

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

"If we would completely rejoice the heart of God, let us strive in all things to conform ourselves to His divine will. Let us not only strive to conform ourselves, but also to unite ourselves to whatever dispositions God makes of us. Conformity signifies that we join our wills to the will of God. Uniformity means more. Uniformity means that we make one will of God's will and our will. In this way we will only what God wills. God's will alone is our will." +SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

Monday, July 27 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:31-35 Jesus proposed a parable to the crowds. "The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the *birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.*" He spoke to them another parable. "The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet:

I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.

Meditation: Unless you spend time baking, "leaven" is probably an unfamiliar term. Leaven is a powerful agent of change. A lump of dough left to itself remains just what it is, a lump of dough. But when the leaven is added to it a transformation takes place which, when heated, produces rich and wholesome bread – a staple of life for humans. Just as leaven transforms the ingredients of dough to make bread, the "living word" of Jesus and the grace of His sacraments have the power to transform each of us into a disciple of Christ. The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers. When we yield our lives to Jesus Christ and allow his word to take root in our heart, we are transformed and made holy by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. As Saint Paul reminds us: "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of Jesus through His teachings and through His sacraments? Do you believe in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure. 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: It comes down to this. If we truly believe in Jesus as our Savior and Redeemer, then shouldn't we desire above all things to be challenged by the Gospel and embrace His teachings? Once we embrace Christ's teachings, we are called to live a life in witness to Christ as "doers of the Word, not hearers only" (James 1:22). Christ's teachings can transform us, but we need to turn away from the ways of the world and instead embrace Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. Don't challenge the Gospel – let the Gospel challenge you!

Tuesday, July 28 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:36-43 Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He said in reply, "He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the Kingdom. The weeds are the children of the Evil One, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be

at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

Meditation: It has been said: "Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny" (Charles Reade). Since we were children we have been reminded by our parents that "you reap what you sow" – if you study hard you will learn well and earn good grades; if you work out regularly and practice you will be a good athlete; if you nourish your faith life with scripture and prayer, do the will of God by living the Gospel you will be a worthy disciple of Christ. Folks, there will be a judgement day for each of us. On that day of judgment each will reap what he or she has sown in this life. And so it would be prudent to look at another Gospel, where Jesus welcomes those into eternal life given the criteria Christ said He would judge us by: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:35-36). And so, once again, it comes down to the challenge of living the Gospel: "be doers of the Word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).

Prayer: O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure. 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: Today's Gospel makes us think, and rightly so, about where each of us are in relation to being followers of Jesus. And so each of us need to make an assessment today by asking: Am I an authentic disciple of Christ? Am I a half-hearted disciple? Am I disciple at all? Be honest with yourself in answering; lying to yourself will not help. At many points on our life's journey we need to assess our faith life and our faithfulness to Christ and His teachings. If your life in Christ – your discipleship – is not where it needs to be, seize this moment to begin anew, starting with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Wednesday, July 29 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time **Memorial: Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus**

Holy Gospel: John 11:19-27 Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother [Lazarus, who had died]. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

Meditation: Martha, like many Orthodox Jews, believed in the life to come. The loss of her brother Lazarus did not diminish her hope in the resurrection – in fact she gently chides Jesus for not coming sooner to save Lazarus from an untimely death. But Jesus does something unexpected and remarkable, both to strengthen her faith and hope in the life to come, and to give her a sign of what he was to accomplish through his own death and resurrection. Jesus gave to her belief a new and profound meaning: He came from the Father to defeat sin and death for us and to restore life to those who believe in him. Jesus states unequivocally the he himself is the Resurrection and the Life. And the life that he offers is abundant life – life which comes from God himself. Jesus also offers everlasting life – the fullness of life which knows no end.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that the example of your Saints may spur us on to a better life, so that we, who celebrate the memory of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus, may also imitate without ceasing their deeds. 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: In light of what unfolds in today's Gospel, we might ask ourselves what gives us hope and joy in the face of death? The loss of a loved one naturally produces grief and anguish of heart. When Martha, the sister of Lazarus and a close friend of Jesus, heard that Jesus was coming to pay respects for the loss of Lazarus, she immediately went out to meet him before he could get to her house. What inspired her to leave the funeral gathering in order to seek out Jesus? Was it simply the companionship

and consolation of Jesus – a friend who loved her brother deeply? Or did she recognize in Jesus the hope that God would restore life through Christ who is our Savior? Probably both, with the latter building on the former; Jesus, who loves each of us as much as he loved Lazarus, is our sweetness and our hope – hope for eternal life with Him that can be ours by living an earthly life “through Him, with Him and in Him” as faithful disciples, loving Christ as He loves us.

Thursday, July 30 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial: Saint Peter Chrysologus, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Optional Memorial: Blessed Solanus Casey, OFM Cap., Religious

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:47-53 Jesus said to the disciples: “The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.” “Do you understand all these things?” They answered, “Yes.” And he replied, “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.” When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there.

Meditation: Many wonder why Jesus compares a “trained scribe” with a “head of a house who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Matthew 13:52). Why emphasize keeping the old along with the new? Why not replace the old, especially if the new seems to be better or more useful? Wouldn't a person want to throw away an old pair of shoes and replace them with a new pair - especially if the old pair became well-worn or torn beyond repair? But, who in his right mind would throw away an old precious jewel or some old gold coins simply because they were old and tarnished? After all, precious gems and gold do not lose their value with age; like vintage wine they increase in value. Jesus' parable of the “old” and the “new” points to the “older covenants” which God made with His people of the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with Moses on Mount Sinai, and with King David (Psalm 89:3 and Psalm 110:1). Jesus' parable also points to the “new covenant” which He came to establish through the shedding of his blood on the cross and the anointing of his Holy Spirit who seals the new covenant on the day of Pentecost. Jesus did not come to abolish the Old Covenant but to fulfill it. The Lord calls us to treasure all of His words – all of His commandments, promises, precepts, and teachings (Psalm 119:14,72,127,162). If we maintain our part of the covenant that He established we will not have to worry about the outcome of where the angels will separate us.

Prayer + Saint Peter Chrysologus: O God, who made the Bishop Saint Peter Chrysologus an outstanding preacher of your incarnate Word, grant, through his intercession, that we may constantly ponder in our hearts the mysteries of your salvation and faithfully express them in what we do. 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 + Blessed Solanus Casey: O God, who in your providence conformed Blessed Solanus Casey to the image of your Son making him tireless in service to the poor, by his intercession and example, grant also to us the same generosity and joy in giving of ourselves in service to our neighbor. 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.

Contemplation: Do you buy into the line “we are a New Testament Church” and therefore ignore the teachings in the Old Testament? There is a profound unity between the Old and New Testaments. Both are divinely inspired by one and the same Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16). The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old – the two shed light on each other. The Old Testament prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ as the redeemer of all who would be saved through His sacrifice on the cross. The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New. That is why Jesus interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures for His disciples and explained, beginning with Moses, how He came to fulfill what was promised and foreshadowed in the Old (Luke 24:27), and that He “did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). That is why we read the Old Testament in the light of Christ's saving death and resurrection.

Friday, July 31 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial: Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Priest; Founder, Society of Jesus

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:54-58 Jesus came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, “Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is he not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and

Judas? Are not his sisters all with us? Where did this man get all this?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house." And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

Meditation: How easily familiarity breeds contempt. Jesus could do no mighty works in His hometown because the people who were familiar with Him were closed-minded and despised His claim to speak and act in the name of God. The people pigeon-holed Jesus, looking down their noses and saying "Is he not the carpenter's son?" as a way of discrediting Him and His teachings.

Prayer: O God, who raised up Saint Ignatius of Loyola in your Church to further the greater glory of your name, grant that by his help we may imitate him in fighting the good fight on earth and merit to receive with him a crown in heaven. 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: Today is an opportunity to ask if I pigeon-hole others, and possibly discredit others as the people did in today's Gospel. Or do I treat others with kindness and respect? The Lord Jesus offers us freedom from sin, prejudice, contempt, and fear. His love and grace sets us free to love others with the same grace and mercy which he has shown to us. Only Jesus can truly set us free from the worst tyranny possible - slavery to sin and the fear of death. His victory on the cross brings us pardon and healing, and the grace to live holy lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Saturday, August 1 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time **Memorial: Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 14:1-12 Herod the tetrarch heard of the reputation of Jesus and said to his servants, "This man is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him." Now Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet. But at a birthday celebration for Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the guests and delighted Herod so much that he swore to give her whatever she might ask for. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was distressed but because of his oaths and the guests who were present, he ordered that it be given, and he had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him; and they went and told Jesus.

Meditation: King Herod, the most powerful and wealthy man in Judea, had everything he wanted, except a clear conscience and peace with God. Herod had respected and feared John the Baptist as a great prophet and servant of God. John, however did not fear to rebuke Herod for his sinful, adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. Not wanting to hear the truth about this adulterous relationship anymore from John, Herodias found the ultimate way to shut him up by having him beheaded. Even though John the Baptist, the source of truth, was silenced, the truth remained; Herodias achieved nothing.

Prayer: O God, who constantly raise up in your Church new examples of virtue, grant that we may follow so closely in the footsteps of the Bishop Saint Alphonsus in his zeal for souls as to attain the same rewards that are his in heaven. 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 Christ gives grace and help to the humble, to those who acknowledge their weaknesses and their sinfulness, and to those who look to God for His mercy and pardon, wisdom and strength. His grace and pardon not only frees us from a guilty conscience, it enables us to pursue holiness in every area of our lives, in our thoughts and intentions as well as our words and actions. If we are doing something contrary to the laws of God and to the teachings of Christ and His Church, don't run from the truth – these situations are moments of opportunity and conversion of mind and heart.

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