

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.

“Our wish, our object, our chief preoccupation must be to form Jesus in ourselves, to make His spirit, His devotion, His affections, His desire, and His disposition live and reign there.” ~SAINT JOHN EUDES

Monday, August 16 ~ Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Stephen of Hungary

Holy Gospel: Matthew 19:16-22 A young man approached Jesus and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” He answered him, “Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He asked him, “Which ones?” And Jesus replied, “You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to him, “All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Meditation: The young man who apparently had the best the world could offer – money, property, a position in society – came to Jesus because he lacked one thing. He wanted the kind of lasting peace and happiness which his possessions could not buy. The answer he got, however, was not what he wanted to hear. He claims to have kept all of the commandments, so he must be an honest person in worldly dealings, and he obviously was a man of faith because he approached Jesus with a legitimate question. But based on the young man’s reaction to Jesus’ response, it becomes quite obvious that there is one thing that impeded the young man from giving himself wholeheartedly to God – his love of his possessions. While he lacked nothing in terms of material goods, he was possessive of what he had, and placed his hope and security in his possessions. That is why he became sad when Jesus challenged him to make God his one true possession and treasure, instead of his earthly possessions. Which begs the question – are you willing to part with your possessions in order to seek and attain everlasting joy with Jesus?

Prayer: Grant your Church, we pray, almighty God, that she may have Saint Stephen of Hungary, who fostered her growth while a king on earth, as her glorious defender in heaven. 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: A very wise, faithful and holy priest I came to know in seminary once told us that one measure of our love for Christ, in comparison to anything else, is our attitude – do I *want* to spend time with Christ, do I *desire* from the heart to spend time with Christ, versus do I *have* to spend my time with Christ. The latter being the negative approach, like a child told to clean his or her room when they want to go out and play – “do I have to do this” versus *wanting* to do it. Apply this to Sunday Mass – do you *desire* to go to Mass, or do you go to Mass simply because you *have* to? Treasure has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of personal will, desire and focus. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. Jesus himself is the greatest treasure we can possibly have. Giving up everything else to have the Lord as our treasure is not sorrowful, but the greatest joy.

Tuesday, August 17 ~ Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 19:23-30 Jesus said to his disciples: “Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they

were greatly astonished and said, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For men this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." Then Peter said to him in reply, "We have given up everything and followed you. What will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Meditation: One might wonder if Jesus was against wealth, and persons who had wealth. We know that Jesus was not opposed to wealth *per se*, nor was he opposed to the wealthy. He had many friends who were well-to-do, including some notorious tax collectors! One (Matthew, who wrote this Gospel) even became an apostle. Jesus' is concerned that wealth can make us falsely independent. The church at Laodicea was warned about their attitude towards wealth and a false sense of security: "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" (Revelations 3:17). Wealth can also lead us into hurtful desires and selfishness (see 1 Timothy 6:9-10). Look at the lesson Jesus gave about the rich man and his sons who refused to aid the poor man Lazarus (see Luke 16:19ff). They neglected to serve God. Only those who put their trust in God and who depend on him, and who share what they have with those in need, will find true peace, security, and happiness which lead to everlasting life and joy in God's kingdom.

Prayer: O God, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see, fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things and above all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire. 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: Do you recognize and acknowledge our total need and dependence on God? If you do not, now is the time to recognize this truth, for only through the Lord will we find true peace, security, and happiness that can sustain us now and forever. Only God alone can satisfy our deepest need and longing – everything else is fleeting at best.

Wednesday, August 18 ~ Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mathew 20:1-16 Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.' So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o'clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.' When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Meditation: In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard we see the extraordinary generosity and compassion of God (Matthew 20:1-16). There is great tragedy in underemployment, unemployment, the loss of work, and the inability to earn enough to live and support oneself or one's family. In Jesus' times laborers had to wait each day in the marketplace until someone hired them for a day's job. No work that day usually meant no food on the family table. The laborers who worked all day and received their payment complain that the master pays the late afternoon laborers the same wage. The master, undoubtedly, hired them in the late afternoon so they wouldn't go home payless and hungry. God is generous in opening the doors of his kingdom to all who will enter, both those who have labored a life-time for him and those who come at the last hour. While the reward is the same, the motive for one's labor can make all the difference. Some work only for reward. They will only put in as much effort as they think they will get back. Others labor out of love and joy for the opportunity to work and to serve others. The Lord Jesus calls each one of us to serve God and his kingdom with joy and zeal and to serve our neighbor with a generous spirit as well.

Prayer: O God, who have prepared for those who love you good things which no eye can see, fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love, so that, loving you in all things and above all things, we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire. 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: Today's Gospel should make us think about whether or not we labor for God's kingdom here on earth, whether or not we live our lives in witness to Christ, and asking if we labor for Christ in order to attain eternal life with Him. What motivates us? What is our intent? What is our ultimate goal in life? If our ultimate goal is not focused on attaining eternal life with Christ, then today is a perfect time to make a course correction in order to get a clear understanding of what our earthly life should be about in order to attain eternal life.

Thursday, August 19 ~ Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint John Eudes, Priest**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and the elders of the people in parables saying, "The Kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come. A second time he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those invited: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast.'" Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then the king said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.' The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. He said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.' Many are invited, but few are chosen."

Meditation: Jesus' parable contains two stories. The first has to do with the original guests invited to the marriage feast. The king had sent out invitations well in advance to his subjects, so they would have plenty of time to prepare for coming to the feast. How insulting for the invited guests to then refuse when the time for celebrating came! They made light of the King's request because they put their own interests above his. They not only insulted the King but the heir to the throne as well. The king's anger is justified because they openly refused to give the king the honor he was due. Jesus directed this warning to the Jews of his day, both to convey how much God wanted them to share in the joy of his kingdom, but also to give a warning about the consequences of refusing his Son, their Messiah and Savior. The second part of the story focuses on those who had no claim on the king and who would never have considered getting such an invitation. The good and the bad along the highways certainly referred to the Gentiles and to sinners. This is certainly an invitation of grace - undeserved, unmerited favor and kindness! But this invitation also contains a warning for those who refuse it or who approach the wedding feast unworthily. God's grace is a free gift, but it is also an awesome responsibility.

Prayer: O God, who wonderfully chose the Priest Saint John Eudes to proclaim the unfathomable riches of Christ, grant us, by his example and teachings, that, growing in knowledge of you, we may live faithfully by the light of the Gospel. 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: Saint John Chrysostom provides some words to contemplate on pertaining to today's parable: "But since you have already come into the house of the marriage feast, our holy church, as a result of God's generosity, be careful, my friends, lest when the King enters he find fault with some aspect of your heart's clothing. We must consider what comes next with great fear in our hearts. But the king came in to look at the guests and saw there a person not clothed in a wedding garment. What do we think is meant by the wedding garment, dearly beloved? For if we say it is baptism or faith, is there anyone who has entered this marriage feast without them? A person is outside because he has not yet come to believe. What then must we understand by the wedding garment but love? That person enters the marriage feast, but without wearing a wedding garment, who is present in the holy church. He may have faith, but he does not have love. We are correct when we say that love is the wedding garment because this is what our Creator himself possessed when he came to the marriage feast to join the church to

himself. Only God's love brought it about that his only begotten Son united the hearts of his chosen to himself. John says that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for us' " (John 3:16).

About Saint John Eudes: Born on a farm in northern France, St. John was a religious, a parish missionary, founder of two religious communities and a great promoter of the devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He joined the religious community of the Oratorians and was ordained a priest at twenty-four. During severe plagues in 1627 and 1631, he volunteered to care for the stricken in his own diocese. Lest he infect his fellow religious, he lived in a huge cask in the middle of a field during the plague. In his parish mission work, John was disturbed by the sad condition of prostitutes who sought to escape their miserable life. Temporary shelters were found but arrangements were not satisfactory. A certain Madeleine Lamy, who had cared for several of the women, one day said to him, "Where are you off to now? To some church, I suppose, where you'll gaze at the images and think yourself pious. And all the time what is really wanted of you is a decent house for these poor creatures." The words, and the laughter of those present, struck deeply within him. The result was another new religious community, called the Sisters of Charity of the Refuge. He is probably best known for the central theme of his writings: Jesus as the source of holiness, Mary as the model of the Christian life. His devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary led Pius XI to declare him the father of the liturgical cult of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He was also the author of several books which served his work, e.g., *The Ideal Confessor* and *The Apostolic Preacher*. He died at the age of seventy-nine.

Friday, August 20 ~ Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40 When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law, tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Meditation: Jesus summarized the whole of the law in two great commandments found in Deuteronomy 6:5 - "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" - and Leviticus 19:18 - "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." God's love directs all that he does - His love is holy, just, and pure because it seeks only what is good, beneficial, and life-giving - rather than what is destructive, evil, or deadly. That is why he commands us to love - to accept and to give only what is good, lovely, just, and pure and to reject whatever is contrary.

Prayer: O God, who made the Abbot Saint Bernard a man consumed with zeal for your house and a light shining and burning in your Church, grant, through his intercession, that we may be on fire with the same spirit and walk always as children of 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: Love is the gift of giving oneself for the good of others - it is wholly other oriented and directed to the welfare and benefit of others. Love which is rooted in pleasing myself is self-centered and possessive - it is a selfish love that takes from others rather than gives to others. It is a stunted and disordered love which leads to many hurtful and sinful desires - such as jealousy, greed, envy, and lust. The root of all sin is disordered love and pride which is fundamentally putting myself above God and my neighbor - it is loving and serving me, myself and I rather than God and neighbor. True love, which is wholly directed and oriented to what is good rather than evil, is rooted in God's truth and moral goodness. How can we possibly love God above all else and obey his commandments willingly and joyfully, and how can we love our neighbor and willing lay down our life for their sake? Paul the Apostle tells us that "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). We do not earn God's love - it is freely given to those who open their heart to God and who freely accept the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Lord Jesus to flood your heart with his love through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

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