

# Lectio Divina

SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

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“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)

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*The Month of August is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.*

***"Whoever seeks the truth seeks God, whether he is conscious of it or not."***

**+SAINT TERESA BENEDICTA OF THE CROSS**

**Monday, August 9 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time**  
**Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Religious, Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 17:22-27** As Jesus and his disciples were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were overwhelmed with grief. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax approached Peter and said, "Does not your teacher pay the temple tax?" "Yes," he said. When he came into the house, before he had time to speak, Jesus asked him, "What is your opinion, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take tolls or census tax? From their subjects or from foreigners?" When he said, "From foreigners," Jesus said to him, "Then the subjects are exempt. But that we may not offend them, go to the sea, drop in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. Open its mouth and you will find a coin worth twice the temple tax. Give that to them for me and for you."

**Meditation:** On three different occasions the Gospels record that Jesus' prediction that he would endure great suffering through betrayal, rejection, and the punishment of a cruel death. The Jews resorted to stoning and the Romans to crucifixion – the most painful and humiliating death they could devise for criminals they wanted to eliminate. No wonder the apostles were greatly distressed at such a prediction! If Jesus their Master were put to death, then they would likely receive the same treatment by their enemies. Jesus called himself the "Son of Man" because this was a common Jewish title for the "Messiah." So why must the Messiah be rejected and killed? Did not God promise that his Anointed One would deliver his people from their oppression and establish a kingdom of peace and justice? The prophet Isaiah had foretold that it was God's will that the "Suffering Servant" make atonement for sins through his suffering and death. Jesus paid the price for our redemption with his blood. Slavery to sin is to want the wrong things (those include anything against the ten commandments, anything contrary to the truths of sacred scripture and the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Catholic Church) and to be in bondage to destructive desires. The ransom Jesus paid sets us free from the worst tyranny possible – the tyranny of sin and the fear of death. Jesus' victory did not end with death but triumphed over the tomb. Jesus defeated the powers of death through his resurrection.

**Prayer:** God of our Fathers, who brought the Martyr Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross to know your crucified Son and to imitate him even until death, grant, through her intercession, that the whole human race may acknowledge Christ as its Savior and through him come to behold you for eternity. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** No one is overly fond of paying taxes, especially when one thinks they might be unreasonable or unjust. And yet taxes provide much in the way of necessary civil services. When questioned about paying the temple tax, Jesus replied to his disciples: We must pay so as not to cause bad example. In fact, we must go beyond our duty in order that we may show others what they ought to do. The scriptural expression to "give no offense" doesn't refer to insult or annoyance; rather it means to put no stumbling block in the way of another that would cause them to trip or fall. Jesus would not allow himself anything which might possibly be a bad example to someone else. Do you evade unpleasant responsibilities or obligations?

**About Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross:** Born Edith Stein of Jewish parents, Saint Teresa Benedicta was a brilliant philosopher who stopped believing in God when she was fourteen. She was so captivated by reading the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila that she began a spiritual journey that led to her

Baptism in 1922. Twelve years later she imitated Teresa by becoming a Carmelite, taking the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Born into a prominent Jewish family in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland), Edith abandoned Judaism in her teens. As a student at the University of Gottingen, she became fascinated by phenomenology, an approach to philosophy, and earned a doctorate in philosophy in 1916. After living in the Cologne Carmel (1934-1938), she moved to the Carmelite monastery in Echt, Netherlands. The Nazis occupied that country in 1940. In retaliation for being denounced by the Dutch bishops, the Nazis arrested all Dutch Jews who had become Christians. Teresa Benedicta and her sister Rosa, also a Catholic, died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz on August 9, 1942.

## **Tuesday, August 10 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time** **Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:1-5,10,12-14** The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost."

**Meditation:** This passage of the gospel is surprising to many. Who would have thought that the disciples would ever have an ego problem, let alone discuss with Jesus who is the greatest? Think about it – are we not guilty of having done the same thing at one or more times in our own lives? The appetite for glory and greatness seems to be inbred in us, and can raise its ugly head at times. Who doesn't cherish the ambition to be "somebody" whom others admire rather than a "nobody" who gets lost in the crowd? Even the Psalms speak about the glory God has destined for us. *You have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor* (Psalm 8:5). And so we might meditate on what kind of glory do we seek in correlation to answering "who is the greatest in God's kingdom?" The answer is simple: the one who is humble and lowly of heart; the one who instead of asserting their rights willingly empty themselves of pride and self-seeking glory by taking the lowly position of a servant and child before God.

**Prayer:** O God, giver of that ardor of love for you by which Saint Lawrence was outstandingly faithful in service and glorious in martyrdom, grant that we may love what he loved and put into practice what he taught. 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' story about a lost sheep tells us much about God and his kingdom. Notice how the shepherd's grief and anxiety is turned to joy when he finds the lost sheep and restores it to the fold. God does not rejoice in the loss of anyone, but desires that all be saved and restored to fellowship with him. That is why the whole community of heaven rejoices when one sinner is found and restored to fellowship with God (Luke 15:7). Those who seek after the lost are needed more than ever in today's "me, myself and I" world. Do you pray and seek after those you know who have lost their way to God?

## **Wednesday, August 11 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time** **Saint Clare, Virgin**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20** Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the Church. If he refuses to listen even to the Church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

**Meditation:** What can we learn from Jesus' instructions today about how to mend a damaged relationship? If you feel you have been wronged by someone, Jesus says the first step is to speak directly but privately to the individual who has done the harm. One of the worst things we can do is brood over

our grievance. This can poison our mind and heart and make it more difficult to go directly to the person who caused the damage. If we truly want to settle a difference with someone, we need to do it face to face. If this fails in its purpose, then the second step is to bring another person or persons, someone who is wise and gracious rather than someone who is hot-tempered or judgmental. The goal is not so much to put the offender on trial, but to persuade the offender to see the wrong and to be reconciled. And if this fails, then we must still not give up, but seek the help of the Christian community. Note the emphasis here is on restoring a broken relationship by seeking the help of other Christians who hopefully will pray and seek a solution for reconciliation based on Christian love and wisdom, rather than relying on coercive force or threat of legal action, such as a lawsuit. Lastly, if even the Christian community fails to bring about reconciliation, what must we do? Jesus seems to say that we have the right to abandon stubborn and obdurate offenders and treat them like social outcasts. The tax-collectors and Gentiles were regarded as "unclean" by the religious-minded Jews and they resorted to shunning them. However we know from the Gospel accounts that Jesus often had fellowship with tax-collectors (as well as other public sinners), ate with them, and even praised them at times! Jesus refuses no one who is open to receive pardon, healing, and restoration. This is what it means to have compassion for someone, which can lead to healing.

**Prayer:** O God, who in your mercy led Saint Clare to a love of poverty, grant, through her intercession, that, following Christ in poverty of spirit, we may merit to contemplate you one day in the heavenly Kingdom. 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 Trappist monk Fr. Thomas Merton, OCSO, once said: "Compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another." In our growing world of independence we walk around life at times with a belief that we are somehow separate from one another. This growing mindset of disconnection from God, other people, and so forth, often leads to a state of imbalance, which can bring about states of stress, anxiety, and depression, which can then lead to other problems and issues. What we fail to recognize is the fundamental belief that we are all connected with one another as children of God, and as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. And therefore recognizing this real dependence on God for everything and this interdependence on one another to help us walk side-by-side on this life's journey that God has given us is a reminder that we all make mistakes, we say things we should not have, we all support causes and beliefs that are wrong simply because we got caught up in the way of the world instead of embracing the way of God and his son, Jesus Christ. And so extending compassion to one another is a way of reaching out to help each other, to reconcile, to repair any damage, and to help restore one another to a life in Christ. Look back for a moment – in your waywardness in life (yes, we are all guilty of this!) how many times has someone reached out to you in compassion? Isn't it time for us to imitate Christ and reach out in compassion to someone who has strayed?

## **Thursday, August 12 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time** **Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, Religious**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:21-19:1** Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the Kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.' Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he had the fellow servant put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?' Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart." When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan.

**Meditation:** Since God constantly has shown mercy to us in granting us pardon for our sins through the Sacrament of Reconciliation then we, in turn, must show mercy and forgiveness towards every person who has offended us. The willingness to forgive those who offend us is a sacred duty. If we expect God to pardon us and show us his mercy when we sin and disobey his commandments, then we must be willing to let go of any resentment, grievance, or ill-will we feel towards our neighbor. Jesus teaches us to pray daily for the grace and strength to forgive others in the same measure in which God has forgiven us (Matthew 6:12,14-15). If we do show mercy and forgiveness to our fellow human beings, how can we expect God to forgive us in turn? The Apostle James says that "*judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy*" (James 2:13).

**Prayer:** O God, who made Saint Jane Frances de Chantal radiant with outstanding merits in different walks of life, grant us, through her intercession, that walking faithfully in our vocation, we may constantly be examples of shining light. 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:** No offense our neighbor can do to us can compare with our own personal debt to God for offending him. We have been forgiven an enormous debt we could not repay on our own. That is why the Father in heaven sent his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who freely and willingly gave up his life for our sake to ransom us from slavery to sin, Satan, and death. Saint Paul says, "you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 7:23) and that price was Jesus' death on the cross. Through the shedding of his blood on the cross, Jesus not only brought forgiveness and pardon for our offenses, but release from our captivity to Satan and bondage to sin. If we want mercy shown to us – and we all do – then we must be ready to forgive others from the heart as God has forgiven us. Do you hold any grudge or resentment towards anyone? Ask the Lord to purify your heart that you may show mercy to all people.

### **Friday, August 13 ~ Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time** **Saints Pontian, Pope and Martyr, and Hippolytus, Priest and Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 19:3-12** Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery." His disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

**Meditation:** Jesus deals with the issue of divorce by taking his hearers back to the beginning of creation and to God's plan for the human race. In Genesis 2:23-24 we see God's intention and ideal that two people who marry should become so indissolubly one that they are one flesh. That ideal is found in the unbreakable union of Adam and Eve. They were created for each other and for no one else. They are the pattern and symbol for all who were to come. Jesus explains that Moses permitted divorce as a *concession* in view of a lost ideal. Jesus sets the high ideal of the married state before those who are willing to accept his commands.

**Prayer:** May the precious long-suffering of the just, O Lord, we pray, bring us a great increase of love for you and always prompt in our hearts constancy in the holy faith. 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:** Both marriage and the single life are calls from God to live a consecrated life, that is to live as married couples or as singles who belong not to themselves but to God. Despite what we may think or feel, our lives are not our own – they belong to God. He gives strength, joy, and blessing to those who seek to follow his way of holiness in their state of life.

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