

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 December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.” ~PRAYER OF FATHER THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

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Monday, December 9 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Patronal Feast Day of the United States of America

Because this Solemnity falls on a Monday this year, it is not a Holy Day of Obligation.

However, all are encouraged to attend Mass on this day to give honor to Our Lady.

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: Do you want to live a grace-filled life? The angel Gabriel salutes Mary as “full of grace.” To become the mother of the Savior, Mary was enriched by God with gifts to enable her to assume this awesome role. There is a venerable tradition among many Christians, dating back to the early church, for honoring Mary as the spotless virgin who bore the Son of God in her womb. A number of early Church fathers link Mary’s obedience to this singular grace of God. One of them Saint Irenaeus, wrote: “Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race. The knot of Eve’s disobedience was united by Mary’s obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.”

Prayer: O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son, grant, we pray, that, as you preserved her from every stain by virtue of the Death of your Son, which you foresaw, so, through her intercession, we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence. 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 Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they immediately experienced the consequence of their action – separation from the God who loved them. God in his mercy promised them a Redeemer who would pay the price for their sin and the sin of the world. We see the marvelous unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the events leading up to the Incarnation, the birth of the Messiah. 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 heart-felt trust as Mary did. When God commands he also gives the grace, 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 and do you yield to his grace?

Tuesday, December 10 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:12-14 Jesus said to his disciples: "What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost."

Meditation: This parable gives us a glimpse of the heart of a true shepherd, and the joy of a community reunited with its lost members. Shepherds not only had to watch over their sheep by day and by night; they also had to protect them from wolves and lions that preyed upon them, and from dangerous terrain and storms. Shepherds often had large flocks, sometimes numbering in the hundreds or thousands. It was common to inspect and count the sheep at the end of the day. You can imagine the surprise and grief of the shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing! Does he wait until the next day to go looking for it? Or does he ask a neighboring shepherd if he might have seen the stray sheep? No, he goes immediately in search of this lost sheep. Delay for even one night could mean disaster leading to death. Sheep by nature are very social creatures. An isolated sheep can quickly become bewildered, disoriented, and even neurotic. Easy prey for wolves and lions!

Prayer: O God, who have shown forth your salvation to all the ends of the earth, grant, we pray, that we may look forward in joy to the glorious Nativity of Christ. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: What was new in Jesus' teaching was the insistence that sinners must be sought out time and time again. How easy to forget and be distracted with other matters while the lost become prey for devouring wolves of the soul. The Apostle Peter reminds us that the "devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (ref. 1 Peter 5:8). God does not rejoice in the loss of anyone, but desires that we be saved and restored to friendship with him. That is why the whole community of heaven rejoices when one sinner is found and restored to fellowship with God. God is on a rescue mission today to save us from the destructive forces of sin and evil. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, watches over every step we take. Do you listen to his voice and heed his wise counsel? Do you follow the path he has set for you - a path that leads to life rather than death? Getting back on the path begins with the Sacrament of Reconciliation – don't let anything hold you back from making a good confession!

Wednesday, December 11 ~ Second Week of Advent Saint Damasus I, Pope

Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus said to the crowds: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Meditation: In this Season of Advent we celebrate the coming of the promised Messiah, our Lord and Savior, our Redeemer. Those who put their trust in God and in the coming of his kingdom receive the blessings of that kingdom – peace with God and strength for living his way of love and holiness (ref. Isaiah 40). Jesus fulfills all the Messianic hopes and promises of God's kingdom. That is why he taught his disciples to pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). His is not a political or military kingdom, but a spiritual one. The yoke of Christ's kingdom, his kingly rule and way of life, liberates us from the oppression of sin and death; Jesus lifts the weight of hopelessness from us. Jesus used the analogy of a yoke to explain how we can exchange the burden of sin and despair for a burden of glory and yoke of freedom from the grip of sin. The yoke which Jesus invites us to embrace is

his way of grace and freedom from the power of sin. And, thus, in this Season of Advent, we seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation to begin anew the path and life of Christ's freedom, lifting the weight and burden of sin from ourselves, and prepare ourselves to celebrate his birth which set into motion our hope for eternal life with him.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, O Lord, that we may constantly exalt the merits of your Martyrs, whom Pope Saint Damasus so venerated and loved. 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 invites us to unite our lives with him, our wills with his will, our heart with his heart. Jesus says his "burden is light." Sometimes we all feel weighed down by life's challenges – we feel "burdened." And in those times when we feel weighed down, we should turn to Christ in prayer and take him up on his offer to come to him, and let him help carry the burdens that are weighing us down – problems at home, school, in the workplace; problems, perhaps, in dealing with the economy. No burden is too heavy when it's given in love and carried in love. When we yoke our lives with Jesus, he also carries our burdens with us and gives us his strength to follow in his way of love. Do you know the joy of resting in Jesus' presence and walking daily with him along the path he has for you? If not, today is a wonderful time to begin. Take Jesus up on his invitation: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."

Thursday, December 12 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas

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: How does Mary respond to the word of God delivered by the angel Gabriel? Does Mary say "Give me a few days to think about this – let me post this on a blog or on Facebook and get some feedback on what people think I should do – let me consult with my attorney and accountant to see what liabilities I may have – let me Tweet, text and e-mail my friends to see what they think I should do." Does Mary cash in on her situation and sell her story to the news media in order to gain attention and publicity, or seek the limelight by creating a blog or posting her story on YouTube? No! Mary knows she is hearing and experiencing something that is beyond mere human capability. 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 in God. 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. Mary is the "mother of God" because God becomes incarnate when he takes on flesh in her womb. When we pray the Nicene Creed we state our confession of faith in this great mystery: "For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man". God gives us grace and he expects us to respond with the same willingness, obedience, and heart-felt 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 and yield to his grace?

Prayer: O God, Father of mercies, who placed your people under the singular protection of your Son's most holy Mother, grant that all who invoke the Blessed Virgin of Guadalupe, may seek with ever more

lively faith the progress of peoples in the ways of justice and of peace. 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 know the favor of the Lord? God lavishes his grace upon all who believe in him. He shows his favor to the lowly, to those who are humble and receptive to his word. We see 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. Let us prepare ourselves in these weeks of Advent to come and adore him.

Friday, December 13 ~ Second Week in the Season of Advent Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19 Jesus said to the crowds: "To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, 'He is possessed by a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, 'Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is vindicated by her works."

Meditation: The prophets remind us that God's kingdom is open to those who are teachable and receptive to the word of God. Jesus' parable challenges us to examine whether we are selective in hearing only what we want to hear. The children in Jesus' parable react with dismay because they cannot get anyone to join in their musical medley. They complain that if they play their music at weddings, no one will dance or sing; and if they play at funerals, it is the same. This refrain echoes the words of Ecclesiastes 3:4 - "there is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." Are you in tune with the message of the kingdom or reign of God? Jesus' message of the kingdom of God is good news and it produces true joy and spiritual freedom for those who will listen; but it is also a warning for those who refuse to listen.

Prayer: May the glorious intercession of the Virgin and Martyr Saint Lucy give us new heart, we pray, O Lord, so that we may celebrate her heavenly birthday in this present age and so behold things eternal. 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 can make us spiritually dull and slow to hear God's voice? Like the generation of Jesus' time, our age is marked by indifference and contempt, especially in regards to the things of heaven. Indifference dulls our ears to God's voice and to the good news of the gospel. Only the humble of heart can find joy and favor in God's grace. Have you come to experience the joy of the Advent season? Do you know the joy of the Gospel? Is your life in tune with Jesus' message of hope and salvation? 'Tis the season to get in tune with what Christ brings to each of us!

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011;
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