

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)

“We are not perfectly free until we live in pure hope. For when our hope is pure, it no longer trusts exclusively in human and visible means, nor rests in any visible end. He who hopes in God trusts God, Whom he never sees, to bring him to the possession of things that are beyond imagination.”

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

**Monday, December 28 ~ Octave of Christmas
Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 2:13-18 When the magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, Out of Egypt I called my son. When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet: “A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.”

Meditation: During this octave of Christmas the Church celebrates the memory of the small children of the neighborhood of Bethlehem put to death by Herod. Sacrificed by a wicked monarch, these innocent lives bear witness to Christ who was persecuted from the time of His birth by a world which would not receive Him. It is Christ Himself who is at stake in this mass-murder of the children; already the choice, for or against Him, is put clearly before men. But the persecutors are powerless, for Christ came to perform a work of salvation that nothing can prevent; when He fell into the hands of His enemies at the time chosen by God it was to redeem the world by His own Blood. The joy of this Christmas Season is tempered today by a feeling of sadness. But the Church looks principally to the glory of the children, of these innocent victims, whom she shows us in heaven following the Lamb wherever He goes.

Prayer: O God, whom the Holy Innocents confessed and proclaimed on this day, not by speaking but by dying, grant, we pray, that the faith in your which we confess with our lips may also speak through our manner of life. Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection. 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: Many ask why God did not prevent this slaughter. Human suffering is indeed a mystery. No explanation seems to satisfy our human craving to understand. These innocent children and their parents suffered for Christ. Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom are the lot of all who chose to follow Jesus Christ. There is no crown without the cross. It was through Jesus' suffering, humiliation, and death on a cross, that our salvation was won. His death won life – eternal life for us. And his blood which was shed for our sake obtained pardon and reconciliation with our heavenly Father.

About the Holy Innocents: From a homily by Saint Augustine: “Dearest brethren, we celebrate the birthday of those children who were slaughtered, as the Gospel tells us, by that exceedingly cruel king, Herod. Let the earth, therefore, rejoice and the Church exult — she, the fruitful mother of so many heavenly champions and of such glorious virtues. Never, in fact, would that impious tyrant have been able to benefit these children by the sweetest kindness as much as he has done by his hatred. For as today's feast reveals, in the measure with which malice in all its fury was poured out upon the holy children, did

heaven's blessing stream down upon them. Blessed are you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah! You suffered the inhumanity of King Herod in the murder of your babes and thereby have become worthy to offer to the Lord a pure host of infants. In full right do we celebrate the heavenly birthday of these children whom the world caused to be born unto an eternally blessed life rather than that from their mothers' womb, for they attained the grace of everlasting life before the enjoyment of the present. The precious death of any martyr deserves high praise because of his heroic confession; the death of these children is precious in the sight of God because of the beatitude they gained so quickly. For already at the beginning of their lives they pass on. The end of the present life is for them the beginning of glory. These then, whom Herod's cruelty tore as sucklings from their mothers' bosom, are justly hailed as 'infant martyr flowers;' they were the Church's first blossoms, matured by the frost of persecution during the cold winter of unbelief."

Tuesday, December 29 ~ Octave of Christmas Saint Thomas Beckett, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:22-35 When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, They took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, He took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted – and you yourself a sword will pierce – so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Meditation: When Joseph and Mary presented the baby Jesus in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized this humble child of Bethlehem as the fulfillment of all the messianic prophecies, hopes, and prayers. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he prophesied that Jesus was to be "a revealing light to the Gentiles". The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of the Lord to those who are receptive and eager to receive him. Are you receptive? Do you recognize the indwelling presence of the Lord with you?

Prayer: O God, who gave the Martyr Saint Thomas Becket the courage to give up his life for the sake of justice, grant, through his intercession, that, renouncing our life for the sake of Christ in this world, we may find it in heaven. 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: There is a certain paradox for those blessed by the Lord. Mary was given the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. She received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. But her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away.

Wednesday, December 30 ~ Octave of Christmas

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:26-30 There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Meditation: What do you hope for? The hope which God places in our heart is the desire for the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness. Hope grows with prayer and age. Anna was pre-eminently a woman of great hope and expectation that God would fulfill all his promises. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she was found daily in the house of the Lord, attending to the Lord in prayer and speaking prophetically to

others about the Lord's promise to send a redeemer. She is a model of godliness to all believers as we advance in age. Advancing age and the disappointments of life can easily make us cynical and hopeless if we do not have our hope placed rightly. Anna's hope in God and his promises grew with age! She never ceased to worship God in faith and to pray with hope. Her hope and faith in God's promises fueled her indomitable zeal and fervor in prayer and service of God's people.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that the newness of the Nativity in the flesh of your Only Begotten Son may set us free, for ancient servitude holds us bound beneath the yoke of sin. 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: A logical question is how do we grow in hope? The answer is simple: by placing our trust in the promises of God the father and his son, Jesus Christ, and relying not on our own strength, but on the grace and help of the Holy Spirit. As Fr. Thomas Merton once wrote: "We are not perfectly free until we live in pure hope. For when our hope is pure, it no longer trusts exclusively in human and visible means, nor rests in any visible end. He who hopes in God trusts God, Whom he never sees, to bring him to the possession of things that are beyond imagination." (Excerpted from "No Man is an Island")

Thursday, December 31 ~ Octave of Christmas Saint Sylvester I, Pope

Holy Gospel: John 1:1-18 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth. John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

Meditation: Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother. From the time of the Apostles the Christian faith has insisted on the incarnation of God's Son "who has come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2). Jesus became the partaker of our humanity so we could be partakers of his divinity (2 Peter 1:4). God's purpose for us, even from the beginning of his creation, is that we would be fully united with Him. By our being united in Jesus, God becomes our Father and we become his sons and daughters.

Prayer: Come, O Lord, to the help of your people, sustained by the intercession of Pope Saint Sylvester, so that, running the course of this present life under your guidance we may happily attain life without end. 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: Saint Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great early Church fathers (330-395 AD) wrote: "Sick, our nature demanded to be healed; fallen, to be raised up; dead, to rise again. We had lost the possession of the good; it was necessary for it to be given back to us. Closed in darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?" If we are going to behold the glory of God, we will do so through Jesus Christ. Let each of us give thanks from the heart to God the Father for sending his only begotten Son to redeem us, and to show us the one path that leads to eternal life.

Note: The year 2020 will be memorable for many reasons, chiefly the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us remember in prayer those who died during the pandemic, pray for those who suffered and sacrificed as a result of the pandemic, and pray that our collective hopes for the New Year will be answered by God.

**Friday, January 1 ~ Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God
~ A Holy Day of Obligation ~**

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:16-21 The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Meditation: What's the significance of a name? For the Jewish people the giving of a name had great importance. When a name was given it represented what that person should be in the future. An unknown name meant that someone could not be completely known. To not acknowledge someone's name meant both denial of the person, destruction of their personality, and change in their destiny. A person's name expressed the reality of his or her being at its deepest level. A Jewish child was named at the time of circumcision, eight days after birth. This rite was instituted by God as an outward sign to single out those who belonged to the chosen people. It was a sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his posterity.

Prayer: O God, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary bestowed on the human race the grace of eternal salvation, grant, we pray, that we may experience the intercession of her, through whom we were found worthy to receive the author of life, 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: In fulfillment of this precept, Mary's newborn child is given the name Jesus on the eighth day according to the Jewish custom. Joseph and Mary gave the name Jesus because that is the name given by God's messenger before Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb. This name signifies Jesus' identity and his mission. The literal Hebrew means the Lord saves. Since God alone can forgive sins, it is God who, in Jesus his eternal Son made man will save his people from their sins (ref. Matthew 1:21). In the birth and naming of this child we see the wondrous design and plan of God in giving us a Savior who would bring us grace, mercy, and freedom from the power of sin and the fear of death. The name "Jesus" signifies that the very name of God is present in the person of his Son who became man for our salvation. Peter the Apostle exclaimed that there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved (ref. Acts 2:12). In the name of Jesus demons flee, cripples walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised. His name is exalted far above every other name (ref. Philippians 2:9-11). The name Jesus is at the heart of all Christian prayer. It is through and in Jesus that we pray to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians have died with one word on the lips, the name of Jesus. Do you exalt the name of Jesus and pray with confidence in his name?

About this Solemnity: "Mary, the all-holy ever-virgin Mother of God, is the masterwork of the mission of the Son and the Spirit in the fullness of time. For the first time in the plan of salvation and because his Spirit had prepared her, the Father found the dwelling place where his Son and his Spirit could dwell among men. In this sense the Church's Tradition has often read the most beautiful texts on wisdom in relation to Mary. Mary is acclaimed and represented in the liturgy as the 'Seat of Wisdom' " (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 721).

**Holy Mother of God,
Thank you for the "yes" of your life.
Thank you for saying yes to being the Mother of Jesus.
Thank you for saying yes to being our Mother, too.
Thank you!
Please teach us to be like you: humble, loving, never quitting, following Him.
Please, Mother, teach us to love God so much that we want only His Will.
Protect us, Holy Mary. Protect your children.
Please Mother, bring our lives to the Heart of Jesus.
Be our advocate, our strength, our joy. Amen.**

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