

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

The month of August is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

"Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger people. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks." +BLESSED SOLANUS CASEY

Monday, July 28 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:31-35 Jesus proposed a parable to the crowds. "The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'" He spoke to them another parable. "The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened." All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: *I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.*

Meditation: What can mustard seeds and leaven teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to be a tree which attracted numerous birds because they loved the little black mustard seed it produced. God's kingdom works in a similar fashion. It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within. Leaven is another powerful agent of change. A lump of dough left to itself remains just what it is, a lump of dough. But when the leaven is added to it a transformation takes place which produces rich and wholesome bread when heated — the staple of life for humans. The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers.

Prayer: O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure. 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: When we yield our lives to Jesus Christ and allow his word to take root in our heart, we are transformed and made holy by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Saint Paul the Apostle says: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (2 Corinthians 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? If not, get on board!

Tuesday, July 29 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial: Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus

Holy Gospel: John 11:19-27 Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother [Lazarus, who had died]. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise." Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

Meditation: Martha, like many Orthodox Jews, believed in the life to come. The loss of her brother Lazarus did not diminish her hope in the resurrection – in fact she gently chides Jesus for not coming sooner to save Lazarus from an untimely death. But Jesus does something unexpected and remarkable,

both to strengthen her faith and hope in the life to come, and to give her a sign of what he was to accomplish through his own death and resurrection. Jesus gave to her belief a new and profound meaning: He came from the Father to defeat sin and death for us and to restore life to those who believe in him. Jesus states unequivocally that he himself is the Resurrection and the Life. And the life that he offers is abundant life – life which comes from God himself. Jesus also offers everlasting life – the fullness of life which knows no end.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that the example of your Saints may spur us on to a better life, so that we, who celebrate the memory of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus, may also imitate without ceasing their deeds. 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 light of what unfolds in today's Gospel, we might ask ourselves what gives us hope and joy in the face of death? The loss of a loved one naturally produces grief and anguish of heart. When Martha, the sister of Lazarus and a close friend of Jesus, heard that Jesus was coming to pay respects for the loss of Lazarus, she immediately went out to meet him before he could get to her house. What inspired her to leave the funeral gathering in order to seek out Jesus? Was it simply the companionship and consolation of Jesus – a friend who loved her brother deeply? Or did she recognize in Jesus the hope that God would restore life through Christ who is our Savior? Probably both, with the latter building on the former; Jesus, who loves each of us as much as he loved Lazarus, is our sweetness and our hope – hope for eternal life with Him that can be ours by living an earthly life "through Him, with Him and in Him" as faithful disciples, loving Christ as He loves us.

Wednesday, July 30 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time
Optional Memorials: Saint Peter Chrysologus, Bishop and Doctor of the Church;
Blessed Solanus Casey, OFM Cap., Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:44-46 Jesus said to his disciples: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it."

Meditation: Discovering God's kingdom is like stumbling across hidden treasure or finding the one pearl of great price. When we discover the kingdom of God we receive the greatest possible treasure — the Lord himself. Selling all that we have to obtain this incomparable treasure could mean many things — our friends, job, our "style of life", what we do with our free time. Treasure has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of will and focus. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. In this parable what does the treasure of the kingdom refer to? It certainly refers to the kingdom of God in all its aspects. But in a special way, the Lord himself is the treasure we seek. If the Almighty is your gold and your precious silver, then you will delight yourself in the Almighty (Job 22:22-23). Is the Lord the treasure and delight of your heart?

Prayer ~ Saint Peter Chrysologus: O God, who made the Bishop Saint Peter Chrysologus an outstanding preacher of your incarnate Word, grant, through his intercession, that we may constantly ponder in our hearts the mysteries of your salvation and faithfully express them in what we do. 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.

Prayer ~ Blessed Solanus Casey: O God, who in your providence conformed Blessed Solanus Casey to the image of your Son making him tireless in service to the poor, by his intercession and example, grant also to us the same generosity and joy in giving of ourselves in service to our neighbor. 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.

Pray + Blessed Solanus Casey Novena: <https://www.praymorenovenas.com/blessed-solanus-casey>

Contemplation: What do you treasure most and how do you keep it secure? In a peasant community the best safe was often the earth. The man in the parable "went in his joy" to sell everything. Why? Because he found a treasure worth possessing above everything else he had. He did not, however, have enough to buy the treasure. Fortunately, he only needed enough money to buy the field. In a similar fashion, God offers his kingdom as incomparable treasure at a price we can afford! We can't pay the full price for the life which God gives us. But when we exchange our life for the life which God offers, we receive a treasure beyond compare. So what is of greater value, then? The treasure of this earthly life? Or the treasure that God makes available to us – the Lord himself!

About Blessed Solanus Casey: Barney Casey became one of Detroit's best-known priests even though he was not allowed to preach formally or to hear confessions! Barney came from a large family in Oak Grove, Wisconsin. At the age of 21, and after he had worked as a logger, a hospital orderly, a streetcar operator, and a prison guard, he entered Saint Francis Seminary in Milwaukee—where he found the studies difficult. He left there, and in 1896, joined the Capuchins in Detroit, taking the name Solanus. His studies for the priesthood were again arduous. On July 24, 1904, Solanus was ordained, but because his knowledge of theology was judged to be weak, he was not given permission to hear confessions or to preach. A Franciscan Capuchin who knew him well said this annoying restriction “brought forth in him a greatness and a holiness that might never have been realized in any other way.” During his 14 years as porter and sacristan in Yonkers, New York, the people there recognized Solanus as a fine speaker. James Derum, his biographer writes, “For, though he was forbidden to deliver doctrinal sermons, he could give inspirational talks, or *feverinos*, as the Capuchins termed them.” His spiritual fire deeply impressed his listeners. Father Solanus served at parishes in Manhattan and Harlem before returning to Detroit, where he was porter and sacristan for 20 years at Saint Bonaventure Monastery. Every Wednesday afternoon he conducted well-attended services for the sick. A co-worker estimates that on the average day 150 to 200 people came to see Father Solanus in the front office. Most of them came to receive his blessing; 40 to 50 came for consultation. Many people considered him instrumental in cures and other blessings they received. The many friends of Father Solanus helped the Capuchins begin a soup kitchen during the Depression. Capuchins are still feeding the hungry there today. In failing health, Solanus was transferred to the Capuchin novitiate in Huntington, Indiana, in 1946, where he lived for ten years until needing to be hospitalized in Detroit. Father Solanus died on July 31, 1957. An estimated 20,000 people passed by his coffin before his burial in Saint Bonaventure Church in Detroit. At the funeral Mass, the provincial Father Gerald said: “His was a life of service and love for people like me and you. When he was not himself sick, he nevertheless suffered with and for you that were sick. When he was not physically hungry, he hungered with people like you. He had a divine love for people. He loved people for what he could do for them—and for God, through them.” In 1960, a Father Solanus Guild was formed in Detroit to aid Capuchin seminarians. By 1967, the guild had 5,000 members—many of them grateful recipients of his practical advice and his comforting assurance that God would not abandon them in their trials. Solanus Casey was declared Venerable in 1995, and beatified on November 18, 2017.

Physical or virtual travel: Visit the Solanus Casey Center in Detroit: <https://www.solanuscenter.org/>

Thursday, July 31 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial: Saint Ignatius of Loyola

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:47-53 Jesus said to the disciples: “The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Do you understand all these things?” They answered, “Yes.” And he replied, “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the Kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.” When Jesus finished these parables, he went away from there.

Meditation: What can a story of a dragnet and a great catch of fish tell us about God's kingdom? The two most common ways of fishing in Jesus' time was with a casting-net (or hand-net) which was thrown from the shore and the drag-net or trawl which was let down or cast into the waters from a boat. As the boat moved through the waters the drag-net was drawn into the shape of a great cone which indiscriminately took in all kinds of fish and flotsam and jetsam swept in its path. It usually took several men to haul such a net to shore. What is Jesus' point here? Just as a drag-net catches every kind of fish in the sea, so the church acts as God's instrument for gathering in all who will come. Just as the drag-net does not or cannot discriminate, so the church does not discriminate between those “identified” or “classified” by segments of humanity as being good or bad, useless or useful. God's kingdom is open to all who will accept and believe in the way of Christ, and covert from the ways of the world. But there will come a time of separation, at the close of the age, when the angels will send the good and the bad to their respective destinations. Our duty is to gather in all who will come. God, in the end, will give the good and the bad the reward they deserve. God offers the treasure of his kingdom to all who believe. Do you hunger for God and his kingdom?

Prayer: O God, who raised up Saint Ignatius of Loyola in your Church to further the greater glory of your name, grant that by his help we may imitate him in fighting the good fight on earth and merit to receive

with him a crown in heaven. 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.

Pray + Saint Ignatius Novena: <https://www.praymorenovenas.com/st-ignatius-of-loyola-novena>

PRAYERS OF SAINT IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Prayer of Surrender: Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding and my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me: I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more. Amen.

Prayer for Generosity: Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will. Amen.

Contemplation: The Catholic Church and her faithful are often the subject of finger pointing by those who say the Church needs to get in step with modern times and contemporary thinking on any number of issues. Many follow what may be popular in opinion polls or the way of the world versus the way of Christ and, in doing so, fail to recognize that Church teaching is based on the timeless truths divinely revealed in Sacred Scripture – both in the Old and New Testaments. So what is right and good and true as defined by God through the Old Testament prophets, and by Jesus in the New Testament, becomes the basis and foundation for Church teaching in faith and morals. Saint Jerome once said “Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ” so the more we read and learn scripture the more we see the correlation with Church teaching. “You are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” These words of our Savior in Matthew 16:18 form the core of the Catholic Church's role as being the one, true Church founded by Jesus Christ: *Ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia* – “Where Peter is, there is the Church.” The Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth, the successor of Peter and bishop of Rome, is the sure sign that the Catholic Church remains the Church of Christ and His apostles. And so when the Church speaks she does so pastorally and with authority always to save souls. We are called, as her faithful, to listen, learn, embrace, and live as she shepherds all men and women to and along the path of Christ.

Friday, August 1 ~ Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial: Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:54-58 Jesus came to his native place and taught the people in their synagogue. They were astonished and said, “Where did this man get such wisdom and mighty deeds? Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? Are not his sisters all with us? Where did this man get all this?” And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house.” And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

Meditation: How easily familiarity breeds contempt. Jesus could do no mighty works in His hometown because the people who were familiar with Him were closed-minded and despised His claim to speak and act in the name of God. The people pigeon-holed Jesus, looking down their noses and saying “Is he not the carpenter’s son?” as a way of discrediting Him and His teachings.

Prayer: O God, who constantly raise up in your Church new examples of virtue, grant that we may follow so closely in the footsteps of the Bishop Saint Alphonsus in his zeal for souls as to attain the same rewards that are his in heaven. 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.

Pray + Saint Alphonsus Novena: <https://www.praymorenovenas.com/st-alphonsus-novena>

Read: “How to Pray at All Times” by Saint Alphonsus: <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/cts/untitled-211.shtml>

Contemplation: Today is an opportunity to ask if I pigeon-hole others, and possibly discredit others as the people did in today’s Gospel. Or do I treat others with kindness and respect? The Lord Jesus offers us freedom from sin, prejudice, contempt, and fear. His love and grace sets us free to love others with the same grace and mercy which he has shown to us. Only Jesus can truly set us free from the worst tyranny possible - slavery to sin and the fear of death. His victory on the cross brings us pardon and healing, and the grace to live holy lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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 Catholic Culture.