

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 March is dedicated to Saint Joseph.

“It is not hard to obey when we love the one whom we obey.”

+SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Monday, March 18 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent
Optional Memorial: Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: John 8:1-11 Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”

Meditation: This incident conveys to us a great deal about Jesus’ attitude toward the sinner. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus with the religious and civil authorities. That is why they brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus. Jesus turned the challenge towards his accusers. In effect he said: Go ahead and stone her! But let the man who is without sin be the first to cast a stone. The Lord leaves the matter to their own consciences. When the adulterous woman is left alone with Jesus, he both expresses mercy and he strongly exhorts her to not sin again. The scribes wished to condemn, Jesus wished to forgive and to restore the sinner to health. His challenge involved a choice – either go back to your former way of sin and death or to reach out to the new way of life and happiness with him. Jesus gave her pardon and a new start on life. God’s grace enables us to confront our sin for what it is – unfaithfulness to God, and to turn back to God with a repentant heart and a thankful spirit for God’s mercy and forgiveness. Make a good confession and experience the joy of repentance and a clean heart.

Prayer: O God, by whose wondrous grace we are enriched with every blessing, grant us so to pass from former ways to newness of life, that we may be made ready for the glory of the heavenly Kingdom. 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 your heart of hearts, do you desire to be changed and transformed in Christlike holiness? God never withholds his grace from us. His steadfast love and mercy is new every day (ref. Lamentations 3:22-23). Through the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit we can be changed and made new in Christ. He can set us free from our unruly desires and passions. As St. Augustine prays: “God our Father, we find it difficult to come to you, because our knowledge of you is imperfect. In our ignorance we have imagined you to be our enemy; we have wrongly thought that you take pleasure in punishing our sins; and we have foolishly conceived you to be a tyrant over human life. But since Jesus came among us, he has shown that you are loving, that you are on our side against all that stunts life, and that our resentment against you was groundless. So we come to you, asking you to forgive our past ignorance, and wanting to know more and more of you and your forgiving love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Tuesday, March 19 ~ Fifth Week in the Season Lent
Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Gospel: Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Meditation: Joseph's faith was put to the test when he discovered that his espoused wife was pregnant. Joseph, a just and God-fearing man, did not wish to embarrass or punish Mary. To all appearances she had broken their solemn pledge to be faithful and chaste to one another. Joseph, no doubt took this troubling matter to God in prayer. He was not hasty to judge or to react with hurt and anger. God rewarded him not only with guidance and consolation, but with the divine assurance that he had indeed called Joseph to be the husband of Mary and to assume a mission that would require the utmost faith, confidence, and trust in Almighty God. Joseph believed in the divine message to take Mary as his wife and to accept the child in her womb as the promised Messiah. Joseph was a worthy successor to the great patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He followed the call of God through the mysterious circumstances that surrounded the coming of Jesus. God entrusted this silent, humble man with the unique privilege of raising his only Son as a growing child. Joseph is a faithful witness and servant of God's unfolding plan of redemption. Are you ready to believe in the promises of God, even when faced with perplexing circumstances and what seems like insurmountable problems? God the Father has not left us alone, but has given us his only begotten Son as our Savior. Where does your faith need to be strengthened? Ask the Lord to increase your faith and trust in his word.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that by Saint Joseph's intercession your Church may constantly watch over the unfolding of the mysteries of human salvation, whose beginnings you entrusted to his faithful care. 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.

An Ancient Prayer to Saint Joseph (this prayer dates to the year 50 A.D.): O St. Joseph, whose protection is so great, so strong, so prompt before the throne of God, I place in you all my interest and desires. O St. Joseph, do assist me by your powerful intercession, and obtain for me from your divine Son all spiritual blessings, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So that, having engaged here below your heavenly power, I may offer my thanksgiving and homage to the most loving of Fathers. O St. Joseph, I never weary of contemplating you, and Jesus asleep in your arms; I dare not approach while He reposes near your heart. Press Him close in my name and kiss His fine head for me and ask Him to return the kiss when I draw my dying breath. St. Joseph, patron of departing souls, pray for me. Amen.

Contemplation: Ask yourself: Are you prepared to obey the Lord in everything? Everything?! Faith in God's word and obedience to his commands go hand in hand. Joseph, like Mary, is a model of faith and justice. Matthew tells us that Joseph was a "just man." St. John Chrysostom once wrote: "The concept of 'just' here signifies the man who possesses all the virtues. By 'justice' one at times understands only one virtue in particular, as in the phrase: the one who is not avaricious is just. But 'justice' also refers to virtue in general. And it is in this sense, above all, that scripture uses the word 'justice'. For example, it refers to: 'a just man and true' (cf. Job 1:1), or the two were just (cf. Luke 1:6). Joseph, then, being just, that is to say good and charitable..."

Wednesday, March 20 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:31-42 Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, 'You will become free?'" Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if the Son frees you, then you will truly be free. I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But you are trying to kill me, because my word has no room among you. I tell you what I have seen in the Father's presence; then do what you have heard from the Father." They answered and said to him, "Our father is Abraham." Jesus

said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God; Abraham did not do this. You are doing the works of your father!" So they said to him, "We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and am here; I did not come on my own, but he sent me."

Meditation: The world presents us with a false notion of truth and freedom – "truth is relative so I choose my own criteria for what is true" and freedom means "I can do whatever I please – regardless of what God or others might think." This confusion only gets compounded when civil laws make legal many things which are contrary to the laws of God, and the Gospel teachings of Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church – abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage, to name a few. This is really a mask for slavery to one's passions and desires – to do what "me, myself and I" will versus humbly submitting ourselves to live our lives according to the will of God. Jesus offers his disciples true freedom – freedom from slavery to pride and arrogance – disbelief and ignorance – selfishness and greed – hatred and revenge – fear and anxiety – despair and depression – and a host of many other hurtful desires and addictions which cripple our lives.

Prayer: Enlighten, O God of compassion, the hearts of your children, sanctified by penance, and in your kindness grant those you stir to a sense of devotion a gracious hearing when they cry out to you. 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 good news is that Jesus Christ has truly set us free from sin and its destructive force in our lives. How is this possible? Through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit we can choose to renounce sin, we choose to live up to the challenges put forth to us by Christ in the Gospel, and in doing so we can yield to God's grace which enables us to walk each day and each moment in Christ's way of love and holiness. A disciple is a follower and a listener. If we want to be a true follower of Christ and live as his disciples, then we must listen to the words of Jesus, with a humble and teachable spirit, and put Jesus' words into action in our daily lives. As we listen with faith and obey with trust, Christ himself gives us grace – the enabling power of his Holy Spirit – to live, think, and act in the truth of his word. Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to change your life and to set you free to walk in Christ's way of love and holiness?

Thursday, March 22 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent

Holy Gospel: John 8:51-59 Jesus said to the Jews: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death." So the Jews said to him, "Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM." So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.

Meditation: When the Jews asked Jesus "Who do you claim to be?" Jesus answered, "before Abraham was, I AM." Jesus claims to be timeless and there is only one in the universe who is timeless, namely God. Scripture tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus was not just a man who came, lived, died, and then rose again. He is the immortal timeless One, who always was and always will be. In Jesus we see the eternal God in visible flesh. His death and rising make it possible for us to share in his eternal life. Do you live in the hope and joy of the resurrection?

Prayer: O God, who reward the merits of the just and offer pardon to sinners who do penance, have mercy, we pray, on those who call upon you, that the admission of our guilt may serve to obtain your pardon for our sins. 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: Do you thirst and hunger to know God fully – to know him personally, and to know the transforming power of his love and wisdom for your life? God made us to know him and he gives us the gift of faith and understanding to grow in our knowledge of him. Jesus challenged the people of Israel to accept his word as the revelation of God. His claims challenged the very foundation of their belief and understanding of God. Jesus made a series of claims which are the very foundation of his life and mission. What are these claims? First, Jesus claims unique knowledge of God as the only begotten Son of the

Father in heaven. Since he claims to be in direct personal communion with his Father in heaven, he knows everything about the Father. Jesus claims that the only way to full knowledge of the mind and heart of God is through himself. Jesus also claims unique obedience to God the Father. He thinks, lives and acts in the knowledge of his Father's word. To look at his life is to "see how God wishes me to live." In Jesus alone we see what God wants us to know and what he wants us to be.

Friday, March 23 ~ Fifth Week in the Season of Lent
Optional Memorial: Saint Turibius, Archbishop; First Saint of the New World

Holy Gospel: John 10:31-42 The Jews picked up rocks to stone Jesus. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, You are gods'"? If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and Scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." Then they tried again to arrest him; but he escaped from their power. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and there he remained. Many came to him and said, "John performed no sign, but everything John said about this man was true." And many there began to believe in him.

Meditation: Why were the religious leaders so upset with Jesus that they wanted to kill him? They charged him with blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God. Jesus made two claims in his response: He was consecrated by the Father to a special task and he was sent into the world to carry out his Father's mission. Jesus challenged his opponents to accept his works if they could not accept his words. One can argue with words, but deeds are beyond argument. Jesus is the perfect teacher in that he does not base his claims on what he says but on what he does. The word of God is life and power to those who believe.

Prayer: O God, who gave increase to your Church through the apostolic labors and zeal for truth of the Bishop Saint Turibius, grant that the people consecrated to you may always receive new growth in faith and holiness. 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 consecrated your life to God? Do you strive to grow in holiness and grace? The scriptural understanding of consecration is "to make holy for God" – to be given over as a free-will offering and sacrifice for God. Jesus made himself a sin-offering for us, to ransom us from condemnation and slavery to sin. He spoke of his Father consecrating him for this mission of salvation. Jesus shows us the way to walk the path of truth and holiness. And he anoints us with his power to live the gospel with joy and to be his witnesses in the world. Are you a doer of God's word, or a hearer only, failing to put into action that which is taught to us in the sacred scriptures so that we may live in the light of Christ? God wants others to see the light of Christ in us in the way we live, speak, and witness the joy and truths of the Gospel. **As we approach Holy Week – the holiest week of the year in the Christian world – let's make sure that we put the "holy" back in Holy Week; it's not just another week of the year.** Let us live this week illuminated with the light of Christ, so that his light shines through each of us. Let us set aside this one week of the year for added prayer, scripture reading and meditation, daily Mass, the Stations of the Cross. Let us remember most of all to thank Christ for his suffering the Passion and death on the cross, with the weight and pain of the cross being our own sinfulness.

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Daily meditations and contemplations adapted from the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* web page and *Biblical Medications for Lent* by Rev. Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P.; prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011; information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.

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