

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 way of Christian perfection begins with a personal summons, addressed to the individual Christian by Christ the Lord, through the Holy Spirit. This summons is a call, a ‘vocation.’ Every Christian in one way or another receives this vocation from Christ – the call to follow Him. Sometimes we imagine that vocation as a prerogative of priests and religious. It is true that they receive a special call to perfection. They dedicate themselves to the quest of Christian perfection by the use of certain definite means. Yet every Christian is called to follow Christ, to imitate Christ as perfectly as the circumstances of his life permit, and thereby to become a saint.”

~Excerpted from **LIFE AND HOLINESS** by Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO

Monday, April 26 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 10:1-10 Jesus said: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.” Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

Meditation: One can legitimately ask what shepherding can teach us about God and our relationship with him. At the end of each day the shepherd brought his sheep into shelter. They knew the voice of their shepherd and came at his beckoning. So familiar was the shepherd and his sheep, that each was called by a distinct name. In the winter the sheep were usually brought to a communal village shelter which was locked and kept secure by a guardian. In the summer months the sheep were usually kept out in the fields and then gathered into a fold at night which was guarded by a shepherd throughout the night. He was literally the door through which the sheep had to pass. The scriptures describe God as a shepherd who brings security and peace to his people. The Lord will keep you going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore (Psalm 120:8). Even the leaders of God's people are called shepherds: they shall lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep which have no shepherd (Numbers 27:17). Just as a shepherd kept watch over his sheep and protected them from danger, so Jesus stands watch over his people as the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). Do you know the peace and security of a life fully submitted to God?

Prayer: O God, perfect light of the blessed, by whose gift we celebrate the paschal mysteries on earth, bring us, we pray, to rejoice in the full measure of your grace for ages unending. 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 Old Testament often speaks of God as “shepherd” of his people, Israel. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want* (Psalm 23:1). *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!* (Psalm 80:1) *We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture* (Psalm 100:3). The Messiah is also pictured as the shepherd of God's people: *He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms* (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus says he is the *Good Shepherd* who will risk his life to seek out and save the stray sheep (Matthew 18:12, Luke 15:4). He is the *Shepherd and Guardian of our souls* (1 Peter 2:25). Saint Augustine wrote: “He has accomplished what he taught us: He has shown us what He commanded

us to do. He laid down his own life for his sheep, that within our mystery he might change his body and blood into food, and nourish the sheep he had redeemed with the food of his own flesh. He has shown us the way we must follow, despite fear of death. He has laid down the pattern to which we must conform ourselves." So ask yourself: Do you look to Jesus the Good Shepherd, to receive the strength and courage you need to live and serve as his disciple?

Tuesday, April 27 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 10:22-30 The feast of the Dedication was taking place in Jerusalem. It was winter. And Jesus walked about in the temple area on the Portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you and you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify to me. But you do not believe, because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Meditation: Saint Cyril, a Father of the Church, comments on Jesus as our Good Shepherd: "He shows in what manner a shepherd may be proved good; and He teaches that he must be prepared to give up his life fighting in defense of his sheep, which was fulfilled in Christ. For man has departed from the love of God, and fallen into sin, and because of this was, I say, excluded from the divine abode of paradise, and when he was weakened by that disaster, he yielded to the devil tempting him to sin, and death following that sin he became the prey of fierce and ravenous wolves. But after Christ was announced as the True Shepherd of all men, He laid down his life for us (1 John 3:16), fighting for us against that pack of inhuman beasts. He bore the Cross for us, that by His own death he might destroy death. He was condemned for us, that He might deliver all of us from the sentence of punishment: the tyranny of sin being overthrown by our faith: fastening to the Cross the decree that stood against us, as it is written (Colossians 2:14). Therefore as the father of sin had as it were shut up the sheep in hell, giving them to death to feed on, as it is written in the psalms (Ps. Xlviii.16), He died for us as truly Good, and truly our Shepherd, so that the dark shadow of death driven away He might join us to the company of the blessed in heaven; and in exchange for abodes that lie far in the depths of the pit, and in the hidden places of the sea, grant us mansions in His Father's House above. Because of this he says to us in another place: Fear not, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you a kingdom (Luke 12:32)."

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, celebrating the mysteries of the Lord's Resurrection, we may merit to receive the joy of our redemption. 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 promises the security of peace and protection from evil and the greatest harm that could befall us – eternal destruction. The Lord does not spare us from all trouble. In this life we will experience pain, suffering, sickness, and death. But through these the Lord will lead us to ultimate victory and safety in his everlasting home. Even in the midst of our sufferings we can find a peace and security which no one can give except God alone. We can confidently follow the Lord wherever he leads, trusting that nothing can keep us from God *if* we trust in him. Which begs the question: Have you placed your life securely in God where it belongs?

Wednesday, April 28 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Easter Optional Memorial, Saint Louis Mary de Montfort, Priest

Holy Gospel: John 12:44-50 Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me. I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last day, because I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. So what I say, I say as the Father told me."

Meditation: God does not leave us in our ignorance and unbelief. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit he helps us to grow in faith, knowledge and understanding of his word. Saint Augustine summed up rather succinctly our need for God's help in the following prayer: "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, and that our resentment against you was groundless." Do you want to know more of God and his transforming love? Look to Jesus, the Light of God, and in his truth you will find joy, freedom, and wholeness of mind, body and soul.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, putting off our old self with all its ways, we may live as Christ did, for through the healing paschal remedies you have conformed us to his nature. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer ~ Saint Louis Mary de Montfort: O God, who willed to direct the steps of the priest Saint Louis along the way of salvation and of the love of Christ, in the company of the Blessed Virgin, grant us, by his example, that, meditating on the mysteries of your love, we may strive tirelessly for the building up of your Church. 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.

Contemplation: To see Jesus is to see God. To hear his words is to hear the voice of God. He is the very light of God that has power to overcome the darkness of sin, ignorance, and unbelief. God's light and truth brings healing, pardon, and transformation. This light is not only for the chosen people of Israel, but for the whole world as well. Jesus warns that if we refuse his word or take it lightly, we choose to remain in spiritual darkness. Jesus made it clear that he did not come to condemn us, but rather to bring abundant life and freedom from the oppression of sin, ignorance and evil. We condemn ourselves when we reject God's wisdom and truth. It is one thing to live in ignorance due to lack of knowledge, but another thing to disdain those who teach us true wisdom and knowledge. Jesus says that his word which we have heard will be our judge. Do you believe that God's word has power to change and transform your life?

Thursday, April 29 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Easter Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: John 13:16-20 When Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, he said to them: "Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. I am not speaking of all of you. I know those whom I have chosen. But so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, the one who ate my food has raised his heel against me. From now on I am telling you before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I AM. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

Meditation: Jesus loved his disciples to the end and proved his faithfulness to them even to death on the cross. Through his death and resurrection Jesus opened a new way of relationship and friendship with God. Jesus tells his disciples that if they accept him they also accept the Father who sent him. This principle extends to all who belong to Christ and who speak in his name. To accept the Lord's messenger is to accept Jesus himself. The great honor and the great responsibility any Christian has is to stand in the world for Jesus Christ. As his disciples and ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20), we are called to speak for him and to act on his behalf. Are you ready to stand for Jesus at the cross of humiliation, rejection, opposition, and suffering?

Prayer: O God, who set Saint Catherine of Siena on fire with divine love in her contemplation of the Lord's Passion and her service to your Church, grant, through her intercession, that your people, participating in the mystery of Christ, may ever exult in the revelation of his glory. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Have you ever given any thought as to how you treat those who cause you grief or harm? Especially those who are close to you in some way? In his last supper discourse, Jesus addressed the issue of fidelity and disloyalty in relationships. Jesus knew beforehand that one of his own disciples would betray him. Such knowledge could have easily led Jesus to distance himself from such a person and to protect himself from harm's way. Instead, Jesus expresses his love, affection, and loyalty to those who were his own, even to the one he knew would "stab him in the back" when he got the opportunity. Jesus used a quotation from Psalm 4:9 which describes an act of treachery by one's closest friend. In the culture of Jesus' day, to eat bread with someone was a gesture of friendship and trust. Jesus extends such friendship to Judas right at the moment when Judas is conspiring to betray his master. The expression lift his heel against me reinforces the brute nature of this act of violent rejection.

Friday, April 30 ~ Fourth Week in the Season of Easter
Optional Memorial: Saint Pius V, Pope

Holy Gospel: John 14:1-6 Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Meditation: The Lord Jesus came to fulfill God's promise to bring his people, not simply to a land flowing with milk and honey, but to a restored paradise and new creation where we can dwell with God in perfect peace and unity. That is why Jesus proclaims, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. Jesus does not simply give advice and direction. *He personally is the Way*, and we cannot miss it. Through his life-giving word and Spirit, Jesus leads and guides us personally every day. The Lord Jesus also is the Truth. Many can say "I have taught you the truth." But folks, only Jesus can say "I am the Truth." Moral truth cannot be conveyed by words alone; it must be conveyed also by example. Jesus embodies the truth in his person. Jesus also is the Life. He not only shows us the path of life (Psalm 16:11); he gives the kind of life which only God can give – abundant life which never fails nor ends. Is there any fear or trouble that keeps you from the perfect peace and happiness of a life surrendered to Jesus Christ as an authentic disciple?

Prayer: O God, author of our freedom and of our salvation, listen to the voice of our pleading and grant that those you have redeemed by the shedding of your Son's Blood may have life through you and, under your protection, rejoice forever unharmed. 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 ~ Pope Saint Pius V: O God, who in your providence raised up Pope Saint Pius the Fifth in your Church that the faith might be safeguarded and more fitting worship be offered to you, grant, through his intercession, that we may participate in your mysteries with lively faith and fruitful charity. 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: As much as we try to avoid it, inevitably we encounter trouble and difficulties in life that are hard to endure. Life is not a bowl of cherries, nor is it a bed of roses – cherries have pits, and roses have thorns. Jesus knew his disciples would have to face trials and persecution after he left them to return to his Father in heaven. Adversity can make us lose hope and become discouraged, or it can press us closer to God and to his promises. "It is the Lord who goes before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8). Just as God went ahead of the Israelites in the wilderness to lead them safely to the promised land, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going ahead to prepare a place for them in God's house – a place of refuge, peace, and security, and everlasting happiness. The greatest fear in this present life – whether it be the separation and loss of life to a loved one or the threat to one's own life – is put to rest by Jesus' promise that we will live forever with him and the Father in their heavenly home.

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