

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

“Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know You, a heart to seek You, wisdom to find You, conduct pleasing to You, faithful perseverance in waiting for You, and a hope of finally embracing You.” +PRAYER OF SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

Monday, January 26 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time Saints Timothy and Titus, Bishops

Holy Gospel: Mark 3:22-30 The scribes who had come from Jerusalem said of Jesus, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “By the prince of demons he drives out demons.”

Summoning them, he began to speak to them in parables, “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; that is the end of him. But no one can enter a strong man’s house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house. Amen, I say to you, all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin.” For they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Meditation: What is the unforgivable sin which Jesus warns us to avoid? Jesus knows that his disciples will be tested and he assures them that the Holy Spirit will give them what they need in their time of adversity. He warns them, however, that it's possible to spurn the grace of God and to fall into “apostasy” (giving up the faith) out of cowardice or disbelief. Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit reprehensible? Blasphemy consists in uttering against God, inwardly or outwardly, words of hatred, reproach, or defiance. It is contrary to the respect that is due to God and his holy name. Jesus speaks of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as the unforgivable sin. Jesus spoke about this sin immediately after the scribes and Pharisees had attributed his miracles to the work of the devil instead of to God. A sin can only be unforgivable if repentance is impossible. If someone repeatedly closes his or her eyes to God and shuts his or her ears to his voice, there comes a point where he or she can no longer recognize God when he can be seen, and when he or she sees evil as good and good as evil (Isaiah 5:20). To fear such a sin, however, signals that one is not dead to God and is conscious of the need for God's grace and mercy. There are no limits to the mercy of God, but any who refuses to accept his mercy by repenting rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. God gives grace and help to all who humbly call upon him. Giving up on God and refusing to turn away from sin and disbelief results from pride and the loss of hope in God. What is the basis of our hope and confidence in God? Jesus' death on the cross won for us our salvation and adoption as the children of God. The love and mercy of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are freely given to those who acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Is your hope securely placed in Christ and his victory on the cross?

Prayer: O God, who adorned Saints Timothy and Titus with apostolic virtues, grant through the intercession of them both, that, living justly and devoutly in this present age, we may merit to reach our heavenly homeland. 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: Satan can only have power or dominion over us if we listen to his lies and succumb to his will which is contrary to the will of God, the teachings of Christ and his Catholic Church. Jesus makes it clear that there are no neutral parties in this world. We are either for Jesus or against him, for the kingdom of God or against it. There are two kingdoms in opposition to one another— the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness under the rule of Satan. If we disobey God's word, we open the door to the power of sin and Satan. If we want to live in freedom from sin and Satan, then our house must be

occupied by Jesus where he is enthroned as Lord as Savior. Do you know the peace and security of a life submitted to God and his word?

Tuesday, January 27 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time

Optional Memorial: Saint Angela Merici, Virgin

Holy Gospel: Mark 3:31-35 The mother of Jesus and his brothers arrived at the house. Standing outside, they sent word to Jesus and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers and your sisters are outside asking for you." But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

Meditation: Who do you love and cherish the most? God did not intend for us to be alone, but to be with others. He gives us many opportunities for developing relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Why does Jesus seem to ignore his own relatives when they pressed to see him? His love and respect for his mother and his relatives is unquestionable. Jesus never lost an opportunity to teach his disciples a spiritual lesson and truth about the kingdom of God. On this occasion when many gathered to hear Jesus he pointed to another higher reality of relationships, namely our relationship with God and with those who belong to God.

Prayer: May the Virgin Saint Angela never fail to commend us to your compassion, O Lord, we pray, that, following the lessons of her charity and prudence, and express it in what we do. 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 is God's love incarnate — God's love made visible in human flesh (1 John 4:9-10). That is why Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and the shepherd who seeks out the sheep who have strayed and lost their way. God is like the father who yearns for his prodigal son to return home and then throws a great party for his son when he has a change of heart and comes back (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus offered up his life on the cross for our sake, so that we could be forgiven and restored to unity and friendship with God. It is through Jesus that we become the adopted children of God — his own sons and daughters. That is why Jesus told his disciples that they would have many new friends and family relationships in his kingdom. Whoever does the will of God is a friend of God and a member of his family — his sons and daughters who have been ransomed by the precious blood of Christ.

Wednesday, January 28 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time

Saint Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor of the Church

Holy Gospel: Mark 4:1-20 On another occasion, Jesus began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land. And he taught them at length in parables, and in the course of his instruction he said to them, "Hear this! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." He added, "Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear."

And when he was alone, those present along with the Twelve questioned him about the parables. He answered them, "The mystery of the Kingdom of God has been granted to you. But to those outside everything comes in parables, so that / *they may look and see but not perceive, / and hear and listen but not understand, / in order that they may not be converted and be forgiven.*"

Jesus said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand any of the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown. As soon as they hear, Satan comes at once and takes away the word sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground who, when they hear the word, receive it at once with joy. But they have no roots; they last only for a time. Then when tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Those sown among thorns are another sort. They are the people who hear the word, but worldly anxiety, the lure of riches, and the craving for other things intrude and choke the word, and it bears no fruit. But those sown on rich soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."

Meditation: Jesus' parable of the sower is aimed at the hearers of his word. There are different ways of accepting God's word and they produce different kinds of fruit accordingly. There is the prejudiced hearer who has a shut mind. Such a person is unteachable and blind to what he or she doesn't want to hear. Then there is the shallow hearer. He or she fails to think things out or think them through; they lack depth. They may initially respond with an emotional reaction; but when it wears off their mind wanders to something else. Another type of hearer is the person who has many interests or cares, but who lacks the ability to hear or comprehend what is truly important. Such a person is too busy to pray or too preoccupied to study and meditate on God's word. Then there is the one whose mind is open. Such a person is at all times willing to listen and to learn. He or she is never too proud or too busy to learn. They listen in order to understand. God gives grace to those who hunger for his word that they may understand his will and have the strength to live according to it. Do you hunger for God's word?

Prayer: O God, who made Saint Thomas Aquinas outstanding in his zeal for holiness and his study of sacred doctrine, grant us, we pray, that we may understand what he taught and imitate what he accomplished. 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 does the parable about seeds and roots say to us about the kingdom of God? Any farmer will attest to the importance of good soil for supplying nutrients for growth. And how does a plant get the necessary food and water it needs except by its roots? The scriptures frequently use the image of fruit-bearing plants or trees to convey the principle of spiritual life and death. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8; see also Psalm 1:3)

About Saint Thomas Aquinas: St. Thomas ranks among the greatest writers and theologians of all time. His most important work, the *Summa Theologiae*, an explanation and summary of the entire body of Catholic teaching, has been standard for centuries, even to our own day. At the Council of Trent it was consulted after the Bible. To a deeply speculative mind, he joined a remarkable life of prayer, a precious memento of which has been left to us in the *Office of Corpus Christi*. Reputed as great already in life, he nevertheless remained modest, a perfect model of childlike simplicity and goodness. He was mild in word and kind in deed. He believed everyone was as innocent as he himself was. When someone sinned through weakness, Thomas bemoaned the sin as if it were his own. The goodness of his heart shone in his face, no one could look upon him and remain disconsolate. How he suffered with the poor and the needy was most inspiring. Whatever clothing or other items he could give away, he gladly did. He kept nothing superfluous in his efforts to alleviate the needs of others. After he died his lifelong companion and confessor testified, "I have always known him to be as innocent as a five-year-old child. Never did a carnal temptation soil his soul, never did he consent to a mortal sin." He cherished a most tender devotion to St. Agnes, constantly carrying relics of this virgin martyr on his person. He died in 1274, at the age of fifty, in the abbey of Fossa Nuova. He is the patron saint of schools and of sacred theology.

Thursday, January 29 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 4:21-25 Jesus said to his disciples, "Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not to be placed on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden except to be made visible; nothing is secret except to come to light. Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear." He also told them, "Take care what you hear. The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you, and still more will be given to you. To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Meditation: What does the image of light and a lamp tell us about God's kingdom? Lamps in the ancient world served a vital function, much like they do today. They enable people to see and work in the dark and to avoid stumbling. The Jews also understood "light" as an expression of the inner beauty, truth, and goodness of God. In his light we see light (Psalm 36:9). His word is a lamp that guides our steps (Psalm 119:105). God's grace not only illumines the darkness in our lives, but it also fills us with spiritual light, joy, and peace. Jesus used the image of a lamp to describe how his disciples are to live in the light of his truth and love. Just as natural light illumines the darkness and enables one to see visually, so the light of Christ shines in the hearts of believers and enables us to see the heavenly reality of God's kingdom. In fact, our mission is to be light-bearers of Christ so that others may see the truth of the gospel and be freed from the blindness of sin and deception.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works. 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 remarks that nothing can remain hidden or secret. We can try to hide things from others, from ourselves, and from God. How tempting to shut our eyes from the consequences of our sinful ways and bad habits, even when we know what those consequences are. And how tempting to hide them from others and even from God. But, nonetheless, everything is known to God who sees all. There is great freedom and joy for those who live in God's light and who seek this truth. Those who listen to God and heed his voice will receive more from him. Do you know the joy and freedom of living in God's light?

Friday, January 30 ~ Third Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 4:26-34 Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the Kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

He said, "To what shall we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

Meditation: What can mustard seeds teach us about the kingdom of God? The tiny mustard seed literally grew to be a tree which attracted numerous birds because they loved the little black mustard seed it produced. God's kingdom works in a similar fashion. It starts from the smallest beginnings in the hearts of men and women who are receptive to God's word. And it works unseen and causes a transformation from within. Just as a seed has no power to change itself until it is planted in the ground, so we cannot change our lives to be like God until God gives us the power of his Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works. 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 Lord of the universe is ever ready to transform us by the power of his Spirit. Are you ready to let God change you by his grace and power? The kingdom of God produces a transformation in those who receive the new life which Jesus Christ offers. When we yield to Jesus Christ and submit to his word, our lives are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Paul the Apostle says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Do you believe in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit?

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