

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)

"God is love and he loves us; that is the heart of the Christian faith. God gave us the commandments and it is in observing them that we show whether we love God. Pray that you may obtain a true love of God. God loves us so much. He wants us to love Him." ~Saint André Besette

Monday, January 4 ~ Season of Christmas Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious

Holy Gospel: Matthew 4:12-17,23-25 When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: "*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen. From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."*" He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people. His fame spread to all of Syria, and they brought to him all who were sick with various diseases and racked with pain, those who were possessed, lunatics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan followed him.

Meditation: Notice that in announcing the good news, Jesus made two simple demands: (1) repent, and (2) believe! Repentance requires a life-change and a transformation of heart and mind. The Holy Spirit gives us a repentant heart, a true sorrow and hatred for sin and its consequences, and a firm resolution to avoid it in the future. The Holy Spirit gives us grace to see our sin for what it is – rebellion and a rejection of the love of God. God's grace helps us to turn away from all that would keep us from his love. Faith or belief is an entirely free gift which God makes to us. Believing is only possible by grace and the help of the Holy Spirit who moves the heart and converts it to God. The Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for us to accept and believe the truth. To believe is to take Jesus at his word, to believe that God loved us so much that he sent his only begotten Son to redeem us from the slavery of sin and death.

Prayer: O God, who crowned with the gift of true faith Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton's burning zeal to find you, grant by her intercession and example that we may always seek you with diligent love and find you in daily service with sincere faith. 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: John the Baptist's enemies had sought to silence him, but the timeless truths of the gospel cannot be silenced. As soon as John had finished his testimony Jesus began his in Galilee. Galilee was at the crossroads of the world and much traffic passed through this little region. It had been assigned to the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Zebulun when the Israelites first came into the land (see Joshua 9). For a long time it had been under Gentile occupation. Isaiah foretold (see Isaiah 9) that the good news of salvation would be proclaimed in this land and reach to the Gentiles. Jesus begins the proclamation of the gospel here to fulfill the word of God. The Old Testament prophets spoke of God's promise to send a Redeemer who would establish God's rule. That time is now fulfilled in Jesus.

Tuesday, January 5 ~ Season of Christmas Saint John Neumann, Bishop

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:34-44 When Jesus saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. By now it was already late and his disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already very

late. Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat." He said to them in reply, "Give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Are we to buy two hundred days' wages worth of food and give it to them to eat?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out they said, "Five loaves and two fish." So he gave orders to have them sit down in groups on the green grass. The people took their places in rows by hundreds and by fifties. Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; he also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And they picked up twelve wicker baskets full of fragments and what was left of the fish. Those who ate of the loaves were five thousand men.

Meditation: 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. 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. Jesus makes a claim only God can make: He is the true bread of heaven that can satisfy the deepest hunger we experience. The feeding of the five thousand shows the remarkable generosity of God and his great kindness towards us. In the multiplication of the loaves and fishes we see a sign and a symbol of what God always does. 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.

Prayer: O God, who called the Bishop Saint John Neumann, renowned for his charity and pastoral service, to shepherd your people in America, grant by his intercession that, as we foster the Christian education of youth and are strengthened by the witness of brotherly love, we may constantly increase the family of your Church. 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: Despite what we may think, no matter what we received at Christmas under the tree, what we may purchase, the trappings and allurements of this earthly world will not bring us true and lasting happiness, for nothing can satisfy the deepest longing and desire of the heart, except God alone. Do you believe that is true? Of all the miracles Jesus did, this is the only one which is repeated in all four gospels. 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 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. In the end, they took up what was left over – twelve baskets full so that nothing would be wasted.

Wednesday, January 6 ~ Season of Christmas **Saint André Besette, Religious**

Holy Gospel: Mark 6:45-52 After the five thousand had eaten and were satisfied, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side toward Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And when he had taken leave of them, he went off to the mountain to pray. When it was evening, the boat was far out on the sea and he was alone on shore. Then he saw that they were tossed about while rowing, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out. They had all seen him and were terrified. But at once he spoke with them, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!" He got into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were completely astounded. They had not understood the incident of the loaves. On the contrary, their hearts were hardened.

Meditation: After the great miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus sends his disciples away to fend for themselves in the dark of the night while a storm begins to brew on the sea. Although they were experienced fishermen, they were fearful for their lives. The Lord's sudden presence on the sea only made them more fearful! Mark says they were terrified (verse 50), not only because the sea was threatening to drown them. When they saw Jesus walking on the water, they thought he was a ghost waiting for their imminent destruction. Jesus had to calm them with his reassuring voice: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." Jesus gave them the courage to cast their anxiety and fear on him who is Lord of the seas as well as their lives. Scripture reminds us that no fear can overtake us if we put our trust in God's

love and care for us. John the Evangelist tells us that God's love abides in us and perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:16,18).

Prayer: Lord our God, friend of the lowly, who gave your servant, Saint André Bessette, a great devotion to Saint Joseph and a special commitment to the poor and afflicted, help us through his intercession to follow his example of prayer and love and so come to share with him in your glory. 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: Do you ever find yourself thinking how much we are like the apostles – especially when we experience trials and adversity? While the Lord may at times seem distant to us, he, nonetheless is constantly present at our side. The scriptures remind us that the Lord is "a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Whatever storms make beset us, he promises to "bring us to our desired haven" (Psalm 107:29-30). The Lord keeps watch over us at all times, and especially in our moments of temptation and difficulty. Do you rely on the Lord for his strength and help? Jesus assures us that we have no need of fear if we trust in Him and in his great love for us. When calamities and trials threaten to overwhelm you, how do you respond? With fear and panic, or with faith and trust in God's love and presence with you?

Thursday, January 7 ~ Season of Christmas **Saint Raymond of Peñafort, Priest**

Holy Gospel: Luke 4:14-22 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.* Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

Meditation: In and through Jesus Christ we see the grace of God in action. His gracious words brought hope, joy, and favor to those who were ready to receive him. Where did Jesus begin his public ministry? In his own land of Galilee where he was reared from his youth in Nazareth. His proclamation of the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah brought wonder to his kin and townsfolk. Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring freedom to those oppressed by sin and evil (see Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus awakened their hope in the promises of God. They, in turn, received his words favorably and wondered what would become of "Joseph's son". Their hearts were hungry for the word of life and they looked to Jesus with anticipation and wonder. Do you look to Jesus with confidence and hope in the fulfillment of all God's promises?

Prayer: O God, who adorned the Priest Saint Raymond with the virtue of outstanding mercy and compassion for sinners and for captives, grant us, through his intercession, that, released from slavery to sin, we may carry out in freedom of spirit what is pleasing to you. 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: What did Jesus come to do for us? He came to set us free from the worst tyranny possible – slavery to sin and the fear of death, and the eternal destruction of both body and soul. God's power alone can save us from emptiness and poverty of spirit, from confusion and error, and from hopelessness and the fear of annihilation. The gospel of salvation is "good news" for us today. Do you know the joy and freedom of the gospel? Really know true joy and true freedom of the gospel? As we begin a New Year, embrace the gospel and experience this true joy and freedom.

Friday, January 8 ~ Season of Christmas

Holy Gospel: Luke 5:12-16 It happened that there was a man full of leprosy in one of the towns where Jesus was; and when he saw Jesus, he fell prostrate, pleaded with him, and said, "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do will it. Be made clean." And the leprosy left him immediately. Then he ordered him not to tell anyone, but "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." The report about him spread all the more, and great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray.

Meditation: In today's gospel the leper who met Jesus 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. He touched the man and made him clean – not only physically but spiritually as well. The Holy Spirit inflames our hearts with the love of Christ that we may reach out to others with compassionate care, especially to those who have been rejected and mistreated. The love of God impels us to do as Jesus did – to love the unlovable, to touch the untouchable, and to forgive the unforgivable. Do you allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with the love and compassion of Christ for others? If not, what is holding you back?

Prayer: Cast your kindly light upon your faithful, Lord, we pray, and with the splendor of your glory set their hearts ever aflame, that they may never cease to acknowledge their Savior and may truly hold fast to him. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Jesus did the unthinkable by physically touching the untouchable. Jewish law forbade anyone from touching or approaching a leper, lest ritual defilement occur. Are there people in your life that you might treat as a leper? They may not have leprosy, but the way you sun them, the way you look upon them, the way you treat them, the way you avoid them, perhaps they might as well have leprosy. When someone who is begging for food, or for your pocket changes approaches you for help, do you pretend not to see them? People created in the same image and likeness of God just like you? Think about it...then do something about it the next time someone needs a helping hand, a kind word, and to know that the love of Christ – the love in your heart – is pouring forth to help them.

Saturday, January 9 ~ Season of Christmas

Holy Gospel: John 3:22-30 Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, where he spent some time with them baptizing. John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was an abundance of water there, and people came to be baptized, for John had not yet been imprisoned. Now a dispute arose between the disciples of John and a Jew about ceremonial washings. So they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him." John answered and said, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said that I am not the Christ, but that I was sent before him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man, who stands and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made complete. He must increase; I must decrease."

Meditation: When the friends of John the Baptist complain that all are now going to Jesus, John in his characteristic humility exclaimed that he was not the Messiah but only the messenger sent to prepare his way. John describes the Messiah as the Bridegroom and himself as the friend of the Bridegroom. The image of marriage and the wedding feast is used throughout the scriptures to describe God's joy in his people, who are regarded as his bride. As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you (ref. Isaiah 62:5).

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, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: John acted as the best man in arranging the marriage and in making preparations for the marriage feast. John and his disciples rejoice that the Bridegroom has come to make his bride, the church, ready for the marriage feast. We see this fulfilled in the New Jerusalem in the marriage feast of the Lamb and his Bride (ref. Revelations 21-22). Do you look with joyful anticipation to the consummation of God's plan for his people at the end of the ages? Something to pray for, to plan for, and to look for!

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