

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 December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“It is impossible to find a saint who did not take the ‘two P’s’ seriously: prayer and penance.” +SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

Monday, December 2 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:5-11 When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.” He said to him, “I will come and cure him.” The centurion said in reply, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come here,’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven.”

Meditation: Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! We want to begin this first Monday of our Advent journey by rallying ourselves to turn to the Lord with great hope. In the midst of many discouraging challenges in our lives – the economy, violence, political in-fighting, problems in our own lives – we desire to spend this day in anticipation of the graces our God desires to give us. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; “One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.” (Isaiah,2) Let us remember the words in scripture which we state during each Mass before we receive the Eucharist: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you; but say only the word and my soul will be healed.”

Prayer: Keep us alert, we pray, O Lord our God, as we await the advent of Christ your Son, so that, when he comes and knocks, he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The prophet Isaiah foretold a time of restoration for the holy city Jerusalem and for its remnants (ref. Isaiah 4:2-6) and also a time of universal peace when all nations would come to Jerusalem to “the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob” and “beat their swords into plowshares” (Isaiah 2:2-4). Jesus fulfills this prophecy first by restoring both Jew and Gentile to fellowship with God through the victory he won for us on the cross. When he comes again he will fully establish his universal rule of peace and righteousness and unite all things in himself (ref. Ephesians 1:10). His promise extends to all generations who believe in him that we, too, might feast at the heavenly banquet table with the patriarchs of the Old Covenant who believed but did not see the promised Messiah. And so we need to ask ourselves: Do you believe in God's promises and do you seek his kingdom first in your life? The season of Advent reminds us that the Lord wants us to actively seek him and the coming of his kingdom in our lives. The Lord will surely reward those who seek his will for their lives. We can approach the Lord Jesus with expectant faith, like the centurion did in today's gospel reading, knowing that he will show us his mercy, love, compassion, along with guidance and help in our time of need.

Tuesday, December 3 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent **Saint Francis Xavier, Priest**

Holy Gospel: Luke 10:21-24 Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except

the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." Turning to the disciples in private he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."

Meditation: What does Jesus' prayer in today's gospel tell us about God and about ourselves? First, it tells us that God is both Father and Lord of earth as well as heaven. He is both Creator and Author of all that he has made, the first origin of everything and transcendent authority, and at the same time, goodness and loving care for all his children. All fatherhood and motherhood are derived from him (ref. Ephesians 3:14-15). Jesus' prayer also contains a warning that pride can keep us from the love and knowledge of God. Pride closes the mind to God's truth and wisdom for our lives. Jesus contrasts pride with child-like simplicity and humility. The simple of heart are like "babes" in the sense that they see purely without pretense and acknowledge their dependence and trust in God who is the source of all wisdom and strength. They seek one thing – the "summum bonum" or "greatest good" which is God himself. Simplicity of heart is wedded with humility, the queen of virtues, because humility inclines the heart towards grace and truth. Just as pride is the root of every sin and evil, so humility is the only soil in which the grace of God can take root. It alone takes the right attitude before God and allows him as God to do all. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Prov. 3:34, James 4:6). The grace of Christ-like humility inclines us towards God and disposes us to receive God's wisdom, grace, and help. Nothing can give us greater joy than the knowledge that we are God's beloved and that our names are written in heaven (ref. Luke 10:20).

Prayer: O God, who through the preaching of Saint Francis Xavier won many peoples to yourself, grant that the hearts of the faithful may burn with the same zeal for the faith and that Holy Church may everywhere rejoice in an abundance of offspring. 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 makes a claim which no one would have dared to make – He is the perfect revelation of God. Our knowledge of God is not simply limited to knowing something about God, but we can know God personally. Jesus makes it possible for each of us to personally know God as our Father. To see Jesus is to see what God is like. In Jesus we see the perfect love of God – a God who cares intensely and who yearns over men and women, loving them to the point of laying down his life for them upon the Cross. Do you pray to your Father in heaven with joy and confidence in his love and care for you?

Wednesday, December 4 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Saint John Damascene, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 15:29-37 At that time: Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, went up on the mountain, and sat down there. Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see, and they glorified the God of Israel. Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way." The disciples said to him, "Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" "Seven," they replied, "and a few fish." He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.

Meditation: When the disciples were confronted by Jesus with the task of feeding four thousand people many miles away from any source of food, they exclaimed: Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them? The Israelites were confronted with the same dilemma when they fled Egypt and found themselves in a barren wilderness. Like the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness, Jesus, himself provides bread in abundance for the hungry crowd who came out into the desert to seek him. The gospel records that all were satisfied and they took up what was leftover. In the multiplication of the loaves and fishes we see a sign and a symbol of what God always does. God knows our needs and he cares. When God gives, he gives in abundance. The gospel account records that the leftovers from the miraculous meal was more than seven times the amount they began with. Seven is a symbol of completion and wholeness. When God gives, he gives until we are satisfied. When God works for his people he gives abundantly – more than we could deserve and more than we need. He nourishes us with his life-giving word and with the bread of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven God will feast us at his

banquet table. Are you satisfied with God's provision for you? And do you long with expectant hope for the coming of his kingdom in all its fullness?

Prayer: Grant, we pray, O Lord, that we may be helped by the prayers of the Priest Saint John Damascene, so that the true faith, which he excelled in teaching, may always be our light and our strength. 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: If we open our eyes to look around us, one cannot help but have our hearts touched at what we see – so many people in need. When we see people in need, do we react as Jesus did – do we share in Jesus' thoughts: "My heart is moved with pity." Though we do not have the capacities of Jesus to perform miracles as He did, we do, in fact, have the capacity to perform "miracles" of a sort by sharing what we have with those in need – especially those who are without such basics as adequate food, clothing and shelter. Those who do not have transportation to get to the grocery store, the drug store, to a place to shop for various needs – especially the elderly. There are so many things we can do to carry on the mission of Jesus Christ by helping those in need. Ask yourself: when you see people in need, is your heart moved with pity? Moved with pity to help them in one way or another? To share what you have been blessed with? In this season of preparation and of giving may your heart be open to help others; in doing so, you are conforming your heart with that of Christ.

Thursday, December 5 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 7:21, 24-27 Jesus said to his disciples: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. "Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined."

Meditation: What can satisfy the deepest hunger and longing of the human heart? Isaiah prophesied that God would provide a heavenly banquet for all peoples and would destroy death once and for all (Isaiah 2:6-8). God sent his only son into the world to fulfill that promise. The miracles performed by Jesus are both a sign of God's kingdom and a demonstration of God's power. They also show the magnitude of God's love and mercy. When the disciples were confronted by Jesus with the task of feeding four thousand people many miles away from any source of food, they exclaimed: Where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them? The Israelites were confronted with the same dilemma when they fled Egypt and found themselves in a barren wilderness. Like the miraculous provision of manna in the wilderness, Jesus, himself provides bread in abundance for the hungry crowd who came out into the desert to seek him. The gospel records that all were satisfied and they took up what was leftover.

Prayer: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come to our help with mighty strength, that what our sins impede the grace of your mercy may hasten. 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: In the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes we see a sign and a symbol of what God always does. God knows our needs and he truly cares about us. When God gives, he gives in abundance. The gospel account records that the leftovers from the miraculous meal was more than seven times the amount they began with. Seven is a symbol of completion and wholeness. When God gives, he gives until we are satisfied. When God works for his people he gives abundantly – more than we could deserve and more than we need. He nourishes us with his life-giving word and with the bread of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven God will feast us at his banquet table. Are you satisfied with God's provision for you? In this Season of Advent, do you long with expectant hope for the coming of his kingdom in all its fullness?

Friday, December 6 ~ First Week in the Season of Advent Saint Nicholas, Bishop

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:27-31 As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying out, "Son of David, have pity on us!" When he entered the house, the blind men approached him and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I can do this?" "Yes, Lord," they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, "Let it be done for you according to your faith." And their eyes were opened. Jesus warned

them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread word of him through all that land.

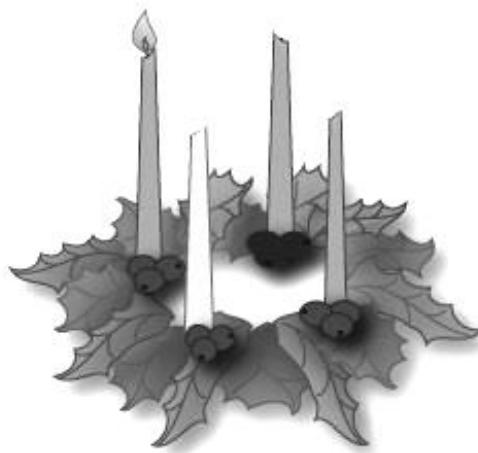
Meditation: The kind of foundation that each of us builds our lives upon will determine whether we can survive the storms that are sure to come. Builders usually lay their foundations when the weather and soil conditions are at their best. It takes foresight to know how a foundation will stand up against adverse conditions. Building a house on a flood plain, such as a dry river-bed, is a sure bet for disaster! Jesus prefaced his story with a warning: We may fool humans with our speech, but God cannot be deceived. He sees the heart as it truly is – with its motives, intentions, desires, and choices (ref. Psalm 139:2). There is only one way in which a person's sincerity can be proved, and that is by one's practice. Fine words can never replace good deeds. Our character is revealed in the choices we make, especially when we are tested. Do you cheat on an exam or on your income taxes, especially when it will cost you? Do you lie, or cover-up, when disclosing the truth will cause you injury or embarrassment? A true person is honest and reliable before God, one's neighbor and oneself. His or her word can be counted on. If you heed God's word and live according to it then you need not fear when storms assail you. God will be your rock and your refuge. Is your life built upon the sure "rock" of Jesus Christ and do you listen to his word as if your life depended on it?

Prayer: We humbly implore your mercy, Lord: protect us in all dangers through the prayers of the Bishop Saint Nicholas, that the way of salvation may lie open before us. 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: What is the best security against disaster and destruction? In the ancient world a strong city, an impregnable fortress, and a secure house were built on solid rock because they could withstand the forces of nature and foe alike. Isaiah speaks of God as an "everlasting rock" (ref. Is. 26:4). He is the rock of refuge and deliverance (ref. Psalm 18:2) and the rock in whom there is no wrong (ref. Psalm 92:15). Scripture warns that destruction will surely come to those who place their security in something other than God and his kingdom. Jesus' parables invite us to stake our lives on the coming of his kingdom or face the consequences of being unprepared when the day of testing and destruction will surely come. In this Advent season, we are reminded to place all of our trust in Jesus Christ, the promised Savior, the Son of God who was sent to this world for our redemption.

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011;
information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of Catholic Culture;
some meditations inspired by *Biblical Meditations for Advent and Christmas* by Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP.

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A Prayer for Advent

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send Your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do seek quiet spaces to hear Your voice each day. We who are anxious over many things look forward to Your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of Your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of Your presence. We are Your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To You we say, "Come Lord Jesus!" ~Father Henri Nouwen