

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 August is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

“See, before God, my brethren, on what side you are. On the side of the sinners, who have abandoned everything and plunge themselves into sin without remorse? On the side of the just souls, who seek but God alone? Or are you of the number of these slack, tepid, and indifferent souls such as we have just been depicting for you? Down which road are you travelling?” ~ SAINT JOHN VIANNEY

**Monday, August 2, 2015 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Peter Julian Eymard ~ “Apostle of the Eucharist”**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:13-21 When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself. The crowds heard of this and followed him on foot from their towns. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, and he cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples approached him and said, “This is a deserted place and it is already late; dismiss the crowds so that they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.” He said to them, “There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves.” But they said to him, “Five loaves and two fish are all we have here.” Then he said, “Bring them here to me,” and he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over – twelve wicker baskets full. Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

Meditation: Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four Gospel accounts (Luke 9:10-17, Mark 6:34-44, John 6:51-58, Matthew 14:13-21). What is the significance of this miracle? The miraculous feeding of such a great multitude recalled the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness under Moses' leadership and intercession for his people (Exodus 16). The daily provision of food for the people of Israel during their forty years of journeying in the barren wilderness foreshadowed the true heavenly bread which Jesus would pass on to his disciples at his last supper meal on the eve of his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus makes a claim which only God can make: He is the *true bread of heaven* that can satisfy the deepest hunger we experience (John 6:32-35). The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, when Jesus said the blessing, broke and distributed the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, is a sign that prefigures the superabundance of the unique bread of the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper which sustains us on our journey to the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer: O God, who adorned Saint Peter Julian Eymard with a wonderful love for the sacred mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son, graciously grant that we, too, may be worthy to receive the delights he drew from this divine banquet. 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: Wherever Jesus went multitudes of people gathered to meet him - people from every part of society - rich and poor, professionals and laborers, even social outcasts and pagans. What drew them to Jesus? Were they simply curious or looking for a healing? Many were drawn to Jesus because they were hungry for God. Jesus' message of God's kingdom and the signs and wonders he performed stirred fresh hope and expectation that God was acting in a new and powerful way to set people free from sin and oppression and to bring them the blessings of his kingdom.

Tuesday, August 3 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:22-36 Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and precede him to the other side of the sea, while he dismissed the crowds. After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to

pray. When it was evening he was there alone. Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear. At once Jesus spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God." After making the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the men of that place recognized him, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought to him all those who were sick and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak, and as many as touched it were healed.

Meditation: This dramatic incident on the sea of Galilee revealed Peter's character rather vividly. Here we see Peter's impulsivity — his tendency to act without thinking of what he was doing. He often failed and came to grief as a result of his impulsiveness. In contrast, Jesus always bade his disciples to see how difficult it was to follow him before they set out on the way he taught them. A great deal of failure in the Christian life is due to acting on impulse, feelings and emotions without counting the cost. Peter, fortunately in the moment of his failure clutched at Jesus and held him firmly. Every time Peter fell, he rose again. His failures only made him love the Lord more deeply and trust him more intently. The Lord keeps watch over us at all times, and especially in our moments of temptation and difficulty.

Prayer: Draw near to your servants, O Lord, and answer their prayers with unceasing kindness, that, for those who glory in you as their Creator and guide, you may restore what you have created and keep safe what you have restored. 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: Does the Lord seem distant when trials or adversity come your way? Jesus assures us that we have no need of fear if we trust in Him and in his great love for us. When calamities or trials threaten to overwhelm you, do you respond with faith and hope in God's love, and his care and presence with you? If not, you should! True peace and divine direction can be ours only if we turn to Christ.

Wednesday, August 4 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint John Vianney, Priest; Patron Saint of Priests**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:22-36 Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and precede him to the other side of the sea, while he dismissed the crowds. After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone. Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear. At once Jesus spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God." After making the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the men of that place recognized him, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought to him all those who were sick and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak, and as many as touched it were healed.

Meditation: When you face life's trials or adversity, do you ever think that Jesus is far from you? It was at Jesus' initiative that the disciples sailed across the lake, only to find themselves in a life-threatening storm. Although they were experienced fishermen, they feared for their lives. While Jesus was not with them in the boat, he, nonetheless watched for them in prayer. When he perceived their trouble he came to them on the sea and startled them with his sudden appearance. While you may think that Jesus is far from you, he never is, and so we must remember to turn to him first and always when we encounter difficulty or challenges in life.

Prayer: Almighty and merciful God, who made the Priest Saint John Vianney wonderful in his pastoral zeal, grant, we pray, that through his intercession and example we may in charity win brothers and sisters

for Christ and attain with them eternal glory. 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: Never forget that the Lord, like a Good Shepherd, keeps watch over us at all times, and especially in our moments of temptation and difficulty. While we may turn our backs on him, Jesus never turns his back on us. Jesus assures us that we have no need of fear if we trust in Him and in his great love for us. And so when calamities or trials threaten to overwhelm you, have faith and hope in God's love, care and presence with you.

A Prayer for Priests: We thank you, God our Father, for those who have responded to your call to priestly ministry. Accept this prayer we offer on their behalf: Fill your priests with the sure knowledge of your love. Open their hearts to the power and consolation of the Holy Spirit. Lead them to new depths of union with your Son. Increase in them profound faith in the Sacraments they celebrate as they nourish, strengthen, and heal us. Lord Jesus Christ, grant that these, your priests, may inspire us to strive for holiness by the power of their example, as men of prayer who ponder your word and follow your will. O Mary, Mother of Christ and our mother, guard with your maternal care these chosen ones, so dear to the Heart of your Son. Intercede for our priests that, offering the Sacrifice of your Son, they may be conformed more each day to the image of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Saint John Vianney, universal patron of priests, pray for us and for our priests. Amen.

A Prayer for Vocations: Heavenly Father, Your Divine Son taught us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His vineyard. We earnestly beg You to bless our Diocese and our world with many priests who will love You fervently; and gladly and courageously spend their lives in service to Your Son's Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We pray that their lives may be always centered on our Eucharistic Lord; that they be always faithful to the Holy Father; and that they may be devoted sons of Mary, our Mother, in making You known and loved; and that all may attain Heaven. Bless our families and our children and choose from our home those whom You desire for this holy work. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, August 5 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Dedication of Saint Mary Major**

Holy Gospel: Luke 11:27-28 As Jesus said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" But He said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Meditation: When an admirer wished to compliment Jesus by praising his mother, Jesus did not deny the truth of the blessing she pronounced. Her "beatitude" (which means "blessedness" or "happiness") recalls Mary's canticle: All generations will call me blessed (Luke 1:48). Jesus adds to her words by pointing to the source of all true blessedness or happiness - union with God in heart, mind, and will. Mary humbly submitted herself to the miraculous plan of God for the incarnation of his only begotten Son - the Word of God made flesh in her womb, by declaring: I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word (Luke 1:38). Mary heard the word spoken to her by the angel and she believed it.

Prayer: Pardon the faults of your servants, we pray, O Lord, that we, who cannot please you by our own deeds, may be saved through the intercession of the Mother of your Son and our Lord. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Our ultimate goal in life, the very reason we were created in the first place, is not to attend a certain university, have a particular job, live at a certain address with a particular car parked in the driveway. No, our ultimate goal is to get to heaven where we may experience complete union with God. We were made for God and our hearts are restless until they rest in him. Saint Lucian of Antioch, an early Christian theologian and martyr, once said that "a Christian's only relatives are the saints." Those who follow Jesus Christ and who seek the will of God enter into a new family, a family of "saints" here on earth and in heaven. Jesus changes the order of relationships and shows that true kinship is not just a matter of flesh and blood. Our adoption as sons and daughters of God transforms all our relationships and requires a new order of loyalty to God and his kingdom. As in "those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28) and those who are "doers of the word, not hearers only" (James 1:22). Think about it!

The Importance of Saint Mary Major: We celebrate today the dedication of one of the four most illustrious churches of Rome. While each diocese and parish keeps its own dedication anniversary, the Church universal commemorates the consecration of the four great Roman basilicas, the mother churches, we may call them, of Christendom, viz., Saint John Lateran, Saint Peter Basilica, Saint Paul Outside the

Walls, and Saint Mary Major. By means of these feasts the Church seeks to link all Christians with the Holy See. This feast commemorates the miracle of the snowfall that occurred during the night of August 4-5 in the year 358 on the site where the basilica now stands. According to tradition, the Virgin Mary appeared in a dream to two faithful Roman Christians, the patrician John and his wife, as well as to Pope Liberius (352-366), asking that a church be built in her honor on the site where snow would fall on the night of August 4-5. Pope Liberius traced the outlines of the church in the snow and the first basilica was built on that site. It was completed about a century later by Pope Sixtus III (432-440), after the Council of Ephesus in 431 during which Mary was declared to be the Mother of God. St. Mary Major is important to Christendom for three reasons: **(a)** It stands as a venerable monument to the Council of Ephesus (431), at which the dogma of Mary's divine Motherhood was solemnly defined; the definition of the Council occasioned a most notable increase in the veneration paid to Mary. **(b)** The basilica is Rome's "church of the crib," a kind of Bethlehem within the Eternal City; it also is a celebrated station church, serving, for instance, as the center for Rome's liturgy for the first Mass on Christmas. In some measure every picture of Mary with the divine Child is traceable to this church. **(c)** Saint Mary Major is Christendom's first Marian shrine for pilgrims. It set the precedent for the countless shrines where pilgrims gather to honor our Blessed Mother throughout the world.

Friday, August 6 ~ Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Feast of the Transfiguration**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:2-10 Jesus took Peter, James, and his brother John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them. As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

Meditation: Saint Jerome's meditation on the Transfiguration of Jesus is worth reading as part of our meditation: "Do you wish to see the transfiguration of Jesus? Behold with me the Jesus of the Gospels. Let him be simply apprehended. There he is beheld both 'according to the flesh' and at the same time in his true divinity. He is beheld in the form of God according to our capacity for knowledge. This is how he was beheld by those who went up upon the lofty mountain to be apart with him. Meanwhile those who do not go up the mountain can still behold his works and hear his words, which are uplifting. It is before those who go up that Jesus is transfigured, and not to those below. When he is transfigured, his face shines as the sun, that he may be manifested to the children of light, who have put off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12). They are no longer the children of darkness or night but have become the children of day. They walk honestly as in the day. Being manifested, he will shine to them not simply as the sun but as he is demonstrated to be, the sun of righteousness."

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of your Only Begotten Son confirmed the mysteries of faith by the witness of the Fathers and wonderfully prefigured our full adoption to sonship, grant, we pray, to your servants, that, listening to the voice of your beloved Son, we may merit to become co-heirs with him. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: When God speaks to those present in today's Gospel and says "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him..." God is also saying that to you, to me, and to every man, woman and child. And so we must ask ourselves: do I listen to Jesus, or do I turn a deaf ear to him? Do I pay attention to what Jesus teaches me, or do I think I know better – "Here's what I think" or "Here's what I feel." If your thoughts or feelings water down, detract or are contrary to what Jesus is revealing to us in sacred scripture, then you need to peel away the layers of the onion more and ask yourself whether or not you truly believe in Jesus? For if you truly believe in Jesus, and what he reveals to us and teaches us, then we ask for nothing more – not our own thoughts, opinions or feelings, which are of human origin – for we need nothing more than Jesus as he has the words of everlasting life.

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