

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)

Month of June ~ Dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

“Our Christian destiny is, in fact, a great one: but we cannot achieve greatness unless we lose all interest in being great. For our own idea of greatness is illusory, and if we pay too much attention to it we will be lured out of the peace and stability of the being God gave us, and seek to live in a myth we have created for ourselves. And when we are truly ourselves we lose most of the futile self-consciousness that keeps us constantly comparing ourselves with others in order to see how big we are.”

~EXCERPTED FROM *NO MAN IS AN ISLAND* BY FATHER THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

Monday, June 28 ~ Thirteenth Week of Ordinary Time
Saint Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:18-22 When Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other shore. A scribe approached and said to him, “Teacher, 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.” Another of his disciples said to him, “Lord, let me go first and bury my father.” But Jesus answered him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.”

Meditation: When the Lord Jesus calls us to follow him, he invites us into a personal relationship of love and friendship. That relationship also involves the commitment of our entire lives to Jesus as Lord and Master, Teacher and Healer, Messiah and Savior. To follow Jesus is the greatest of all calls. What an awesome privilege and an awesome responsibility to be a disciple of Jesus Christ! What does it cost to be a disciple? For the first disciples, they paid the ultimate price for being a follower of Jesus by not renouncing Christ as Lord, Savior, Messiah; by not renouncing Christ’s teachings; by being steadfast disciples of Christ. A disciple must be willing to make sacrifices, even the sacrifice of his own life to follow Jesus as his Master and Lord. Notice how another would-be disciple responded by saying that he must first bury his father, that is go back home and take care of his father until he died. Jesus appealed to the man’s heart and told him to detach himself from whatever might keep him from following as his disciple.

Prayer: O God, who called the Bishop Saint Irenaeus to confirm true doctrine and the peace of the Church, grant, we pray, through his intercession, that, being renewed in faith and charity, we may always be intent on fostering unity and concord. 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: What can keep us from giving our all to God? Fear, anxiety, self-concern, pre-occupation and attachment to other things, to name a few. Even spiritual things can get in the way of having God alone as our Treasure if we put them first. Detachment is a necessary step is we want to make the Lord our Treasure and Joy. It frees us to give ourselves without reserve to the Lord and to his service. There is nothing greater we can do with our lives than to place them at the service of the Lord and Master of the universe. We cannot out give God in generosity. Jesus promises that those who are willing to part with what is most dear to them for his sake “will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). Is there anything holding you back from giving your all to the Lord?

Tuesday, June 29 ~ Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time
Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:16-19 When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Meditation: Today the Apostles Peter and Paul are commemorated. Both were martyred in Rome in the first century. They tirelessly worked for the spread of the gospel, not only to the people of Israel, but to all the nations as well. They risked their lives in the process and gladly poured out their blood in loyalty to their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul so eloquently stated in his second epistle to Timothy: "they courageously fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). So it is worth asking: How firm is your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? At an opportune time Jesus tested his disciples with a crucial question: Who do men say that I am and who do you say that I am? (Matthew 16:13). Jesus was widely recognized in Israel as a mighty man of God, even being compared with the greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. Peter, always quick to respond, exclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. No mortal being could have revealed this to Peter; but only God. Jesus then conferred on Peter authority to govern the church that Jesus would build, a church that no powers could overcome. Jesus played on Peter's name which is the same word for "rock" in both Aramaic and Greek. To call someone a "rock" is one of the greatest of compliments.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, O Lord our God, that we may be sustained by the intercession of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, that, as through them you gave your Church the foundations of her heavenly office, so through them you may help her to eternal 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: When Jesus asks: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" he poses that question to each of us. Our response is twofold – one by word, and the other by action. We can proclaim Christ as our Lord and Savior, and share in his saving mission through word by sharing the message found in sacred scripture. But most important is to put the teachings of sacred scripture into action in our daily lives. If you are firm in your faith, this is something that occurs naturally. If you find yourself hesitating out of "fear" or "embarrassment" then there is work to be done in making sure that when you proclaim to be a Catholic, a Christian, a disciple of Christ, that you mean what you say and say what you mean. Don't insult Jesus with mere lip service – prove to him and to the world that you are a true disciple by living the Word day in and day out. Be a doer of the Word.

Wednesday, June 30 ~ Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time First Martyrs of the Church of Rome

Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:28-34 When Jesus came to the territory of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs who were coming from the tombs met him. They were so savage that no one could travel by that road. They cried out, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?" Some distance away a herd of many swine was feeding. The demons pleaded with him, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go then!" They came out and entered the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea where they drowned. The swineherds ran away, and when they came to the town they reported everything, including what had happened to the demoniacs. Thereupon the whole town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him to leave their district.

Meditation: There are many times throughout our lives when we feel compelled by forces that seem to be beyond our strength to repel. In today's Gospel, two men driven mad by the force of many evil spirits found refuge in the one person who could set them free. The Gospel describes this force as savage, which connotes wild and unmentionable atrocities. Our age has certainly witnessed untold crimes and mass destruction at the hands of possessed rulers and their armies. What is more remarkable—the destructive force of these driven and possessed men, or the bended knee at Jesus' feet imploring mercy and release? 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. In times of trouble, let us remember the words of the Psalmist: *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).*

Prayer: O God, who consecrated that abundant first fruits of the Roman Church by the blood of the Martyrs, grant, we pray, that with firm courage we may together draw strength from so great a struggle and ever rejoice at the triumph of faithful love. 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 took pity on these men who were 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 demoniacs 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?

About the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome: There were Christians in Rome within a dozen or so years after the death of Jesus, though they were not the converts of the "Apostle of the Gentiles" (see Romans 15:20). Paul had not yet visited them at the time he wrote his great letter in A.D. 57-58. There was a large Jewish population in Rome. Probably as a result of controversy between Jews and Jewish Christians, the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome in A.D. 49-50. Suetonius the historian says that the expulsion was due to disturbances in the city "caused by the certain Chrestus" [Christ]. Perhaps many came back after Claudius's death in A.D. 54. Paul's letter was addressed to a church with members from Jewish and gentile backgrounds. In July of A.D. 64, more than half of Rome was destroyed by fire. Rumor blamed the tragedy on Nero, who wanted to enlarge his palace. He shifted the blame by accusing the Christians. According to the historian Tacitus, a "great multitude" of Christians were put to death because of their "hatred of the human race." Peter and Paul were probably among the victims. Threatened by an army revolt and condemned to death by the senate, Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68 at the age of thirty-one. Wherever the Good News of Jesus was preached, it met the same opposition as Jesus did, and many of those who began to follow him shared his suffering and death. But no human force could stop the power of the Spirit unleashed upon the world. The blood of martyrs has always been, and will always be, the seed of Christians.

Thursday, July 1 ~ Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Junipero Serra, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8 After entering a boat, Jesus made the crossing, and came into his own town. And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Courage, child, your sins are forgiven." At that, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said: "Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"— he then said to the paralytic, "Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home." He rose and went home. When the crowds saw this they were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men.

Meditation: *Question:* What cripples the mind and heart and stifles the healing power of love? *Answer:* Sin and an unforgiving mind and heart! You should not be amazed at the fact that sin cripples us more than any physical ailment can. Sin is the work of the kingdom of darkness and it holds us in eternal bondage. There is only one solution to sin – the healing, cleansing power of Jesus' forgiveness. Jesus' treatment of sinners upset the religious teachers of the day.

Prayer: O God, who by your ineffable mercy have been pleased through the labors of your priest Saint Junipero Serra to count many American peoples within your Church, grant by his intercession that we may so join our hearts to you in love, as to carry always and everywhere before all people the image of your Only Begotten Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The crippled man in today's Gospel had been crippled not only physically, but spiritually as well. Jesus freed him from his burden of guilt and restored his body. It would be time well spent for each of us to look deeply and honestly at how we, too, may be crippled by our own sinfulness, and where we turn to for healing. It is all too easy to fall into the habit of letting society redefine what sin is and is not. Truth is truth, and sin is sin, as defined by God the Father (not civil or secular laws [e.g. abortion, same-sex marriage, etc.]); the timeless teachings of Jesus Christ (not a talk show host, newspaper or editorial columnist, or politician) and the one, true church – the Catholic Church – founded by Jesus Christ. Yes, we are sinners. And yes, all are welcome in the Catholic Church. But all are called to convert from sin, to humbly and lovingly submit ourselves to God, and to live our lives according to the will of God – not have God submit to us or to impose our will upon God. In this topsy-turvy world, there are many who place themselves and their wants, desires, lifestyle, et cetera, above God and, in doing so, recreate and relive the sin of Adam and Eve. When we search for the truth, when we search for answers, for

guidance and direction, for healing and reconciliation, it is the Lord in his infinite love and mercy who is every ready to bring us healing of mind, body, and soul. His grace brings us freedom from the power of sin and from bondage to harmful desires and addictions. A first step – primary action – is receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a priest, who has the power to absolve you of your sins and to get you back on the road to follow Jesus Christ. What is holding you back?

**Please say daily prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
Your prayers and those of all who are faithful truly matter!**

SERRA PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

O God, Who wills not the death of a sinner but rather that he be converted and live grant we beseech you through the intercession of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, Saint Joseph, her spouse, Saint Junipero Serra and all the saints an increase of laborers for Your Church, fellow laborers with Christ to spend and consume themselves for souls through the same Jesus Christ Your Son Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever. Amen.

SERRA VOCATION PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Son of the Eternal Father and Mary Immaculate, give to our young people the generosity necessary to follow Your call and the courage to overcome all obstacles to their vocation in life.

Give to parents that faith, love, and spirit of sacrifice which will inspire them to offer their children to God's service and to rejoice whenever one of their children is called to the priesthood or the religious life.

Let your example and that of our Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph encourage both young people and parents, and let Your grace sustain them. Amen.

Friday, July 2 ~ Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13 As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Meditation: We live in a world where Jesus constantly invites each of us to follow him. And yet, on this day when we celebrate our country's birth, there are many reasons to celebrate the blessings that God has bestowed on our country, and causes for concern about the freedoms we exercise. Does Christ invite us to follow him to view pornography? Does Jesus invite us to follow him by participating in any way in having an abortion? Does Jesus invite us to participate in same-sex marriage? Of course not, as these are contrary to God's laws and the teachings of Jesus Christ. And yet so many Americans – including those who call themselves Christian – regularly participate in these sinful acts and, in doing so, choose not follow Christ. On this day when we celebrate the birth of the United States of America, let us pray that our fellow citizens – men and women of all ages, walks of life, and religious faiths – will turn away from all that separates us from the love of God, and in doing so simply take up Jesus Christ on his personal invitation to each and every one of us when he says: "follow me."

Prayer: O God, who through the grace of adoption chose us to be children of light, grant, we pray, that we may not be wrapped in the darkness of error but always be seen to stand in the bright light of truth. 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: What is God's call on your life? When Jesus saw Matthew sitting at his tax office – no doubt counting his day's profit – Jesus spoke only two words – "follow me." Those two words changed Matthew's life forever, from a self-serving profiteer to a God-loving God-serving apostle who would bring the treasures of God's kingdom to the poor and needy. Jesus says "follow me" to every man and woman on this earth. How do you respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him? Take Christ up on his personal invitation to "follow me," and in doing so let your life be forever changed.

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