

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 April is dedicated to the Holy Spirit.

“The most potent and acceptable prayer is the prayer that leaves the best effects. I don't mean it must immediately fill the soul with desire . . . The best effects (are) those that are followed up by actions; when the soul not only desires the honor of God, but really strives for it.” +SAINT TERESA OF AVILA

Monday, April 8 ~ Second Week in the Season of Easter Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:26-38 The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation: We see the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. The new era of salvation begins with the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary. This child to be born is conceived by the gracious action of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, who finds favor with God. As Eve was the mother of all humanity doomed to sin, now Mary becomes the mother of the new Adam who will father a new humanity by his grace (Romans 5:12-21). This child to be conceived in her womb is the fulfillment of all God's promises. He will be “great” and “Son of the Most High” and “King” (Luke 1:32-33), and his name shall be called “Jesus”, which means “the Lord saves.” “He will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The promise of an everlasting kingdom to the house of David (Isaiah 9:6-7) is fulfilled in the King to be born in Mary's womb.

Prayer: O God, who willed that your Word should take on the reality of human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, grant, we pray, that we, who confess our Redeemer to be God and man, may merit to become partakers even in his divine nature. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: When the word of God is delivered by the angel Gabriel to Mary, she knows she is hearing something beyond human capability. It will surely take a miracle which surpasses all that God has done previously. Her question, “how shall this be, since I have no husband” is not prompted by doubt or skepticism, but by wonderment! She is a true hearer of the Word and she immediately responds with faith and trust. Mary's prompt response of “yes” to the divine message is a model of faith for all believers. Mary believed God's promises even when they seemed impossible. She was full of grace because she trusted that what God said was true and would be fulfilled. She was willing and eager to do God's will, even if it seemed difficult or costly. God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heartfelt trust as Mary did. When God commands he also gives the help, strength, and

means to respond. We can either yield to his grace or resist and go our own way. Do you believe in God's promises? Do you yield to his grace?

Tuesday, April 9 ~ Second Week in the Season of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 3:7b-15 Jesus said to Nicodemus: "'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to him, 'How can this happen?' Jesus answered and said to him, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand this? Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

Meditation: Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of the power of his cross and a "new birth in the Spirit." The Hebrew word for "spirit" means both "wind" and "breath." Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You can hear, feel, and see the effects of the wind, but you do not know where it comes from. In like manner, you can see the effects of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those the Spirit touches." Jesus was explaining to Nicodemus the necessity of the crucifixion and resurrection by analogy with Moses and the bronze serpent in the desert. When the people of Israel were afflicted with serpents in the wilderness because of their sin, God instructed Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (Book of Numbers 21:8).

Prayer: Enable us, we pray, almighty God, to proclaim the power of the risen Lord, that we, who have received the pledge of his gift, may come to possess all he gives when it is fully revealed. 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 bronze serpent points to the cross of Christ which defeats sin and death and obtains everlasting life for those who believe. The result of Jesus "being lifted up on the cross" and his rising and exaltation to the Father's right hand in heaven, is our "new birth in the Spirit" and adoption as sons and daughters of God. God not only redeems us, but he fills us with his own divine life and power that we might share in his glory. Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit that we may have power to be his witnesses and to spread and defend the gospel by word and action, and to never be ashamed of the Cross of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives us his seven-fold gifts of wisdom and understanding, right judgment and courage, knowledge and reverence for God and his ways, and a holy fear in God's presence (ref. Isaiah 11) that we may live for God and serve him in the power of his strength. Do you thirst for new life in the Spirit?

Wednesday, April 10 ~ Second Week in the Season of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 3:16-21 God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

Meditation: Do you know the love which surpasses all else? A true lover holds nothing back but gives the best that can be offered, even everything in their possession for the beloved. God proved his love for us by giving us the best he had to offer – his only begotten Son who freely gave himself as an offering to God for our sake and as the atoning sacrifice for our sin and the sin of the world. Abraham's willing sacrifice of his only son, Isaac prefigures the perfect offering and sacrifice of God's beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This passage in the gospel of John tells us of the great breadth and width of God's love. Not an excluding love for just a few or for a single nation, but a redemptive love that embraces the whole world, and a personal love for each and every individual whom God has created. God is a loving Father who cannot rest until his wandering children have returned home to him. Saint Augustine says, God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love. God gives us the freedom to choose whom and what we will love.

Prayer: As we recall year by year the mysteries by which, through the restoration of its original dignity, human nature has received the hope of rising again, we earnestly beseech your mercy, Lord, that what we celebrate in faith we may possess in unending 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 shows us the paradox of love and judgment. We can love the darkness of sin and unbelief or we can love the light of God's truth, beauty, and goodness. This all takes place by the choices we make – our “free will.” If our love is guided by what is true, and good and beautiful then we will choose for God and love him above all else. What we love shows what we prefer. Do you love God above all else? Does he take first place in your life, in your thoughts, and actions? Are your choices guided by the love of God? If not, why not?

Thursday, April 11 ~ Second Week in the Season of Easter Memorial: Saint Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr

Holy Gospel: John 3:31-36 The one who comes from above is above all. The one who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of earthly things. But the one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever does accept his testimony certifies that God is trustworthy. For the one whom God sent speaks the words of God. He does not ration his gift of the Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has given everything over to him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him.

Meditation: God's truth has consequences and he gives us the freedom to choose how we will respond. The choice he gives us has eternal consequences – everlasting life or everlasting death. God challenged his people in the Old Covenant: “See I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil...I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). And he issues the same challenge to the people of the New Covenant today. And so we must ask ourselves... Do you weigh the consequences of your choices? Do they lead you towards life or towards death? If you choose to obey God's voice and to do his will, then you will know and experience that life which comes from God himself. If you choose to follow your own way apart from God and his will, then you choose for death – a spiritual death which poisons and then kills the soul until there is nothing left but an empty person devoid of love, truth, goodness, purity, peace, and joy. Do your choices lead you towards God or away from God?

Prayer: O God, restorer and lover of innocence, direct the hearts of your servants towards yourself, that those you have set free from the darkness of unbelief may never stray from the light 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.

Prayer (Saint Stanislaus): O God, for whose honor the Bishop Saint Stanislaus fell beneath the swords of his persecutors, grant we pray, that we may persevere strong in faith even until death. 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: Do you hunger for the true life which God offers through the gift of his Holy Spirit? The Jews understood that God gave a certain portion of his Spirit to his prophets. When Elijah was about to depart for heaven, his servant Elisha asked for a double portion of the Spirit (2 Kings 2:9). Jesus tells his disciples that they can believe the words he speaks because God the Father has poured his Spirit on him in full measure, without keeping anything back. The function of the Holy Spirit is to reveal God's truth to us. When we receive the Holy Spirit he enables us to recognize and understand God's truth. Jesus is the Word of God and he gives us his Holy Spirit so that we can recognize his truth and live according to it.

Friday, April 12 ~ Second Week in the Season of Easter

Holy Gospel: John 6:1-15 John Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs he was performing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised his eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, he said to Philip, “Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” He said this to test him, because he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, “Two hundred days’ wages worth of food would not be enough for each of them to have a little.” One of his disciples, Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, said to him, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what good are these for so many?” Jesus said, “Have the people recline.” Now there was

a great deal of grass in that place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining, and also as much of the fish as they wanted. When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." So they collected them, and filled twelve wicker baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves that had been more than they could eat. When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world." Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.

Meditation: Can anything on this earth truly satisfy the deepest longing and hunger we experience God? A great multitude had gathered to hear Jesus, no doubt because they were hungry for the word of life. Jesus' disciples wanted to send them away at the end of the day because they did not have the resources to feed them. They even complained how much money it would take to feed such a crowd – at least six month's wages! Jesus, the Bread of Life, took the little they had – five loaves and two fish – and giving thanks to his heavenly Father, distributed to all until they were satisfied of their hunger. The people of Israel had been waiting for the prophet whom Moses had promised: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren – him shall you heed (Deuteronomy 18:15). The signs which Jesus did, including the miraculous feeding of the five thousand signified that God has indeed sent him as anointed Prophet and King. Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. What is the significance of this miracle? The miraculous feeding of such a great multitude pointed to God's provision of manna in the wilderness for the people of Israel under Moses' leadership. This food foreshadowed the true heavenly bread which Jesus would offer his followers. Jesus makes a claim only God can make: He is the true bread of heaven that can satisfy the deepest hunger we experience. The sign of the multiplication of the loaves when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes through his disciples prefigures the superabundance of the unique bread of his Eucharist or Lord's Supper. When we receive from the Lord's table we unite ourselves to Jesus Christ, who makes us sharers in his sacred body and blood. Saint Ignatius of Antioch calls it the "one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ" (Ad Eph. 20,2). This supernatural food is healing for both body and soul and strength for our journey heavenward. When you approach the Table of the Lord, what do you expect to receive? Healing, pardon, comfort, and rest for your soul? The Lord has much more for us, more than we can ask or imagine. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist is an intimate union with Christ. As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens us in charity and enables us to break with disordered attachments to creatures and to be more firmly rooted in the love of Christ.

Prayer: O God, who for the salvation of the world brought about the paschal sacrifice, be favorable to the supplications of your people, so that Christ our High Priest, interceding on our behalf, may by his likeness to ourselves bring us reconciliation, and by his equality with you free us from our sins. 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 feeding of the five thousand shows the remarkable generosity of God and his great kindness towards us. When God gives, he gives abundantly. He gives more than we need for ourselves that we may have something to share with others, especially those who lack what they need. God takes the little we have and multiplies it for the good of others. Do you trust in God's provision for you? Do you share freely with others, especially those who lack even the most basic necessities, such as food and clothing? How about doing some spring cleaning, and take what you're not using in your home (items that are clean and in good condition, of course) and give them to any number of Catholic organizations reaching out to help those in need – especially our Saint Vincent de Paul Chapter.

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