

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 February is dedicated to the Holy Family.

"Be good, love the Lord, pray for those who do not know Him. What a great grace it is to know God!" +SAINT JOSEPHINE BAKHITA

Monday, February 5 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Agatha, Virgin and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:53-56 After making the crossing to the other side of the sea, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and tied up there. As they were leaving the boat, people immediately recognized him. They scurried about the surrounding country and began to bring in the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. Whatever villages or towns or countryside he entered, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch only the tassel on his cloak; and as many as touched it were healed.

Meditation: Faith is an entirely free gift which God makes to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Believing and trusting in God to act in our lives is only possible by the grace and help of the Holy Spirit who moves the heart and converts it to God. The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the mind and helps us to understand, accept, and believe God's word. How do we grow in faith? By listening to God's word with trust and submission. Faith also grows through testing and perseverance. The Lord wants to teach us how to pray in faith for his will for our lives and for the things he wishes to give us to enable us to follow him faithfully and serve him generously. Jesus gave his disciples the perfect prayer which acknowledges God as our Father who provides generously for his children. The *Lord's Prayer* teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and to pray that God's will be accomplished in our lives. The Lord in turn, gives us what we need to live each day for his glory. The Lord is never too distant nor too busy to meet us and to give his blessing. Do you pray to the Father with confidence that he will show you his will and give you what you need to follow him? Ask the Lord to increase your faith and gratitude for his merciful love and provision for your life.

Prayer: May the Virgin Martyr Saint Agatha implore your compassion for us, O Lord, we pray, for she found favor with you by the courage of her martyrdom and the merit of her chastity. 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 recognize the Lord's presence in your life? The gospel records that when Jesus disembarked from the boat the people immediately recognized him. What did they recognize in Jesus? A prophet, a healer, the Messiah, the Son of God? For sure they recognized that Jesus had power from God to heal and to make whole bodies, limbs, minds, and hearts that were beset with disease, affliction, and sin. What happened when they pressed upon him and touched the fringe of his garment? They were made well. The Lord Jesus is ever ready to meet our needs as well. Do you approach him with expectant faith?

Tuesday, February 6 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Paul Miki and Companions, Martyrs

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:1-3 When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. (For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.) So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, "Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?" He responded, "Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written: *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.* You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition." He went on to say, "How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition! For Moses said, *Honor your father and your mother,*

and *Whoever curses father or mother shall die*. Yet you say, 'If someone says to father or mother, "Any support you might have had from me is *qorban*"' (meaning, dedicated to God), you allow him to do nothing more for his father or mother. You nullify the word of God in favor of your tradition that you have handed on. And you do many such things."

Meditation: The Scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of breaking their ritual traditions. Jesus deals with the accusation by going to the heart of the matter – by looking at God's intention and purpose for the commandments. Jesus explains that they void God's command because they allow their hearts and minds to be clouded by their own notions of religion. Jesus accuses them specifically of two things. First of all, hypocrisy. Like actors, who put on a show, they appear to obey God's word in their external practices while they inwardly harbor evil desires and intentions. Secondly, he accuses them of abandoning God's word by substituting their own arguments and interpretations of what God requires us to do. They paid more attention to their own legal arguments rather than God's word. Jesus refers them to the prophecy of Isaiah (29:31) where the prophet accuses the people of his day for honoring God with their lips while their hearts were far away from choosing and doing what God asked of them. If we listen to God's word with faith and reverence, it will both enlighten our mind and purify the hearts - thus enabling us to better understand how he wants us to love and obey him.

Prayer: O God, strength of all the Saints, who through the Cross were pleased to call the Martyrs Saint Paul Miki and companions to life, grant, we pray, that by their intercession we may hold with courage even until death to the faith that we profess. 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 and his disciples apparently upset some of the religious leaders of Jerusalem who had invited them over for dinner. What did they do wrong? They apparently neglected the Jewish custom of washing their hands before eating. Such an offence was not only bad table manners, but it also caused ritual impurity for the religious-minded Jews. Jesus was publicly scolded as a rabbi who should have known better to instruct his disciples to keep themselves ritually clean. Jesus' response, however, caught his hosts off guard. Jesus turned the table on his accusing hosts by chiding them for their uncleanness of heart. The Lord invites each of us to draw near to him and to feast at his banquet table. Do you approach with a clean heart and mind? Ask the Lord to cleanse and renew you with the purifying fire of his Holy Spirit.

Wednesday, February 7 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:14-23 Jesus summoned the crowd again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile." When he got home away from the crowd his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, "Are even you likewise without understanding? Do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach and passes out into the latrine?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) "But what comes out of the man, that is what defiles him. From within the man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile."

Meditation: Remember the story of Cain and Abel, when Cain became jealous of his brother Abel and God warned Cain to guard his own heart: "Sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (ref. Genesis 4:7). Unfortunately, Cain did not take God's warning to heart. He allowed his jealousy to grow into spite and hatred for his brother, and he began to look for an opportunity to eliminate his brother altogether. When jealousy and other sinful desires come knocking at the door of your heart, how do you respond? Do you entertain them and allow them to overtake you? Do you slam the door to keep these sinful desires out? Fortunately God does not leave us alone in our struggle with hurtful desires and sinful tendencies. He gives us the grace and strength we need to resist and overcome sin when it approaches the door of our heart.

Prayer: Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your 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: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ wants to set us free from the burden of guilt and from the destructive force of sin in our personal lives. He wants to purify our hearts and renew our minds so that we can love and act in every situation as he would love and act. The Lord is ready to change and purify our hearts through the grace and help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Like a physician who examines the wound before treating it, God through his Word and Spirit first brings sin into the light that we may

recognize it for what it truly is and call upon his mercy and grace for pardon and healing. The Spirit of truth is our Consoler and Helper. His power and grace enables us to choose what is good and to reject what is evil. Believe in the power of God's love to heal, change, and transform your heart and mind! The beginning of Lent – Ash Wednesday – is one week from today. Use this Lenten Season to transform your life, to turn away from sin and instead turn toward the Lord and grow closer to him.

Thursday, February 8 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Jerome Emiliani, Priest; Saint Josephine Bakhita, Virgin

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:24-30 Jesus went to the district of Tyre. He entered a house and wanted no one to know about it, but he could not escape notice. Soon a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She replied and said to him, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's scraps." Then he said to her, "For saying this, you may go. The demon has gone out of your daughter." When the woman went home, she found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Meditation: This passage describes the only occasion in which Jesus ministered outside of Jewish territory. (Tyre and Sidon were fifty miles north of Israel and still exist today in modern Lebanon.) A Gentile woman – an outsider who was not a member of the chosen people – puts Jesus on the spot by pleading with him to show mercy to her daughter who was tormented with an evil spirit. At first Jesus seemed to pay no attention to her, and this made his disciples feel embarrassed. Jesus very likely did this not to put the woman off, but rather to test her sincerity and to awaken faith in her.

Prayer ~ Saint Jerome Emiliani: O God, Father of mercies, who sent Saint Jerome Emiliani as a helper and father to orphans, grant through his intercession, that we may preserve faithfully the spirit of adoption, by which we are called, and truly are, your children. 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 ~ Saint Josephine Bakhita: O God, who led Saint Josephine Bakhita from abject slavery to the dignity of being your daughter and a bride of Christ, grant, we pray, that by her example we may show constant love for the Lord Jesus crucified, remaining steadfast in charity and prompt to show compassion. 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 praises a Gentile woman for her persistent faith and for her affectionate love. She made the misery of her child her own and she was willing to suffer rebuff in order to obtain healing for her loved one. She also had indomitable persistence. Her faith grew in contact with the person of Jesus. She began with a request and she ended on her knees in worshipful prayer to the living God. No one who ever sought Jesus with faith – whether Jew or Gentile – was refused his help. Do you seek Jesus with expectant faith?

About Saint Jerome Emiliani: A careless and irreligious soldier for the city-state of Venice, Jerome was captured in a skirmish at an outpost town and chained in a dungeon. In prison Jerome had a lot of time to think, and he gradually learned how to pray. When he escaped, he returned to Venice where he took charge of the education of his nephews—and began his own studies for the priesthood. In the years after his ordination, events again called Jerome to a decision and a new lifestyle. Plague and famine swept northern Italy. Jerome began caring for the sick and feeding the hungry at his own expense. While serving the sick and the poor, he soon resolved to devote himself and his property solely to others, particularly to abandoned children. He founded three orphanages, a shelter for penitent prostitutes and a hospital. Around 1532 Jerome and two other priests established a congregation dedicated to the care of orphans and the education of youth. Jerome died in 1537 from a disease he caught while tending the sick. He was canonized in 1767. In 1928 Pius XI named him the universal patron of orphans and abandoned children.

Prayer to Saint Jerome Emiliani: O St. Jerome Emiliani, our country is in such need of your powerful intercession before the throne of God. So many children are orphans of broken homes, some are missing and others have been used for evil purposes on our city streets. Even worse than this, people are killing children before they are even born. Inspire parents to adopt orphans. Help us to have your fervor for all children, especially those in most need. Finally, we ask you to transform us into children so that we may one day enter the Kingdom of Heaven and with you praise the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

About Saint Josephine Bakhita: For many years, Josephine Bakhita was a slave, but her spirit was always free and eventually that spirit prevailed. Born in Olgossa in the Darfur region of southern Sudan, Josephine was kidnapped at the age of seven, sold into slavery and given the name Bakhita, which means fortunate. She was resold several times, finally in 1883 to Callisto Legnani, Italian consul in Khartoum, Sudan. Two years later he took Josephine to Italy and gave her to his friend Augusto Michieli. Soon Bakhita became babysitter to Mimmina Michieli, whom she accompanied to Venice's Institute of the Catechumens, run by the Canossian Sisters. While Mimmina was being instructed, Josephine felt drawn to the Catholic Church. She was baptized and confirmed in 1890, taking the name Josephine. Josephine entered the Institute of Saint Magdalene of Canossa in 1893 and made her profession three years later. In 1902, she was transferred to the city of Schio (northeast of Verona), where she assisted her religious community through cooking, sewing, embroidery and welcoming visitors at the door. She soon became well loved by the children attending the sisters' school and the local citizens. On the occasion of her beatification, Pope John Paul II praised her for "leaving us a message of reconciliation and evangelic forgiveness in a world so much divided and hurt by hatred and violence. She, that was the victim of the worst injuries of all times, namely slavery, herself declared: 'If I was to meet those slave raiders that abducted me and those who tortured me, I'd kneel down to them to kiss their hands, because, if it had not been for them, I would not have become a Christian and religious woman'."

Prayer to Saint Josephine Bakhita: God of goodness and mercy, rewarder of the humble, you blessed St. Josephine Bakhita of Sudan with charity and patience. May her prayers help us, and her example inspire us to carry our cross and to love you always. (*Mention your intention here.*) Pour upon us the spirit of wisdom and love with which you filled St. Josephine Bakhita. By serving you as she did, may we please you by our faith and our actions. St. Josephine Bakhita, pray for us. Amen.

Friday, February 9 ~ Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 7:31-37 Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!") And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Meditation: When Jesus approaches a man who is both deaf and a stutterer, Jesus shows his considerateness for this man's predicament. Jesus takes him aside privately, not doubt to remove him from embarrassment with a noisy crowd of gawkers. Jesus then puts his fingers into the deaf man's ears and he touches the man's tongue with his own spittle to physically identify with this man's infirmity and to awaken faith in him. With a word of command the poor man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Prayer: Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection. 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 never turned anyone aside who approached him with sincerity and trust. And whatever Jesus did, he did well. He demonstrated both the beauty and goodness of God in his actions. Pope Saint Gregory the Great comments on this miracle: "The Spirit is called the finger of God. When the Lord puts his fingers into the ears of the deaf mute, he was opening the soul of man to faith through the gifts of the Holy Spirit." The Lord treats each of us with kindness and compassion and he calls us to treat one another in like kind. The Holy Spirit who dwells within us enables us to love as Jesus loves. Do you show kindness and compassion to your neighbors and do you treat them with considerateness as Jesus did?

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