

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)

“Dear brothers and sisters, the commandment of love that Jesus left to his disciples is also kept in our relationship with the sick. A society is all the more human to the degree that it cares effectively for its most frail and suffering members, in a spirit of fraternal love. Let us strive to achieve this goal, so that no one will feel alone, excluded or abandoned. To Mary, Mother of Mercy and Health of the Infirm, I entrust the sick, healthcare workers and all those who generously assist our suffering brothers and sisters.”

~MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS FOR THE 29TH WORLD DAY OF THE SICK, FEBRUARY 11

Monday, February 8 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Saint Jerome Emiliani, Priest; Saint Josephine Bakhita, Virgin

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:53-56 After making the crossing to the other side of the sea, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and tied up there. As they were leaving the boat, people immediately recognized him. They scurried about the surrounding country and began to bring in the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. Whatever villages or towns or countryside he entered, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak; and as many as touched it were healed.

Meditation: Faith is an entirely free gift which God makes to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Believing and trusting in God to act in our lives is only possible by the grace and help of the Holy Spirit who moves the heart and converts it to God. The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the mind and helps us to understand, accept, and believe God's word. How do we grow in faith? By listening to God's word with trust and submission. Faith also grows through testing and perseverance. The Lord wants to teach us how to pray in faith for his will for our lives and for the things he wishes to give us to enable us to follow him faithfully and serve him generously. Jesus gave his disciples the perfect prayer which acknowledges God as our Father who provides generously for his children. The Lord's prayer teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and to pray that God's will be accomplished in our lives. The Lord in turn, gives us what we need to live each day for his glory. The Lord is never too distant nor too busy to meet us and to give his blessing. Do you pray to the Father with confidence that he will show you his will and give you what you need to follow him? Ask the Lord to increase your faith and gratitude for his merciful love and provision for your life.

Prayer ~ Saint Jerome Emiliani: O God, Father of mercies, who sent Saint Jerome Emiliani as a helper and father to orphans, grant through his intercession, that we may preserve faithfully the spirit of adoption, by which we are called, and truly are, your children. 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.

Prayer ~ Saint Josephine Bakhita: O God, who led Saint Josephine Bakhita from abject slavery to the dignity of being your daughter and a bride of Christ, grant, we pray, that by her example we may show constant love for the Lord Jesus crucified, remaining steadfast in charity and prompt to show compassion. 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: Do you recognize the Lord's presence in your life? The gospel records that when Jesus disembarked from the boat the people immediately recognized him. What did they recognize in Jesus? A prophet, a healer, the Messiah, the Son of God? For sure they recognized that Jesus had power from God to heal and to make whole bodies, limbs, minds, and hearts that were beset with disease, affliction, and sin. What happened when they pressed upon him and touched the fringe of his garment? They were made well. The Lord Jesus is ever ready to meet our needs as well. Do you approach him with expectant faith?

As we begin the Season of Lent this week, perhaps we need to examine our level of faith, our sincerity of faith, so that we may grow in our faith of Christ.

Tuesday, February 9 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:1-3 When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. (For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.) So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?" He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.* You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." He went on to say, "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition! For Moses said, *Honor your father and your mother, and Whoever curses father or mother shall die.* Yet you say, 'If someone says to father or mother, "Any support you might have had from me is *qorban*"' (meaning, dedicated to God), you allow him to do nothing more for his father or mother. You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many such things."

Meditation: The Scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of breaking their ritual traditions. Jesus deals with the accusation by going to the heart of the matter – by looking at God's intention and purpose for the commandments. Jesus explains that they void God's command because they allow their hearts and minds to be clouded by their own notions of religion. Jesus accuses them specifically of two things. First of hypocrisy. Like actors, who put on a show, they appear to obey God's word in their external practices while they inwardly harbor evil desires and intentions. Secondly, he accuses them of abandoning God's word by substituting their own arguments and interpretations of what God requires us to do. They paid more attention to their own legal arguments rather than God's word. Jesus refers them to the prophecy of Isaiah (29:31) where the prophet accuses the people of his day for honoring God with their lips while their hearts were far away from choosing and doing what God asked of them. If we listen to God's word with faith and reverence, it will both enlighten our mind and purify the hearts - thus enabling us to better understand how he wants us to love and obey him.

Prayer: Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unflinching care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection. 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 and his disciples apparently upset some of the religious leaders of Jerusalem who had invited them over for dinner. What did they do wrong? They apparently neglected the Jewish custom of washing their hands before eating. Such an offence was not only bad table manners, but it also caused ritual impurity for the religious-minded Jews. Jesus was publicly scolded as a rabbi who should have known better to instruct his disciples to keep themselves ritually clean. Jesus' response, however, caught his hosts off guard. Jesus turned the table on his accusing hosts by chiding them for their uncleanness of heart. The Lord invites each of us to draw near to him and to feast at his banquet table. Do you approach with a clean heart and mind? Ask the Lord to cleanse and renew you with the purifying fire of his Holy Spirit.

Wednesday, February 10 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Scholastica, Virgin

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:14-23 Jesus summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile." When he got home away from the crowd his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, "Are even you likewise without understanding? Do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach and passes out into the latrine?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) "But what comes out of the man, that is what defiles him. From within the man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."

Meditation: Remember the story of Cain and Abel, when Cain became jealous of his brother Abel and God warned Cain to guard his own heart: "Sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (ref. Genesis 4:7). Unfortunately, Cain did not take God's warning to heart. He allowed his jealousy to grow into spite and hatred for his brother, and he began to look for an opportunity to eliminate his brother altogether. When jealousy and other sinful desires come knocking at the door of your heart, how do you respond? Do you entertain them and allow them to overtake you? Do you slam the door to keep these sinful desires out? Fortunately God does not leave us alone in our struggle with hurtful desires and sinful tendencies. He gives us the grace and strength we need to resist and overcome sin when it approaches the door of our heart.

Prayer: As we celebrate anew the Memorial of the Virgin Saint Scholastica, we pray, O Lord, that, following her example, we may serve you with pure love and happily receive what comes from loving 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: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ wants to set us free from the burden of guilt and from the destructive force of sin in our personal lives. He wants to purify our hearts and renew our minds so that we can love and act in every situation as he would love and act. The Lord is ready to change and purify our hearts through the grace and help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Like a physician who examines the wound before treating it, God through his Word and Spirit first brings sin into the light that we may recognize it for what it truly is and call upon his mercy and grace for pardon and healing. The Spirit of truth is our Consoler and Helper. His power and grace enables us to choose what is good and to reject what is evil. Do you believe in the power of God's love to heal, change, and transform your heart and mind?

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A REMINDER: One week from today is Ash Wednesday – the beginning of Lent.

Start thinking about how you can make wise use of the Season of Lent for the benefit of your faith life, your spiritual life, and how you can help the poor, the needy, the homeless, the ill, the infirmed, and all who have particular needs.

Thursday, February 11 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
Our Lady of Lourdes; 29th World Day of the Sick
February 11 was proclaimed World Day of the Sick by Pope John Paul II

Holy Gospel: John 2:1-11 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

Meditation: John's Gospel takes its shape from a series of signs, revealing Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, and Savior of the world. This miracle story is the first of these signs. The marriage feast at Cana heralds that Messianic age had begun. And, as a result of the miracle at Cana, "his disciples began to believe in him." Are you truly a disciple of Christ? If so, do you believe in him?

Prayer: Grant us, O merciful God, protection in our weakness, that we, who keep the Memorial of the Immaculate Mother of God, may with the help of her intercession, rise up from our iniquities. 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: When Mary says to the servers "Do whatever he tells you..." we, too, are taught by these words that if we desire anything from Christ, we will not obtain our wishes unless we depend on him and him alone, look to him, pray to him, and, in short, do whatever he tells us. This is part of his invitation throughout scripture when Jesus says "Follow me." He is the shepherd and we are his flock. Thus, as a

disciple, do you really follow Christ? Do you do whatever he teaches in scripture, follow his teachings, and incorporate them in your daily life?

About Our Lady of Lourdes: The many miracles which have been performed through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes prompted the Church to institute a special commemorative feast, the "Apparition of the Immaculate Virgin Mary." The Office gives the historical background. Four years after the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854), the Blessed Virgin appeared a number of times to a very poor and holy girl named Bernadette. The actual spot was in a grotto on the bank of the Gave River near Lourdes. The Immaculate Conception had a youthful appearance and was clothed in a pure white gown and mantle, with an azure blue sash. A golden rose adorned each of her bare feet. On her first apparition, February 11, 1858, the Blessed Virgin bade the girl make the sign of the Cross piously and say the rosary with her. Bernadette saw her take the rosary that was hanging from her arms into her hands. This was repeated in subsequent apparitions. With childlike simplicity Bernadette once sprinkled holy water on the vision, fearing that it was a deception of the evil spirit; but the Blessed Virgin smiled pleasantly, and her face became even more lovely. The third time Mary appeared she invited the girl to come to the grotto daily for two weeks. Now she frequently spoke to Bernadette. On one occasion she ordered her to tell the ecclesiastical authorities to build a church on the spot and to organize processions. Bernadette also was told to drink and wash at the spring still hidden under the sand. Finally on the feast of the Annunciation, the beautiful Lady announced her name, "I am the Immaculate Conception." The report of cures occurring at the grotto spread quickly and the more it spread, the greater the number of Christians who visited the hallowed place. The publicity given these miraculous events on the one hand and the seeming sincerity and innocence of the girl on the other made it necessary for the bishop of Tarbes to institute a judicial inquiry. Four years later he declared the apparitions to be supernatural and permitted the public veneration of the Immaculate Conception in the grotto. Soon a chapel was erected, and since that time countless pilgrims come every year to Lourdes to fulfill promises or to beg graces.

Friday, February 12 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:31-37 Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!") And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Meditation: When Jesus approaches a man who is both deaf and a stutterer, Jesus shows his considerateness for this man's predicament. Jesus takes him aside privately, not doubt to remove him from embarrassment with a noisy crowd of gawkers. Jesus then puts his fingers into the deaf man's ears and he touches the man's tongue with his own spittle to physically identify with this man's infirmity and to awaken faith in him. With a word of command the poor man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Prayer: Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection. 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 never turned anyone aside who approached him with sincerity and trust. And whatever Jesus did, he did well. He demonstrated both the beauty and goodness of God in his actions. Pope Saint Gregory the Great comments on this miracle: "The Spirit is called the finger of God. When the Lord puts his fingers into the ears of the deaf mute, he was opening the soul of man to faith through the gifts of the Holy Spirit." The Lord treats each of us with kindness and compassion and he calls us to treat one another in like kind. The Holy Spirit who dwells within us enables us to love as Jesus loves. Do you show kindness and compassion to your neighbors and do you treat them with considerateness as Jesus did?

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