

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)

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT: DAILY PRAYER AS YOU GATHER BEFORE YOUR ADVENT WREATH

O Lord, stir up Thy might, we beg Thee, and come, that by Thy protection we may deserve to be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins and saved by Thy deliverance. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Advent is the ‘sacrament’ of the presence of God in His world, in the Mystery of Christ at work in history... This mystery is the revelation of God Himself in His Incarnate Son. But it is not merely a manifestation of the Divine Perfections, it is the concrete plan of God for the salvation of men and the restoration of the whole world in Christ.”

~FR. THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

Monday, November 29 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:5-11 When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.” He said to him, “I will come and cure him.” The centurion said in reply, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come here,’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven.”

Meditation: In the Roman world the position of centurion was very important. He was an officer in charge of a hundred soldiers. In a certain sense, he was the backbone of the Roman army, the cement which held the army together. The centurion who approached Jesus was not only courageous, but faith-filled as well. He risked the ridicule of his cronies as well as mockery from the Jews by seeking help from an itinerant preacher from Galilee. Nonetheless, the centurion approached Jesus with great confidence and humility. He was an extraordinary man because he loved his slave. In the Roman world slaves were treated like animals – something to be used for work and pleasure and for bartering and trade. This centurion was a man of great compassion and extraordinary faith. He wanted Jesus to heal his beloved slave. Jesus commends him for his faith and immediately grants him his request.

Prayer: Keep us alert, we pray, O Lord our God, as we await the advent of Christ your Son, so that, when he comes and knocks, he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The prophet Isaiah foretold a time of restoration for the holy city Jerusalem and for its remnants (ref. Isaiah 4:2-6) and also a time of universal peace when all nations would come to Jerusalem to “the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob” and “beat their swords into plowshares” (Isaiah 2:2-4). Jesus fulfills this prophecy first by restoring both Jew and Gentile to fellowship with God through the victory he won for us on the cross. When he comes again he will fully establish his universal rule of peace and righteousness and unite all things in himself (ref. Ephesians 1:10). His promise extends to all generations who believe in him that we, too, might feast at the heavenly banquet table with the patriarchs of the Old Covenant who believed but did not see the promised Messiah. And so we need to ask ourselves: Do you believe in God's promises and do you seek his kingdom first in your life? The season of Advent reminds us that the Lord wants us to actively seek him and the coming of his kingdom in our lives. The Lord will surely reward those who seek his will for their lives. We can approach the Lord Jesus with expectant faith, like the centurion did in today's gospel reading, knowing that he will show us his mercy, love, compassion, along with guidance and help in our time of need.

Tuesday, November 30 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Saint Andrew, Apostle

Holy Gospel: Matthew 4:18-22 As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him.

Meditation: Notice that when Jesus began his public ministry he went everywhere he could to speak to those who would listen to him about the kingdom of God. He chose as his closest friends and coworkers those who were ready to follow as his disciples and he gave them an unusual mission – "to catch people for the kingdom of God." And what kind of disciples did Jesus choose? He starts by choosing hard working, hard playing, everyday people, beginning with fishermen. In the choice of the first apostles we see a characteristic feature of Jesus' work by choosing ordinary, everyday people like you and me. They were non-professionals, had no wealth or position of power or fame in society. They were chosen from the common people who did ordinary things, had no special marks of education, and no social advantages. Jesus wanted ordinary people who could take an assignment and do it extraordinarily well. He chose these individuals, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and guidance. So when the Lord calls each of us to be his disciples, we must not think we have nothing to offer him in exchange. The Lord takes what ordinary people like us can offer, and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. So don't shortchange yourself – we all have something to offer by following Christ and taking life's cues from him.

Prayer: We humbly implore your majesty, O Lord, that, just as the blessed Apostle Andrew was for your Church a preacher and pastor, so he may be for us a constant intercessor before 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: God wants others to see the light of Christ in us in the way we live, speak, and witness the joy of the gospel. Paul the Apostles says, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ Jesus always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:15). And so we might ask ourselves today: Do I show others around me the joy of the gospel by living my life in witness to Christ's teachings? Do I pray for my neighbors, co-workers, and relatives that they may come to personally know the Lord Jesus Christ and grow in the knowledge of his love?

Special devotional prayer during Advent: Beginning on Saint Andrew the Apostle's feast day, the following beautiful prayer is traditionally recited fifteen times a day until Christmas. This is a very meditative prayer that helps us increase our awareness of the feast of Christmas and helps us prepare ourselves spiritually for His coming. **Prayer:** *Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires, [here mention your request] through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of His blessed Mother. Amen.*

Wednesday, December 1 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Blessed Charles de Foucauld (to be canonized a Saint in 2022)

Holy Gospel: Matthew 15:29-37 At that time: Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, went up on the mountain, and sat down there. Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see, and they glorified the God of Israel. Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way." The disciples said to him, "Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" "Seven," they replied, "and a few fish." He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and

gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.

Meditation: When the disciples were confronted by Jesus with the task of feeding four thousand people many miles away from any source of food, they exclaimed: “Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?” Jesus, himself provides bread in abundance for the hungry crowd who came out into the desert to seek him. The gospel records that all were satisfied and they took up what was leftover. In the multiplication of the loaves and fishes we see a sign and a symbol of what God always does. God knows our needs better than we do, and he cares to provide for what we “need” versus what we “want” – there is a difference. When God gives, he gives in abundance. The gospel account records that the leftovers from the miraculous meal was more than seven times the amount they began with. Seven is a symbol of completion and wholeness. When God gives, he gives until we are satisfied. When God works for his people he gives abundantly - more than we could deserve and more than we need. He nourishes us with his life-giving word and with the bread of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven God will feast us at his banquet table. Are you satisfied with what God provides for you? If not, why not?

Prayer: God our Father, You have called Blessed Charles to live through your love in intimacy with your Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Grant that we may find in the Gospel the foundation of a more and more luminous Christian life and in the Eucharist, the source of universal kinship. 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: Who can satisfy the deepest hunger and longing of our human hearts? Isaiah prophesied that God would provide a heavenly banquet for all peoples and would destroy death once and for all (Isaiah 25:6-8). Jesus came to fulfill that promise. Jesus' miracles are both a sign of God's kingdom and a demonstration of God's power. They also show the magnitude of God's love, mercy and compassion for us. Challenging as it may be for some of us during this Christmas shopping season, let's look at what we really need – and perhaps shifting our focus toward the needs of others, and less on what “I want.”

Thursday, December 2 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 7:21, 24-27 Jesus said to his disciples: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”

Meditation: Since most of us are not in the construction business, some might ask what the significance is of this story? The kind of foundation we build our lives upon will determine whether we can survive the storms and challenges of life that are sure to come. Builders usually lay their foundations when the weather and soil conditions are at their best. It takes foresight to know how a foundation will stand up against adverse conditions. Building a house on a flood plain, such as a dry river-bed, is a sure bet for disaster; same with building them on ground level next to the beach, versus up on stilts. Jesus prefaced his story with a warning: We may fool humans with our speech, but God cannot be deceived. He sees each of our hearts as they truly are - with all of our motives, intentions, desires, and choices (Psalm 139:2).

Prayer: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come to our help with mighty strength, that what our sins impede the grace of your mercy may hasten. 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: There is sure way in which a person's sincerity can be proved, and that is by the way one lives one's life – their habits, their practices, the choices they make. Talk is cheap; words can never replace good deeds. And so looking back on our lives we can ask: Did I cheat on an exam or on my income taxes? Did I lie, or cover-up, when disclosing the truth would have caused me injury or embarrassment? A true person is honest and reliable before God, one's neighbor and oneself – all of the time, not just when it is convenient. His or her word can be counted on – his or her word is a bond that can be trusted. If we heed God's word and live according to it then we need not fear when storms assail us. God will be our rock and our refuge. Two more questions to think about: Is my life built upon the sure “rock” of Jesus Christ? Do I listen to his word as if my very life (and eternal life) life depended on it?

Friday, December 3 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Saint Francis Xavier, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:27-31 As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying out, "Son of David, have pity on us!" When he entered the house, the blind men approached him and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I can do this?" "Yes, Lord," they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread word of him through all that land.

Meditation: God wants to change and transform our lives to set us free to live as his sons and daughters and citizens of his kingdom. Faith is key to this transformation. How can we grow in faith? Faith is a gift freely given by God to help us know God personally, to understand his truth, and to live in the power of his love. For faith to be effective it must be linked with trust and obedience - an active submission to God and a willingness to do whatever he commands. The Lord Jesus wants us to live in the confident expectation that he will fulfill his promises to us and bring us into the fullness of his kingdom - a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

Prayer: O God, who through the preaching of Saint Francis Xavier won many peoples to yourself, grant that the hearts of the faithful may burn with the same zeal for the faith and that Holy Church may everywhere rejoice in an abundance of offspring. 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: Are there any blind-spots in your life that keep you from recognizing God's power and mercy? When two blind men heard that Jesus was passing their way, they followed him and begged for his mercy. The word *mercy* literally means "sorrowful at heart." But mercy is something more than compassion, or heartfelt sorrow at another person's misfortune. Compassion empathizes with the sufferer, but mercy goes further - mercy removes suffering. A merciful person shares in another person's misfortune and suffering as if it were their own. Note also that when the two blind men approached Jesus, he questioned their earnestness. "Do you believe that I can do this?" Jesus put them to the test, not to rebuff them, but to strengthen their faith and trust in God's mercy. He touched their eyes, both to identify with their affliction and to awaken faith in them. Their faith grew as they responded to his word with confident hope. Jesus restored their sight - both physically and spiritually to the reality of God's kingdom. Faith opens the way for us to see the power of God's kingdom and to experience his healing presence in our lives.

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Daily meditations and contemplations adapted from the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* web page and *Biblical Medications for Advent* by Rev. Carroll Stuhlmüller, C.P.; prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011; information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.

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DURING THIS ADVENT SEASON...

The Advent Season is filled with preparation and expectation. Everyone is getting ready for Christmas — shopping and decorating, baking and cleaning. Too often, however, we are so busy with the material preparations that we lose sight of the real reason for our activity: the Word made flesh coming to dwell among us. Christians are urged to preserve the spiritual focus of Christmas amidst the prevailingly secular and consumer-driven society. In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the season, let us strive to keep Advent a season of waiting and longing, of conversion and hope, meditating often on the incredible love and humility of our God in taking on flesh of the Virgin Mary. In our shopping and baking, let us remember to purchase and prepare something for the poor and less fortunate, perhaps an older neighbor or single person down the street who doesn't have family nearby. When we clean our homes, let us distribute some of our possessions to those who lack many necessities. While we are decking the halls of our homes, let us not forget to prepare a peaceful place in our hearts wherein our Savior may come to dwell.

