

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 February: Dedicated to the Holy Family

“Love Mary!... She is loveable, faithful, constant. She will never let herself be outdone in love but will ever remain supreme. If you are in danger, she will hasten to free you. If you are troubled, she will console you. If you are sick, she will bring you relief. If you are in need, she will help you. She does not look to see what kind of person you have been. She simply comes to a heart that wants to love her. She comes quickly and opens her merciful heart to you, embraces you and consoles and serves you. She will even be at hand, to accompany you on the trip to eternity.” +SAINT GREGORY OF NAREK

Monday, February 24 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 9:14-29 As Jesus came down from the mountain with Peter, James, John and approached the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes arguing with them. Immediately on seeing him, the whole crowd was utterly amazed. They ran up to him and greeted him. He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I have brought to you my son possessed by a mute spirit. Wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they were unable to do so." He said to them in reply, "O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him to me." They brought the boy to him. And when he saw him, the spirit immediately threw the boy into convulsions. As he fell to the ground, he began to roll around and foam at the mouth. Then he questioned his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" He replied, "Since childhood. It has often thrown him into fire and into water to kill him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' Everything is possible to one who has faith." Then the boy's father cried out, "I do believe, help my unbelief!" Jesus, on seeing a crowd rapidly gathering, rebuked the unclean spirit and said to it, "Mute and deaf spirit, I command you: come out of him and never enter him again!" Shouting and throwing the boy into convulsions, it came out. He became like a corpse, which caused many to say, "He is dead!" But Jesus took him by the hand, raised him, and he stood up. When he entered the house, his disciples asked him in private, "Why could we not drive the spirit out?" He said to them, "This kind can only come out through prayer."

Meditation: The mighty works and signs which Jesus did demonstrate that the kingdom of God is present in him. These signs attest that the Father has sent him as the promised Messiah. They invite belief in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world. The coming of God's kingdom means defeat of Satan's kingdom. Jesus' exorcisms anticipate his great victory over "the ruler of this world" (ref. John 12:31). While Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and may cause grave injuries of a spiritual nature, and indirectly even of a physical nature, his power is nonetheless limited and permitted by divine providence (ref. Romans 8:28). Jesus offers freedom from bondage to sin and Satan. There is no affliction that he cannot deliver us from.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. 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: There have been times when each of us have caused disappointment to others. In this gospel incident the disciples of Jesus brought disappointment to a pleading father because they failed to heal his epileptic son. Jesus' response seemed stern; but it was really tempered with love and compassion. We see at once both Jesus' dismay with the disciples' lack of faith and his concern to meet the need of this troubled boy and his anguished father. Jesus recognized the weakness of the father's faith

and at the same time challenged him to pray boldly with expectant faith: "All things are possible to him who believes!" Saint Augustine of Hippo reminds us that prayer and faith go together: "Where faith fails, prayer perishes. For who prays for that in which he does not believe? ... So then in order that we may pray, let us believe, and let us pray that this same faith by which we pray may not falter." The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit that we may have the confidence and boldness we need to ask our heavenly Father for his help and grace. Do you trust in God's love and care for you and pray with expectant faith?

Tuesday, February 25 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 9:30-37 Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. For they had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

Meditation: How ashamed the disciples must have been when Jesus overheard them arguing about who among them was the greatest! But aren't we like the disciples? We compare ourselves with others and desire their praise. The appetite for glory and greatness seems to be inbred in us. Who doesn't cherish the ambition to be "somebody" whom others admire rather than a "nobody"? Even the psalms speak about the glory God has destined for us. You have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor (ref. Psalm 8:5). Jesus made a dramatic gesture by embracing a child to show his disciples who really is the greatest in the kingdom of God. What can a little child possibly teach us about greatness? Children in the ancient world had no rights, position, or privileges of their own. They were socially at the "bottom of the rung" and at the service of their parents, much like the household staff and domestic servants. What is the significance of Jesus' gesture? Jesus elevated a little child in the presence of his disciples by placing the child in a privileged position of honor. It is customary, even today, to seat the guest of honor at the right side of the host. Who is the greatest in God's kingdom? The one who is humble and lowly of heart – who instead of asserting their rights willingly empty themselves of pride and self-seeking glory by taking the lowly position of a servant or child.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. 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: One might wonder why Jesus told his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod? To the Jewish person leaven was a sign of evil. It was a piece of dough left-over from a previous baking. In due course it fermented and this fermented dough became leaven. Fermentation was associated with decomposing rot. Jesus warned his disciples to avoid the evil influence of the Pharisees and of Herod who sought their own counsels rather than the will of God. As the apostles continued to worry about their lack of bread, Jesus reminded them of his miraculous provision of bread in the feeding of the four thousand. He then upbraided them for their lack of trust in God. "Do you still not understand?" It's easy to get preoccupied with the problems and needs of the present moment and to forget the most important reality of all – God's abiding presence with us and his abundant provision for our lives as well. Thus when you pray, do you pray with joyful confidence, "Father, give us this day our daily bread?"

Wednesday, February 26 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 9:38-40 John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

Meditation: Are we not like the disciples when we get upset at the good deeds of others who seem to shine more than us? Paul says that "love is not jealous... but rejoices in the right" (1 Corinthians 13:4,6). Envy and jealousy, its counterpart, are sinful because they lead us to sorrow over what should make us rejoice – namely, our neighbor's good. The reason we may grieve over our another's good is that somehow we see that good as lessening our own value or excellence. Envy forms when we believe that

the other person's advantage or possession diminishes or brings disgrace on us. Envy is contrary to love. Both the object of love and the object of envy is our neighbor's good, but by contrary movements, since love rejoices in our neighbor's good, while envy grieves over it. How can we overcome envy? With the love that God has put into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit purifies our love and frees us from our disordered passions, such as envy, jealousy, greed, and bitterness. The love that God places in our hearts seeks the highest good of our neighbor.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. 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: God created us in love for love. The charity we show to our neighbor also expresses the gratitude we have for the abundant goodness and kindness of God towards us. Jesus declared that any kindness shown and any help given to the people of Christ will not lose its reward. Jesus never refused to give to anyone in need who asked for his help. As his disciples we are called to be kind and generous as he is. Are you grateful for God's mercy and kindness towards you and are you ready to show that same kindness and generosity towards your neighbor?

Thursday, February 27 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time **Optional Memorial: Saint Gregory of Narek, Abbot & Doctor of the Church**

Holy Gospel: Mark 9:41-50 Jesus said to his disciples: "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the Kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another."

Meditation: Jesus set before his disciples the one supreme goal in life that is worth any sacrifice, and that goal is God himself and his will for our lives which leads to everlasting peace and happiness. Just as a doctor might remove a limb or some part of the body in order to preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us to sin and which leads to spiritual death. Jesus warns his disciples of the terrible responsibility that they must set no stumbling block in the way of another, that is, not give offense or bad example that might lead another to sin. The Greek word for temptation (*scandalon*) is exactly the same as the English word *scandal*. The original meaning of scandal is a trap or a stumbling block which causes one to trip and fall. The Jews held that it was an unforgivable sin to teach another to sin. If we teach another to sin, he in turn may teach still another, until a train of sin is set in motion with no foreseeable end. The young in faith are especially vulnerable to the bad example of those who should be passing on the faith.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. 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 Gregory of Narek: Almighty and eternal God, who gave your holy Church blessed Gregory as Doctor, grant that what he taught when moved by the divine Spirit may always stay firm in our hearts; and, as by your gift we embrace him as our patron, may we also have him as our defender to entreat your mercy. 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: It is sad when people follow human opinion and human feelings that lead them to sin, versus following the truths of sacred scripture. We need to examine not only our own sinful habits, but also how we have shared our sinfulness with family members, friends, neighbors – whomever we have enjoined to get on the secular bandwagon that leads people away from Christ, and instead turn toward Christ and follow him. The first step is always one of humility – recognizing who we are in relation to Jesus Christ, and allowing him to shepherd and guide us with his timeless teachings. Remember what St. Augustine said: "If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself." The next step would be to confess your sins, so that you can once again be in God's graces. As part of the Act of Contrition, we say "I firmly intend, with the help of your grace, to

sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin." So, the next step means turning away from all things that lead you to sin – internet pages and blogs, advocacy groups of all types who have a popular agenda that is contrary to the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ, perhaps even a friend. You might want to pray this short prayer at times – again from Saint Augustine: "Oh, God, to know you is life. To serve You is freedom. To praise you is the soul's joy and delight. Guard me with the power of Your grace here and in all places. Now and at all times, forever. Amen."

Friday, February 28 ~ Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 10:1-12 Jesus came into the district of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds gathered around him and, as was his custom, he again taught them. The Pharisees approached him and asked, "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" They were testing him. He said to them in reply, "What did Moses command you?" They replied, "Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her." But Jesus told them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate." In the house the disciples again questioned Jesus about this. He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Meditation: Jesus deals with the issue of divorce by taking his hearers back to the beginning of creation and to God's plan for the human race. In Genesis 2:23-24 we see God's intention and ideal that two people who marry should become so indissolubly one that they are one flesh. That ideal is found in the unbreakable union of Adam and Eve. They were created for each other and for no one else. They are the pattern and symbol for all who were to come. Jesus explains that Moses permitted divorce as a concession in view of a lost ideal. Jesus sets the high ideal of the married state before those who are willing to accept his commands. Jesus, likewise sets the high ideal for those who freely renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (see Matthew 19:12). Both marriage and celibacy are calls from God to live a consecrated life, that is to live as married couples or as singles who belong not to themselves but to God. We must recognize that our lives are not our own – they belong to God.

Prayer: Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. 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: Tertullian, an early second century Christian writer, wrote the following to his wife, which is worth contemplating on today: "Where are we to find language adequately to express the happiness of that marriage which the church cements, the oblation confirms, the benediction signs and seals, the angels celebrate, and the Father holds as approved? For all around the earth young people do not rightly and lawfully wed without their parents' consent. What kind of yoke is that of two believers who share one hope, one desire, one discipline, one service? They enjoy kinship in spirit and in flesh. They are mutual servants with no discrepancy of interests. Truly they are 'two in one flesh.' Where the flesh is one, the spirit is one as well. Together they pray, together they bow down, together perform their fasts, mutually teaching, mutually entreating, mutually upholding. In the church of God they hold an equal place. They stand equal at the banquet of God, equally in crises, equally facing persecutions, and equally in refreshments. Neither hides anything from the other. Neither neglects the other. Neither is troublesome to the other."

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
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+ THE SEASON OF LENT BEGINS ON ASH WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5 +

"Do you wish your prayer to fly toward God? Make for it two wings: fasting and almsgiving."

—Saint Augustine of Hippo

"The less we have, the more we give. Seems absurd, but it's the logic of love."

—Saint Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa)

"It is to those who have the most need of us that we ought to show our love more especially."

—Saint Francis de Sales