

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 February is dedicated to the Holy Family.

“The purpose of Lent is not only expiation, to satisfy the divine justice, but above all a preparation to rejoice in His love. And this preparation consists in receiving the gift of His mercy—a gift which we receive insofar as we open our hearts to it, casting out what cannot remain in the same room with mercy. Now one of the things we must cast out first of all is fear. Fear narrows the little entrance to our heart. It shrinks up our capacity to love. It freezes up our power to give ourselves. If we were terrified of God as an inexorable judge, we would not confidently await His mercy, or approach Him trustfully in prayer. Our peace and our joy in Lent are a guarantee of grace.” ~FATHER THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

Monday, February 26 ~ Second Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: Luke 6:36-38 Jesus said to his disciples: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. “Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

Meditation: God seeks our highest good and teaches us to seek the greatest good of others, even those who hate and abuse us. Our love for others, even those who are ungrateful and selfish towards us, must be marked by the same kindness and mercy which God has shown to us. It is easier to show kindness and mercy when we can expect to benefit from doing so. How much harder when we can expect nothing in return. Our prayer for those who do us ill both breaks the power of revenge and releases the power of love to do good in the face of evil. How can we possibly love those who cause us harm, ill-will, and grief? With God all things are possible. He gives power and grace to those who know his love and who ask for the gift and help of the Holy Spirit. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5) God's love conquers all, even our hurts, fears, prejudices and grief. Only the cross of Jesus Christ and his victory over sin can free us from the tyranny of malice, hatred, revenge, and resentment, and give us the courage to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

Prayer: O God, who have taught us to chasten our bodies for the healing of our souls, enable us, we pray, to abstain from all sins, and strengthen our hearts to carry out your loving commands. 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 makes Christians different and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion? It is grace – treating others, not as they deserve, but as God wishes them to be treated – with loving-kindness and mercy. Do you pray for mercy and forgive those who wrong you? When we are confronted with our sinful condition and failings we experience guilt and shame. This can often either lead us to cast off pride and make-belief or it can lead us to lose our inhibitions and fall into more shameless deeds! If we are utterly honest and humble before God, we will admit our sins and ask for his mercy and forgiveness. Do you know the joy and freedom of repentance, forgiveness, and a clean heart?

Tuesday, February 27 ~ Second Week in the Season of Lent

Optional Memorial + Saint Gregory of Narek, Abbott and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12 Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They

tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Meditation: Jesus seemed to be warning both his disciples and the religious leaders about the temptation to seek titles and honors to increase one's reputation and admiration by others. The scriptures give ample warning about the danger of self-seeking pride: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6; Proverbs 3:24). Respect for God and his ways inclines us to Godly humility and simplicity of heart. Why should we embrace true humility? True humility is not feeling bad about yourself, or having a low opinion of yourself. True humility frees us from preoccupation with ourselves, whereas a low self-opinion tends to focus our attention on ourselves. Humility is truth in self-understanding and truth in action. Viewing ourselves truthfully, with sober judgment, means seeing ourselves the way God sees us (Psalm 139:1-4). A humble person makes a realistic assessment of oneself without illusion or pretense to be something one is not. A truly humble person regards oneself neither smaller nor larger than one truly is. True humility frees us to be ourselves as God sees us and to avoid despair and pride. A humble person does not wear a mask or put on a facade in order to look good to others. Such a person is not swayed by fame, reputation, success, or failure. Do you know the joy of Christ-like humility and simplicity of heart?

Prayer: Guard your Church, we pray, O Lord, in your unceasing mercy, and, since without you mortal humanity is sure to fall, and directed to all that brings salvation. 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.

Prayer ~ Saint Gregory of Narek: Almighty and eternal God, who gave your holy Church blessed Gregory as Doctor, grant that what he taught when moved by the divine Spirit may always stay firm in our hearts; and, as by your gift we embrace him as our patron, may we also have him as our defender to entreat your mercy. 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: Humility serves as the foundation of all the other virtues because humility enables us to see and judge correctly, the way God sees. Humility helps us to be teachable so we can acquire true knowledge, wisdom, and an honest view of reality. It directs our energy, zeal, and ambition to give ourselves to something greater than ourselves. Humility frees us to love and serve others selflessly, for their sake, rather than our own. Saint Paul the Apostle gives us the greatest example and model of humility in the person of Jesus Christ, who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and ...who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:7-8). Do you want to be a servant as Jesus served and loved others? The Lord gives grace to those who humbly seek him.

About Saint Gregory of Narek: St. Gregory was born in the city of Narek about 950 A.D. He was a monk, poet, mystical philosopher, and theologian, born into a family of writers. He became a priest at the age of 25 and dedicated himself to God completely, always searching for the truth. Most of his life he lived in the monasteries of Narek where he taught at the monastic school. He launched his writings with a commentary on the "Song of Songs;" he also wrote a number of famous letters, sharagans, treasures, odes, melodies, and church writings. However, his masterpiece is considered to be his Book of Lamentations, commonly called "Narek," in which his genius is displayed. Considered the greatest poet of the Armenian nation, Saint Gregory of Narek was canonized and proclaimed a Doctor of the Universal Church on April 12, 2015 by Pope Francis.

Wednesday, March 28 ~ Second Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 20:17-28 As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the Twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom." Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left,

this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Meditation: Have you ever given any thought as to who or what takes first place in your life? Selfish ambition drives us to get ahead of others. When two of Jesus' disciples tried to get ahead, Jesus did the unthinkable by telling them that the path to glory would be through suffering and the cross. And he wedded authority with selfless-service and with sacrifice – the willing offering of one's life for the sake of another. Jesus used stark language to explain what kind of sacrifice he had in mind. His disciples must drink his cup if they expect to reign with him in his kingdom. The cup he had in mind was a bitter one involving crucifixion. What kind of cup does the Lord have in mind for us? For some disciples such a cup entails physical suffering and the painful struggle of "martyrdom" in one form or another. This entails the long routine of the Christian life, with all its daily sacrifices, disappointments, set-backs, struggles, and temptations. A disciple must be ready to lay down his or her life in martyrdom and be ready to lay it down each and every day in the little and big sacrifices required. An early church father summed up Jesus' teaching with the expression: to serve is to reign with Christ. We share in God's reign by laying down our lives in humble service of one another as Jesus did for our sake. Are you up to this call?

Prayer: Keep your family, O Lord, schooled always in good works, and so comfort them with your protection here as to lead them graciously to gifts on high. 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 paid the price for our redemption with his blood. Slavery to sin is to want the wrong things 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. Do you want the greatest freedom possible – that is, the freedom to live as God truly meant us to live as his sons and daughters? Embrace his laws, his teachings, and his will, and true and lasting freedom will be yours!

Thursday, February 29 ~ Second Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: Luke 16:19-31 Jesus said to the Pharisees: "There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Meditation: The name "Lazarus" means "God is my help." Despite a life of misfortune and suffering, Lazarus did not lose hope in God. His eyes were set on a treasure stored up for him in heaven. The rich man, however, could not see beyond his material wealth and possessions. He not only had every thing he needed, he selfishly spent all he had on himself. He was too absorbed in what he possessed to notice the needs of those around him. He lost sight of God and the treasure of heaven because he was preoccupied with seeking happiness in material things. He served wealth rather than God. In the end the rich man became a beggar! Do you know the joy and freedom of possessing God as your true and lasting treasure? Those who put their hope and security in heaven will not be disappointed (see Hebrews 6:19)?

Prayer: O God, who delight in innocence and restore it, direct the hearts of your servants to yourself, that, caught up in the fire of your Spirit, we may be found steadfast in faith and effective in works.

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' parable about the afflictions of the poor man Lazarus brings home a very important lesson for us to think about during Lent, and to change the way we choose to help or not help those in need. In this story Jesus paints a dramatic scene of contrasts – riches and poverty, heaven and hell, compassion and indifference, inclusion and exclusion. We also see an abrupt and dramatic reversal of fortune. Lazarus was not only poor, but sick and unable to lift himself. He was “laid” at the gates of the rich man’s house. The dogs which licked his sores probably also stole the little bread he got for himself. Dogs in the ancient world symbolized contempt. Enduring the torment of these savage dogs only added to the poor man’s miseries and sufferings. The rich man treated the beggar with contempt and indifference, until he found his fortunes reversed at the end of his life! In God's economy, those who hold on possessively to what they have, lose it all in the end, while those who share generously receive back many times more than they gave away.

Friday, March 1 ~ Second Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46 Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: “Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned. Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes? They answered him, He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times.” Jesus said to them, Did you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes? Therefore, I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they knew that he was speaking about them. And although they were attempting to arrest him, they feared the crowds, for they regarded him as a prophet.

Meditation: What is the message of the parable of the vineyard? Jesus’ story about an absentee landlord and his not-so-good tenants would have made sense to his audience. The hills of Galilee were lined with numerous vineyards, and it was quite common for the owners to let out their estates to tenants. Many did it for the sole purpose of collecting rent. So why did Jesus' story about wicked tenants cause offense to the scribes and Pharisees? It contained both a prophetic message and a warning. Isaiah had spoken of the house of Israel as “the vineyard of the Lord” (Isaiah 5:7). Jesus' listeners would likely understand this parable as referring to God's dealing with a stubborn and rebellious people; this parable speaks to us today as well, as it conveys important truths about God and the way he deals with his people. God trusts us enough to give us freedom to run life as we choose, but “free will” can be dangerous if we do not follow the path of Christ – choices have consequences. Not once, but many times he forgives the tenants their debts, but while the tenants take advantage of the owner's patience, his judgment and justice prevail.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, purifying us by the sacred practice of penance, you may lead us in sincerity of heart to attain the holy things to come. 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 foretold both his death and his ultimate triumph. He knew he would be rejected and be killed, but he also knew that would not be the end. After rejection would come glory – the glory of resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. The Lord blesses his people today with the gift of his kingdom. And he promises that we will bear much fruit if we abide in him (ref. John 15:1-11). He entrusts his gifts and grace to each of us and he gives us work to do in his vineyard – the body of Christ. He promises that our labor will not be in vain if we persevere with faith to the end (ref. 1 Corinthians 15:58). We can expect trials and even persecution. But in the end we will see triumph. Do you do any labor for the Lord? Do you do so with joyful hope and with confidence in his victory?

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 Lent* by Rev. Carroll Stuhlmuehler, 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.