

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 April is dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

"Born as a son, led forth as a lamb, sacrificed as a sheep, buried as a man, He rose from the dead as a God, for He is by nature God and Man. He is all things: He judges, and so He is Law; He teaches, and so He is Word; He saves, and so He is Grace; He begets and so He is Father; He is begotten, and so He is Son; He suffers, and so He is Sacrifice; He is buried, and so He is man; He rises again, and so He is God. This is Jesus Christ, to Whom belongs Glory for all ages." +SAINT MELITO OF SARDIS

Monday, April 1 ~ The Octave of Easter

Holy Gospel: Matthew 28:8-15 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce the news to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." While they were going, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had happened. The chief priests assembled with the elders and took counsel; then they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole him while we were asleep.' And if this gets to the ears of the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." The soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has circulated among the Jews to the present day.

Meditation: Have you ever asked what the basis is of our faith in the resurrection? The scriptures tell us that "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"(Hebrews 11:1). Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to us. Our faith is a free assent to the whole truth which God reveals to us through his word. Faith is certain because it is based on the very word of God who cannot lie. Faith also seeks understanding. That is why God enlightens the "eyes of our hearts" that we may know what is the hope to which he has called us (Ephesians 1:18). Peter the Apostle says we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Through the gift of faith, the Lord reveals himself to those who believe in his word and he fills them with "new life in his Holy Spirit". Do you live in the joy and hope of the resurrection? And do you recognize the presence of the Risen Lord in his word, in the "breaking of the bread", and in his church, the body of Christ?

Prayer: O God, who give constant increase to your Church by new offspring, grant that your servants may hold fast in their lives to the Sacrament they have received in 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: Are you always prepared to meet the Risen Lord? The disciples of Jesus were as unprepared for his resurrection as they were for his death. The empty tomb made them fearful and joyful at the same time. "Where did they put the body or did he really rise just as he predicted?" Even though Jesus had spoken to them before of his death and rising, they could not believe until they saw the empty tomb and met the risen Lord. Aren't we the same? We want to see with our own eyes before we believe! The guards brought their testimony to the chief priests and elders who met the news with denial. They were resolved to not believe that Jesus had risen and they bribed the guards in the hope of keeping others from believing.

Tuesday, April 2 ~ The Octave of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 20:11-18 Mary Magdalene stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she

turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and then reported what he had told her.

Meditation: The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of our hope – the hope that we will see God face to face and share in his everlasting glory and joy. "Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9). And so, do you recognize the Lord's presence with you, in his word, in the "breaking of the bread", and in his church, the body of Christ?

Prayer: O God, who have bestowed on us paschal remedies, endow your people with heavenly gifts, so that, possessed of perfect freedom, they may rejoice in heaven over what gladdens them now on earth. 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: How easy it can be to miss the Lord when our focus is on ourselves! Mary did not at first recognize the Lord because her focus was on the empty tomb and on her own grief. It took only one word from the Master, when he called her by name, for Mary to recognize him. Mary's message to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, is the very essence of Christianity. It is not enough that a Christian know about the Lord, but that we know him personally. It is not enough to argue about him, but to meet him. In the resurrection we encounter the living Lord who loves us personally and shares his glory with us. The Lord gives us "eyes of faith" to see the truth of his resurrection and victory over sin and death (Ephesians 1:18).

Wednesday, April 3 ~ The Octave of Easter

Holy Gospel: Luke 24:13-35 That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his Body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the Eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Meditation: St. Augustine provides a reflection on the dimness of their perception: "They were so disturbed when they saw him hanging on the cross that they forgot his teaching, did not look for his resurrection, and failed to keep his promises in mind" (Sermon 235.1). "Their eyes were obstructed, that they should not recognize him until the breaking of the bread. And thus, in accordance with the state of their minds, which was still ignorant of the truth (that the Christ would die and rise again", their eyes were

similarly hindered. It was not that the truth himself was misleading them, but rather that they were themselves unable to perceive the truth." (From *The Harmony of the Gospels*, 3.25.72) How often do we fail to recognize the Lord when he speaks to our hearts and opens his mind to us? The Risen Lord is ever ready to speak his word to us and to give us understanding of his ways. Do you listen attentively to the Word of God and allow his word to change and transform you?

Prayer: O God, who gladden us year by year with the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection, graciously grant that, by celebrating these present festivities, we may merit through them to reach eternal joys. 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: We often wonder how it would have been difficult for the disciples to recognize the risen Lord. To put it simply, Jesus' death scattered his disciples and shattered their hopes and dreams. They had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. They saw the cross as defeat and could not comprehend the empty tomb until the Lord appeared to them and gave them understanding. Jesus chided the disciples on the road to Emmaus for their slowness of heart to believe what the scriptures had said concerning the Messiah. They did not recognize the risen Jesus until he had broken bread with them. Do you recognize the Lord in his word and in the breaking of the bread?

Thursday, April 4 ~ The Octave of Easter

Holy Gospel: Luke 24:35-48 The disciples of Jesus recounted what had taken place along the way, and how they had come to recognize him in the breaking of bread. While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them. He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Meditation: Isn't amazing how much we are like the apostles? We won't believe unless we can see with our own eyes. The gospels attest to the reality of the resurrection. Jesus goes to great lengths to assure his disciples that he is no mere ghost or illusion. He shows them the marks of his crucifixion and he explains how the scriptures foretold his death and rising. Jerome, an early church bible scholar, comments: "As he showed them real hands and a real side, he really ate with his disciples; really walked with Cleophas; conversed with men with a real tongue; really reclined at supper; with real hands took bread, blessed and broke it, and was offering it to them...Do not put the power of the Lord on the level with the tricks of magicians, so that he may appear to have been what he was not, and may be thought to have eaten without teeth, walked without feet, broken bread without hands, spoken without a tongue, and showed a side which had no ribs." (*From a letter to Pammachius against John of Jerusalem 34, 5th century*)

Prayer: O God, who have united the many nations in confessing your name, grant that those reborn in the font of Baptism may be one in the faith of their hearts and the homage of their deeds. 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 central teaching of the gospel is the cross; but it does not stop there. Through the cross Jesus defeated our enemies – death and Satan and won pardon for our sins. His cross is the door to heaven and the key to paradise. The way to glory is through the cross. When the disciples saw the risen Lord they disbelieved for joy! How can death lead to life, the cross to victory? Jesus shows us the way and he gives us the power to overcome sin and despair, and everything else that would stand in the way of his love and truth. Just as the first disciples were commissioned to bring the good news of salvation to all the nations, so, we, too, are called to be witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who live on the face of the earth. Do you witness the joy of the gospel to those around you?

Friday, April 5 ~ The Octave of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 21:1-14 Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

Meditation: Why didn't the apostles immediately recognize the Lord when he greeted them at the Sea of Tiberias? John gives us a clue. He states that Peter decided to return to his home district of Galilee, very likely so he could resume his fishing career. Peter was discouraged and didn't know what to do after the tragedy of Jesus' death! He went back to his previous career out of despair and uncertainty. The other apostles followed him back to Galilee. When was the last time Peter was commanded to let down his net after a futile night of fishing? It was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee when the Lord dramatically approached Peter in his fishing boat after a futile night of fishing and commanded him to lower his nets (see Luke 5:4-11). After the miraculous catch, Jesus told Peter that he would be 'catching people' for the kingdom of God. Now Jesus repeats the same miracle. John, the beloved disciple, is the first to recognize the Lord. Peter impulsively leaps from the boat and runs to the Lord. Do you run to the Lord when you meet setbacks, disappointments, or trials? The Lord is ever ready to renew us in faith and to give us fresh hope in his promises.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who gave us the Paschal Mystery in the covenant you established for reconciling the human race, so dispose our minds, we pray, that what we celebrate by professing the faith we may express in deeds. 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: Skeptics who disbelieve the resurrection say the disciples only saw a vision of Jesus. The gospels, however, give us a vivid picture of the reality of the resurrection. Jesus went out of his way to offer his disciples various proofs of his resurrection – that he is real and true flesh, not just a spirit or ghost. In his third appearance to the apostles, after Jesus performed the miraculous catch of fish, he prepared a breakfast and ate with them. Peter's prompt recognition of the Master and exclamation "It is the Lord!" stands in sharp contrast to his previous denial of his Master during the night of Jesus' arrest. The Lord Jesus reveals himself to each of us as we open our hearts to receive his word. Do you recognize the Lord's presence in your life? Do you receive his word with faith? Are you open to conforming your mind and heart to that of Jesus Christ, so that you can follow him with love as a true disciple?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Daily meditations and contemplations adapted from the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* web page and *Biblical Medications for Easter* by Rev. Carroll StuhlmueLLer, C.P.; prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011; information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.

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