

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 war of the Evil One against the Lord is his war against the family, and the war of the Evil One against the family is the core of his war against the Lord. Because the family is the image of God, from the beginning of the creation of this universe, The Evil one is focusing on destroying the family, the foundation of God’s plan.”

+SAINT SHARBEL (CHARBEL) MAKHLŪF

Monday, July 19 ~ Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 12:38-42 Some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” He said to them in reply, “An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here. At the judgment the queen of the south will arise with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here.”

Meditation: The demand for “signs” by God’s messengers by the Jewish people was a staple. The image of adultery was often used in the scriptures for describing apostasy or infidelity towards God. When the religious leaders pressed Jesus to give proof for his claims, he says in so many words that he is God’s sign and that they need no further evidence from heaven than his own person. The Ninevites recognized God’s warning when Jonah spoke to them, and they repented. And the Queen of Sheba recognized God’s wisdom in Solomon. Jonah was God’s sign and his message was the message of God for the people of Nineveh. Unfortunately the religious leaders were not content to accept the signs right before their eyes. They had rejected the message of John the Baptist and now they reject Jesus as God’s Anointed One (Messiah) and they fail to heed his message. Simeon had prophesied at Jesus’ birth that he was “destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that inner thoughts of many will be revealed” (Luke 2:34-35). Jesus confirmed his message with many miracles in preparation for the greatest sign of all – Christ’s resurrection on the third day.

Prayer: Show favor, O Lord, to your servants and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace, that, made fervent in hope, faith and charity, they may be ever watchful in keeping your commands. 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 would Jesus say about our generation? The Lord Jesus through the gift of his Holy Spirit offers us freedom from sin and ignorance and he gives us wisdom and understanding so that we may grow in knowledge of him and his ways. Do you thirst for God and for the wisdom which comes from above? If we wish to be wise in God’s ways, then we must humble ourselves before him, like attentive students who wish to learn, and submit our heart and mind to his will for our lives. The single of heart and mind desire one thing alone — God who is the source of all wisdom, goodness, truth, and knowledge. Do you wish to be wise and loving as God is wise and loving? Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the wisdom which comes from above and to free your heart from all that would hinder God’s loving action in your life.

Tuesday, July 20 ~ Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Saint Apollinaris, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 12:46-50 While Jesus was speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. Someone told him, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you.” But he said in reply to the one who told him, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my

mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Meditation: An important aspect of living out our Catholic faith is based on relationships – relationships that are based on love, trust, affection, commitment, loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion, mercy, helpfulness, encouragement, support, strength, protection, and so many other qualities that bind persons together in mutual love, respect and unity. God offers us the greatest of relationships – union of heart, mind, and spirit with himself, the very author and source of love (ref. 1 John 4:8,16). God's love never fails, never forgets, never compromises, never lies, never lets us down nor disappoints us. His love is consistent, unwavering, unconditional, and unstoppable. Nothing can deter him from ever leaving us, ignoring us, or treating us unkindly. He will love us no matter what. It is his nature to love. That is why he created us – to be united with him and to share in his love (ref. 1 John 3:1).

Prayer: Direct your faithful, Lord, in the way of eternal salvation, which the Bishop Saint Apollinaris showed by his teaching and martyrdom, and grant, through, his intercession, that we may so persevere in keeping your commandments as to merit being crowned with him. 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: Those who have been baptized into Jesus Christ and who live as his disciples enter into a new family – a family of children of God, of brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus changes the order of relationships and shows that true kinship is not just a matter of flesh and blood. Our adoption as sons and daughters of God transforms all of our relationships and requires a new order of loyalty to God first and to his kingdom of righteousness and peace. Do you want to grow in love and friendship? Allow God's Holy Spirit to transform your heart, mind, and will to enable you to love freely and generously as he loves.

Wednesday, July 21 ~ Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9 On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

Meditation: Jesus' parable of the sower is aimed at the hearers of his word. There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear. Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else. Another type of hearer is the person who has many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is for ever too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word. He or she may work so hard that they are too tired to even think of anything else but their work. Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it. Do you hunger for God's word?

Prayer: O God, who for the glory of your name and the salvation of souls bestowed on the Priest Saint Lawrence of Brindisi a spirit of counsel and fortitude, grant, we pray, that in the same spirit, we may know what must be done and, through his intercession, bring it to completion. 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' teaching method was a very simple one. He used parables – short stories and images taken from everyday life to convey hidden truths about the kingdom of God. Like a skillful artist, Jesus painted evocative pictures with short and simple words. A good image can speak more loudly and clearly than many words. Jesus used the ordinary everyday images of life and nature to point to another order of reality – hidden, yet visible to those who had “eyes to see” and “ears to hear.” Do you filter out the noise and haste of this world, so that you can allow your ears to hear Christ's word with clarity, understanding and conviction of both mind and heart?

Thursday, July 22 ~ Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Mary Magdalene

Holy Gospel: John 20:1-2, 11-18 On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and then reported what he told her.

Meditation: How easy it is to miss the Lord when our focus is on ourselves! Mary Magdalene did not at first recognize the Lord because her focus was on the empty tomb and on her own grief. It took only one word from the Master, when he called her by name, for Mary to recognize him. Mary's message to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, is the very essence of Christianity. It is not enough that a Christian know about the Lord, but that we know him personally. It is not enough to argue about him, but to meet him. In the resurrection we encounter the living Lord who loves us personally and shares his glory with us.

Prayer: O God, whose Only Begotten Son entrusted Mary Magdalene before all others with announcing the great joy of the Resurrection, grant, we pray, that through her intercession and example we may proclaim the living Christ and come to see him reigning in your glory. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The Lord gives us "eyes of faith" to see the truth of his resurrection and victory over sin and death (ref. Ephesians 1:18). The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of our hope -- the hope that we will see God face to face and share in his everlasting glory and joy. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9). Do you recognize the Lord's presence with you, in his word, in his truth, in the sacraments, in the Eucharist, and in his church, the body of Christ?

Visit: The grotto in Saint Baume where Mary Magdalene lived ~ <https://www.saintebaume.org/grotto/>

Friday, July 23 ~ Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Bridget of Sweden, Religious

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:18-23 Jesus said to his disciples: "Hear the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the Kingdom without understanding it, and the Evil One comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirty-fold."

Meditation: This parable of Jesus is a warning to those who hear and who preach the word of God. What makes us ineffective and unresponsive to God's word? Preoccupation with other things can distract us from what is truly important and worthwhile. And letting our hearts and minds be consumed with material things can easily weigh us down and draw us away from the treasure that lasts for eternity. God's word can only take root in a receptive heart which is docile and ready to hear what God has to say. One lesson is quite clear: the harvest is sure. While some seed will fall by the wayside and some fall on shallow ground and never come to maturity, and some be choked to death by the thorns; nonetheless a harvest will come. The seed that falls on good soil, on the heart that is receptive, will reap abundant fruit.

Prayer: O God, who guided Saint Bridget of Sweden along different paths of life and wondrously taught her the wisdom of the Cross as she contemplated the Passion of your Son, grant us, we pray, that,

walking worthily in our vocation, we may seek you in all things. 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: To respond to this parable, we need to look at the story as if we are the seed. Many who hear the Gospel never seem to “get it.” The message is forgotten before it ever takes root. Statistically, 50% of all Catholic youth who receive the sacraments disappear somewhere between age 18 and 35. Shallow roots fail to equip them to take the heat of our secular culture. Then there are the 89% of lifelong, regular churchgoers who, according to a Gallup Poll, embrace the values and lifestyles identical to those of their secular neighbors, devoid of anything rooted in the laws of God or the teachings of Jesus Christ. Their Catholic faith has been neutralized by poor theology, poor catechesis, and a focus on worldliness. Then there are those who stay away from serious sin, manage to do some good for some people, but all in all produce a mediocre harvest. Finally there are those who are not satisfied with just getting by. They sink their roots deep into the truths of Scripture, tradition, prayer and the sacraments, and as a result produce a bumper crop. So, what kind of seed are you?

Saturday, July 24 ~ Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint Sharbel (Charbel) Makhlūf, Priest**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 20:20-28 The mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, “What do you wish?” She answered him, “Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your Kingdom.” Jesus said in reply, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?” They said to him, “We can.” He replied, “My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Meditation: There are many who seek places of honor, position, and prestige. Many seem to have an unquenchable thirst for fame and recognition, to seek the limelight and be the center of attention, to have their voice or opinion heard regularly through a blog or social media, for example. Should we be surprised to see some of the disciples of Jesus thirsting for power, authority, and position? James and John, the sons of Zebedee, urged their mother to strike a deal with Jesus, their Master. They wanted the distinction of being in the highest position of authority and power, next to Jesus, of course! When Jesus called the twelve apostles to be his inner circle of disciples who would rule on his behalf, he did the unthinkable! He taught contrary to their understanding of power and position, by reversing the order of master and servant, lord and subject, first and last!

Prayer: O God, who called the Priest Saint Sharbel (Charbel) Makhlūf to the solitary combat of the desert and imbued him with all manner of devotion, grant us, we pray, that, being made imitators of the Lord's Passion, we may merit to be co-heirs of his Kingdom. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: What kind of cup does the Lord have in mind for us? For some such a cup entails physical suffering and the painful struggle of martyrdom. But for many, it entails the long routine of the Christian life, with all its daily sacrifices, disappointments, set-backs, challenges, struggles, and temptations. As disciples we must always be ready to lay down our lives in martyrdom for the sake of the gospel and be ready to lay it down each and every day in the little and big sacrifices required. What makes such sacrifice a joy rather than a burden? It is love — the kind of “love which God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (ref. Romans 5:5). An early church father summed up Jesus' teaching with the expression: “to serve is to reign with Christ.” We share in God's reign by laying down our lives in humble service and love for one another, just as Jesus did for our sake. Are you ready to lay down your life and to serve others as Jesus has taught and modeled for us?

Visit: National Basilica and Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon: <https://www.ourladyoflebanonshrine.com/>

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