

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 August is dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

“...being or doing good does not always receive a positive response. On the contrary, because its beauty at times annoys those who do not welcome it, one can end up encountering harsh opposition, even insolence and oppression. Acting in truth has its cost, because there are those in the world who choose lies, and the devil – who takes advantage of the situation – often seeks to block the actions of good people. Jesus, however, invites us with His help not to give in and conform ourselves to this mentality, but to continue to act for our good and the good of all, even those who make us suffer. He invites us not to respond to insolence with vengeance, but to remain faithful to the truth in love. The martyrs witnessed this by shedding their blood for their faith. We, too, can imitate their example even in different circumstances and ways.” +POPE LEO XIV, ANGELUS EXCERPT, 8-17-25

Monday, August 25 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorials: Saint Louis of France, King; Saint Joseph Calasanz, Priest

Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:13-22 Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the Kingdom of heaven before men. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.’ Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred? And you say, ‘If one swears by the altar, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, one is obligated.’ You blind ones, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? One who swears by the altar swears by it and all that is upon it; one who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it.”

Meditation: Jesus was angry with the religious leaders because they failed to listen to God's word and they misled the people they were supposed to teach and lead in the ways of God. Jesus gave a series of examples to show how misguided they were. In their zeal to win converts, they required unnecessary and burdensome rules which obscured the more important matters of religion, such as love of God and love of neighbor. They were leading people to “Pharisaism” rather than to God. They failed as religious leaders to teach others the way of God's kingdom because they failed to listen to and to understand the intention of God's word. Through their own pride and prejudice they blindly shut the door of their own hearts and minds to God's understanding of his kingdom.

Prayer: O God, who brought Saint Louis from the cares of earthly rule to the glory of a heavenly realm, grant, we pray, through his intercession, that, by fulfilling our duties on earth, we may seek out your eternal 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.

Prayer: O God, who adorned the Priest Saint Joseph Calasanz with such charity and patience that he labored tirelessly to educate children and endow them with every virtue, grant, we pray, that we, who venerate him as a teacher of wisdom, may constantly imitate him, for he was a co-worker of your truth. 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: How can we shut the door of God's kingdom in our lives? By closing our ears to Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelations 17:14; 19:16), who speaks words of life and love, truth and freedom, hope and pardon. The Lord Jesus wants to dwell with us and to bring us his kingdom. He

opens the way for each of us to "ascend to heaven" and to bring "heaven to earth" in the daily circumstances of our lives. God's kingdom is present in all who seek him and who do his will. Do you pray as Jesus taught, "May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10)?

Tuesday, August 26 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:23-26 Jesus said: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean."

Meditation: Jesus used the example of tithing to show how far the scribes and Pharisees had missed the mark. God had commanded a tithe of the first fruits of one's labor as an expression of thanksgiving and honor for his providential care for his people (ref. Deuteronomy 14:22; Leviticus 27:30). The scribes, however, went to extreme lengths to tithe on insignificant things (such as tiny plants) with great mathematical accuracy. They were very attentive to minute matters of little importance, but they neglected to care for the needy and the weak. Jesus admonished them because their hearts were not right. They were filled with pride and contempt for others. They put unnecessary burdens on others while neglecting to show charity, especially to the weak and the poor. They meticulously went through the correct motions of conventional religion while forgetting the realities.

Prayer: O God, who cause the minds of the faithful to unite in a single purpose, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found. 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 today's gospel, do you allow any blindspots to blur your vision of God's kingdom and his ways? Jesus went to the heart of the matter when he called the religious leaders of his day blind Pharisees and hypocrites! The word "hypocrite" means "actor" — someone who puts on a show or a "game face" usually to draw attention to themselves, or a "public face" to appear one way on public, but in reality act very different "behind the scenes." Jesus chastised them for neglecting the more important matters of religion, such as justice and the love of God and love of neighbor. Might we be guilty at times for falling into the same mindset? We need to remember that God places in every heart a desire and intimate yearning to personally know the One who created us in love for love. Saint Augustine, who found God only after many years of "acting" and wandering in disbelief and spiritual darkness, exclaimed in his book *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." May we learn to rest in the arms of the Lord, and to have genuine minds and hearts rooted in Christ.

Wednesday, August 27 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time **Memorial: Saint Monica**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 23:27-32 Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood.' Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out!"

Meditation: Jesus used strong language to warn the religious leaders about the vanity of appearance and pretense. In Palestine tombs were often placed by the sides of roads. They were painted white which made them glisten in the midday sun, especially around the time of the great feasts, so that people would not accidentally touch them and incur ritual impurity. Jesus warns that what truly corrupts a person is not ritual impurity but the impurity of sinful attitudes — such as pride, greed, sloth, envy, hatred, gluttony, and lust — which lead to sinful behavior. The scribes and Pharisees were intensely religious in their outward observances, but their outward show didn't match the inner reality of the state of their hearts. They not only neglected the poor and the weak, but they were intolerant towards anyone who challenged their idea of religion. That is why so many of the prophets in past ages — who warned about tolerating evil desires

and unjust behavior towards one neighbor – were persecuted and even killed by their own rulers and people.

Prayer: O God, who console the sorrowful and who mercifully accepted the motherly tears of Saint Monica for the conversion of her son Augustine, grant us, through the intercession of them both, that we may bitterly regret our sins and find the grace of your pardon. 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 chastised the religious leaders for being double-minded and for demanding from others standards which they refused to satisfy. They professed admiration for the prophets by building their tombs while at the same time they opposed the prophets' message and closed their ears to the word of God. They shut themselves to heaven and they hindered others from understanding God's word. They rejected Jesus as their Messiah because their hearts were blinded and hardened to the voice of God. Only the humble of heart can receive from God true wisdom and understanding, pardon and healing. The Holy Spirit is ever ready to renew our minds and hearts and to teach us God's way of love and holiness. Ask the Holy Spirit to purify your heart and mind and to fill you with the wisdom and understanding of God's word.

Thursday, August 28 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Memorial: Saint Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Matthew 24:42-51 Jesus said to his disciples: "Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come. "Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household to distribute to them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so. Amen, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is long delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."

Meditation: Jesus ends his teaching on watchfulness and vigilance with a parable that contains an element of surprise – the master suddenly returns home unexpectedly, probably from a long journey. He rewards the dutiful servant for his faithfulness to his master. He has performed his service with diligence and has done all that the master required of him. The master punishes the other servant who behaved wickedly. This servant was not only irresponsible, he was frequently absent from work and spent his master's money by throwing endless parties with his friends. The wicked servant also abused his fellow workers with physical force and violence, probably to make them do the work he was supposed to do for his master. The master not only throws him out of his house, he fires him from his job! He also throws him into the worst possible place – a prison of no return where there is nothing but torment and misery. Should we be surprised to see the master acting with such swift judgment? After all he is only giving back what they have given to him. The master rewards the faithful servant with honor, promotion, and friendship, and he punishes the unfaithful servant – who stole from his master and used his position to abuse others – by removing him from his position of trust with the master and by throwing him into prison for robbing the master and mistreating his fellow servants.

Prayer: Renew in your Church, we pray, O Lord, that spirit with which you endowed your Bishop Saint Augustine that, filled with the same spirit, we may thirst for you, the sole fount of true wisdom, and seek you, the author of heavenly love. 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 calls us to be vigilant in watching for his return and to be ready to meet him when he calls us to himself. The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit so that we may have the wisdom, help, and strength we need to turn away from sin to embrace God's way of love, justice, and holiness. The Lord's warning of judgment causes dismay for those who are unprepared, but it brings joyful hope to those who eagerly wait for his return in glory. God's judgment is good news for those who are ready to meet him. Their reward is God himself, the source of all truth, beauty, goodness, love and everlasting life.

Friday, August 29 ~ Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

Passion of John the Baptist

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:17-29 Herod was the one who had John the Baptist arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married. John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill

him but was unable to do so. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him. She had an opportunity one day when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, his military officers, and the leading men of Galilee. Herodias' own daughter came in and performed a dance that delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you." He even swore many things to her, "I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the Baptist." The girl hurried back to the king's presence and made her request, "I want you to give me at once on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was deeply distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests he did not wish to break his word to her. So he promptly dispatched an executioner with orders to bring back his head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison. He brought in the head on a platter and gave it to the girl. The girl in turn gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Meditation: Are you prepared to be a witness, and if necessary, a martyr for Jesus Christ? John the Baptist bridged the Old and New Testaments. He is the last of the Old Testament prophets who pointed the way to the Messiah. He is the first of the New Testament witnesses and martyrs. Jesus equated the coming of his kingdom with violence. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force (Matthew 11:12). John suffered violence for announcing that the kingdom of God was near. He was thrown into prison and then beheaded. Why did Herod put John to death when he knew him to be a righteous and holy man? Herod was a weak ruler. He could take a strong stand on the wrong things when he knew the right. Such a stand, however, was a sign of weakness and cowardice. Unfortunately for Herod, he could not rid himself of sin by ridding himself of the man who confronted him with his sin.

Prayer: O God, who willed that Saint John the Baptist should go ahead of your Son both in his birth and in his death, grant that, as he died a Martyr for truth and justice, we, too, may fight hard for the confession of what you teach. 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: Since John's martyrdom to the present times the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and persecution at the hands of violent people. The blood of Christian martyrs throughout the ages bear witness to this fact. Their testimony to the truth of the gospel and their willingness to suffer and die for their faith prove victory rather than defeat for the kingdom of God. Through Christ's victory on the cross they obtain the glorious crown of victory and everlasting life with Jesus Christ. What gives us the power, boldness, and courage to witness to Jesus Christ and to the truth of the gospel? The Holy Spirit fills us with courage, love, and boldness to make Jesus Christ known and loved. We do not need to fear those who oppose the timeless truths of the gospel, because the love of Jesus Christ is stronger than fear and death itself. His love conquers all – even our fears and timidity in the face of opposition and persecution. We can trust in his grace and help at all times.

About Saint John the Baptist: There is no doubt that blessed John suffered imprisonment and chains as a witness to our Redeemer, whose forerunner he was, and gave his life for him. His persecutor had demanded not that he should deny Christ, but only that he should keep silent about the truth. Nevertheless, he died for Christ. Does Christ not say: "I am the truth"? Therefore, because John shed his blood for the truth, he surely died for Christ. Through his birth, preaching and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering he showed that Christ also would suffer. Such was the quality and strength of the man who accepted the end of this present life by shedding his blood after the long imprisonment. He preached the freedom of heavenly peace, yet was thrown into irons by ungodly men. He was locked away in the darkness of prison, though he came bearing witness to the Light of life and deserved to be called a bright and shining lamp by that Light itself, which is Christ. To endure temporal agonies for the sake of the truth was not a heavy burden for such men as John; rather it was easily borne and even desirable, for he knew eternal joy would be his reward.

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