

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.

"The role of faith may be compared to that of the root which fixes the tree to the ground, and by its imperceptible but unceasing work maintains its strength. All the growth of the tree, its whole development, depends on this secret nourishment. Cut the roots and the tree, however splendid and full of life it may be, will perish miserably."

+BLESSED COLUMBA MARMION, O.S.B.

Monday, January 8 ~ Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Holy Gospel: Mark 1:7-11 This is what John the Baptist proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Meditation: The great Benedictine Abbot and spiritual writer, Blessed Dom Columba Marmion, in *Christ in His Mysteries*, wrote in reflecting upon today's Feast: "And Jesus being baptized, forthwith came out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened to Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him. And behold a voice from heaven saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.' Jesus stoops so low as to mingle with the multitude of sinners, and forthwith the heavens are opened to magnify Him — He acknowledges Himself worthy of the strokes of divine justice, and behold, the Father declares that He takes all His delight in Him. It is at this moment that the mission of Jesus, as One sent by God, is declared authentic. The Father's testimony accredits, so to speak, His Son before the world, and hence this testimony relates to one of the characters of Christ's work as regards ourselves. The mission of Jesus has a double aspect: it bears at the same time the character of redemption and of sanctification. It is to redeem souls, and, this done, to infuse life into them. That is the whole work of the Savior."

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who, when Christ had been baptized in the River Jordan and as the Holy Spirit descended upon him, solemnly declared him your beloved Son, grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be well pleasing to you. 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.

Contemplation: Without question, the greatest obstacle to following Christ has been, and continues to be, people's own preconception and self-will. As Blessed Columba Marmion wrote in *Christ, the Life of the Soul*, such persons "make holiness consist in such or such a conception formed by their own intelligence; attached to those purely human ideas they have formed, they go astray; if they make great strides, it is outside the true way marked out by God; they are victims of those illusions against which St. Paul warned the first Christians. In so grave a matter, in so vital a question, we must look at and weigh things as God looks and weighs them. God judges all things in the light, and His judgment is the test of all truth. 'We must not judge according to our own liking,' says St. Francis de Sales, 'but according to God's will.' Divine Wisdom is infinitely above human wisdom; God's thoughts contain possibilities of fruitfulness such as no created thought possesses. That is why God's plan is so wise that it cannot fail to reach its end because of any intrinsic insufficiency, but only through our own fault. If we leave the Divine idea full freedom to operate in us, if we adapt ourselves to it with Love and fidelity, it becomes extremely fruitful and may lead us to the most sublime sanctity." As a new year gets underway, let's contemplate the meaning of our own Baptism into the mystical body of Christ, and ponder the words of Blessed Columba Marmion on lovingly following Christ, embracing His wisdom, and in doing so enjoy the fruits of a life rooted in Christ.

Tuesday, January 9 ~ First Week in Ordinary Time

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: Ask yourself a couple of very simple questions: Do you believe that God's word has power to change and transform your life? And 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. Do you respond to God's commands as God wants you to?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who were pleased to shine forth with new light through the coming of your Only Begotten Son, grant, we pray, that, just as he was pleased to share our bodily form through the childbearing of the Virgin Mary, so we, too, may one day merit to become companions in his kingdom of grace. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: 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." We must always remember that faith is mighty, but without love faith profits nothing (ref. 1 Corinthians 13). True faith works through love (ref. Galatians 5:6) and abounds in hope (ref. Romans 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, we 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, with an eagerness to do everything the Lord desires, 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, once taught by Christ, to conform your life according to the Word of the Lord?

Wednesday, January 10 ~ 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: We all have challenges, but how we deal with them is important. Who do you take your troubles to? A self-help book? An advice web page, blog? A TV talk show host? What about Christ? 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 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' (ref. John 1:26) 'The kingdom of God is in your midst' (ref. 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 first in your life? Do you make the Lord and healer number one in your personal life, family, and community, especially in times of trial, challenge, fears and anxiety? Learn to approach Christ 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.

Thursday, January 11 ~ 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: No one who sought Jesus out is 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.

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: Jewish law forbade anyone from touching or approaching a leper; ritual defilement occurred when contact was made. This leper did something quite remarkable. He approached Jesus confidently and humbly, expecting that Jesus could and would heal him. Normally a leper would be stoned or at least warded off if he tried to come near a rabbi. 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. St. Francis of Assisi once said: "Preach the Gospel at all times – if necessary, use words." In other words, our Christ-directed actions speak louder than words in helping others at all times. Talk can be cheap. Do your actions speak louder than your words about how you live your life as a proclaimed disciple of Christ?

Friday, January 12 ~ 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: Jesus' treatment of sinners upset the religious teachers of the day. When a person with a severe physical handicap 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. 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.

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: Have you ever experienced the great healing power associated with forgiveness? Remember what we pray for each time we pray the "Lord's Prayer" – "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Before we can fully experience God's love and mercy in forgiving us, we must first extend that same level of love and mercy to those who seek our forgiveness. If we don't we risk placing walls between us and the love and mercy of Christ. The Lord is every ready to bring us healing of body, mind and soul. Do you allow anything to keep you from experiencing the love and mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ?

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

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: 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. They 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 Jews.

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: 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. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (ref. Romans 3:23). The Lord fills us with his grace and mercy. And he wants us, in turn, to seek the good of our neighbors, including the unlikeable and the trouble-maker by showing them the same kindness and mercy which we have received. Do you thank the Lord for the great kindness and mercy he has shown to you?

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