

# 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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***“Christian faith in the full sense of the word, is not just the acceptance of ‘truths about’ Christ. It is not just acquiescence in the story of Christ with its moral and spiritual implications. It is not merely the decision to put into practice, to some extent at least, the teachings of Christ. All these forms of acceptance are compatible with an acquiescence in what is ‘not Christ.’ It is quite possible to ‘believe in Christ,’ in the sense of mentally accepting the truth that He lived on earth, died, and rose from the dead, and yet still live ‘in the flesh,’ according to the standards of a greedy, violent, unjust and corrupt society, without noticing any real contradiction in one’s life. But the real meaning of faith is the rejection of everything that is not Christ in order that all life, all truth, all hope, all reality may be sought and found ‘in Christ.’”***

~Excerpted from “Life and Holiness” by Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO

### Monday, March 22 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

**Holy Gospel: John 8:1-11** Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

**Meditation:** This incident conveys to us a great deal about Jesus’ attitude toward the sinner. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus with the religious and civil authorities. That is why they brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. Jesus turned the challenge towards his accusers. In effect he said: Go ahead and stone her! But let the man who is without sin be the first to cast a stone. The Lord leaves the matter to their own consciences. When the adulterous woman is left alone with Jesus, he both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again. The scribes wished to condemn, Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge involved a choice – either go back to your former way of sin and death or to reach out to the new way of life and happiness with him. Jesus gave her pardon and a new start on life. God’s grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is – unfaithfulness to God, and to turn back to God with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for God’s mercy and forgiveness. Make a good confession and experience the joy of repentance and a clean heart.

**Prayer:** O God, by whose wondrous grace we are enriched with every blessing, grant us so to pass from former ways to newness of life, that we may be made ready for the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** In your heart of hearts, do you desire to be changed and transformed in Christlike holiness? God never withholds his grace from us. His steadfast love and mercy is new every day (ref. Lamentations 3:22-23). Through the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit we can be changed and made new in Christ. He can set us free from our unruly desires and passions. As St. Augustine prays: “God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins;

and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you are loving, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

## **Tuesday, March 23 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent**

**Holy Gospel: John 8:21-30** Jesus said to the Pharisees: "I am going away and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come." So the Jews said, "He is not going to kill himself, is he, because he said, 'Where I am going you cannot come'?" He said to them, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "What I told you from the beginning. I have much to say about you in condemnation. But the one who sent me is true, and what I heard from him I tell the world." They did not realize that he was speaking to them of the Father. So Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him." Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him.

**Meditation:** To "sin" literally means to "miss the mark" or "to be off target." The essence of sin is that we, through our choice, separate ourselves from the love of God and from our true purpose in life – to know the source of all truth and beauty which is God himself and to be united with God in everlasting joy. When Adam and Eve first sinned, they hid themselves from God (Genesis 3:8-10). That is what sin does; it separates us from the One who is all loving, all-wise, and all-just. Jesus went on to explain that if people could not recognize him in his word, they would have the opportunity to recognize him when he is "lifted upon the cross of Calvary. Jesus pointed to the atoning sacrifice of his life on the cross as the true source of healing and victory over the sin of the world. The sacrifice of Christ's life on the cross for our sins is the ultimate proof of God's love for us. God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). To fail to recognize Jesus and where he came from is to remain in spiritual darkness; to believe Jesus and his words is to walk in the joy and light of God's truth.

**Prayer:** Grant us, we pray, O Lord, perseverance in obeying your will, that in our days the people dedicated to your service may grow in both merit and number. 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:** The healing power of the cross of Christ is very real. When the people of Israel were afflicted with serpents in the wilderness because of their sin, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (ref. Numbers 21:8). The bronze serpent points to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe. The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising and exaltation 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 redeems us, but he fills us with his own divine life and power that we might share in his glory. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit that we may have power to be his witnesses and to spread and defend the gospel by word and action, and to never be ashamed of Christ's Cross. Are you ready to live your life as a witness the truth and joy of the Gospel to those around you?

## **Wednesday, March 24 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent**

**Holy Gospel: John 8:31-42** Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if the Son frees you, then you will truly be free. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father." They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father!" So they said to him, "We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me."

**Meditation:** The world presents us with a false notion of truth and freedom – “truth is relative so I choose my own criteria for what is true” and freedom means “I can do whatever I please – regardless of what God or others might think.” This confusion only gets compounded when civil laws make legal many things which are contrary to the laws of God, and the Gospel teachings of Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church – abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage, to name a few. This is really a mask for slavery to one’s passions and desires – to do what “me, myself and I” will versus humbly submitting ourselves to live our lives according to the will of God. Jesus offers his disciples true freedom – freedom from slavery to pride and arrogance – disbelief and ignorance – selfishness and greed – hatred and revenge – fear and anxiety – despair and depression – and a host of many other hurtful desires and addictions which cripple our lives.

**Prayer:** Enlighten, O God of compassion, the hearts of your children, sanctified by penance, and in your kindness grant those you stir to a sense of devotion a gracious hearing when they cry out to you. 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:** The good news is that Jesus Christ has truly set us free from sin and its destructive force in our lives. How is this possible? Through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit we can choose to renounce sin, we choose to live up to the challenges put forth to us by Christ in the Gospel, and in doing so we can yield to God's grace which enables us to walk each day and each moment in Christ's way of love and holiness. A “disciple” is a “follower” and a “listener.” If we want to be a true follower of Christ and live as his disciples, then we must listen to the words of Jesus, with a humble and teachable spirit, and put Jesus' words into action in our daily lives. As we listen with faith and obey with trust, Christ himself gives us grace – the enabling power of his Holy Spirit – to live, think, and act in the truth of his word. Come to believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit – it can change each of our lives and set us free to walk in Christ's way of love and holiness.

### **Thursday, March 25 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord**

**Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26-38** The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

**Meditation:** In this particular passage of sacred scripture we see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. This child to be born is conceived by the gracious action of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, who finds favor with God. As Eve was the mother of all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary becomes the mother of the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (ref. Romans 5:12-21). This child to be conceived in her womb is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He will be “great” and “Son of the Most High” and “King” (ref. Luke 1:32-33), and his name shall be called “Jesus”, which means “the Lord saves”. “He will save his people from their sins” (ref. Matthew 1:21). The promise of an everlasting kingdom to the house of David (ref. Isaiah 9:6-7) is fulfilled in the King to be born in Mary's womb.

**Prayer:** O God, who willed that your Word should take on the reality of human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, grant, we pray, that we, who confess our Redeemer to be God and man, may merit to become partakers even in his divine nature. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** How does Mary respond to the word of God delivered by the angel Gabriel? Mary knows she is hearing something beyond human capability. It will surely take a miracle which surpasses all that

God has done previously. Her question, "how shall this be, since I have no husband" is not prompted by doubt or skepticism, but by wonderment! She is a true hearer of the Word and she immediately responds with faith, trust, and without hesitation. Mary's prompt response of "yes" to the divine message is a model of faith for all believers. Mary believed God's promises even when they seemed impossible. She was full of grace because she trusted that what God said was true and would be fulfilled. She was willing and eager to do God's will, even if it seemed difficult or costly. Mary is the "mother of God" because God becomes incarnate when he takes on flesh in her womb. When we pray the Nicene Creed we state our confession of faith in this great mystery: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heartfelt trust as Mary did.

## Friday, March 26 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

**Holy Gospel: John 10:31-42** The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, You are gods'?" If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and Scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried again to arrest him; but he escaped from their power. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. Many came to him and said, "John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true." And many there began to believe in him.

**Meditation:** Why were the religious leaders so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill him? They charged him with blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God. Jesus made two claims in his response: He was consecrated by the Father to a special task and he was sent into the world to carry out his Father's mission. Jesus challenged his opponents to accept his works if they could not accept his words. One can argue with words, but deeds are beyond argument. Jesus is the perfect teacher in that he does not base his claims on what he says but on what he does. The word of God is life and power to those who believe.

**Prayer:** Pardon the offenses of your peoples, we pray, O Lord, and in your goodness set us free from the bonds of the sins we have committed in our weakness. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** Have you consecrated your life to God? Do you strive to grow in holiness and grace? The scriptural understanding of consecration is "to make holy for God" – to be given over as a free-will offering and sacrifice for God. Jesus made himself a sin-offering for us, to ransom us from condemnation and slavery to sin. He spoke of his Father consecrating him for this mission of salvation. Jesus shows us the way to walk the path of truth and holiness. Are you a doer of God's word, or a hearer only, failing to put into action that which is taught to us in the sacred scriptures so that we may live in the light of Christ? God wants others to see the light of Christ in us in the way we joyfully live in witness to the Gospel.

**As we approach Holy Week:** The holiest week of the year in the Christian world is upon us – let's make sure that we live and experience the "holy" in Holy Week; it's not just another week of the year. Let us live this week illuminated with the light of Christ, so that his light shines through each of us. Let us set aside this one week of the year for added prayer, scripture reading and meditation, daily Mass, the Stations of the Cross. Let us remember most of all to thank Christ for his gift of the Eucharist, for his suffering the Passion and death on the cross with the weight and pain of the cross being our own sinfulness, and for the celebration of Easter to come. There is so much that each of us can gain by immersing ourselves in all that Holy Week has to offer. Don't miss out on this most holy week of the year for you and your family members and friends to walk alongside Christ.

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