

Lectio Divina

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING + MEDITATION + PRAYER + CONTEMPLATION

The month of July is dedicated to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus.

"There is a big difference between involvement and commitment. Live the commitment in the Church not the involvement in the community. The direction you take is more important than the speed you adopt. What is the benefit of speed and acceleration if the direction is wrong? Do not start anything on earth if it does not end in heaven. Do not walk on a path on earth that does not lead to heaven." +SAINT CHARBEL MAKHLOUF

**Monday, July 22 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
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.

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, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: The Lord gives us "eyes of faith" to see the truth of his resurrection and victory over sin and death (ref. 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 his truth, in the sacraments, in the Eucharist, and in his church, the body of Christ?

Visit: Visit the place (now a shrine) in what is now modern-day France where Mary Magdalene reportedly lived out the last years of her life: <https://www.saintebaume.org/grotto/>

**Tuesday, July 23 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
Saint Bridget of Sweden, Religious**

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 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, one 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 24 ~ Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Sharbel Makhoul, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9 On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

Meditation: Jesus' parable of the sower is aimed at the hearers of his word. There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear. Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else. Another type of hearer is the person who has many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is for ever too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word. He or she may work so hard that they are too tired to even think of anything else but their work. Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it. Do you hunger for God's word?

Prayer: O God, who called the Priest Saint Sharbel Makhoul 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, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Do you hunger for God's word? Saint Matthew tells us that Jesus taught many things to those who came to listen and learn. Jesus' teaching method was a very simple one. He used parables –

short stories and images taken from everyday life to convey hidden truths about the kingdom of God. Like a skillful artist, Jesus painted evocative pictures with short and simple words. As busy as we are in this day and age, we still need to carve out an ample amount of time to listen to the truths of Christ in the gospels, and to learn from him. This *Lectio Divina* is an excellent start to carving out time to learn the truths of scripture, to think about them, meditate upon them, in order to apply the teachings in one's daily living -- to be a "doer of the word, not a hearer only" (James 1:22).

About Saint Sharbel Makhoulf: Joseph Makhoulf 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.

Thursday, July 25 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time Saint James, Apostle

Holy Gospel: Matthew 20:20-28 The mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Jesus with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, "What do you wish?" She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your Kingdom." Jesus said in reply, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My chalice you will indeed drink, but to sit at my right and at my left, this is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Meditation: There are many who seek places of honor, position, and prestige. Many seem to have an unquenchable thirst for fame and recognition, to seek the limelight and be the center of attention, to have their voice or opinion heard through a web site, blog, Facebook or Twitter for example. Should we be surprised to see some of the disciples of Jesus thirsting for power, authority, and position? James and John, the sons of Zebedee, urged their mother to strike a deal with Jesus, their Master. They wanted the distinction of being in the highest position of authority and power, next to Jesus, of course! When Jesus called the twelve apostles to be his inner circle of disciples who would rule on his behalf, he did the unthinkable! He taught contrary to their understanding of power and position, by reversing the order of master and servant, lord and subject, first and last!

Prayer: Almighty and ever-living God, who consecrated the first fruits of your Apostles by the blood of Saint James, grant, we pray, that your Church may be strengthened by his confession of faith and constantly sustained by his protection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: What kind of cup does the Lord have in mind for us? For some such a cup entails physical suffering and the painful struggle of martyrdom. But for many, it entails the long routine of the Christian life, with all its daily sacrifices, disappointments, set-backs, challenges, struggles, and temptations. As disciples we must always be ready to lay down our lives in martyrdom for the sake of the gospel and be ready to lay it down each and every day in the little and big sacrifices required. What makes such sacrifice a joy rather than a burden? It is love — the kind of "love which God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (ref. Romans 5:5). An early church father summed up Jesus' teaching with the expression: "to serve is to reign with Christ." We share in God's reign by laying down our lives in humble service and love for one another, just as Jesus did for our sake. Are you ready to lay down your life and to serve others as Jesus has taught and modeled for us?

Friday, July 26 ~ Sixteenth Week in the Season of Ordinary Time
Saints Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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 Lord, God of our Fathers, who bestowed on Saints Joachim and Anne this grace, that of them should be born the Mother of your incarnate Son, grant, through the prayers of both, that we may attain the salvation you have promised to your people. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one 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 Saints Joachim and Anne: It was in the home of Joachim and Ann where the Virgin Mary received her training to be the Mother of God. Thus, devotion to Ann and Joachim is an extension of the affection Christians have always professed toward our Blessed Mother. We, too, owe a debt of gratitude to our parents for their help in our Christian formation. Our information about Mary's parents comes from an apocryphal Christian writing, the *Protoevangelium Jacobi* (or *Gospel of James*), written about the year 170 A.D. Accordingly, Joachim was a prominent and respected man who had no children, and he and his wife, Anne, looked upon this as a punishment from God. In answer to their prayers, Mary was born and was dedicated to God at a very early age. From this early Christian writing have come several of the feast days of Mary, particularly the Immaculate Conception, the Nativity of Mary, and her Assumption into Heaven. Very early also came feast days in honor of Saints Joachim and Anne, and in the Middle Ages numerous churches, chapels, and confraternities were dedicated to St. Anne. We know little else about the lives of Mary's parents, but considering the person of Mary, they must have been two very remarkable people to have been given such a daughter and to have played so important a part in the work of the Redemption.

Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI for Grandparents: Lord Jesus, you were born of the Virgin Mary, the daughter of Saints Joachim and Anne. Look with love on grandparents the world over. Protect them! They are a source of enrichment for families, for the Church and for all of society. Support them! As they grow older, may they continue to be for their families strong pillars of Gospel faith, guardians of noble domestic ideals, living treasuries of sound religious traditions. Make them teachers of wisdom and courage, that they may pass on to future generations the fruits of their mature human and spiritual experience. Lord Jesus, help families and society to value the presence and role of grandparents. May they never be ignored or excluded, but always encounter respect and love. Help them to live serenely and to feel welcomed in all the years of life which you give them. Amen!

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011;
information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.