

# 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 June is dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

***"Don't forget that you are a temple of God. The Holy Spirit – the Paraclete – is in the center of your soul: listen to Him, and follow His inspirations with docility."***

**+SAINT JOSEMARIA ESCRIVÁ**

**Monday, June 24 ~ Twelfth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time  
Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist**

**Holy Gospel: Luke 1:57-66,80** When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him. The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

**Meditation:** John the Baptist's life was fueled by one burning passion – to point others to Jesus Christ and to the coming of God's kingdom. Scripture tells us that John was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15, 41) by Christ himself, whom Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. When Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, John leaped in the womb of Elizabeth as they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). The fire of the Spirit dwelt in John and made him the forerunner of the coming Messiah. John was led by the Spirit into the wilderness prior to his ministry where he was tested and grew in the word of God. John's clothing was reminiscent of the prophet Elijah (see Kings 1:8). John broke the prophetic silence of the previous centuries when he began to speak the word of God to the people of Israel. His message was similar to the message of the Old Testament prophets who chided the people of God for their unfaithfulness and who tried to awaken true repentance in them. Among a people unconcerned with the things of God, it was his work to awaken their interest, unsettle them from their complacency, and arouse in them enough good will to recognize and receive Christ when he came. What is the significance of John the Baptist and his message for our lives? When God acts to save us he graciously fills us with his Holy Spirit and makes our faith come "alive" to his promises. Each and every day the Lord is ready to renew us in faith, hope, and love. Like John the Baptist, the Lord invites each of us to make our life a free-will offering to God. God wants to fill us with his glory all the days of our lives, from birth through death. Renew the offering of your life to God and give him thanks for his mercy and favor towards you.

**Prayer:** Grant, we pray, almighty God, that your family may walk in the way of salvation and, attentive to what Saint John the Precursor urged, may come safely to the One he foretold, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** Do you marvel at the grace and work of God, especially in your personal life? The friends of Zechariah and Elizabeth marveled at the wonderful way in which God blessed them with a child. This child was destined by God for an important mission. The last verses in the last book of the Old Testament, taken from the prophet Malachi, speak of the Lord's messenger, the prophet Elijah who will return to "turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (ref. Malachi 4:6). We see the beginning of the fulfillment of this word when the Angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah the marvelous birth and mission of John the Baptist (ref. Luke 1:17). When this newly born child was about to

be named, as customary on the eighth day, his relatives quibbled over what name to give him. This child, however, has been named from above! And Elizabeth is firm in her faith and determined to see that God be glorified through this child. The name "John" means "the Lord is gracious". In the birth of John and in the birth of Jesus the Messiah we see the grace of God breaking forth into a world broken by sin and without hope. John's miraculous birth shows the mercy and favor of God in preparing his people for the coming of its Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Of Note:** The Jewish historian Josephus, giving testimony to the holiness of John the Baptist, wrote: "He was indeed a man endued with all virtue, who exhorted the Jews to the practice of justice towards men and piety towards God; and also to baptism, preaching that they would become acceptable to God if they renounced their sins, and to the cleanness of their bodies added purity of soul." Thus Jews and Christians unite in reverence and love for this prophet-saint whose life is an incomparable example of both humility and courage.

## **Tuesday, June 25 ~ Twelfth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 7:12-14** Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces." Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the Law and the Prophets. "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few."

**Meditation:** Jesus' expression about "pearls before swine" is concerns not exclusivity, but with purity — the purity of the faith which has been entrusted to us by an all-loving and all-wise God. The early church referenced this expression with the Eucharist or the Lord's Table. In the liturgy of the early church, a proclamation was given shortly before communion: Holy things to the holy. The *Didache*, a first century church manual stated: Let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized into the name of the Lord; for, as regards this, the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy unto dogs." The Lord invites us to his table, but we must approach worthily.

**Prayer:** Grant, O Lord, that we may always revere and love your holy name, for you never deprive of your guidance those you set firm on the foundation of your love. 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 concludes his discourse with the reminder that we must treat our neighbor in the same way we wish to be treated by God and by others. We must not just avoid doing harm to our neighbor, we must actively seek his or her welfare. In doing so, we fulfill the law and the prophets, namely what God requires of us – loving God with all that we have and are and loving our neighbor as ourselves. The personal love we show to our neighbor is fueled by the love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit is every ready to transform our lives in Jesus' way of love. Do you thirst for holiness and for the fire of God's love? If not, or if you find yourself repeatedly falling short in this regard, pray the prayer of St. Clement XI of Rome: "Let me love you, my Lord and my God, and see myself as I really am – a pilgrim in this world, a Christian called to respect and love all whose lives I touch, those in authority over me or those under my authority, my friends and my enemies. Help me to conquer anger with gentleness, greed by generosity, apathy by fervor. Help me to forget myself and reach out towards others."

## **Wednesday, June 26 ~ Twelfth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time Saint Josemaría Escrivá, Priest; Founder of Opus Dei**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 7:15-20** Jesus said to his disciples: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them."

**Meditation:** What do grapes, thorns, figs, and thistles have to teach us about the kingdom of God? The imagery used by Jesus would have been very familiar to his audience. A certain thorn bush had berries which resembled grapes. And a certain thistle had a flower, which at least from a distance, resembled the fig. Isn't it the same today? What we "hear" might have a resemblance of the truth, but, in fact, when you inspect it closely, it's actually false. False prophets or teachers abound today as much as they did in biblical times. But with the internet and plethora of cable TV channels, the messages of an army of false

prophets have the ability to work their way into our homes, into our family lives, and – if we're not careful – into our minds and hearts. Keep up your spiritual guard! Don't let your moral compass be misguided by false prophets!

**Prayer:** O God, who alone are holy and without whom no one is good, command, we pray, through the intercession of Saint Josemaría Escrivá, that we be numbered among those who do not deserve to be deprived of your glory. 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's the test of a true or false teacher? Jesus connects soundness with good fruit. Something is sound when it is free from defect, decay, or disease and is healthy. Good fruit is the result of sound living – living according to moral truth and upright character. The prophet Isaiah warned against the dangers of falsehood: Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness (ref. Isaiah 5:20). The fruits of falsehood produce an easy religion which takes the iron out of religion, the cross out of Christianity, and any teaching which eliminates the hard sayings of Jesus, and which push the judgments of God into the background and makes us think lightly of sin. How do we avoid falsehood in our personal lives? By being true – true to God, his word and his grace. And that takes character! Those who are true to God know that their strength lies not in themselves but in God who supplies what we need. The fruit of a disciple is marked by faith, hope and love, justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance. Do you cultivate good fruit in your life and reject whatever produces bad fruit?

### **Thursday, June 27 ~ Twelfth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time Saint Cyril of Alexandria, Bishop and Doctor of the Church**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 7:21-29** 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. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'" "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." When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

**Meditation:** What's the significance of the story for us? The kind of foundation we build our lives upon will determine whether we can survive the storms and trials of life 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 riverbed, is a sure bet for disaster! Jesus prefaced his story with a warning: We may fool one another with our words, but God cannot be deceived. He sees the heart as it truly is – with its motives, intentions, desires, and choices (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 must choose between what is true and false, good and evil. 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 pain or embarrassment? A true person is honest and reliable before God, neighbor, and oneself. Such a person's word can be taken as trustworthy.

**Prayer:** O God, who made the Bishop Saint Cyril of Alexandria and invincible champion of the divine motherhood of the most Blessed Virgin Martyr, grant, we pray, that we, who believe she is truly the Mother of God, may be saved through the Incarnation of Christ your Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

**Contemplation:** If you could foresee a threat to your life and the loss of your home and goods, wouldn't you take the necessary precautions to avoid such a disaster? Jesus' story of being swept away by flood waters and wind storms must have caught the attention of his audience who knew that terrific storms did occasionally sweep through their dry arid land without any warning signs. When Jesus described the builders who were unprepared for such a life-threatening storm, he likely had the following proverb in mind: When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm for ever (ref. Proverbs 10:25).

**About Saint Cyril of Alexandria:** Saint Cyril is one of the great Greek Fathers of the Church. He was chosen by Divine Providence to be the shield and champion of the Church against Nestorius, who denied the unity of persons in Christ. If this heresy had succeeded, Mary would not be called the Mother of God. Excepting Sts. Athanasius and Augustine, his equal as a defender of orthodoxy can hardly be found in the Church's history. His greatest achievement was the successful direction of the ecumenical council at Ephesus (431), of which he was the soul (Pope Celestine had appointed him papal legate). In this council two important dogmas were defined—that there is but one person in Christ, and that Mary (in the literal sense of the word) can be called the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). His successful defense of the latter doctrine is his greatest title to honor. His writings show such depth and clarity that the Greeks called him the "seal of the fathers." He died in 444 A.D., after having been bishop for thirty-two years. In Rome, the basilica of St. Mary Major stands as a most venerable monument to the honor paid Mary at the Council of Ephesus. On the arch leading into the sanctuary important incidents in the lives of Jesus and Mary are depicted in mosaic.

**Friday, June 28 ~ Twelfth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time  
Saint Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr**

**Holy Gospel: Matthew 8:1-4** When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And then a leper approached, did him homage, and said, "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I will do it. Be made clean." His leprosy was cleansed immediately. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one, but go show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them."

**Meditation:** What can hold us back from approaching the Lord with faith and confidence that he can change and transform us – perhaps fear, pride, and the risk of losing one's reputation and friends? Jesus did something which was both remarkable and unthinkable at the same time. He approached the "unapproachables" – he touched the untouchables. Lepers were outcasts of society. Their physical condition was terrible as they slowly lost the use of their limbs and withered away with open sores over their entire bodies. They were not only shunned but regarded as "already dead" even by their relatives. The Jewish law forbade anyone from touching or approaching a leper, lest ritual defilement occur. The leper did something quite remarkable. He approached Jesus confidently and humbly, expecting that Jesus could and would heal him. Normally a leper would be stoned or at least warded off if he tried to come near a rabbi. Jesus not only grants the man his request, but he demonstrates the personal love, compassion, and tenderness of God in his physical touch. The medical knowledge of his day would have regarded such contact as grave risk for incurring infection. Jesus met the man's misery with compassion and tender kindness. He communicated the love and mercy of God in a sign that spoke more eloquently than words. He touched the man and made him clean – not only physically but spiritually as well.

**Prayer:** O God, who called the Bishop Saint Irenaeus to confirm true doctrine and the peace of the Church, grant, we pray, through his intercession, that, being renewed in faith and charity, we may always be intent on fostering unity and concord. 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:** There once was a man named Francis, who at one point in his life met a leper on the road as he journeyed towards Assisi in Italy. "Though the leper caused him no small disgust and horror, he nonetheless, got off the horse and prepared to kiss the leper. But when the leper put out his hand as though to receive something, he received money along with a kiss" (from *The Life of St. Francis* by Thomas of Celano). Francis did what seemed humanly impossible because he was filled with the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit inflames our hearts with the fire of Christ's love that we may reach out to others with compassionate care, especially to those who have been rejected, mistreated, and left utterly alone. This begs the question: do you allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with the love and compassion of Christ for others so that you may reach out and help others, serve others?

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