

# Lectio Divina

## SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

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“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)

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*The month of January is dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus.*

***"The devil is afraid of us when we pray and make sacrifices. He is also afraid when we are humble and good. He is especially afraid when we love Jesus very much. He runs away when we make the Sign of the Cross."*** +SAINT ANTHONY, ABBOT

### **Monday, January 15 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 2:18-22** The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were accustomed to fast. People came to Jesus and objected, “Why do the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins.”

**Meditation:** Jesus warns his disciples about the problem of the “closed mind” that refuses to learn new things. Jesus used an image familiar to his audience — new and old wineskins. In Jesus’ time wine was stored in wineskins, not bottles. New wine poured into skins was still fermenting. The gases exerted gave pressure. New wine skins were elastic enough to take the pressure, but old wine skins easily burst because they were hard. What did Jesus mean by this comparison? Are we to reject the old in place of the new? Just as there is a right place and a right time for fasting and for feasting, so there is a right place for the old as well as the new. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old (Matthew 13:52). How impoverished we would be if we only had the Old Testament or the New Testament, rather than both. The Lord gives us wisdom so we can make the best use of both the old and the new. Are you eager to grow in the knowledge and understanding of God's word and plan for your life? If not, what is holding you back?

**Prayer:** Almighty ever-living God, who govern all things, both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times. 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:** Which comes first, fasting or feasting? The disciples of John the Baptist were upset with Jesus' disciples because they did not fast. Fasting was one of the three most important religious duties, along with prayer and almsgiving. Jesus gave a simple explanation. There's a time for fasting and a time for feasting (or celebrating). To walk as a disciple with Jesus is to experience a whole new joy of relationship akin to the joy of the wedding party in celebrating with the groom and bride their wedding bliss. But there also comes a time when the Lord's disciples must bear the cross of affliction and purification. For the disciple there is both a time for rejoicing in the Lord's presence and celebrating his goodness and a time for seeking the Lord with humility and fasting and for mourning over sin. Do you take joy in the Lord's presence with you and do you express sorrow and contrition for your sins?

### **Tuesday, January 16 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 2:23-28** As Jesus was passing through a field of grain on the Sabbath, his disciples began to make a path while picking the heads of grain. At this the Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions were hungry? How he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of offering that only the priests could lawfully eat, and shared it with his companions?” Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

**Meditation:** What does the commandment “keep holy the Sabbath” require us to do? The religious leaders confronted Jesus on this issue. The “Sabbath rest” was meant to be a time to remember and celebrate God’s goodness and the goodness of his work, both in creation and redemption. It was a day set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on our behalf. It was intended to bring everyday work to a halt and to provide needed rest and refreshment. Jesus’ disciples are scolded by the scribes and Pharisees, not for plucking and eating corn from the fields, but for doing so on the Sabbath. In defending his disciples, Jesus argues from the scriptures that human need has precedence over ritual custom.

**Prayer:** Almighty ever-living God, who govern all things, both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times. 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:** So how do you spend the Sabbath (Sunday for we Catholic Christians)? There was a time when families and individuals spent Sunday attending Mass, relaxing in one way or another, having “Sunday Dinner” with family, visiting grandma. The Sabbath – the “Lord’s Day” should always be a day of praise and worship to God through the Mass; it should also be a day rest for us, giving us time to “re-create” ourselves for the coming week. In our hurried world, take some time to contemplate how you spend your Sundays. Carve out time on this day to give praise and worship to God the Father and receive the Eucharist during Mass, then carve out some time for yourself and your family.

### **Wednesday, January 17 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time** **Saint Anthony, Abbot ~ the “Father of Monks”**

**Holy Gospel: Mark 3:1-6** Jesus entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched Jesus closely to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him. He said to the man with the withered hand, “Come up here before us.” Then he said to the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?” But they remained silent. Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.

**Meditation:** What is God’s intention for the commandment “keep holy the Sabbath” (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12)? The scribes and Pharisees wanted to catch Jesus in the act of breaking the Sabbath ritual so they might accuse him of breaking God’s law. In a few penetrating words Mark records that Jesus knew their thoughts. They were filled with fury and contempt for Jesus because they put their own thoughts of right and wrong above God. They were ensnared in their own legalism because they did not understand or see the purpose of God. Jesus shows their fallacy by pointing to God’s intention for the Sabbath: to do good and to save life rather than to do evil or to destroy life.

**Prayer:** O God, who brought the Abbot Saint Anthony to serve you by a wondrous way of life in the desert, grant, through his intercession, that, denying ourselves, we may always love you above all things. 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.

**Saint Anthony intercessory prayer:** Dear God, Saint Anthony the Abbot accepted your call to renounce the world and to love you above all things. He faithfully served you in the solitude of the desert by fasting, prayer, humility and good works. In the Sign of the Cross, he triumphed over the devil. Through his intercession, may we learn to love you better; with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds, all our strength and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Saint Antony the Abbot, great and powerful saint, intercede for us also for this special request (*mention your request*). We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** We Catholics – in fact all Christians – celebrate Sunday as the Lord’s Day, to commemorate God’s work of redemption in Jesus Christ and the new work of creation he accomplished through Christ’s death and resurrection. Taking “our Sabbath rest” is a way of expressing honor to God for all that he has done for us. Such “rest” however does not exempt us from our love for our neighbor. If we truly love the Lord above all else, then the love of God will overflow to love of neighbor as well. Do you honor the Lord in the manner with which you celebrate Sunday, the Lord’s Day, and in the way you treat you neighbor?

## Thursday, January 18 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time

**Holy Gospel: Mark 3:7-12** Jesus withdrew toward the sea with his disciples. A large number of people followed from Galilee and from Judea. Hearing what he was doing, a large number of people came to him also from Jerusalem, from Idumea, from beyond the Jordan, and from the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him. He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him. And whenever unclean spirits saw him they would fall down before him and shout, "You are the Son of God." He warned them sternly not to make him known.

**Meditation:** Is there anything holding you back from giving yourself unreservedly to God? Jesus offered freedom to everyone who sought him out. Wherever Jesus went the people came to him because they had heard all the things he did. They were hungry for God and desired healing from their afflictions. In faith they pressed upon Jesus to touch him. As they did so power came from Jesus and they were healed. Even demons trembled in the presence of Jesus and acknowledged his true identity: You are the Son of God. When you hear God's word and consider all that Jesus did, how do you respond? With doubt or with expectant faith? With skepticism or with confident expectation? Ask the Lord to increase your faith in his saving power and grace.

**Prayer:** Almighty ever-living God, who govern all things, both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times. 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 this scene, where Jesus is withdrawing a bit, do you feel a special closeness to him? He came to enter our world completely and be with us. It must have been a challenge for him to be so misunderstood by his disciples, to be so sought after by the poor, to be so rejected by the religious leaders, and have the demons proclaim that they alone seem to know who he is. In scenes like this, we can recognize that he must understand us when we are tired or stretched, misunderstood or rejected, frustrated or discouraged. Knowing this, can you draw closer to him during times of anxiety or challenge? Times of rejection or persecution?

## Friday, January 19 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time

**Holy Gospel: Mark 3:13-19** Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him. He appointed Twelve, whom he also named Apostles, that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach and to have authority to drive out demons: He appointed the Twelve: Simon, whom he named Peter; James, son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James, whom he named Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus; Thaddeus, Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.

**Meditation:** When Jesus embarked on his mission he chose twelve men for the task of preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick in the power of that kingdom. In the choice of the twelve, we see a characteristic feature of God's work: Jesus chose very ordinary people. They were non-professionals, who had no wealth or position. They were chosen from the common people who did ordinary things, had no special education, and no social advantages. Jesus wanted ordinary people who could take an assignment and do it extraordinarily well. He chose these men to be his apostles – not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power.

**Prayer:** Almighty ever-living God, who govern all things, both in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times. 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:** While Jesus called twelve men to be his apostles, Jesus calls all of us to serve the Lord as his disciples. When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not shrug back because we think that we have little or nothing to offer. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. Do you make your life an offering to the Lord and allow him to use you as he sees fit?

## Saturday, January 20 ~ Second Week in Ordinary Time Saint Fabian, Pope and Martyr; Saint Sebastian, Martyr

**Holy Gospel: Mark 3:20-21** Jesus came with his disciples into the house. Again the crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

**Meditation:** Have you thought about how the Lord Jesus Christ is honored in your home? Why would Jesus' relatives be so upset with him when he began his public ministry? On one occasion Jesus remarked that a man's enemies will be the members of his own household (Matthew 10:36). The Gospel of Mark records the reaction of Jesus' relatives when he went home: they came to seize him. They, no doubt, thought that Jesus must have gone mad or become a religious fanatic. How could a good home-body from Nazareth leave his father's carpentry trade and go off to become an itinerant preacher? Jesus had thrown away the security and safety of a quiet and respectable life close to his family and relatives. He, undoubtedly, expected opposition from the Jewish authorities. The hardest opposition, however, may come from someone close to us, even your own kin. Jesus met opposition with grace and with determination to fulfill his Father's will. Are you ready to obey and follow the Lord even if others oppose your doing so?

**Prayer ~ Saint Fabian:** O God, glory of your Priests, grant we pray, that, helped by the intercession of your Martyr Saint Fabian, we may make progress by communion in the faith and by worthy service. 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.

**Prayer ~ Saint Sebastian:** Grant us, we pray, O Lord, a spirit of fortitude, so that, taught by the glorious example of your Martyr Saint Sebastian, we may learn to obey you rather than men. 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:** The Gospel, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and St. Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* all tell us that "talk is cheap" – that love ought to show itself more in deeds than in words, that we ought to focus more on acting like Catholics and Christians by loving one another than by going around simply talking about being a Catholic Christian. Part of today's message is about not being a hypocrite, which begs the question -- have you co-opted this directive for your own devices, using it as a reason to rarely talk about being a Catholic Christian. Why ask this? Because of what happened to Jesus and his followers in today's gospel passage. After beginning his ministry, he returns home where his friends and relatives reject him and think he is crazy. What do you choose to do or not do in order to be "accepted" by others? Do you shortchange your faith in order to be part of the crowd?

**About Saint Fabian:** St. Fabian, a Roman, was as energetic as he was admired and respected. He was able to accomplish a great deal during his long pontificate. Escaping the persecution of Emperor Maximus Thrax, who had been assassinated, Fabian enjoyed peace in the Church under the reigns of succeeding emperors. One of St. Fabian's first acts was to reorganize the clergy of Rome to better serve the increasing flock. He is also credited with beautifying and enlarging the cemeteries. He ordered paintings to adorn the vaults, and he erected a church above the cemetery of Calixtus. The Church flourished under St. Fabian as a succession of emperors left the Christians to themselves. This peaceful time came to an abrupt end with the ascension of Emperor Decius. He was a cruel enemy and he decreed that all Christians were to deny Christ by openly worshipping pagan idols. The Church was to lose many followers, but more stood firm to suffer torture and even death. Certainly, one of the first was Pope Fabian. Arrested, he was thrown in prison and died at the hands of his brutal captors. He is buried in the cemetery of Calixtus.

**About Saint Sebastian:** St. Sebastian was widely venerated during the Middle Ages, particularly as a protector against the plague. Paul the Deacon relates that in 670 a great pestilence at Rome ceased when an altar was dedicated in his honor. The Breviary account of the saint is highly legendary; in part it reads: "Diocletian tried by every means to turn Sebastian from the faith of Christ. After all efforts had proven fruitless, he ordered him tied to a post and pierced with arrows. When everyone thought him dead, a devout woman named Irene arranged for his burial during the night; finding him still alive, she cared for him in her own house. After his recovery he appeared again before Diocletian and boldly rebuked him for his wickedness. Enraged by the saint's sharp words, the emperor ordered him scourged until he expired. His body was thrown into a sewer."

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 the Catholic Culture web site.

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