

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)

“Faith is the gift of our whole being to Truth, to the Word. It is the center and meaning of all existence. Faith is rejecting all that is not Christ so that all life, truth, hope is found in Him. Faith relies completely on Him in perfect trust ... letting Him take care of us without knowing how He will do so.”

EXCERPTED FROM “LIFE AND HOLINESS” BY FR. THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

Monday, January 18 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 2:18-22 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were accustomed to fast. People came to Jesus and objected, “Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins.”

Meditation: The disciples of John the Baptist were upset with Jesus’ disciples because they did not fast. Fasting was one of the three most important religious duties, along with prayer and almsgiving. Jesus gave a simple explanation. There’s a time for fasting and a time for feasting. To walk as a disciple with Jesus is to experience a whole new joy of relationship akin to the joy of the wedding party in celebrating with the groom and bride their wedding bliss. But there also comes a time when the Lord’s disciples must bear the cross of affliction and purification. For the disciple there is both a time for rejoicing in the Lord’s presence and celebrating his goodness and a time for seeking the Lord with humility and fasting and for mourning over sin. Do you take joy in the Lord’s presence with you and do you express sorrow and contrition for your sins?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who govern all things, both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times. 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: In Jesus’ times, wine was stored in wineskins, not bottles. New wine poured into skins was still fermenting. The gases exerted gave pressure. New wine skins were elastic enough to take the pressure, but old wine skins easily burst because they were hard. What did Jesus mean by this comparison? Are we to reject the old in place of the new? Just as there is a right place and a right time for fasting and for feasting, so there is a right place for the old as well as the new. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old (Matthew 13:52). How impoverished we would be if we only had the Old Testament or the New Testament, rather than both. The Lord gives us wisdom so we can make the best use of both the old and the new. He doesn’t want us to hold rigidly to the past and to be resistant to the new work of his Holy Spirit in our lives. He wants our minds and hearts to be like new wine skins – open and ready to receive the new wine of the Holy Spirit. Are you eager to grow in the knowledge and understanding of God’s word and plan for your life?

Tuesday, January 19 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 2:23-28 As Jesus was passing through a field of grain on the Sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. At this the Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared

it with his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Meditation: What does the commandment "keep holy the Sabbath (the Lord's Day)" require of us? Or better yet, what is the primary intention behind this command? The religious leaders confronted Jesus on this issue. The "Sabbath rest" was meant to be a time to remember and celebrate God's goodness and the goodness of his work, both in creation and redemption. It was and still is a day set apart for the praise and worship of God (for Catholics that means attending Mass), for praising God's work of creation, and his saving actions on our behalf. It was intended to bring everyday work to a halt and to provide needed rest and refreshment – to "re-create" ourselves in him. Jesus' disciples are scolded by the scribes and Pharisees, not for plucking and eating corn from the fields, but for doing so on the Sabbath.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who govern all things, both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times. 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: We Catholics celebrate Sunday as the Lord's Day, to commemorate God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ and the new work of creation he accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection. Taking the "sabbath rest" is a way of expressing honor to God for all that he has done for us. Such "rest" however does not exempt us from our love for our neighbor, nor does it mean that we take a "rest" from attending Mass and hearing the Living Word of God, and receiving the greatest of all gifts – the Eucharist, Christ's Body and Blood. This day of rest should be spent with family, and should be a day of rest away from sports practices and workouts, sporting events, and other "extracurricular events" in our schools. In this era of people trying to pack ten pounds into a five-pound bag, each of us needs to ask: has Sunday (the Lord's Day) lost its meaning in my life? Do I honor the Lord in the way I celebrate Sunday – the Lord's Day? Or do I treat Sunday as if it is simply another day of the week? If it is the latter, remember the commandment "Remember to keep Holy the Lord's day" – notice this is not a suggestion, but a commandment given to us by God.

Wednesday, January 20 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time Saint Fabian, Pope and Martyr; Saint Sebastian, Martyr

Holy Gospel: Mark 3:1-6 Jesus entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched Jesus closely to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Come up here before us." Then he said to the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?" But they remained silent. Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.

Meditation: In their usual folly the scribes and Pharisees wanted to catch Jesus in the act of breaking the Sabbath ritual so they might accuse him of breaking God's law. In a few penetrating words Luke records that Jesus knew their thoughts. They were filled with fury and contempt for Jesus because they put their own thoughts of right and wrong above God. They were ensnared in their own legalism because they did not understand or see the purpose of God. Jesus shows their fallacy by pointing to God's intention for the Sabbath: to do good and to save life rather than to do evil or to destroy life.

Prayer ~ Saint Fabian: O God, glory of your Priests, grant we pray, that, helped by the intercession of your Martyr Saint Fabian, we may make progress by communion in the faith and by worthy service. 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 ~ Saint Sebastian: Grant us, we pray, O Lord, a spirit of fortitude, so that taught by the glorious example of your Martyr Saint Sebastian, we may learn to obey you rather than men. 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: Taking our "sabbath rest" does not mean that we ignore the needs of others. Are hospitals closed on Sundays? Of course not. Do doctors, nurses, EMT's and others shut down simply because it is Sunday, the Lord's Day? No. The health and well-being of others is a daily activity, especially those who need healing. Jesus healing the man with the withered hand is an act of love, an act of caring for a person in need – something that can and should occur each and every day in the lives who call themselves disciples of Christ.

Thursday, January 21 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Mark 3:7-12 Jesus withdrew toward the sea with his disciples. A large number of people followed from Galilee and from Judea. Hearing what he was doing, a large number of people came to him also from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from beyond the Jordan, and from the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him. He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him. And whenever unclean spirits saw him they would fall down before him and shout, "You are the Son of God." He warned them sternly not to make him known.

Meditation: Jesus offered freedom to everyone who sought him out. Wherever Jesus went the people came to him because they had heard all the things he did. They were hungry for God and desired healing from their afflictions. In faith they pressed upon Jesus to touch him. As they did so power came from Jesus and they were healed. Even demons trembled in the presence of Jesus and acknowledged his true identity: You are the Son of God.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who choose what is weak in the world to confound the strong, mercifully grant, that we, who celebrate the heavenly birthday of your Martyr Saint Agnes, may follow her constancy in the faith. 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: Is there anything holding you back from giving yourself unreservedly to God? When you hear God's word and consider all that Jesus did, how do you respond? With doubt or with expectant faith? With skepticism or with confident expectation? Ask the Lord the increase your faith in his saving power and grace.

Friday, January 22 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time
Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children
Anniversary of Roe v. Wade

Holy Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12a When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Meditation: As Christ's disciples, we are called by faith to adhere to the moral code – to do good and avoid evil. This can become challenging at times when people and advocacy groups "spin" the truth in order to promote and gain acceptance for their cause. In our world there are many who have watered down the fact that abortion is an evil act; abortion is a mortal sin; abortion is the taking of an innocent human life. There are those who place laws created by humans above the laws of God, not recognizing that laws of human creation are not designed to lead us to eternal life – but adherence to God's laws and the teachings of Christ and his Church are the path to eternal life. Thus we must constantly be on guard to do what is right and good and true according to God's way, Christ's way – not the way of the world. As Saint John Chrysostom once noted: " 'I am a victim of violence in my nature,' you say. 'I love Christ, yet my nature compels me to sin.' If you were in fact compelled to sin, if you were the victim of violence, then you would be forgiven for it. On the other hand, if you sin through idleness, do not expect forgiveness. But let us look at the question a moment to discover if we do commit sins by compulsion, under pressure of violence, rather than through idleness or serious negligence. It is written: 'Thou shalt not kill.' But who compels you to kill? Who forces you to do it? On the contrary, you have to do violence to your own nature to kill someone. Which of us would light-heartedly cut a neighbor's throat? Who would gladly stain his hands with blood? No one. So the facts are the exact opposite of your contention. To sin, you have to force yourself. God has given our nature the gift of mutual love as a result of which every living creature loves its own kind, every human being loves his neighbor. Do you see? Our nature predisposes us to virtue. It is the vices that are contrary to nature. If they win a victory, it is the fault of serious

negligence on our part. The conclusion is clearly apparent: virtue is consistent with our nature, whereas vice is opposed to it." On this anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, let us always be mindful of the virtues grounded in Truth – the truths of Christ (who is Truth personified), and the timeless truths of sacred scripture. Strip the whitewash and sanitized language of "choice" and "reproductive health" away from abortion to see what it really is – the taking of an innocent, human life in the womb. We also pray for those facing this decision, that they will open their minds and hearts to do God's will, to follow God's law of life ("Thou shall not kill.") and to protect the innocent life in the womb.

Prayer: God our Creator, we give thanks to you, who alone have the power to impart the breath of life as you form each of us in our mother's womb; grant, we pray, that we, whom you have made stewards of creation, may remain faithful to this sacred trust and constant in safeguarding the dignity of every human 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.

Prayer for the Unborn Child: Almighty God, our Father, you who have given us life and intended us to have it forever, grant us your blessings. Enlighten our minds to an awareness and to a renewed conviction that all human life is sacred because it is created in your image and likeness. Help us to teach by word and the example of our lives that life occupies the first place, that all human life is precious because it is the gift of God whose love is infinite. Give us the strength to defend human life against every influence or action that threatens or weakens it, as well as the strength to make every life more human in all its aspects. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer to end abortion: Lord God, I thank you today for the gift of my life, And for the lives of all my brothers and sisters. I know there is nothing that destroys more life than abortion, Yet I rejoice that you have conquered death by the Resurrection of Your Son. I am ready to do my part in ending abortion. Today I commit myself never to be silent, never to be passive, never to be forgetful of the unborn. I commit myself to be active in the pro-life movement, and never to stop defending life until all my brothers and sisters are protected, and our nation once again becomes a nation with liberty and justice not just for some, but for all, through Christ our Lord. Amen!

We pray for all whose hearts ache from the sin of abortion, that God will soothe and heal them with the balm of his love, compassion and mercy;

We pray for mothers broken by the memory of a child lost to abortion, that through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, the gentle and merciful love of God may heal their innermost being;

We pray for everyone who is haunted by the memory of abortion, that they might come to know repentance, forgiveness, mercy, and peace.

Contemplation: What is the good life, the ultimate end and the purpose of life? Is it not happiness, which is none other than the complete good, the sum of all goods, leaving nothing more to be desired? Jesus addresses this question in his sermon on the mount. The word "beatitude" literally means "happiness" or "blessedness." The beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness that God has placed in every heart. They teach us the final end to which God calls us, namely the coming of God's kingdom (Matthew 4:17), the vision of God (Matthew 5:8; 1 John 2;1), entering into the joy of the Lord (Matthew 25:21-23) and into his rest (Hebrews 4:7-11). Jesus' beatitudes also confront us with decisive choices concerning the life we pursue here on earth and the use we make of the goods he puts at our disposal. God alone satisfies – far above that possible by any human. And so we must ask ourselves: Do you seek the highest good, the total good, the moral good, which is above all else?

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