

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 month of October – a Marian Month – is dedicated to the Holy Rosary.

“Humility, obedience, meekness, and love are the virtues that shine through the Cross and the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. O my Jesus, help me imitate You!”

~SAINT ANTHONY CLARET

Monday, October 25 ~ Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 13:10-17 Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. And a woman was there who for eighteen years had been crippled by a spirit; she was bent over, completely incapable of standing erect. When Jesus saw her, he called to her and said, “Woman, you are set free of your infirmity.” He laid his hands on her, and she at once stood up straight and glorified God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant that Jesus had cured on the Sabbath, said to the crowd in reply, “There are six days when work should be done. Come on those days to be cured, not on the Sabbath day.” The Lord said to him in reply, “Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it out for watering? This daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years now, ought she not to have been set free on the Sabbath day from this bondage?” When he said this, all his adversaries were humiliated; and the whole crowd rejoiced at all the splendid deeds done by him.

Meditation: An infirmity, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, can come upon us for a variety of reasons, and God can use such occasions for some purpose that we do not readily understand. When Jesus encountered an elderly woman who was spent of her strength and unable to stand upright, he gave her words of faith and freedom and he restored her to health. She must have suffered much, both physically and spiritually for eighteen years, since Jesus remarked that Satan had bound her. How can Satan do this? The scriptures indicate that Satan can act in the world with malice and can cause injuries of a spiritual nature, and indirectly even of a physical nature. Satan's power, however, is not infinite. He cannot prevent the building up of God's kingdom or reign in our lives. Jesus demonstrates the power and authority of God's kingdom in releasing people who are oppressed by physical and emotional sickness, by personal weakness and sin, and by the harassment of the evil one in their lives. It took only one word from Jesus to release this woman instantly of her infirmity. Do you believe in the power of Jesus to release you from affliction and oppression?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, increase our faith, hope and charity, and make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise. 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: The Jewish leaders were indignant that Jesus would perform such a miraculous work on the Sabbath, the holy day of rest. They were so caught up in their ritual observance of the Sabbath that they lost sight of God's mercy and goodness. Jesus healed on the Sabbath because God does not rest from showing his mercy and love, ever. God's word has power to change us, spiritually, physically, and emotionally. And so today we must look within, be introspective, and ask ourselves if there is anything that keeps us bound up or that weighs us down? Let the Lord speak his word to you through sacred scripture and prayer, and give you true freedom, peace and joy.

Tuesday, October 26 ~ Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 13:18-21 Jesus said, “What is the Kingdom of God like? To what can I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that a man took and planted in the garden. When it was fully grown, it became a large bush and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches.” Again he said, “To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch of dough was leavened.”

Meditation: What can mustard seeds and leaven teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to be a tree which attracted numerous birds because they loved the little black mustard seed it produced. God's kingdom works in a similar fashion. It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within. Leaven is another powerful agent of change. A lump of dough left to itself remains just what it is, a lump of dough. But when the leaven is added to it a transformation takes place which produces rich and wholesome bread when heated -- the staple of life for humans. The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers. When we yield to Jesus Christ, our lives are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Paul the Apostle says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, increase our faith, hope and charity, and make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise. 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: Jesus answers his own rhetorical questions with marvelous images -- the tiny seed that grows into the large bush, the yeast that transforms the flour into an abundance of bread. We know this -- that a small thing can have a big effect, as we have known a suggestion, a hope, an idea -- followed -- to lead to a whole career or way of life. From a chance meeting comes a fruitful relationship; from a small kindness comes -- well, salvation. To me, this is about Faith and Hope -- especially that my little faith and smaller abilities may yet help build "the Kingdom of Heaven." So although I continue to weep and groan, I pray each day, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done." A good question for today is: What can I do today that might be the seed or the bit of yeast that will grow into the Kingdom for others? That's a good question, and may be the right question for my readers. But -- true confession here! -- having considered this Gospel, I've discovered the question truly rhetorical (because I have an answer) that I've been trying to avoid -- that I am finally asking myself today is: What little things (or big things) must I change in my life so that I will allow God to reign in me?

Wednesday, October 27 ~ Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 13:22-30 Jesus passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" He answered them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, 'Lord, open the door for us.' He will say to you in reply, 'I do not know where you are from.' And you will say, 'We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.' Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the Kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Meditation: What does the image of a simple, ordinary door say to us about the kingdom of God? Jesus' story about the door being shut to those who come too late suggests they had offended their host and deserved to be excluded. It was customary for teachers in Jesus' time to close the door on tardy students and not allow them back for a whole week in order to teach them a lesson in discipline and faithfulness. Jesus told this story in response to the question of who will make it to heaven. Many rabbis held that all Israel would be saved, except for a few blatant sinners who excluded themselves! After all, they were specially chosen by God when he established a covenant with them.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, increase our faith, hope and charity, and make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise. 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: Notice how Jesus doesn't directly answer the question. But his response is nonetheless unsettling on two counts. First, Jesus surprised his listeners by saying that one's membership as a covenanted people does not automatically mean entry into the kingdom of God. Second, Jesus asserts that many from the gentile nations would enter God's kingdom. God's invitation is open to Jew and Gentile alike. But Jesus warns that we can be excluded if we do not strive to enter by the narrow door. What did Jesus mean by this expression? The door which Jesus had in mind was himself. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved (John 10:9). Jesus opens the way for us to enter into God's kingdom

through the cross where he laid down his life as an atoning sacrifice for each of our sins. If we want to enter and remain citizens of God's kingdom, then each of us must follow Jesus in the way of the cross. The word "strive" can also be translated "agony." To enter the kingdom of God one must struggle against the forces of temptation to sin and whatever holds us back from doing the will of God (even apathy, indifference, and compromise, to name a few).

Thursday, October 28 ~ Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:12-16 Jesus went up to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alpheus, Simon who was called a Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Meditation: In choosing the 12 Apostles, we see a characteristic feature of God's work – Jesus chose very ordinary people, from everyday walks of life. Sinners all, they were non-professionals, who had no wealth or position. They were chosen from the common people who did ordinary things, had no special education, and no social advantages. Jesus wanted ordinary people who could take an assignment and do it extraordinarily well. He chose these men, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power. When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not shrug back because we think that we have little or nothing to offer. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom.

Prayer: O God, who by the blessed Apostles have brought us to acknowledge your name, graciously grant, through the intercession of Saints Simon and Jude, that the Church may constantly grow by increase of the peoples who believe in you. 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 is God's call to you? And are you responding to God's call? Just as Jesus called the 12 Apostles in various ways to "Come, follow me..." Jesus extends this same invitation to each one of us, to share in his mission, to live our lives according to the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ. We, too, are ordinary, everyday people, all capable of achieving many things – great and small – as Christ's followers, as his disciples. What's holding you back from giving yourself entirely over to God? Are you ready to respond to Jesus' invitation of "Come, follow me..." or is something holding you back?

Friday, October 29 ~ Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 14:1-6 On a Sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. In front of him there was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus spoke to the scholars of the law and Pharisees in reply, asking, "Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath or not?" But they kept silent; so he took the man and, after he had healed him, dismissed him. Then he said to them "Who among you, if your son or ox falls into a cistern, would not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" But they were unable to answer his question.

Meditation: In our increasingly busy world where we regularly try to pack ten pounds of activities into a five-pound bag, today we should give an honest assessment of how each of us approaches the commandment to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest to honor the Lord. Obviously there is a balance to be struck here. The Pharisees were convinced that Jesus was a reckless Sabbath-breaker. The Gospels record seven incidents in which Jesus healed people on the Sabbath - the seventh day of the week set apart for rest and the worship of God. You would think Jesus' miracles on the Sabbath day of rest would draw admiration and gratitude from all. Unfortunately, each incident seemed to incite increasing hostility from the religious leaders who held an interpretation that went beyond God's intention for the Sabbath day of rest. They were certain that Jesus was a dangerous and irreligious man, a Sabbath-breaker, who must be stopped at all costs. But what about ourselves? How do we treat Sunday (the Sabbath for Christians)? Do we make going to Mass a priority because we want to give fitting praise, worship and thanksgiving to God, and to be nourished by the words of sacred scripture and the Body and Blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ? Do we have a desire to "want" to go to Mass, versus a drag-your-feet attitude of "do I have to go to Mass?" Do I place sports, practices, rehearsals, sleep, shopping, travel, time in the office to catch up, yard work, et cetera above Mass? Or do I make Mass a priority recognizing that I can do these other things later? After Mass, am I cheating myself out of a much-needed day of rest by choosing instead to pack ten pounds of activities into a five-pound bag?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, increase our faith, hope and charity, and make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise. 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: Why did God give the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath and enjoined his people to refrain from work on that day? The "Sabbath rest" was (and is still) meant to be a time to remember and celebrate God's goodness and the goodness of his works, both in creation and redemption. It was (and still is) a day set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on our behalf. It was (and still is) intended to bring everyday work to a halt and to provide needed rest and refreshment. It was not, however, intended to put a stop to love of God and love of neighbor. The law of love supersedes the law of rest! Jesus shows the fallacy of the Pharisees' legalism by pointing to God's intention for the Sabbath: to do good and to heal. Are hospitals closed on Sundays? Of course not. The need for physical healing is a constancy in our lives. So is spiritual healing, which is just as important. That is why the Sabbath remains an important day in our lives to get the spiritual nourishment we need to keep ourselves spiritually fit in order to live our lives as disciples of Christ.

Saturday, October 30 ~ Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 14:1,7-11 On a Sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, 'Give your place to this man,' and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, 'My friend, move up to a higher position.' Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Meditation: Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues because it enables us to view and judge ourselves correctly – correctly meaning the way that God sees us, which is more important than the way others may view us through the lens of the secular world. Humility leads to true self-knowledge, honesty, realism, strength, and dedication to give ourselves to something greater than ourselves. Humility frees us to love and serve others selflessly, for their sake, rather than our own. Saint Paul gives us the greatest example and model of humility in the person of Jesus Christ, who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, ...who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (ref. Philippians 2:7-8). The Lord Jesus gives grace to all people who seek him humbly.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, increase our faith, hope and charity, and make us love what you command, so that we may merit what you promise. 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: Think about what true humility is. True humility is not feeling bad about yourself, or having a low opinion of yourself, or thinking of yourself as inferior to others. True humility frees us from preoccupation with ourselves, whereas a low self-opinion tends to focus our attention on ourselves. Humility is truth in self-understanding and truth in action. Viewing ourselves truthfully, with sober judgment, means seeing ourselves the way God sees us (ref. Psalm 139:1-4). A humble person makes a realistic assessment of himself or herself without illusion or pretense to be something he or she is not. The humble regard themselves as being neither smaller nor larger than they truly are. True humility frees us to be our true selves, avoiding despair and pride. A humble person does not have to put on a facade in order to look good to others, especially to those who are not really familiar with that person. The humble are not swayed by things such as fame, glory, reputation, success, or failure. The humble person wants to serve God fully, and simply do God's will. Pray simply to be humble as Christ was humble and to love freely and graciously all whom we are called to serve. Remember what Saint Augustine said: "It was pride that changed the angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels."

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