

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)

“Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to God's heart. You must speak to Jesus not only with your lips, but with your heart. In fact on certain occasions you should only speak to Him with your heart.” ~SAINT PIO OF PIETRELCINA (PADRE PIO)

Monday, September 21 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Matthew, Apostle

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: What did Jesus see in Matthew? Others saw Matthew as a cheat a sinner. But Jesus saw something in Matthew that others did not. Matthew's heart must have yearned for God, even though he dare not show his face in a synagogue - the Jewish house of prayer and the study of Torah - God's law. When Jesus saw Matthew sitting at his tax office counting his day's profit, Jesus spoke only two words: “follow me.” And so he did; those two words changed Matthew from a self-serving profiteer to a God-serving apostle who would bring the treasures of God's kingdom to the poor and needy. Saint John Chrysostom described Matthew's calling: “Why did Jesus not call Matthew at the same time as he called Peter and John and the rest? He came to each one at a particular time when he knew that they would respond to him. He came at a different time to call Matthew when he was assured that Matthew would surrender to his call. Similarly, he called Paul at a different time when he was vulnerable, after the resurrection, something like a hunter going after his quarry. For he who is acquainted with our inmost hearts and knows the secrets of our minds knows when each one of us is ready to respond fully. Therefore he did not call them all together at the beginning, when Matthew was still in a hardened condition. Rather, only after countless miracles, after his fame spread abroad, did he call Matthew. He knew Matthew had been softened for full responsiveness.”

Prayer: O God, who with untold mercy were pleased to choose as an Apostle Saint Matthew, the tax collector, grant that, sustained by his example and intercession, we may merit to hold firm in following 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: Jesus always seeks out those in the greatest need, just as he did with Matthew. A true physician seeks healing of the whole person – body, mind, and spirit. Jesus came as the divine physician and good shepherd to care for his people and to restore them to wholeness of life. The orthodox were so preoccupied with their own practice of religion that they neglected to help the very people who needed spiritual care. Their religion was selfish because they didn't want to have anything to do with people not like themselves. Jesus stated his mission in unequivocal terms: *I came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners*. Ironically the orthodox were as needy as those they despised. Recall Saint Paul's words: *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). And yet all are invited to turn away from sin as Jesus invites us to follow him just as he did Matthew.

Tuesday, September 22 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 8:19-21 The mother of Jesus and his brothers came to him but were unable to join him because of the crowd. He was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.” He said to them in reply, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it.”

Meditation: From time to time it is good to ask ourselves some basic questions. In light of today's Gospel we might ask ourselves: "What is the essence of my being a Christian?" It is certainly more than doctrine, precepts, and commandments. It is first and foremost a relationship – a relationship of trust, affection, commitment, loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion, mercy, helpfulness, encouragement, support, strength, protection, and so many other qualities that bind people together in mutual love and unity. And not just for the sake of living these qualities on their own, but imitating Jesus Christ our Savior and Redeemer who taught us the importance of living these by living a life in him.

Prayer: O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbor, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. 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 Christ is the Word incarnate, Jesus is God's love incarnate – God's love made visible in human flesh (1 John 4:9-10). That is why Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and the shepherd who seeks out the sheep who have strayed and lost their way. God is like the father who yearns for his prodigal son to return home and then throws a great party for his son when he has a change of heart and comes back (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus offered up his life on the cross for our sake, so that we could be forgiven and restored to unity and friendship with God. It is through Jesus that we become the adopted children of God - his own sons and daughters. That is why Jesus told his disciples that they would have many new friends and family relationships in his kingdom. Whoever does the will of God is a friend of God and a member of his family - his sons and daughters who have been ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Wednesday, September 23 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:1-6 Jesus summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and let no one take a second tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from there. And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them." Then they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Meditation: We see in today's Gospel where Jesus gave power and authority to his apostles. But we must also recognize that he gave to all of his disciples (including each of us) other kinds of "power and authority" through our God-given gift, abilities and talents so that we may exercise them in our personal lives in service to God and his people. God's word has power to change and transform our lives in one way or another, on one level or another. Jesus gave his apostles both power and authority to speak and to act in his name – to cast out evil spirits, to heal, and to speak the word of God. When Jesus spoke of power and authority he did something unheard of. He wedded power and authority with love and humility. The *world* and the *flesh* seek power for selfish gain. Jesus teaches each of us to use it for the good of our neighbor. What have you done lately for the good of your neighbor?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who, by a singular grace, gave the Priest Saint Pio a share in the Cross of your Son and, by means of his ministry, renewed the wonders of your mercy, grant that through his intercession we may be united constantly to the sufferings of Christ, and so brought happily to the glory of the 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.

Contemplation: Sometimes we think we must do "great" things in order to imitate Christ. Not so. Look at the simple acts of charity and kindness that we can extend to one another in our families, at our places of work, in our schools, in our neighborhoods, or to total strangers for that matter, in helping those who need help of one type or another. In these day-to-day acts of charity and kindness we imitate Christ, and that's what living our faith in witness to Christ is all about.

About Saint Padre Pio: Born to a southern Italian farm family, the son of Grazio, a shepherd. At age 15 he entered the novitiate of the Capuchin Friars in Morcone, and joined the order at age 19. He suffered several health problems, and at one point his family thought he had tuberculosis. He was ordained at age 22 on 10 August 1910. While praying before a cross on September 20, 1918, Padre Pio received the stigmata. He is the first priest ever to be so blessed. As word spread, especially after American soldiers brought home stories of Padre Pio following WWII, the priest himself became a point of pilgrimage for

both the pious and the curious. He would hear confessions by the hour, reportedly able to read the consciences of those who held back. He was reportedly able to bi-locate, levitate, and heal by touch. In 1956 he founded the House for the Relief of Suffering, a hospital that serves 60,000 a year. Padre Pio died on September 23, 1968 at age 81. Today there are over 400,000 members worldwide in prayer groups begun by Padre Pio in the 1920s. His canonization miracle involved the cure of Matteo Pio Colella, age 7, the son of a doctor who works in the House for Relief of Suffering, the hospital in San Giovanni Rotondo. On the night of June 20, 2000, Matteo was admitted to the intensive care unit of the hospital with meningitis. By morning doctors had lost hope for him as nine of the boy's internal organs had ceased to give signs of life. That night, during a prayer vigil attended by Matteo's mother and some Capuchin friars of Padre Pio's monastery, the child's condition improved suddenly. When he awoke from the coma, Matteo said that he had seen an elderly man with a white beard and a long, brown habit, who said to him: "Don't worry, you will soon be cured." The miracle was approved by the Congregation and (now Saint) Pope John Paul II on December 20, 2001.

Thursday, September 24 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:7-9 Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was greatly perplexed because some were saying, "John has been raised from the dead;" others were saying, "Elijah has appeared;" still others, "One of the ancient prophets has arisen." But Herod said, "John I beheaded. Who then is this about whom I hear such things?" And he kept trying to see him.

Meditation: King Herod had respected and feared John the Baptist as a great prophet and servant of God. John, however did not fear to rebuke Herod for his adulterous affair with his brother's wife. Herod, though, was more of what we would call today a "people pleaser" than one who lived one's life in a manner that was pleasing to God. Herod not only imprisoned John to silence him, but he also beheaded him simply to please his family and friends. So when reports of Jesus' miracles and teaching reach Herod's court, Herod became very troubled in conscience. He thought that John the Baptist had risen from the dead! Herod sought to meet Jesus more out of curiosity and fear than out of a sincere desire to know God's will. He wanted to meet Jesus - not to follow him but to prevent him from troubling his conscience any further. We can try to rid ourselves of guilt and sin by suppressing the truth or by ridding ourselves of anyone or anything that points us to the truth. No power on earth, however, can remove a guilty conscience or free us from slavery to sin - only God can set us free through the atoning sacrifice which his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ made for us on the cross.

Prayer: O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbor, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. 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: People often ask how we can find true peace with ourselves and with God. Always remember that the Lord Jesus shows us the way. Jesus explained to his followers, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Only Jesus can set us free, and this can happen ONLY if we listen to his voice and obey his divine words of truth will we find true peace, joy, and freedom to live as sons and daughters of God. And so we might ask ourselves today: Does God's word take priority in my daily life? Or do I allow other human voices, opinions and messages distract me or lead me astray? The Lord Jesus promises to be with us and to guide us continually if we will listen to his voice and obey his word. Jesus never leads us astray - he leads us along life's path to the only way to Heaven - through him, with him and in him.

Friday, September 25 ~ Twenty-Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:18-22 Once when Jesus was praying in solitude, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'" Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said in reply, "The Christ of God." He rebuked them and directed them not to tell this to anyone. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."

Meditation: When Jesus asks "But who do YOU say that I am?" he asks that questions not only of those present in today's Gospel, but also to each of us. Who is Jesus to you? What difference does Jesus make in your life? Many in Israel recognized Jesus as a mighty man of God, even comparing him with the greatest of the prophets. Peter, always quick to respond whenever Jesus spoke, professed that Jesus was truly the "Christ of God" - "the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). No mortal being could have

revealed this to Peter, but only God. Through the "eyes of faith" Peter discovered who Jesus truly was. Peter recognized that Jesus was much more than a great teacher, prophet, and miracle worker. Peter was the first apostle to publicly declare that Jesus was the *Anointed One*, consecrated by the Father and sent into the world to redeem a fallen human race enslaved to sin and cut off from eternal life with God (Luke 9:20, Acts 2:14-36). The word for "Christ" in Greek is a translation of the Hebrew word for "Messiah" - both words literally mean the *Anointed One*. Why did Jesus command his disciples to be silent about his identity as the anointed Son of God? They were, after all, appointed to proclaim the good news to everyone. Jesus knew that they did not yet fully understand his mission and how he would accomplish it. Saint Cyril of Alexandria, a Father of the Church, explains the reason for this silence: "There were things yet unfulfilled which must also be included in their preaching about him. They must also proclaim the cross, the passion, and the death in the flesh. They must preach the resurrection of the dead, that great and truly glorious sign by which testimony is borne him that the Emmanuel is truly God and by nature the Son of God the Father. He utterly abolished death and wiped out destruction. He robbed hell, and overthrew the tyranny of the enemy. He took away the sin of the world, opened the gates above to the dwellers upon earth, and united earth to heaven. These things proved him to be, as I said, in truth God. He commanded them, therefore, to guard the mystery by a seasonable silence until the whole plan of the dispensation should arrive at a suitable conclusion" (*Commentary on Luke, Homily 49*).

Prayer: O God, who founded all the commands of your sacred Law upon love of you and of our neighbor, grant that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life. 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 told his disciples that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and die in order that God's work of redemption might be accomplished. How startled the disciples were when they heard this word. How different are God's thoughts and ways from our thoughts and ways (Isaiah 55:8). It was through humiliation, suffering, and death on the cross that Jesus broke the powers of sin and death and won for us eternal life and freedom from the slavery of sin and from the oppression of our enemy, Satan, the father of lies and the deceiver of humankind. So if we want to share in the victory of the Lord Jesus, then we must also take up our cross and follow where, how and when he leads us. What is the "cross" that you and I must take up each day? When my will does not align with God's will, then I must change my course, my path, and align my will with that of God - God's will must be done as in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done." To know Jesus Christ is to know the power of his victory on the cross where he defeated sin and conquered death through his resurrection. The Holy Spirit gives each of us the gifts and strength we need to live as sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit gives us *faith* to know the Lord Jesus personally as our Redeemer, and the *power* to live the gospel faithfully, and the *courage* to witness to others the joy, truth, and freedom of the Gospel. Who do you say that Jesus is?

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