

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)

“Let us then, my brethren, endure in hope. Let us devote ourselves, side-by-side with our hoping, so that the God of the entire universe, as he beholds our intention, may cleanse us from all sins, fill us with high hopes from what we have in hand, and grant us the change of heart that saves. God has called you, and you have your calling.”

~SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM

Monday, March 15 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 4:43-54 At that time Jesus left [Samaria] for Galilee. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his native place. When he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves had gone to the feast. Then he returned to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. Now there was a royal official whose son was ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, who was near death. Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.” The royal official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus said to him, “You may go; your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said to him and left. While the man was on his way back, his slaves met him and told him that his boy would live. He asked them when he began to recover. They told him, “The fever left him yesterday, about one in the afternoon.” The father realized that just at that time Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live,” and he and his whole household came to believe. Now this was the second sign Jesus did when he came to Galilee from Judea.

Meditation: Recall in sacred scripture Isaiah’s prophecy that God would establish a new heaven and earth when he came to restore his people. Jesus’ miracles are signs that manifest the presence and power of God’s kingdom. When a Gentile official heard the reports of Jesus’ preaching and miracles, he decided to seek Jesus out for an extraordinary favor. It took raw courage for a Gentile court official to travel twenty miles in search of Jesus, the Galilean carpenter. He had to swallow his pride and put up with some ridicule from his cronies. And when he found the healer carpenter, Jesus seemed to put him off with the blunt statement that people would not believe unless they saw some kind of miracle or sign from heaven. Jesus likely said this to test the man to see if his faith was in earnest. If he turned away discouraged or irritated, he would prove to be insincere. Jesus, perceiving his faith, sent him home with the assurance that his prayer had been heard.

Prayer: O God, who renew the world through mysteries beyond all telling, grant, we pray, that your Church may be guided by your eternal design. 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: If you think about it, it was probably not easy for this man to leave Jesus and go back home only with the assuring word that his son would be healed. Couldn't Jesus have come to this man's home and touched his dying child? The court official believed and surrendered to Jesus. He was ready to return home and face ridicule and laughter because he trusted in Jesus' word. God's mercy shows his generous love -- a love that bends down in response to our misery and wretchedness. Do you approach the Lord Jesus with the readiness to believe in his word and to do whatever he commands?

Tuesday, March 16 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 5:1-16 There was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is

stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk." Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked. Now that day was a Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." He answered them, "The man who made me well told me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who told you, 'Take it up and walk'?" The man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away, since there was a crowd there. After this Jesus found him in the temple area and said to him, "Look, you are well; do not sin any more, so that nothing worse may happen to you." The man went and told the Jews that Jesus was the one who had made him well. Therefore, the Jews began to persecute Jesus because he did this on a Sabbath.

Meditation: Water is an amazing creation of God. Water has the power to transform everything it touches – water brings life, healing, and restoration. Jesus offers himself as the source of this living water which he will pour out upon his disciples in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The signs and miracles which Jesus performed manifest the power and presence of God's kingdom and they demonstrate the love and mercy God has for his people. In the pool at Bethesda we see an individual's helplessness overcome by God's mercy and power. On this occasion Jesus singles out an incurable invalid, helpless and hopeless for almost forty years. He awakens hope when he puts a probing question to the man, "Do you really want to be healed?" And he then orders him to "get up and walk!"

Prayer: May the venerable exercises of holy devotion shape the hearts of your faithful, O Lord, to welcome worthily the Paschal Mystery and proclaim the praises of your 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: God wants to free us from the power of sin and make us whole. But he will not force our hand against our will. The first essential step towards growth and healing is the desire for change. If we are content to stay as we are, then no amount of coaxing will change us. The Lord manifests his power and saving grace towards those who desire transformation of life in Christ. The Lord approaches each of us with an important and probing question: "Do you really want to be changed, to be set free from the power of sin, and to be transformed in my holiness?" And so how each of us responds has life-long implications. In these last weeks of Lent, why not take the first step to reconciling yourself with God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation? The path to eternal life has many stops in the confessional.

Wednesday, March 17 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent Saint Patrick of Ireland

Holy Gospel: John 5:17-30 Jesus answered the Jews: "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God. Jesus answered and said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for what he does, the Son will do also. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything that he himself does, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you may be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes. Nor does the Father judge anyone, but he has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life. Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to the Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation. "I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me."

Meditation: God's actions always reveal to us his mercy and compassion, and his justice. Do you ever pause to recognize his action in your life, his saving grace and love, and the purifying fire of his Spirit who convicts us of sin and transforms us in his holiness? Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah when he brings healing, restoration, and forgiveness to those who accept his divine message. Unfortunately many people refused Jesus' message and authority to speak and act on behalf of the Father. The religious authorities charged Jesus as a "Sabbath-breaker" and as a "blasphemer." They wanted to kill Jesus because he

claimed the same authority and power as God. He claimed equality with God— something no mortal could say without blaspheming. Jesus answered their charge of breaking the Sabbath law by demonstrating God's purpose for creation and redemption — to save and restore life. God's love and mercy never ceases, even on the Sabbath. Jesus continues to show the Father's mercy, even on the Sabbath day of rest. When they charged that Jesus was making himself equal with God, he replied that he was not acting independently of God because his relationship is that of a Father and Son relationship.

Prayer: O God, who reward the merits of the just and offer pardon to sinners who do penance, have mercy, we pray, on those who call upon you, that the admission of our guilt may serve to obtain your pardon for our sins. 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: If we wish to see how God reacts to sin and how he responds to our sinful condition, then we must look to Jesus. The mind of Jesus is the mind of God, and the words of Jesus are the words of God. Jesus also states that his identity to the Father is based on complete obedience. Jesus always did what his Father wanted him to do. His obedience was not based on submission or power, but on authentic love. The unity between Jesus and the Father is a unity of love. We are called to submit our lives to God with the same love and obedience which Jesus demonstrated for his Father. Jesus states that to accept him is life and to reject him is death. Are you ready to follow the Lord and to leave behind whatever is false and contrary to his will? Each of us has the capacity to do this – begin today by living a life in loving obedience to God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Thursday, March 18 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Lent Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

Holy Gospel: John 5:31-47 Jesus said to the Jews: "If I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is not true. But there is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that the testimony he gives on my behalf is true. You sent emissaries to John, and he testified to the truth. I do not accept human testimony, but I say this so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light. But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. Moreover, the Father who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form, and you do not have his word remaining in you, because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf. But you do not want to come to me to have life. "I do not accept human praise; moreover, I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I came in the name of my Father, but you do not accept me; yet if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father: the one who will accuse you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

Meditation: Jesus' opponents refused to accept his divine authority and claim to be the only Son of God the Father. They demanded evidence for his Messianic claim and equality with God. Jesus answers their charges with the supporting evidence of witnesses. The Mosaic law had laid down the principle that the unsupported evidence of one person shall not prevail against a man for any crime or wrong in connection with any offence he committed (see Deuteronomy 17:6). At least two or three witnesses were needed. Jesus begins his defense by citing John the Baptist as a witness, since John publicly pointed to Jesus as the Messiah and had repeatedly borne witness to him (see John 1:19, 20, 26, 29, 35, 36). Jesus also asserts that a greater witness to his identity are the signs he performed. He cites his works - not to point to himself but to point to the power of God working in and through him - and God as his supreme witness.

Prayer: We invoke your mercy in humble prayer, O Lord, that you may cause us, your servants, corrected by penance and schooled by good works, to persevere sincerely in your commands and come safely to the paschal festivities. 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 asserts that the scriptures themselves point to himself as the One foretold, the Messiah, the promised Savior. The problem with the scribes and Pharisees was that they did not believe what Moses had written. They desired the praise of their fellow humans and because of that they were unable to recognize and understand the word of God. Their pride made them deaf to God's voice. God reveals himself to the lowly, to those who trust not in themselves, but in God. The Lord opens the ears of

those who are eager to hear his voice and he fills their hearts and minds with his love and wisdom. Saint Augustine once said: "As Christians, our task is to make daily progress toward God. Our pilgrimage on earth is a school in which God is the only teacher, and it demands good students, not ones who play truant. In this school we learn something every day. We learn something from commandments, something from examples, and something from sacraments. These things are remedies for our wounds and materials for study." So we must ask: Are you a humble yet eager student of God's word, his timeless truths?

Friday, March 19 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Lent Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a Jacob was 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." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Meditation: Joseph's faith was put to the test when he discovered that his espoused wife was pregnant. Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish Mary. To all appearances she had broken their solemn pledge to be faithful and chaste to one another. Joseph, no doubt took this troubling matter to God in prayer. He was not hasty to judge or to react with hurt and anger. God rewarded him not only with guidance and consolation, but with the divine assurance that he had indeed called Joseph to be the husband of Mary and to assume a mission that would require the utmost faith, confidence, and trust in Almighty God. Joseph believed in the divine message to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah. Joseph was a worthy successor to the great patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He followed the call of God through the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the coming of Jesus. God entrusted this silent, humble man with the unique privilege of raising his only Son as a growing child. Joseph is a faithful witness and servant of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Are you ready to believe in the promises of God, even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems? God the Father has not left us alone, but has given us his only begotten Son as our Savior. Where does your faith need to be strengthened? Ask the Lord to increase your faith and trust in his word.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that by Saint Joseph's intercession your Church may constantly watch over the unfolding of the mysteries of human salvation, whose beginnings you entrusted to his faithful care. 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.

A prayer for this day: God our Father, you love your people and bless the ordinary lives we quietly live. As you blessed Saint Joseph, bless what I do, however hidden and simple it may be, and let all I do be done with love for you and your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Contemplation: Ask yourself: Are you prepared to obey the Lord in everything? Everything?! Faith in God's word and obedience to his commands go hand in hand. Joseph, like Mary, is a model of faith and justice. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a "just man". John Chrysostom, the great 5th century father writes: "The concept of 'just' here signifies the man who possesses all the virtues. By 'justice' one at times understands only one virtue in particular, as in the phrase: the one who is not avaricious is just. But 'justice' also refers to virtue in general. And it is in this sense, above all, that scripture uses the word 'justice'. For example, it refers to: 'a just man and true' (cf. Job 1:1), or the two were just (cf. Luke 1:6). Joseph, then, being just, that is to say good and charitable..."

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011;
some meditations and contemplations inspired by *Biblical Meditations for Lent* by Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP;
information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of Catholic Culture.

frlumpe:2021

