

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 March is dedicated to Saint Joseph

“If you suffer with Him, you will reign with Him. If you cry with Him, you will have joy with Him. If you die with Him on the Cross of tribulation, you will possess the eternal dwelling place in the splendor of the saints. And your name, written in the Book of Life, will be glorious among men.” +SAINT CLARE OF ASSISI

Monday, March 23 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent
Optional Memorial: Saint Turibius of Mongrovejo

Holy Gospel: John 8:1-11 Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

Meditation: This incident conveys to us a great deal about Jesus’ attitude toward the sinner. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus with the religious and civil authorities. That is why they brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. Jesus turned the challenge towards his accusers. In effect he said: Go ahead and stone her! But let the man who is without sin be the first to cast a stone. The Lord leaves the matter to their own consciences. When the adulterous woman is left alone with Jesus, he both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again. The scribes wished to condemn, Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge involved a choice – either go back to your former way of sin and death, or reach out to the new way of life and happiness with him. Jesus gave her pardon and a new start on life. God’s grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is – unfaithfulness to God, and to turn back to God with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for God’s mercy and forgiveness. Do you know the joy of repentance and a clean heart and mind?

Prayer: O God, by whose wondrous grace we are enriched with every blessing, grant us so to pass from former ways to newness of life, that we may be made ready for the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. 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: In your heart of hearts, do you desire to be changed and transformed in Christ-like holiness? God never withholds his grace from us. His steadfast love and mercy is new every day (ref. Lamentations 3:22-23). Through the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit we can be changed and made new in Christ. He can set us free from our unruly desires and passions. Let us pray as St. Augustine prayed: “God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you love, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Tuesday, March 24 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:21-30 Jesus said to the Pharisees: "I am going away and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come." So the Jews said, "He is not going to kill himself, is he, because he said, 'Where I am going you cannot come?'" He said to them, "You belong to what is below, I belong to what is above. You belong to this world, but I do not belong to this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "What I told you from the beginning. I have much to say about you in condemnation. But the one who sent me is true, and what I heard from him I tell the world." They did not realize that he was speaking to them of the Father. So Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him." Because he spoke this way, many came to believe in him.

Meditation: To "sin" literally means to *miss the mark* or *to be off target*. The essence of sin is that we, through our choice, separate ourselves from the love of God and from our true purpose in life – to know the source of all truth and beauty which is God himself and to be united with God in everlasting joy. When Adam and Eve first sinned, they hid themselves from God (Genesis 3:8-10). That is what sin does; it separates us from the One who is all loving, all-wise, and all-just. Jesus went on to explain that if people could not recognize him in his word, they would have the opportunity to recognize him when he is "lifted upon the cross of Calvary. Jesus pointed to the atoning sacrifice of his life on the cross as the true source of healing and victory over the sin of the world. The sacrifice of Christ's life on the cross for our sins is the ultimate proof of God's love for us. God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). To fail to recognize Jesus and where he came from is to remain in spiritual darkness; to believe Jesus and his words is to walk in the joy and light of God's truth. There are certain opportunities in life that come and do not return. Each of us is given the opportunity to know and to accept Jesus Christ, as our Lord and Savior. But that opportunity can be rejected and lost. Life here is limited and short, but how we live it has everlasting consequences. Do you take advantage of the present time to make room for God so that your life will count for eternity?

Prayer: Grant us, we pray, O Lord, perseverance in obeying your will, that in our days the people dedicated to your service may grow in both merit and number. 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: Do you know the healing power of the cross of Christ? When the people of Israel were afflicted with serpents in the wilderness because of their sin, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (ref. Numbers 21:8). The bronze serpent points to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe. The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising and exaltation to the Father's right hand in heaven, is our "new birth in the Spirit" and adoption as sons and daughters of God. God not only redeems us, but he fills us with his own divine life and power that we might share in his glory. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit that we may have power to be his witnesses and to spread and defend the gospel by word and action, and to never be ashamed of Christ's Cross. Are you ready to live your life as a witness the truth and joy of the Gospel to those around you?

Wednesday, March 25 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

The Lord said, as He entered the world: "Behold, I come to do Your will, O God."

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26-38 The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who

was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation: In this particular passage of sacred scripture we see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. This child to be born is conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, who finds favor with God. As Eve was the mother of all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary becomes the mother of the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (ref. Romans 5:12-21).

Prayer: O God, who willed that your Word should take on the reality of human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, grant, we pray, that we, who confess our Redeemer to be God and man, may merit to become partakers even in his divine nature. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: How does Mary respond to the word of God delivered by the angel Gabriel? She knows she is hearing something beyond human capability. It will surely take a miracle which surpasses all that God has done previously. Her question, "how shall this be, since I have no husband" is not prompted by doubt or skepticism, but by wonderment! She is a true hearer of the Word and she immediately responds with faith, trust, and without hesitation. Mary's prompt response of "yes" to the divine message is a model of faith for all believers. Mary believed God's promises even when they seemed impossible. She was full of grace because she trusted that what God said was true and would be fulfilled. She was willing and eager to do God's will, even if it seemed difficult or costly. Mary is the "mother of God" because God becomes incarnate when he takes on flesh in her womb. When we pray the Nicene Creed we state our confession of faith in this great mystery: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heartfelt trust as Mary did. When God commands he also gives the help, strength, and means to respond. We can either yield to his grace or resist and go our own way. Going our own way leads to nowhere; following Christ leads to eternal life.

Thursday, March 26 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:51-59 Jesus said to the Jews: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." So the Jews said to him, "Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.

Meditation: When the Jews asked Jesus "Who do you claim to be?" Jesus answered, "before Abraham was, I AM." Jesus claims to be timeless and there is only one in the universe who is timeless, namely God. Scripture tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus was not just a man who came, lived, died, and then rose again. He is the immortal timeless One, who always was and always will be. In Jesus we see the eternal God in visible flesh. His death and rising make it possible for us to share in his eternal life. Do you live in the hope and joy of the resurrection?

Prayer: O God, who reward the merits of the just and offer pardon to sinners who do penance, have mercy, we pray, on those who call upon you, that the admission of our guilt may serve to obtain your pardon for our sins. 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: Do you thirst and hunger to know God fully – to know him personally, and to know the transforming power of his love and wisdom for your life? God made us to know him and he gives us the gift of faith and understanding to grow in our knowledge of him. Jesus challenged the people of Israel to accept his word as the revelation of God. His claims challenged the very foundation of their belief and understanding of God. Jesus made a series of claims which are the very foundation of his life and mission. What are these claims? First, Jesus claims unique knowledge of God as the only begotten Son of the Father in heaven. Since he claims to be in direct personal communion with his Father in heaven, he knows everything about the Father. Jesus claims that the only way to full knowledge of the mind and heart of

God is through himself. Jesus also claims unique obedience to God the Father. He thinks, lives and acts in the knowledge of his Father's word. To look at his life is to see how God wishes me to live. In Jesus alone we see what God wants us to know and what he wants us to be.

Friday, March 27 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 10:31-42 The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, You are gods'?" If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and Scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried again to arrest him; but he escaped from their power.

He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. Many came to him and said, "John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true." And many there began to believe in him.

Meditation: Why were the religious leaders so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill him? They charged him with blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God. Jesus made two claims in his response: He was consecrated by the Father to a special task and he was sent into the world to carry out his Father's mission. Jesus challenged his opponents to accept his works if they could not accept his words. One can argue with words, but deeds are beyond argument. Jesus is the perfect teacher in that he does not base his claims on what he says but on what he does. The word of God is life and power to those who believe.

Prayer: Pardon the offenses of your peoples, we pray, O Lord, and in your goodness set us free from the bonds of the sins we have committed in our weakness. 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: As we approach Holy Week – the holiest week of the year in the Christian world – let's make sure that we put the "HOLY" in the upcoming Holy Week by the way we live our Catholic faith and

how we choose to spend our time during this week. Let us live this week illuminated with the light of Christ, so that his light shines through each of us. Let us set aside this one week of the year for added prayer, scripture reading and meditation, daily Mass, praying the Stations of the Cross, attending the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper, and attending the Good Friday Passion of the Lord Liturgy. Have you been to confession lately? How can we best thank Christ for his suffering the Passion and death on the cross, with the weight and pain of the cross being our own sinfulness? Walk alongside him during the upcoming Holy Week, and devote your life to "be doers of the Word, not hearers only" (James 1:22)



Excerpts from the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition*
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