convenient approach to the truth by thinking I'm sophisticated and modern, and thus in my mind thinking that the truth has become "old fashioned" and out-of-step with modern times? The laws of God and the teachings of Christ do not have a shelf life. Always remember what Jesus tells us in John 14:6: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me..." and in John 14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Folks, we need to embrace the truth with much more zeal and confidence. We cannot think that others apart from Christ have a solution to life's challenges or think that their way of living is acceptable when it is contrary to Christ. The truth is worth living, promoting and defending. We have one life, and we must turn away from the compromise of Christ's truths and instead embrace his teachings and let him be our shepherd and guide – not popular culture.

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.