

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

“You cannot please both God and the world at the same time. They are utterly opposed to each other in their thoughts, their desires, and their actions.” +SAINT JOHN VIANNEY

Monday, July 6 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial: Saint Maria Goretti, Virgin and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:18-26 While Jesus was speaking, an official came forward, knelt down before him, and said, “My daughter has just died. But come, lay your hand on her, and she will live.” Jesus rose and followed him, and so did his disciples. A woman suffering hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the tassel on his cloak. She said to herself, “If only I can touch his cloak, I shall be cured.” Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, “Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you.” And from that hour the woman was cured.

When Jesus arrived at the official’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd who were making a commotion, he said, “Go away! The girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they ridiculed him. When the crowd was put out, he came and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose. And news of this spread throughout all that land.

Meditation: From time to time we need to pause and reflect on how we do things in our lives. One of them is what actions we take when we face challenges or experience troubles in our lives. Do you take your troubles to the Lord with expectant faith and confidence in his help? Or is an afternoon talk show host, or a self-help book your source of knowledge and guidance when you have a problem? People in desperate or helpless circumstances were not disappointed when they sought Jesus out. What drew them to Jesus? He spoke words of hope to the woman (Take heart, daughter!) to ignite the spark of faith in her (your faith has made you well!). Jesus provides us with the same hope when we turn to him in prayer.

Prayer: O God, author of innocence and lover of chastity, who bestowed the grace of martyrdom on your handmaid, the Virgin Saint Maria Goretti, in her youth, grant, we pray, through her intercession, that, as you gave her a crown for her steadfastness, so we, too, may be firm in obeying your commandments. 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 took considerable courage and risk for the ruler of a synagogue to openly go to Jesus, for in doing so he invited the public scorn of his neighbors and kin. Even the hired mourners laughed at him in scorn. Their grief was devoid of any hope. Nonetheless, Jesus took the girl by the hand and delivered her from the grasp of death. In both instances we see Jesus' personal concern for the needs of others and his readiness to heal and restore life. In Jesus we see the infinite love of God extending to each and every individual as he gives freely and wholly of himself to each person he meets. Do you approach the Lord with confident expectation that he will hear your request and act? Seek him, find him, pray to him, for he alone is available to you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Why would anyone seek the advice of a talk show host or a self-help book when Jesus is the only when who can help you anytime, anywhere, in your hour of need.

Tuesday, July 7 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 9:32-38 A demoniac who could not speak was brought to Jesus, and when the demon was driven out the mute man spoke. The crowds were amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “He drives out demons by the prince of demons.”

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to

his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

Meditation: We often wonder what kind of help or level of hope can we give to someone who has chronic distress or an incurable disease of mind or body? Spiritual, emotional, and physical suffering often go hand in hand. Jesus was well acquainted with individuals who suffered intolerable affliction - whether physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. A "demoniac" was brought to Jesus by his friends with the hope that Jesus would set him free. These neighbors, no doubt, took pity on this man who had a double impediment. He had not only lost his ability to speak, but was also greatly disturbed in mind and spirit. This was no doubt due to the influence of evil spirits who tormented him day and night with thoughts of despair and hopeless abandonment by God.

Prayer: Show favor, O Lord, to your servants and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace, that, made fervent in hope, faith and charity, they may be ever watchful in keeping your commands. 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: How could Jesus' miracles cause both scorn and wonder at the same time from those who professed faith in God? Don't we often encounter the same reaction today, even in ourselves! The crowds looked with awe at the wonderful works which Jesus did, but the religious leaders attributed this same work to the power of the devil. They disbelieved because they refused to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Their idea of religion was too narrow and closed to accept Jesus as the Anointed One sent by the Father. They were too set in their own ways to change and they were too proud to submit to Jesus.

Wednesday, July 8 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:1-7 Jesus summoned his Twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. The names of the Twelve Apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus.

Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Meditation: Have you ever come to really know and/or experience the power of the gospel in your life? St. Benedict did, for he realized that the core of the gospel message is a simple one: the kingdom of God is imminent! What is the kingdom of God? It is that society of men and women who submit to Jesus Christ and who honor him and him alone as their only King and Lord. In the *Lord's Prayer* we pray for God to reign in our lives and in our world: May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus' preaching of God's kingdom was accompanied by signs and wonders. People were healed not only spiritually, but physically as well. Jesus' words are just as relevant today, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. We cannot buy heaven; but those who know the love and mercy of Jesus already possess heaven in their hearts!

Prayer: O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness. 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: We need not look too closely to see that in the choice of the twelve apostles there is a characteristic feature of God's work: Jesus chose very ordinary people. They were non-professionals, 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, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power. Remember that the Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom.

Thursday, July 9 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Optional memorial: Saint Augustine Zhao Rong, Priest, and Companions, Martyrs

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:7-15 Jesus said to his Apostles: "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick. The laborer deserves his

keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave. As you enter a house, wish it peace. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you. Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words, go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town." Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Meditation: Jesus gave his disciples a two-fold commission: to speak in his name and to act with his power. The core of the gospel message is quite simple: the kingdom (or reign) of God is imminent! What is the kingdom of God? It is that society of men and women who freely submit to God and who honor him as their Lord and King. In the *Lord's Prayer* we pray for God to reign in our lives and in our world: May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus also commissioned his disciples to carry on the works which he did -- bringing the healing power of God to the weary and oppressed. The gospel has power to set people free from harmful and sinful desires, and from fear, oppression, and sickness, whether spiritual, emotional, or physical. The Lord will free us from anything that keeps us from loving him and our neighbor with joy and confidence.

Prayer: O God, who in your wonderful providence have strengthened your Church through the confession of the Martyrs Saint Augustine Zhao and companions, grant that your people, faithful to the mission entrusted to it, may enjoy ever greater freedom and witness to the truth before the world. 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: One of the messages in today's Gospel is that the people of God must never fail in their duty to give the worker of God what he or she needs to sustain themselves in the Lord's service. Do you pray for the work of the gospel, and do you support the Church with your material and financial resources? Jesus ends his instructions with a warning: If people reject God's invitation and refuse his word, then they bring judgment and condemnation on themselves. When God gives us his word there comes with it the great responsibility to respond. Indifference will not do. We are either for or against God in how we respond to his word. God gives us his word that we may have life abundant life in him. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. God shares his word with us and he commissions us to speak it boldly and simply to others. Are you a living witness to the truths and joy of the gospel?

Friday, July 10 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:16-23 Jesus said to his Apostles: "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

Meditation: What does Jesus mean when he tells his disciples that they must be sheep in the midst of wolves? The prophet Isaiah foretold a time when wolves and lambs will dwell in peace (ref. Isaiah 11:6 and 65:25). This certainly refers to the second coming of Christ when all will be united under the Lordship of Jesus after he has put down his enemies and established the reign of God over the heavens and the earth. Until that time, the disciples must expect opposition and persecution from those who oppose the gospel. Jesus never hesitated to tell his disciples what they might expect if they followed him. And the message that Jesus gave to his disciples then is just as pertinent today, for many of us have felt like lambs among the wolves when we discuss or practice living out our faith. Simple practices such as asking the Lord to bless our food before a meal while in a public restaurant can often draw stares from people, let alone standing up for what is right and truthful – protection of human life by speaking out against abortion; preserving the institution of marriage as designed by God, versus same-sex marriage (both of which will be in the news quite a bit during this election season). Jesus never said that proclaiming God's word, and answering his call to "follow me" would be an easy one. Jesus suffered and died on the cross as a result of proclaiming God's word! Are we willing to suffer, remembering what Christ said in today's gospel: "You will be hated by all because of my name, and whoever endures to the end will be saved." What is more important – being popular among people in this earthly life, or being loved by Jesus Christ

for being a true disciple? The answer is clear, but we must decide for ourselves which path we must take – and the result of our decision puts nothing less than our chances of obtaining eternal life at stake. Don't be fooled by others, or fool yourself; make the right decision by following Christ.

Prayer: O God, who in the abasement of your Son have raised up a fallen world, fill your faithful with holy joy, for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin you bestow eternal gladness. 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 Jesus is telling us in today's gospel comes down to this: *This is my task for you at its grimmest and worst; do you accept it?* This offering means a lot of blood, toil, sweat, tears, and heartache. We tend not to think of this when Jesus our Lord and Savior commissions us in his service. Nonetheless, our privilege is to follow in the footsteps of the Master who laid down his life for us. Recall what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: "The way of Christ 'leads to life'; a contrary way 'leads to destruction.'" (CCC #1696) Now, once more, are you willing to accept hardship and suffering in following in the footsteps of Jesus our Lord – footsteps which lead to a simpler, less complex life on earth while leading us on the path to eternal life? Or are you looking to be popular with the people of this earth – "get along" for the sake of getting along, while turning your back on the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ? Will you deny him as Peter did? Or will you stand up and stand firm against the tide of all that is contrary to the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ? It's your call – make the right one! God's laws and Christ's teachings are timeless. Can we say that about anything else on this earth?

Saturday, July 11 ~ Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time **Memorial: Saint Benedict of Nursia, Abbot**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 10:24-33 Jesus said to his Apostles: "No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, for the slave that he become like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household! "Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."

Meditation: When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom (reign) of God he met opposition and hostility. He tells his disciples that they must expect the same treatment if they are to live and to proclaim the reign of God. There is both a warning and a privilege in his statement. Just as Jesus had to carry his cross, so the disciple of Christ must bear his or her own cross and not try to evade it. To suffer for the faith is to share in the work of Jesus Christ. As one chestnut hymn states: *Lift high the Cross, the love Christ proclaimed! Till all the world adore His sacred name. Led on their way by this triumphant sign, the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.* The Holy Spirit gives us supernatural power, freedom, and grace to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. Do you trust in God who gives us the strength and perseverance we need to follow his will and to embrace our cross each day for Jesus' sake?

Prayer: O God, who made the Abbot Saint Benedict an outstanding master in the school of divine service, grant, we pray, that, putting nothing before love of you, we may hasten with a loving heart in the way of your commands. 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 *fear* of the Lord? *Fear* of God? It is reverence for the One who made us in love and who sustains us in mercy and kindness. A healthy *fear* of God leads to spiritual maturity, wisdom and right judgment and it frees us from the tyranny of sinful pride, cowardice - especially in the face of evil, and spiritual deception. Do you trust in God's grace and mercy? Do you obey his word? If not, why not?

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