

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 September is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows

"Our Mother Mary always wants to walk with us, be close, help us with her intercession and love. So I would like to pray together with you. Let us pray together for this new mission, for the whole church, for peace in the world, and let us ask Mary, our Mother, for this special grace." + POPE LEO XIV

Monday, September 15 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time
Our Lady of Sorrows

Holy Gospel: John 19:25-27 Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Meditation: Recall that at the beginning of Jesus' birth, when he was presented in the temple, Simeon had predicted that Mary would suffer greatly – a sword will pierce through your own soul (see Luke 2:33-35). Many have called Mary a martyr in spirit. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux said: Jesus "died in body through a love greater than anyone had known. She died in spirit through a love unlike any other since his." Mary did not despair in her sorrow and loss, since her faith and hope were sustained by her trust in God and the love she had for her Son. Jesus, in his grief and suffering, did not forget his mother. He entrusted her care to John, as well as John to her. No loss, no suffering can keep us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39). Paul the Apostle says that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:3). We can find no greater proof of God's love for us than the willing sacrifice of his Son on the cross. Do you know the love that enables you to bear your cross and to endure trial and difficulties with faith and hope in God?

Prayer: O God, who willed that, when your Son was lifted high on the Cross, his Mother should stand close by and share his suffering, grant that your Church, participating with the Virgin Mary in the Passion of Christ, may merit a share in his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Pray the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows: <https://ourladyssorrows.com/rosary/>

Prayer of Saint Alphonsus Liguori to Our Lady of Sorrows: O afflicted Virgin, O soul great in virtues, as in sorrows, both the one and the other spring from that fire burning in thy heart for God, the only love of thy heart! Mother, have pity on me, who has not loved God, and who has so greatly offended Him. Thy sorrows, it is true, assure me of pardon, but that's not sufficient. I wish to love God. Who could obtain for me the grace if not thee, who are the Mother of the holy love? O Mary, Thou consolest everyone; favor me also, with thy consolations. Amen.

Contemplation: As Mary stood at the foot of the Cross on which Jesus hung, the sword of sorrow Simeon had foretold pierced her soul. Below are the seven sorrows of Mary. We would serve ourselves well to spend quiet time reading sacred scripture and contemplating upon these seven sorrows:

1. The prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35)
2. The flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15)
3. Loss of the Child Jesus for three days (Luke 2:41-50)
4. Mary meets Jesus on his way to Calvary (Luke 23:27-31; John 19:17)
5. Crucifixion and Death of Jesus (John 19:25-30)
6. The body of Jesus being taken from the Cross (Psalm 130; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:31-37)
7. The burial of Jesus (Isaiah 53:8; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42; Mark 15:40-47)

Tuesday, September 16 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Cornelius, Pope and Martyr; and Saint Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:11-17 Jesus journeyed to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd accompanied him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, "Do not weep." He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, "A great prophet has arisen in our midst," and "God has visited his people." This report about him spread through the whole of Judea and in all the surrounding region.

Meditation: The scriptures make clear that God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (see Ezekiel 33:11); he desires life, not death. Jesus not only had heart-felt compassion for the widow who lost her only son, he also had extraordinary supernatural power – the ability to restore life and to make whole again. Jesus, however, as an observant Jew incurred grave risk by approaching the bier, since the Jews understood that contact with a dead body made oneself ritually impure. His physical touch, however, not only restored life but brought freedom and wholeness to soul as well as body. This miracle took place near the spot where the prophet Elisha raised another mother's son back to life again (ref. 2 Kings 4:18-37). Jesus claimed as his own one whom death had seized as its prey. By his word of power he restored life for a lad marked for death. Jesus is Lord not only of the living but of the dead as well. Jesus triumphed over the grave and he promises that because he lives, we also shall have abundant life with and in him both now and forever (John 14:19). Do you trust in the Lord Jesus to give you abundant life and everlasting hope in the face of life's trials, misfortunes, and moments of despair?

Prayer: God our Father, in Saints Cornelius and Cyprian you have given your people an inspiring example of dedication to the pastoral ministry and constant witness to Christ in their suffering. May their prayers and faith give us courage to work for the unity of your Church. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: In a number of places the gospel records that Jesus was "moved to the depths of his heart" when he met with individuals and with groups of people. The word "compassion" doesn't fully convey the deeper meaning of the original Hebrew word which expresses heart-felt "sympathy" and personal identification with the suffering person's grief and physical condition. Why was Jesus so moved on this occasion when he met a widow and a crowded funeral procession on their way to the cemetery? Jesus not only grieved the untimely death of a young man, but he showed the depth of his concern for the woman who lost not only her husband, but here only child as well. When a member of the parish dies, how do you respond to the death of a member of the parish? What about the deceased's family members? Perhaps you may not know them well, but as a member of the parish community, should we not pray for the repose of the soul of the deceased, and extend heartfelt compassion and sympathy for the family? Of course we should. For this is an important aspect of community, of belonging to a parish, and what being a member of Christ body is all about.

Wednesday, September 17 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Robert Bellarmine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

"On the last day, when the general examination takes place, there will be no question at all on the text of Aristotle, the aphorisms of Hippocrates, or the paragraphs of Justinian. Charity will be the whole syllabus." +SAINT ROBERT BELLARMINE

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:31-35 Jesus said to the crowds: "To what shall I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a dirge, but you did not weep.' For John the Baptist came neither eating food nor drinking wine, and you said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by all her children."

Meditation: So, what do children's games have to do with the kingdom of God? The children in Jesus' parable react with disappointment because they cannot convince anyone to join in their musical medley. They complain that when they play their music at weddings, no one dances or sings; and when they play at funerals, it is the same dead response. This refrain echoes the words of Ecclesiastes 3:4 — there is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance. Jesus' message of the kingdom of God is a proclamation of good news and of great joy for those who will listen; but it is also a warning for those

who refuse. Why did the message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus meet with resistance and deaf ears? It was out of jealousy and spiritual blindness that the scribes and Pharisees attributed John the Baptist's austerities to the devil and they attributed Jesus' table fellowship as evidence for messianic pretense. They succeeded in frustrating God's plan for their lives because they had closed their hearts to the message of John the Baptist and now to Jesus.

Prayer: O God, who adorned the Bishop Saint Robert Bellarmine with wonderful learning and virtue to vindicate the faith of your Church, grant, through his intercession, that in the integrity of that same faith your people may always find joy. 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: Have you ever sat back and thought about those things that can make us spiritually dull and slow to hear God's voice? Like the generation of Jesus' time, our age is marked by indifference and contempt, especially in regards to the things of God's kingdom. Indifference dulls our ears to God's voice and to the good news of the gospel. Only the humble of heart can find joy in God's grace and favor. Do you listen to God's word with faith and obedience?

About Saint Robert Bellarmine: St. Robert Bellarmine was born at Montepulciano in Tuscany on October 4, 1542, the feast of the Poverello of Assisi toward whom he always cherished a special devotion. The day on which he died, September 17, is now the feast in honor of the stigmata of St. Francis. In 1560 Robert Bellarmine entered the Society of Jesus. He easily ranks among its greatest men, illustrious for learning as well as for piety, humility, and simplicity of heart. If it were possible to summarize his life in a single sentence, one that would resolve all the varied activities and accomplishments of his long career, a verse from the psalm might serve: "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand be forgotten." His most important work was controversial in nature but the impact of his presentation "resembled the final chord in a mighty cantata, a chord that resounded through all the vice and scandal resulting from the internal corruption of the Church of that day, and that chord heralded Mother Church as one, holy, and Catholic" (E. Birmingham). Bellarmine also acted as confessor to the youthful Aloysius and John Berchmans. It might be asked why three hundred years passed before the beatification and canonization of Bellarmine. Long ago Bishop Hefele pointed to the reason when he wrote: "Bellarmine deserves the highest degree of respect from Catholics, even though he has not been canonized. Those who labored to besmirch him have only erected a monument of shame for themselves!" Finally in 1923, he was beatified; canonization followed in 1930, and on September 17, 1931, Pope Pius XI declared him a Doctor of the Church.

Thursday September 18 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Luke 7:36-50 A certain Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus said to him in reply, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?" Simon said in reply, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven." He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The others at table said to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Meditation: Why did the woman approach Jesus and anoint him at the risk of ridicule and abuse by others? Mary's action was motivated by one thing, and one thing only, namely, her love for Jesus and her gratitude for forgiveness. She did something, though, that a Jewish woman would never do in public. She loosed her hair and anointed Jesus with her tears. It was customary for a woman on her wedding day to bound her hair. Thus, for a married woman to loosen her hair in public was a sign of grave immodesty. It is obvious that the woman was oblivious to all around her, except for Jesus. She also did something which only love can do. She took the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus. Her love was not calculated but extravagant. In a spirit of humility and heart-felt repentance, she lavishly served the one

who showed her the mercy and kindness of God. Jesus, in his customary fashion, never lost the opportunity to draw a lesson from such an incident.

Prayer: Look upon us, O God, Creator and ruler of all things, and, that we may feel the working of your mercy, grant that we may serve you with all our heart. 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: No one who met Jesus could do so with indifference. They were either attracted to him or repelled by him. Why did a rabbi invite him to a nice dinner and then treat him discourteously by neglecting to give him the customary signs of respect and honor? Simon was very likely a collector of celebrities. He patronized Jesus because of his popularity with the crowds. Why did he criticize Jesus' compassionate treatment of a "sinful woman" — most likely a prostitute? The Pharisees shunned the company of "public sinners" and in so doing they neglected to give them the help they needed to find healing and wholeness. Jesus makes clear that great love springs from a heart forgiven and cleansed. "Love covers a multitude of sins" (ref. 1 Peter 4:8), "for love is of God" (ref. 1 John 4:7). The woman's lavish expression of love was proof that she had found favor with God. The stark contrast of attitudes between Simon and the woman of ill-repute, demonstrate how we can either accept or reject God's mercy.

Friday, September 19 ~ Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Saint Januarius, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 8:1-3 Jesus journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

Meditation: Are you ready to serve the Lord and to support the work of the gospel with your personal resources? During his three years of public ministry Jesus traveled widely. The gospel records that a band of women accompanied Jesus and the twelve apostles. This was a diverse group of women; some came from rich and prominent families; some had been prostitutes, and others had been afflicted with mental and physical infirmities. We know that Mary Magdalene had lived a very troubled life before Jesus freed her from seven demons. She was privileged to be the first to see Jesus as the risen Lord. As the wife of King Herod's chief financial officer, Joanna was a wealthy lady of the court. It's unlikely that these two would have ever met under other circumstances. What brought them together and united them in a bond of friendship, service, and loyalty to Jesus? Certainly Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God had transformed them. Unlike the apostles, who took great pride in being the chosen twelve, these women did not seek position or demand special privileges. Jesus had touched them so deeply that they were grateful to do anything for him, even menial service. They brought their gifts and resources to Jesus to use as he saw fit. Or are you more like the status-conscious apostles who were concerned for their position, or like the women who were content to serve Jesus quietly and generously with their personal resources? In our fallen state, our natural tendency is to want to be served and placed first and to avoid giving too much of ourselves to the service of others. And besides, who really prefers to take the lowly place of a servant who puts the needs of others before their own needs? Jesus is our best example who "came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom" for us (Matthew 20:28). The gospel honors these women who imitated Jesus in his selfless sacrificial love and humble service.

Prayer: O God, who grant us to venerate the memory of the Martyr Saint Januarius, give us, we pray, the joy of his company in blessed happiness for all eternity. 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: Our privilege as children of God and disciples of Jesus is to serve as Jesus served with humility, selfless love, generosity, joy, and a willingness to do whatever God asks of us. God, in his turn, gives us every good gift and grace we need to carry out our task and mission. God in his infinite power needs no one, but in his wisdom and love, he chooses to entrust his work through each one of us. His Holy Spirit equips us with all that we need to love and serve others. No one is unimportant or unnecessary in God's economy. The least in his kingdom find a home and a mission at Jesus' side. Do you know the joy of serving Jesus in company with others who love and serve him willingly?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
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