

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 July is dedicated to the Precious Blood of Jesus.

“A truly prayerful person will often approach Christ to ascertain whether they are pleasing or displeasing to Him.” +SAINT ANTHONY ZACCARIA

**Monday, July 1 ~ Thirteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
Saint Junípero Serra, Priest**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:18-22 When Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other shore. A scribe approached and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus answered him, “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.” Another of his disciples said to him, “Lord, let me go first and bury my father.” But Jesus answered him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.”

Meditation: When the Lord Jesus calls us to follow him, he invites us into a personal relationship of love and friendship. That relationship also involves the commitment of our entire lives to Jesus as Lord and Master, Teacher and Healer, Messiah and Savior. To follow Jesus is the greatest of all calls. What an awesome privilege and an awesome responsibility to be a disciple of Jesus Christ! What does it cost to be a disciple? For the first disciples, they paid the ultimate price for being a follower of Jesus by not renouncing Christ as Lord, Savior, Messiah; by not renouncing Christ’s teachings; by being steadfast disciples of Christ. A disciple must be willing to make sacrifices, even the sacrifice of his own life to follow Jesus as his Master and Lord. Notice how another would-be disciple responded by saying that he must first bury his father, that is go back home and take care of his father until he died. Jesus appealed to the man’s heart and told him to detach himself from whatever might keep him from following as his disciple.

Prayer: O God, who by your ineffable mercy have been pleased through the labors of your priest Saint Junípero Serra to count many American peoples within your Church, grant by his intercession that we may so join our hearts to you in love, as to carry always and everywhere before all people the image of your Only Begotten Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: What can keep us from giving our all to God? Fear, anxiety, self-concern, pre-occupation and attachment to other things, to name a few. Even spiritual things can get in the way of having God alone as our Treasure if we put them first. Detachment is a necessary step if we want to make the Lord our Treasure and Joy. It frees us to give ourselves without reserve to the Lord and to his service. There is nothing greater we can do with our lives than to place them at the service of the Lord and Master of the universe. We cannot out give God in generosity. Jesus promises that those who are willing to part with what is most dear to them for his sake “will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). Is there anything holding you back from giving your all to the Lord?

Prayer for Vocations: O God, Who will not the death of a sinner but rather that he be converted and live, grant we beseech you, through the intercession of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, Saint Joseph, her spouse, St. Junípero Serra, and all the saints, an increase of laborers for your Church, fellow laborers with Christ to spend and consume themselves for souls through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen.

Tuesday, July 2 ~ Thirteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:23-27 As Jesus got into a boat, his disciples followed him. Suddenly a violent storm came up on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by waves; but he was asleep. They came and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” He said to them, “Why are you terrified, O you

of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?"

Meditation: What is stronger than fear, even the fear of death? Scripture gives an answer: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). The Wisdom of Solomon tells us that "love is stronger than death" (Song of Songs 8:6). Jesus' sleeping presence on the storm-tossed sea reveals the sleeping faith of his disciples. They feared for their lives even though their Lord and Master was with them in the boat. They were asleep to Christ while he was present to them in their hour of need.

Prayer: O God, who through the grace of adoption chose us to be children of light, grant, we pray, that we may not be wrapped in the darkness of error but always be seen to stand in the bright light of truth. 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: Wherever the Good News of Jesus was preached, it met the same opposition as Jesus did, and many of those who began to follow him shared his suffering and death. But no human force could stop the power of the Spirit unleashed upon the world. The blood of martyrs has always been, and will always be, the seed of Christians. Jesus is always present to us in our hour of need – especially in times of challenge, fear, and anxiety. Jesus was there for the first martyrs of Rome in their persecution in living out the teachings of Christ, just as he is present to us as we bring the teachings of Christ into our world – into our homes, our places of work, our schools, in our neighborhoods. The truth of Christ always prevails and flourishes, while dictators, fads, people and activist groups with their own personal agenda and other secular things wither like a dead tree limb. Never be afraid to promote the truth of Christ, and to live it to the fullest, no matter what opposition you may experience in life. Remember this simple prayer: "Jesus my Lord, my God, my all, you are the only foundation that can hold us up when trials and disaster threaten us. Give me the wisdom, foresight, and strength of character I need to do what is right and good and to reject whatever is false and contrary to your will. May I always meet the challenges and trials of life head on, knowing you are at my side. May I be a doer of your word and not a hearer only."

Wednesday, July 3 ~ Thirteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time Feast of Saint Thomas, Apostle

Holy Gospel: John 20:24-29 Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Meditation: What gives us unshakeable hope and confidence in the face of death and defeat? The apostles abandoned Jesus in his hour of trial and lost hope when Jesus was handed over to the Romans for execution. They saw the cross as defeat rather than victory. They were slow to believe the reports of the resurrection until the Risen Lord appeared to them and reassured them of his presence and love. The last apostle to meet the resurrected Lord was the first to go with him to Jerusalem at Passover time. The apostle Thomas was a natural pessimist. When Jesus proposed that they visit Lazarus after receiving news of his illness, Thomas said to the disciples: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). While Thomas deeply loved the Lord, he lacked the courage to stand with Jesus in his passion and crucifixion. After Jesus' death, Thomas made the mistake of withdrawing from the other apostles. He sought loneliness rather than fellowship in his time of adversity. He doubted the women who saw the resurrected Jesus and he doubted his own fellow apostles. When Thomas finally had the courage to rejoin the other apostles, the Lord Jesus made his presence known to him and reassured him that he had indeed overcome death and risen again. When Thomas recognized his Master, he believed and exclaimed that Jesus was truly Lord and truly God!

Prayer: Grant, almighty God, that we may glory in the Feast of the blessed Apostle Thomas, so that we may always be sustained by his intercession and, believing, may have life in the name of Jesus Christ your Son, whom Thomas acknowledged as the Lord. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: It is through the gift of faith that we, too, are able to recognize the presence of the risen Lord in our personal lives. The Holy Spirit reveals the Lord Jesus to us and helps us to grow in knowledge and understanding of God and his ways. Through the gift of faith we are able to proclaim that Jesus is our personal Lord and our God. He died and rose that we, too, might have new life in him. The Lord offers each of us new life in his Holy Spirit that we may know him personally and walk in this new way of life through the power of his resurrection. Do you believe in God's word and in the power of the Holy Spirit?

**Thursday, July 4 ~ Thirteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
+ Independence Day +**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8 After entering a boat, Jesus made the crossing, and came into his own town. And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Courage, child, your sins are forgiven." At that, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said: "Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"— he then said to the paralytic, "Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home." He rose and went home. When the crowds saw this they were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men.

Meditation: *Question:* What cripples the mind and heart and stifles the healing power of love? *Answer:* Sin and an unforgiving mind and heart! You should not be amazed at the fact that sin cripples us more than any physical ailment can. Sin is the work of the kingdom of darkness and it holds us in eternal bondage. There is only one solution to sin – the healing, cleansing power of Jesus' forgiveness. Jesus' treatment of sinners upset the religious teachers of the day. When a cripple was brought to Jesus because of the faith of his friends, Jesus did the unthinkable. He first forgave the man his sins. The scribes regarded this as blasphemy because they understood that only God had authority to forgive sins and to unbind a man or woman from their burden of guilt. Jesus claimed an authority which only God could rightfully give. Jesus not only proved that his authority came from God, he showed the great power of God's redeeming love and mercy by healing the cripple of his physical ailment.

Prayer: God of justice, Father of truth, who guide creation in wisdom and goodness to fulfillment in Christ your Son, open our hearts to the truth of his Gospel, that your peace may rule in our hearts and your justice guide our lives. 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: The crippled man in today's Gospel had been crippled not only physically, but spiritually as well. Jesus freed him from his burden of guilt and restored his body. It would be time well spent for each of us to look deeply and honestly at how we, too, may be crippled by our own sinfulness, and where we turn to for healing. It is all too easy to fall into the habit of letting society redefine what sin is and is not. Truth is truth, and sin is sin, as defined by God the Father (not civil or secular laws [e.g. abortion, same-sex marriage, etc.]), the timeless teachings of Jesus Christ (not talk show hosts, newspaper columnists, blogs, Supreme Court justices or government officials) and the one, true church – the Catholic Church – founded by Jesus Christ. Yes, we are sinners. And yes, all are welcome in the Catholic Church. But all are called to convert from sin – not to be affirmed on our sinfulness – and to submit ourselves to God, and to live our lives according to the will of God – not have God submit to us or to impose our will upon God. In this topsy-turvy world, there are many who place themselves and their wants, desires, lifestyle, et cetera, above God and, in doing so, recreate and relive the sin of Adam and Eve. It was our first parents who, tempted by Satan, determined what they thought was right and wrong and, in doing so, placed themselves before and above God. When we search for the truth, when we search for answers, for guidance and direction, for healing and reconciliation, for it is the Lord in his infinite love and mercy who is ever-ready to bring us healing of mind, body, and soul. His grace brings us freedom from the power of sin and from bondage to harmful desires and addictions. A first step – primary action – is receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a priest, who has the power to absolve you of your sins and to get you back on the road to follow Jesus Christ.

On this Independence Day: We would do well to recall and reflect upon the words of Pope Saint John Paul II: "For the Christian people of America conversion to the Gospel means to revise all the different areas and aspects of life, especially those related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good. It will be especially necessary to nurture the growing awareness in society of the dignity of every person and, therefore, to promote in the community a sense of the duty to participate in political life in harmony with the Gospel."

Friday, July 5 ~ Thirteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
Saint Anthony Zaccaria, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13 As Jesus passed by, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Meditation: We live in a world where Jesus constantly invites each of us to follow him. And yet, as we celebrate our country's birth this week, there are many reasons to celebrate the blessings that God has bestowed on our country, and causes for concern about the freedoms that some choose to exercise. During this week when we celebrate the birth of the United States of America, let's not declare our independence from God, but rather independence from those things (definition of a noun: any person place or thing) that lead us to sin, praying that our fellow citizens – men and women of all ages, walks of life, and religious faiths – will turn away from all that separates us from the love of God, and in doing so simply take up Jesus Christ on his personal invitation to each and every one of us when he says: "follow me."

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, that in the spirit of the Apostle Paul we may pursue the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, for, having learned it, Saint Anthony Zaccaria constantly preached your saving word in the Church. 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 God's call on your life? When Jesus saw Matthew sitting at his tax office – no doubt counting his day's profit – Jesus spoke only two words – "follow me." Those two words changed Matthew's life forever, from a self-serving profiteer to a God-serving apostle who would bring the treasures of God's kingdom to the poor and needy. Jesus says "follow me" to every man and woman on this earth. How do you respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him? Take Christ up on his personal invitation to "follow me," and in doing so let your life be forever changed.

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
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information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.

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Prayer offered by the Chaplain, Rev. Edward G. Latch
July 3, 1974 in the U.S. House of Representatives

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord (Psalms 33:12).

Eternal God, stir thou our minds and stimulate our hearts with a high sense of patriotism as we approach the Fourth of July. May all that this day symbolizes renew our faith in freedom, our devotion to democracy, and redouble our efforts to keep a government of the people, by the people, and for the people truly alive in our world. Grant that we may highly resolve on this great day to dedicate ourselves anew to the task of ushering in an era when good will shall live in the hearts of a free people, justice shall be the light to guide their feet, and peace shall be the goal of humankind: to the glory of Thy Holy Name and the good of our nation and of all mankind. Amen.