

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 January is dedicated to the Holy Name of Jesus

“Pay attention to what I tell you: whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes, whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures; in whatever place you live do not easily leave it. Keep these three precepts and you will be saved.” +SAINT ANTONY, ABBOTT (-AKA- OF EGYPT, OF THE DESERT, FATHER OF MONKS)

Monday, January 12 ~ First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 1:14-20 After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God: “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Then they left their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

Meditation: When Jesus preached the gospel message he called others to follow as his disciples and he gave them a mission – “to catch people for the kingdom of God.” What kind of disciples did he choose? Fishermen! In the choice of the first apostles we see a characteristic feature of Jesus' work: he chose very ordinary people. They were regular folks, 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 individuals, not for what they were, but for what they would be capable of becoming under his direction and power. When the Lord calls us to serve, we must not think we have nothing to offer. The Lord takes what ordinary people, like us, can offer and uses it for greatness in his kingdom. Do you believe that God wants to work through and in you for his glory? Jesus speaks the same message to us today: we will “catch people” for the kingdom of God if we allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine through us. God wants others to see the light of Christ in us in the way we live in witness to the gospel.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who through your Only Begotten Son have made us a new creation for yourself, grant, we pray, that by your grace we may be found in the likeness of him in whom our nature is united to you. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: In announcing the good news, Jesus made two demands: repent and believe. Repentance requires a life change, a change of mind, sorrow for sin and its consequences, a hatred of sin and a firm resolution to avoid it in the future. The Lord gives us grace to see sin for what it really is -- a rejection of his love and wisdom and a refusal to do what is good and in accord with his will. His grace brings pardon and help for turning away from everything that would keep us from his love. To believe is to take Jesus at his word and to recognize that God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son to free us from bondage to fear and sin. God made the supreme sacrifice of his Son on the cross to bring us back to himself. God loved us first and he invites us in love to surrender our lives to him. Do you believe that the gospel has power to free you from bondage to fear and sin?

Tuesday, January 13 ~ First Week in Ordinary Time Saint Hilary of Poitiers, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Mark 1:21-28 Jesus came to Capernaum with his followers, and on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” Jesus rebuked him and said, “Quiet! Come out of him!” The unclean spirit convulsed him

and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him." His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.

Meditation: Saint Augustine once remarked that the "devils confessed Christ, but lacking charity it availed nothing. ..They confessed a sort of faith, but without love. Hence they were devils." Faith is mighty, but without love it profits nothing (1 Corinthians 13). True faith works through love (Galatians 5:6) and abounds in hope (Rom. 15:13). That is why faith is both a free gift of God and the free assent of our will to the whole truth that God has revealed. To live, grow, and persevere in the faith to the end, each of us must nourish it with the word of God. The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds that we may grow in his truth and in the knowledge of his great love for each of us. If we approach God's word submissively, and with an eagerness to do everything that the Lord will and desires of us, we are in a much better position to learn what God wants to teach us through his word. Are you eager to be taught by the Lord and to conform your life according to his word?

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that we may rightly understand and truthfully profess the divinity of your Son, which the Bishop Saint Hilary taught with such constancy. 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: God's word has power to change and transform each of our lives. Are you eager to hear and believe the word of God? When Jesus taught he spoke with authority. He spoke the word of God as no one had spoken it before. When the Rabbis taught they supported their statements with quotes from other authorities. The prophets spoke with delegated authority – "Thus says the Lord." When Jesus spoke he needed no authorities to back his statements. He was authority incarnate – the Word of God made flesh. When he spoke, God spoke. When he commanded even the demons obeyed. Will you obey his commands, his teachings?

Wednesday, January 14 ~ First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 1:29-39 On leaving the synagogue Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you." He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come." So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

Meditation: Who do you take your troubles to? Jesus' disciples freely brought their troubles to him because they found him ready and able to deal with any difficulty, affliction, or sickness which they encountered. When Simon brought Jesus to his home, his mother-in-law was instantly healed because Jesus heard Simon's prayer. Saint Jerome, an early church bible scholar (c. 347-420), reflects on this passage: "Can you imagine Jesus standing before your bed and you continue sleeping? It is absurd that you would remain in bed in his presence. Where is Jesus? He is already here offering himself to us. 'In the middle,' he says, 'among you he stands, whom you do not recognize' (Cf. John 1:26) 'The kingdom of God is in your midst' (Mark 1:15). Faith beholds Jesus among us. If we are unable to seize his hand, let us prostrate ourselves at his feet. If we are unable to reach his head, let us wash his feet with our tears. Our repentance is the perfume of the Savior. See how costly is the compassion of the Savior."

Prayer: Attend to the pleas of your people with heavenly care, O Lord, we pray, that they may see what must be done and gain strength to do what they have seen. 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 allow Jesus to be the Lord and healer in your personal life, family, and community? Do you approach him with expectant faith? God's healing power restores us not only to health but to active service and care of others. There is no trouble he does not want to help us with and there is no bondage he can't set us free from. Do you take your troubles to him with expectant faith that he will help you?

Thursday, January 15 ~ First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 1:40-45 A leper came to him and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched the leper, and said to

him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. Then he said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Meditation: Do you seek the Lord Jesus with expectant faith? No one who sought Jesus out was refused his help. Even the untouchables and the outcasts of Jewish society found help in him. Unlike the people of Jesus' time who fled at the sight of a leper, Jesus touched the leper who approached him and he made him whole and clean. Why was this so remarkable? Lepers were outcasts of society. Their physical condition was terrible as they slowly lost their limbs and withered away. They were not only shunned but regarded as "already dead" even by their relatives. The Jewish law forbade anyone from touching or approaching a leper, lest ritual defilement occur. This leper did something quite remarkable. He approached Jesus confidently and humbly, expecting that Jesus could and would heal him.

Prayer: Attend to the pleas of your people with heavenly care, O Lord, we pray, that they may see what must be done and gain strength to do what they have seen. 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 ancient times a leper normally would be stoned or at least warded off if he or she tried to come near anyone. Jesus not only grants the man his request, but he demonstrates the personal love, compassion, and tenderness of God in his physical touch. The medical knowledge of his day would have regarded such contact as grave risk for incurring infection. Jesus met the man's misery with compassion and tender kindness. He communicated the love and mercy of God in a sign that spoke more eloquently than words. Have you given any thought as to how do you approach the untouchables and outcasts, and those you find difficult to love. Do you offer them mercy and help as Jesus did? The Lord is always ready to show us his mercy and to free us from whatever makes us unclean.

Friday, January 16 ~ First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 2:1-12 When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to him, "Child, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?" Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth" -he said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home." He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

Meditation: Do you know the healing power of forgiveness? Jesus' treatment of sinners upset the religious teachers of the day. When the paralytic was brought to Jesus because of the faith of his friends, Jesus did the unthinkable. He first forgave the man his sins. The scribes regarded this as blasphemy because they understood that only God had authority to forgive sins and to unbind a man or woman from their burden of guilt. Jesus claimed an authority which only God could rightfully give.

Prayer: Attend to the pleas of your people with heavenly care, O Lord, we pray, that they may see what must be done and gain strength to do what they have seen. 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 not only proved that his authority came from God, he showed the great power of God's redeeming love and mercy by healing the cripple of his physical ailment. This man had been crippled not only physically, but spiritually as well. Jesus freed him from his burden of guilt and restored his body as well. The Lord is every ready to bring us healing of body, soul, and mind. Do you allow anything to keep you from Jesus?

Saturday, January 17 ~ First Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Antony of Egypt, Abbott; "The Great", "The Father of Monks"

Holy Gospel: Mark 2:13-17 Jesus went out along the sea. All the crowd came to him and he taught them. As he passed by, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the customs post. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed Jesus. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners sat with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. Some scribes who were Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors and said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus heard this and said to them, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Meditation: When the Pharisees challenged his unorthodox behavior in eating with public sinners, Jesus' defense was quite simple. A doctor doesn't need to visit healthy people; instead he goes to those who are sick. Jesus likewise sought out those in the greatest need. A true physician seeks healing of the whole person – body, mind, and spirit. Jesus came as the divine physician and good shepherd to care for his people and to restore them to wholeness of life. The orthodox were so preoccupied with their own practice of religion that they neglected to help the very people who needed care. Their religion was selfish because they didn't want to have anything to do with people not like themselves. Jesus stated his mission in unequivocal terms: I came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners. Ironically the orthodox were as needy as those they despised.

Prayer: O God, who brought the Abbot Saint Antony to serve you by a wondrous way of life in the desert, grant, through his intercession, that, denying ourselves, we may always love you above all things. 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: Many people were drawn to Jesus, including the unwanted and the unlovable, such as the lame, the blind, and the lepers, as well as the homeless such as widows and orphans. But public sinners, like the town prostitutes and corrupt tax collectors, were also drawn to Jesus. In calling Matthew to be one of his disciples, Jesus picked one of the unlikeliest of men – a tax collector who by profession was despised by the people. Why did the religious leaders find fault with Jesus for making friends with sinners and tax collectors like Matthew? The orthodox Jews had a habit of dividing everyone into two groups: those who rigidly kept the law and its minute regulations and those who did not. The latter were treated like second class citizens. The orthodox scrupulously avoided their company, refused to do business with them, refused to give or receive anything from them, refused to intermarry, and avoided any form of entertainment with them, including table fellowship. Jesus' association with the latter, especially with tax collectors and sinners, shocked the sensibilities of these orthodox people.

About Saint Antony: Saint Antony (251-356), the Patriarch of all monks, was born at Coma in upper Egypt, at the age of 20 he gave away his property (which was considerable) to the poor and lived as a hermit near his native place. About the year 305 he established a community at Fayum and another shortly after at Pispir. Thus he was the first to establish the religious life as we know it today, by gathering together large groups of hermits into loose communities. Soon he became famous throughout Egypt and beyond, and was in great demand as an advisor by people of every rank. He was a personal friend of Saint Athanasius and his staunch supporter against the Arians, whom he arraigned as heretics in a public sermon preached at Alexandria at the invitation of Athanasius, when he was ninety years old. Athanasius himself became St. Antony's biographer. St. Antony died in his hermitage on Mt. Kolzim, near the Red Sea. In art he is frequently shown with a T-shaped cross and a pig. The latter, perhaps originally the symbol of evil, became associated with a privilege of the Hospital Brothers of St. Antony founded in the 17th century. St. Antony's fire was apparently an epidemic form of erysipelas against which the saint's intercession was invoked.

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