

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 Most Precious Blood of Jesus

"Safeguard the warmth of the family, because all the warmth of the world will not make up for it." +SAINT SHARBEL (CHARBEL) MAKHLŪF

Monday, July 20 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
Optional Memorial: Saint Apollinaris, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 12:38-42 Some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." He said to them in reply, "An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and there is something greater than Jonah here. At the judgment the queen of the south will arise with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here."

Meditation: It was characteristic of the Jewish people to demand "signs" from God's messengers to authenticate their claims. Jesus faulted them for one thing: spiritual adultery. The image of adultery was often used in the scriptures for describing apostasy or infidelity towards God. When the religious leaders pressed Jesus to give proof for his claims, he says in so many words that he is God's sign and that they need no further evidence from heaven than his own person. The Ninevites recognized God's warning when Jonah spoke to them, and they repented (Jonah 3:5). And the Queen of Sheba recognized God's wisdom in Solomon (1 Kings 10:1-9). Jonah was God's sign and his message was the message of God for the people of Nineveh. Unfortunately the religious leaders were not content to accept the signs right before their very eyes. They had rejected the message of John the Baptist and now they reject Jesus as God's Anointed One (Messiah) and they fail to heed his message. Simeon had prophesied at Jesus' birth that he was "destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that inner thoughts of many will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Jesus confirmed his message with many miracles in preparation for the greatest sign of all – his resurrection on the third day.

Prayer: Direct your faithful, Lord, in the way of eternal salvation, which the Bishop Saint Apollinaris showed by his teaching and martyrdom, and grant through his intercession, that we may so persevere in keeping your commandments as to merit being crowned with him. 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 Lord Jesus through the gift of his Holy Spirit offers us freedom from sin and ignorance and he gives us wisdom and understanding so that we may grow in knowledge of God and his ways. Do you thirst for God and for the wisdom which comes from above? James the Apostle says that the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity (James 3:17). A double-minded person cannot receive this kind of wisdom. If we wish to be wise in God's ways, then we must humble ourselves before him, like attentive students who wish to learn, and submit our heart and mind to his will for our lives. The single of heart and mind desire one thing alone – God who is the source of all wisdom, goodness, truth, and knowledge. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the wisdom which comes from above and to free your heart from all that would hinder God's loving action in your life.

Tuesday, July 21 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
Optional Memorial: Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 12:46-50 While Jesus was speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are

standing outside, asking to speak with you.” But he said in reply to the one who told him, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Meditation: God offers us the greatest of relationships – union of heart, mind, and spirit with himself, the very author and source of love (1 John 4:8,16). God's love never fails, never forgets, never compromises, never lies, never lets us down nor disappoints us. His love is consistent, unwavering, unconditional, and unstoppable. Nothing can deter him from ever leaving us, ignoring us, or treating us unkindly. He will love us no matter what. It is his nature to love. That is why he created us – to be united with him and to share in his love and unity of persons (1 John 3:1). God is a trinity of persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and a community of love. That is why Jesus challenged his followers and even his own earthly relatives to recognize that God is the true source of all relationships. God wants all of our relationships to be rooted in his love.

Prayer: O God, who for the glory of your name and the salvation of souls bestowed on the Priest Saint Lawrence of Brindisi a spirit of counsel and fortitude, grant, we pray, that in the same spirit, we may know what must be done and, through his intercession, bring it to completion. 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 is God's love incarnate – God's love made visible in human flesh (1 John 4:9-10). That is why Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and the shepherd who seeks out the sheep who have strayed and lost their way. God is like the father who yearns for his prodigal son to return home and then throws a great party for his son when he has a change of heart and comes back (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus offered up his life on the cross for our sake, so that we could be forgiven and restored to unity and friendship with God. It is through Jesus that we become the adopted children of God – his own sons and daughters. That is why Jesus told his disciples that they would have many new friends and family relationships in his kingdom. Whoever does the will of God is a friend of God and a member of his family – his sons and daughters who have been ransomed by the precious blood of Christ.

Wednesday, July 22 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene

Holy Gospel: John 20:1-2, 11-18 On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”

Mary 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 Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and then reported what he told her.

Meditation: How easy it is to miss the Lord when our focus is on ourselves! Mary Magdalene 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). 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). 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, whose Only Begotten Son entrusted Mary Magdalene before all others with announcing the great joy of the Resurrection, grant, we pray, that through her intercession and example we may proclaim the living Christ and come to see him reigning in your glory. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Saint Mary Magdalene has always been the example of great love and great forgiveness, one of those close to Jesus who grasped the truth of God's love for human beings and spent her life bearing witness to that love. So we might ask ourselves: How do I embrace the truth of God's love for me and for others? Through my actions and interactions with others, do I always bear witness to that same level of love?

About Saint Mary Magdalene: The feast of St. Mary Magdalene is considered one of the most mystical of feasts, and it is said that of all the songs of the saints, that of Mary Magdalene is the sweetest and strongest because her love was so great. That love was praised by Jesus Himself who said that because much was forgiven her, she loved much. She was from Magadala, a small fishing town on the Sea of Galilee. She was known to be a "great sinner" – a woman of the streets who heard Jesus speak of the mercy and forgiveness of God and changed her life completely. Her matter-of-fact witness to the Resurrection moved Peter and John to go and see for themselves: "I have seen the Lord and these things he said to me." Jesus had chosen her to bring the news to them and she simply told them what had happened. She has always been the example of great love and great forgiveness, one of those close to Jesus who grasped the truth of God's love for human beings and spent her life bearing witness to that love.

Thursday, July 23 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time **Optional Memorial: Saint Bridget of Sweden, Religious**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:10-17 The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Why do you speak to the crowd in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because *they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand*. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says:

You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted and I heal them.

"But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

Meditation: Saint Augustine of Hippo once said: "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe." Both faith and understanding are gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable us to hear God's word with clarity so we can know God better and grow in the knowledge of his love and truth. Jesus, however, had to warn his disciples that not everyone would understand his teaching. The prophet Isaiah had warned that some would hear God's word, but not believe, some would see God's actions and miracles, and remained unconvinced. Ironically some of the greatest skeptics of Jesus' teaching and miracles were the learned scribes and Pharisees who prided themselves on their knowledge of scripture and the law of Moses. They heard Jesus' parables and saw the great signs and miracles which he performed, but they refused to accept both Jesus and his message. How could they "hear and never understand" and "see but never perceive"? They were spiritually blind and deaf because their hearts were closed and their minds were blocked by pride and prejudice.

Prayer: O God, who guided Saint Bridget of Sweden along different paths of life and wondrously taught her the wisdom of the Cross as she contemplated the Passion of your Son, grant us, we pray, that, walking worthily in our vocation, we may seek you in all things. 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 is only one thing that can open a closed, confused, and divided mind – a broken heart and humble spirit! The word disciple means one who is willing to learn and ready to submit to the wisdom and truth which comes from God. Psalm 119 expresses the joy and delight of a disciple who loves God's word and who embraces it with trust and obedience. "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:97-99). God can only reveal the secrets of his kingdom to the humble and trusting person who acknowledges their need for

God and for his truth. The parables of Jesus will enlighten us if we approach them with an open mind and heart, ready to let them challenge us. If we approach God's word with indifference, skepticism, and disbelief, then we, too, may "hear but not understand" and "see but not perceive." God's word can only take root in a humble and receptive heart that is ready to believe. If we want to hear and to understand God's word, we must listen with openness, humility, reverence and faith – nothing else will suffice. Do you believe God's word and do you submit to it with trust and reverence?

Friday, July 24 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
Optional Memorial: Saint Sharbel (Charbel) Makhlūf, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:18-23 Jesus said to his disciples: "Hear the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the Kingdom without understanding it, and the Evil One comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."

Meditation: This parable of Jesus is a warning to those who hear and who preach the word of God. What makes us ineffective and unresponsive to God's word? Preoccupation with other things can distract us from what is truly important and worthwhile; letting our hearts and minds be consumed with material things can easily weigh us down and draw us away from the treasure that lasts for eternity. God's word can only take root in a receptive heart which is ready to hear what God has to say. One lesson is clear: the harvest is sure. While some seed will fall by the wayside and some fall on shallow ground and never come to maturity, and some be choked to death by the thorns; nonetheless a harvest will come. The seed that falls on good soil, on the heart that is receptive, will reap abundant fruit. Are you teachable and eager to learn God's truth?

Prayer: O God, who called the Priest Saint Sharbel Makhlūf to the solitary combat of the desert and imbued him with all manner of devotion, grant us, we pray, that, being made imitators of the Lord's Passion, we may merit to be co-heirs of his Kingdom. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The word "harden" means "to become hard, obstinate, and stubborn." When scripture speaks of hardening our hearts, it is referring to our becoming insensitive to the Word of God. When our heart becomes hard, then we set up a resistance to His Word. Many times without knowing it God's people become defiant to God's Word, and they resist any conviction God brings in their life. When they refuse to hear, they refuse to change, then they resist conviction. They have hardened their hearts to God's will and His way. These have closed their minds to anything God would speak to them. They want to follow their own will, and go their own way. In doing this, they allow God no access to their lives. The heart of a disciple is malleable, not hard, and is open to always receiving the Word. Is your heart malleable?

About Saint Sharbel (Charbel) Makhlūf: Joseph Makhlūf was born in 1828 at Beqa-Kafra, Lebanon. His family lived a strong faith, were attentive to the Divine Liturgy, and had a great devotion to the Mother of God. At the age of 23, Charbel (the name he chose when entering Novitiate) left his closely knit family to enter the Lebanese-Maronite Monastery called Notre-Dame de Mayfouk. Following studies and profession at St. Cyprian de Kfifane Monastery, he was ordained in 1859. For the next seven years, Charbel lived in the mountainous community of Anaya. After that he spent the next twenty-three years in complete solitude at Sts. Peter and Paul Hermitage near Anaya. He died there on Christmas Eve, 1898. Charbel had a reputation for his austerity, penances, obedience, and chastity. At times, Charbel was gifted with levitations during prayer, and he had great devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament. In all things, Charbel maintained perfect serenity.

Make a Pilgrimage: Visit the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon located in North Jackson, Ohio, just west of Youngstown. For information visit www.ourladyoflebanonshrine.com, or call (330) 538-3351.

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