

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)

*Jubilee Year 2025: Pilgrims of Hope
Month of March: Dedicated to Saint Joseph*

“Even the darkest moments of the liturgy are filled with joy, and Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten fast, is a day of happiness, a Christian feast. It cannot be otherwise, as it forms part of the great Easter cycle. The Paschal Mystery is above all the mystery of life, in which the church, by celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ, enters in the Kingdom of Life which he has established once and for all by His definitive victory over sin and death. We must remember the original meaning of Lent, as the VER SACRUM, the Church’s ‘holy spring’ in which the Catechumens were prepared for their Baptism, and public penitents were made ready by penance for their restoration to the sacramental life in a communion with the rest of the Church. Lent is then not a season of punishment so much as one of healing. There is joy in the salutary fasting and abstinence of the Christian who eats and drinks less in order that his mind may be more clear and receptive to receive the sacred nourishment of God’s word, which the whole Church announces and meditates upon in each day’s liturgy throughout Lent. The whole life and teaching of Christ pass before us, and Lent is a season of special reflection and prayer, a forty-day retreat in which each Christian, to the extent that he is able, tries to follow Christ into the desert by prayer and fasting. The cross of ashes, traced upon the forehead of each Christian, is not only a reminder of death but inevitably (though tacitly) a pledge of resurrection. The ashes of a Christian are no longer mere ashes. The body of a Christian is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and though it is fated to see death, it will return again to life in glory. The cross, with which the ashes are traced upon us, is the sign of Christ’s victory over death. The words, ‘Remember, that thou art dust, and that to dust thou shalt return,’ are not to be taken as the quasi-form of a kind of “sacrament of death” (as if such a thing were possible). It might be good stoicism to receive a mere reminder of our condemnation to die, but it is not Christianity. The declaration that the body must fall temporarily into dust is a challenge to spiritual combat, that our burial may be ‘in Christ’ and that we may rise with Him to ‘live unto God.’ The ashes of this Wednesday are not merely a sign of death, but a promise of life to those who do penance. And yet the ashes are clearly a summons to penance, fasting, and compunction.” ~FATHER THOMAS MERTON, OCSO

Monday, March 3 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial: Saint Katharine Drexel, Virgin

Holy Gospel: Mark 10:17-27 As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.” He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” At that statement, his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, “Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.” They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For men it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.”

Meditation: Despite initial reactions, we know that Jesus was not opposed to wealth, nor was he opposed to the wealthy. He had many friends who were well-to-do, including some tax collectors! One (Matthew) was even called by Christ to be one of his apostles! Jesus' warning reiterated the teaching of the Old Testament wisdom: Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is perverse in his ways (Proverbs 28:6; see also Psalm 37:16). Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist (Proverbs 23:4). Why is Jesus so cautious, then, about wealth? Simple. Wealth can make us falsely independent. The church at Laodicea was warned about their attitude towards wealth and a false sense of security: "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing" (Revelations 3:17). Wealth can also lead us into hurtful desires and selfishness (see 1 Timothy 6:9-10). Look at the lesson Jesus gave about the rich man and his sons who refused to aid the poor man Lazarus (see Luke 16:19ff). They also neglected to serve God. The scriptures give us a paradox: we lose what we keep and we gain what we give away. Generosity will be amply repaid, both in this life and in eternity (Proverbs 3:9-10, Luke 6:38). Jesus offers us an incomparable treasure which no money can buy. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. Remember, "you can't take it with you." So...where is your treasure?

Prayer: Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that the course of our world may be directed by your peaceful rule and that your Church may rejoice, untroubled in her devotion. 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 Katharine Drexel: God of love, you called Saint Katharine Drexel to teach the message of the Gospel and to bring the life of the Eucharist to the Native American and African American peoples; by her prayers and example, enable us to work for justice among the poor and the oppressed, and keep us undivided in love in the Eucharistic community of your Church. 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: Those who are generous towards God and towards their neighbor find that they cannot out give God in his generosity towards us. God blesses us with the priceless treasures of his kingdom – freedom from fear and the griping power of sin, selfishness and pride which block his love and grace in our lives; freedom from loneliness, isolation and rejection which keep his children from living together in love, peace, and unity; and freedom from hopelessness, despair, and disillusionment which blind our vision of God's power to heal every hurt, bind every wound, and remove every blemish which mar the image of God within us. God offers us treasure which money cannot buy. He alone can truly satisfy the deepest longing and desires of our heart. Are you willing to part with all earthly things that might keep you from seeking true and complete joy with Jesus?

Tuesday, March 4 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time ~ Tuesday before Lent

Holy Gospel: Mark 10: 28-31 Peter began to say to Jesus, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Meditation: Right after a wealthy young man refused to follow Jesus, Peter, somewhat crudely wanted to know what he and the other disciples would get out of it since they had freely accepted Jesus' offer to follow him unconditionally. Jesus spoke with utter honesty: Those who left all for him would receive a hundred times more now, even in this life, as well as unending life in the age to come. Jesus' disciples can expect opposition and persecution from those who are opposed to Christ and his gospel. Thus this gospel presents us with a paradox: we lose what we keep, and we gain what we give away. When we lose our lives for Jesus Christ, we gain a priceless treasure and an inheritance which last forever. Whatever we give to God comes back a hundredfold. Generosity flows from a heart full of gratitude for the abundant mercy and grace which God grants. Do you give freely and generously? Do you give for reward or for love?

Prayer: Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that the course of our world may be directed by your peaceful rule and that your Church may rejoice, untroubled in her devotion. 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: Should we be surprised if we lose favor and experience ridicule, intimidation, and injury when we take a stand for truth and righteousness? In place of material wealth, Jesus promised his disciples the blessing and joy of rich fellowship with the community of believers. No earthly good or possession can rival the joy and bliss of knowing God and the peace and unity he grants to his disciples. The Lord wants to fill our hearts with the vision of heaven and with his joy and peace. Do you know the

joy of following the Lord as his disciple? Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the joy of the gospel and the knowledge of God's personal love.

Wednesday, March 5 ~ Ash Wednesday ~ The Beginning of Lent **A DAY OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."



Meditation: As we begin this penitential season of Lent, we would do well to meditate as to why Jesus singled out prayer, fasting, and almsgiving for his disciples. The Jews considered these three as the cardinal works of the religious life. These were seen as the key signs of a pious person, the three great pillars on which the good life was based. Jesus pointed to the heart of the matter. Why do you pray, fast, and give alms? To draw attention to yourself so that others may notice and think highly of you? Or to give glory to God? The Lord warns his disciples of self-seeking glory – the preoccupation with looking good and seeking praise from others. True piety is something more than feeling good or looking holy. True piety is loving devotion to God. It is an attitude of awe, reverence, worship and obedience. It is a gift and working of the Holy Spirit that enables us to devote our lives to God with a holy desire to please him in all things (Isaiah 11:1-2). The forty days of Lent is the annual retreat of the people of God in imitation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. Forty is a significant number in the scriptures. Moses went to the mountain to seek the face of God for forty days in prayer and fasting. The people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years in preparation for their entry into the promised land. Elijah fasted for forty days as he journeyed in the wilderness to the mountain of God. We are called to journey with the Lord in a special season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and penitence as we prepare to celebrate the feast of Easter, the Christian Passover. The Lord gives us spiritual food and supernatural strength to seek his face and to prepare ourselves for spiritual combat and testing. We, too, must follow in the way of the cross in order to share in the victory of Christ's death and resurrection. As we begin this holy season of testing and preparation, let's ask the Lord for a fresh outpouring of his Holy Spirit that we may grow in faith, hope, and love and embrace his will more fully in our lives.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, that we may begin with holy fasting this campaign of Christian service, so that, as we take up battle against spiritual evils, we may be armed with weapons of self-restraint. 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 hunger for God? Do you thirst for God's holiness? God wants to set our hearts ablaze with the fire of his Holy Spirit that we may share in his holiness and radiate the joy of the gospel to those around us. St. Augustine tells us that there are two kinds of people and two kinds of love: "One is holy, the other is selfish. One is subject to God; the other endeavors to equal Him." We are what we love. God wants to free our hearts from all that would keep us captive to selfishness and sin. "Rend your hearts and not your garments" says the prophet Joel (Joel 2:12). Use this Season of Lent to the fullest – embrace the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Holy Catholic Church. Undergo a conversion of mind and heart. Conform your will to God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, transform your minds and hearts to be lead in God's way of truth and holiness – the one and only way!

Thursday, March 6 ~ Thursday After Ash Wednesday

Holy Gospel: Luke 9:22-25 Jesus said to his disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."

Then he said to all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?"

Meditation: Quite simply, the cross of Jesus Christ leads to freedom and victory over sin and death. We then need to ask ourselves: "What is the cross which Christ commands me to take up each day as his disciple?" When my will crosses with his will, then his will must be done. The way of the cross involves sacrifice, the sacrifice of laying down my life each and every day for Jesus' sake. What makes such sacrifice possible and "sweet" is the love of God poured out for us in the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). Try as we may, we can never out give God. He always gives us more than we can expect or imagine. Are you ready to lose all for Christ in order to gain all with Christ?

Prayer: Turn our hearts to you, eternal Father, and grant that, seeking always the one thing necessary and carrying out works of charity, we may be dedicated to your worship. 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: We need to ask ourselves: "What will I give to God in exchange for freedom and eternal life?" In thinking about this question, are you ready to part with anything that might keep you from following him and his perfect plan for your life? Jesus poses these questions to challenge our assumptions about what is most profitable and worthwhile in life. In every decision of life we are making ourselves a certain kind of person. It is possible that some can gain all the things they set their heart on, only to wake up suddenly and discover that they missed the most important things of all. A true disciple is ready to give up all that he or she has in exchange for happiness and life with God. The life which God offers is abundant, everlasting life. And the joy which God places in our hearts no sadness or loss can diminish.

Friday, March 7 ~ Friday After Ash Wednesday ~ A Day of Abstinence

PRAY THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9nu9x5ND2Y>

Holy Gospel: Mark 9:14-15 The disciples of John approached Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Meditation: What kind of fasting is pleasing to God? Fasting can be done for a variety of reasons: to gain freedom from some bad habit, addiction, or vice, to share in the suffering of those who go without, or to grow in our hunger for God and for the things of heaven. Saint Basil the Great wrote: "Take heed that you do not make fasting to consist only in abstinence from meats. True fasting is to refrain from vice. Shred to pieces all your unjust contracts. Pardon your neighbors. Forgive them their trespasses." Do you hunger for more of God and for his holiness and for the abundant life he has to offer you?

Prayer: Show gracious favor, O Lord, we pray, to the works of penance we have begun, that we may have strength to accomplish with sincerity the bodily observances we undertake. 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 ever find yourself hungering for God? We must remember that hungering for God and fasting for his kingdom go hand in hand. When asked why he and his disciples did not fast Jesus used the vivid picture of a wedding celebration. In Jesus' time the newly wed celebrated their honeymoon at home for a whole week with all the guests! This was a time of great feasting and celebrating. Jesus points to himself as the bridegroom and his disciples as the bridegroom's friends. He alludes to the fact that God takes delight in his people as a groom delights in his bride (Isaiah 62:5). To be in God's presence is pure delight and happiness. But Jesus also reminds his followers that there is a time for fasting and for humbling oneself in preparation for the coming of God's kingdom and for the return of the Messianic King. The Lord's disciples must also bear the cross of affliction and purification. For the disciple there is both a time for rejoicing in the Lord's presence and celebrating his goodness and a time for seeking the Lord with humility, fasting, and mourning for sin. If we hunger for the Lord, he will not disappoint us. His grace draws us to his throne of mercy and favor. Do you seek the Lord with confident trust and allow his Holy Spirit to transform your life with his power and grace?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Daily meditations and contemplations adapted from the Irish Jesuits' *Sacred Space* web page and *Biblical Medications for Lent* by Rev. Carroll Stuhlmüller, C.P.; prayers are from *The Roman Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing, 2011; information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of the Catholic Culture web site.