

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.

“You will soon face a dangerous crisis; the devil will try to ensnare you. To start with, he will tell you that frequent Communion is good for children, not for adults, and that once in a great while is quite enough for you. Then he will do his best to keep you from sermons by making you feel bored by God’s words. He will convince you that certain things are not sinful. Then you’ll have to tussle with friends and what they might say, with [dangerous] readings, with your own passions, and so on. Be on your guard. Do not let the devil rob you of that peace of mind and purity of soul which makes you God’s friends!” +SAINT JOHN BOSCO

Monday, January 29 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 5:1-20 Jesus and his disciples came to the other side of the sea, to the territory of the Gerasenes. When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. In fact, he had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!” (He had been saying to him, “Unclean spirit, come out of the man!”) He asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “Legion is my name. There are many of us.” And he pleaded earnestly with him not to drive them away from that territory. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside. And they pleaded with him, “Send us into the swine. Let us enter them.” And he let them, and the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine. The herd of about two thousand rushed down a steep bank into the sea, where they were drowned. The swineherds ran away and reported the incident in the town and throughout the countryside. And people came out to see what had happened. As they approached Jesus, they caught sight of the man who had been possessed by Legion, sitting there clothed and in his right mind. And they were seized with fear. Those who witnessed the incident explained to them what had happened to the possessed man and to the swine. Then they began to beg him to leave their district. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed pleaded to remain with him. But Jesus would not permit him but told him instead, “Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you.” Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed.

Meditation: Jesus took pity on the man who was overtaken by a legion of evil spirits. The destructive force of these demons is evident for all who can see as they flee and destroy a herd of swine. After Jesus freed the demoniac the whole city came out to meet him. No one had demonstrated such power and authority against the forces of Satan as Jesus did. They feared Jesus as a result and begged him to leave them. Why would they not want Jesus to stay? Perhaps the price for such liberation from the power of evil and sin was more than they wanted to pay. Jesus is ready and willing to free us from anything that binds us and that keeps us from the love of God.

Prayer: Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. 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: A legion is no small force — usually an army comprised of some 6,000 strong! Our age has also witnessed untold crimes and mass destruction at the hands of possessed rulers and their armies.

What is more remarkable — the destructive force of this driven and possessed man — or the bended knee at Jesus' feet imploring mercy and release? God's word reminds us that no destructive force can keep anyone from the peace and safety which God offers to those who seek his help. "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you...Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation" (Psalm 91:7,9).

Tuesday, January 30 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 5:21-43 When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around him, and he stayed close to the sea. One of the synagogue officials, named Jairus, came forward. Seeing him he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, saying, "My daughter is at the point of death. Please, come lay your hands on her that she may get well and live." He went off with him and a large crowd followed him. There was a woman afflicted with hemorrhages for twelve years. She had suffered greatly at the hands of many doctors and had spent all that she had. Yet she was not helped but only grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak. She said, "If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured." Immediately her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. Jesus, aware at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who has touched my clothes?" But his disciples said to him, "You see how the crowd is pressing upon you, and yet you ask, Who touched me?" And he looked around to see who had done it. The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction." While he was still speaking, people from the synagogue official's house arrived and said, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the teacher any longer?" Disregarding the message that was reported, Jesus said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid; just have faith." He did not allow anyone to accompany him inside except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they arrived at the house of the synagogue official, he caught sight of a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. So he went in and said to them, "Why this commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but asleep." And they ridiculed him. Then he put them all out. He took along the child's father and mother and those who were with him and entered the room where the child was. He took the child by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha kum*" which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!" The girl, a child of twelve, arose immediately and walked around. At that they were utterly astounded. He gave strict orders that no one should know this and said that she should be given something to eat.

Meditation: People in desperate or helpless circumstances were not disappointed when they sought Jesus out. What drew them to Jesus? Was it hope for a miracle or a word of comfort in their affliction? What did the elderly woman who had suffered greatly for twelve years expect Jesus to do for her? And what did a grieving father expect Jesus to do about his beloved lost daughter? Jesus gave hope where there seemed to be no human cause for it because his hope was directed to God. He spoke words of hope to the woman ("Take heart, daughter!") to ignite the spark of faith in her ("your faith has made you well!").

Prayer: Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. 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: Saint Ephrem of Syria commented on the miracle in today's gospel, which is worth contemplating today: "Glory to you, hidden Son of God, because your healing power is proclaimed through the hidden suffering of the afflicted woman. Through this woman whom they could see, the witnesses were enabled to behold the divinity that cannot be seen. Through the Son's own healing power his divinity became known. Through the afflicted woman's being healed her faith was made manifest. She caused him to be proclaimed, and indeed was honored with him. For truth was being proclaimed together with its heralds. If she was a witness to his divinity, he in turn was a witness to her faith...He saw through to her hidden faith, and gave her a visible healing."

Wednesday, January 31 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Saint John Bosco, Priest;

Founder of the Salesian Society and the Daughters of Mary

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:1-6 Jesus departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands! Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of

James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house." So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Meditation: Jesus startled his familiar audience with a seeming rebuke that no prophet or servant of God can receive honor among his own people. The people of Nazareth took offense at Jesus and refused to listen to what he had to say. They despised his preaching because he was a mere workman, a carpenter, and a layman who had no formal training by a scholar or teacher. They also despised him because of his undistinguished family background. How familiarity can breed contempt. Jesus could do no mighty works in their midst because they were closed-minded and unbelieving towards him.

Prayer: O God, who raised up the Priest Saint John Bosco as a father and teacher of the young, grant we pray, that, aflame with the same fire of love, we may seek out souls and serve you alone. 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 word "gospel" literally means "good news." Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom to the afflicted who suffered from physical, mental, or spiritual oppression (see Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus came to set people free – not only from their physical, mental, and spiritual infirmities – but also from the worst affliction of all – the tyranny of slavery to sin, Satan, and the fear of losing one's life. God's power alone can save us from hopelessness, dejection, and emptiness of life. The gospel of salvation is "good news" for everyone who will receive it. Do you know, live and experience the joy and freedom of the gospel?

Thursday, February 1 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saint Brigid of Kildare, Virgin

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:7-13 Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits. He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick —no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." So they went off and preached repentance. The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Meditation: When people read this particular scripture passage they often wonder why Jesus tells the apostles to "travel light" with little or no provision. Actually the answer is quite simple. "Poverty of spirit" frees us from greed and preoccupation with possessions and makes ample room for God's provision. The Lord wants his disciples to be dependent on him and not on themselves. He wills to work through and in each of us for his glory. Are you ready to handle the power and authority which God wishes you to exercise on his behalf? The Lord entrusts us with his gifts and talents. Are you eager to place yourself at his service, to do whatever he bids you, and to witness his truth and saving power to whomever he sends you?

Prayer: O God, Who gives us joy by the power of the intercession of Saint Brigid of Kildare, graciously grant that we may be assisted by her merits by the example of whose chastity we are enlightened. 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: What kind of authority and power does the Lord want you to exercise on his behalf? Jesus gave his apostles both the power and the authority to speak and to act in his name. He commanded them to do the works which he did – to heal, to cast out evil spirits, and to speak the word of God – the good news of the gospel which they received from Jesus. When Jesus spoke of power and authority he did something unheard of. He wedded power and authority with love and humility. The "world" and the "flesh" seek power for selfish gain. Jesus teaches us to use it for the good of our neighbor.

Friday, February 2 ~ Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Holy Gospel: Luke 2:22-40 When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the

sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Meditation: Simeon was a just and devout man who was very much in tune with the Holy Spirit. He believed that the Lord would return to his temple and renew his chosen people. The Holy Spirit also revealed to him that the Messiah and King of Israel would also bring salvation to the Gentile nations. When Joseph and Mary presented the baby Jesus in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized this humble child of Bethlehem as the fulfillment of all the messianic prophecies, hopes, and prayers. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he prophesied that Jesus was to be "a revealing light to the Gentiles." Simeon then blessed Mary and Joseph and he prophesied to Mary about the destiny of this child and the suffering she would undergo for his sake. There is a certain paradox for those blessed by the Lord. Mary was given the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. She received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. But her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, we humbly implore your majesty that, just as your Only Begotten Son was presented on this day in the Temple in the substance of our flesh, so, by your grace, we may be presented to you with minds made pure. 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: Anna was pre-eminently a woman of great hope and expectation that God would fulfill all his promises. She is a model of godliness to all believers as we advance in age. Advancing age and the disappointments of life can easily make us cynical and hopeless if we do not have our hope placed rightly. Anna's hope in God and his promises grew with age. She never ceased to worship God in faith and to pray with hope. Her hope and faith in God's promises fueled her indomitable zeal and fervor in prayer and service of God's people. What do you hope for? The hope which God places in our heart is the desire for the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness. How do we grow in hope? By placing our trust in the promises of Jesus Christ and relying not on our own strength, but on the grace of the Holy Spirit.

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