

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)

“We shall not injure God by remaining ignorant of Him, but shall deprive ourselves of His friendship.” ~SAINT JUSTIN MARTYR

Monday, May 28 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time
~ Memorial Day ~

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?

Memorial Day Prayer: God of power and mercy, you destroy war and put down earthly pride. Banish violence from our midst and wipe away our tears, that we may all deserve to be called your sons and daughters. Keep in your mercy those men and women who have died in the cause of freedom and bring them safely into your kingdom of justice and peace. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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, May 29 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

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? And why 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, one 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, May 30 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

Holy Gospel: Mark 10:32-45 The disciples were on the way, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went ahead of them. They were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. Taking the Twelve aside again, he began to tell them what was going to happen to him. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit upon him, scourge him, and put him to death, but after three days he will rise." Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?" They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the chalice that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to him, "We can." Jesus said to them, "The chalice that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Meditation: On three different occasions the Gospels record that Jesus predicted he would endure great suffering through betrayal, rejection, and the punishment of a cruel death. The Jews resorted to stoning and the Romans to crucifixion – the most painful and humiliating death they could devise for criminals they wanted to eliminate. No wonder the apostles were greatly distressed at such a prediction! If Jesus their Master were put to death, then they would likely receive the same treatment by their enemies. Jesus called himself the "Son of Man" because this was a common Jewish title for the Messiah. Why must the Messiah be rejected and killed? Did not God promise that his Anointed One would deliver his people from their oppression and establish a kingdom of peace and justice? The prophet Isaiah had foretold that it was God's will that the "Suffering Servant" make atonement for sins through his suffering and death (Isaiah

53:5-12). Jesus paid the price for our redemption with his blood. Slavery to sin is to want the wrong things and to be in bondage to destructive desires. The ransom Jesus paid sets us free from the worst tyranny possible – the tyranny of sin and the fear of death. Jesus' victory did not end with death but triumphed over the tomb. Jesus defeated the powers of death through his resurrection. Do you want the greatest freedom possible, the freedom to live as God truly meant us to live as his sons and daughters?

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, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Notice how Jesus weds authority with selfless service and with loving sacrifice. Authority without sacrificial love is brutish and self-serving. Jesus also used stark language to explain what kind of sacrifice he had in mind. His disciples must drink his cup if they expect to reign with him in his kingdom. The cup he had in mind was a bitter one involving crucifixion. What kind of cup does the Lord have in mind for us? For some disciples such a cup entails physical suffering and the painful struggle of martyrdom. But for many, it entails the long routine of the Christian life, with all its daily sacrifices, disappointments, set-backs, struggles, and temptations. A disciple must be ready to lay down his or her life in martyrdom and be ready to lay it down each and every day in the little and big sacrifices required. An early church father summed up Jesus' teaching with the expression: to serve is to reign with Christ. We share in God's reign by laying down our lives in humble service as Jesus did for our sake. Are you willing to lay down your life and to serve others as Jesus did?

Thursday, May 31 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Gospel: Luke 1:39-56 Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled." And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever." Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Meditation: People often ask about the significance of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth before the birth of Jesus. It comes down to this. When Elizabeth greeted Mary and recognized the Messiah in Mary's womb they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with a joyful anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promise to give a Savior. What a marvelous wonder for God to fill not only Elizabeth's heart with his Holy Spirit but the child in her womb as well. John the Baptist, even before the birth of the Messiah, pointed to his coming and leapt for joy in the womb of his mother as the Holy Spirit revealed to him the presence of the King to be born. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to enable us to know and experience the indwelling presence of God and the power of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the way in which God reigns within each of us. Knowing this, do you live in the joy and knowledge of God's indwelling presence with you through his Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who, while the Blessed Virgin Mary was carrying your Son in her womb, inspired her to visit Elizabeth, grant us, we pray, that, faithful to the promptings of the Spirit, we may magnify your greatness with the Virgin Mary at all times. 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: The word "blessed" [*makarios* in Greek] literally means "happiness" or "beatitude." It describes a kind of joy which is serene and untouchable, self-contained, and independent from chance and changing circumstances of life. There is a certain paradox for those "blessed" by the Lord. Mary was given the "blessedness" of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. Saint Anselm, a great teacher and Archbishop of

Canterbury (1033-1109), spoke these words in a homily: "Without God's Son nothing could exist; without Mary's son, nothing could be redeemed." To be chosen by God is an awesome privilege and responsibility. Mary received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. Her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his disciples that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away. Do you know the joy of a life given over to God in faith and in trust?

Friday, June 1 ~ Eighth Week in Ordinary Time **Saint Justin, Martyr**

Holy Gospel: Mark 11:11-26 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple area. He looked around at everything and, since it was already late, went out to Bethany with the Twelve. The next day as they were leaving Bethany he was hungry. Seeing from a distance a fig tree in leaf, he went over to see if he could find anything on it. When he reached it he found nothing but leaves; it was not the time for figs. And he said to it in reply, "May no one ever eat of your fruit again!" And his disciples heard it. They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, "Is it not written: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples? But you have made it a den of thieves.'" The chief priests and the scribes came to hear of it and were seeking a way to put him to death, yet they feared him because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city. Early in the morning, as they were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered to its roots. Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." Jesus said to them in reply, "Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it shall be done for him. Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours. When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions."

Meditation: Fig trees were a common and important source of food for the Jews. Bad figs or a decaying fig tree was linked with evil deeds, sin and spiritual decay. The unfruitful fig tree symbolized the outcome of Israel's unresponsiveness to the word of God. The prophets depicted the languishing fig tree as signifying the desolation and calamity of Israel due to her unfaithfulness to God (ref. Joel 1:7,12; Habakuk 3:17; and Jeremiah 8:13). The history of Israel is one long preparation for the coming of the Promised One. But the promise is unfulfilled in those who reject Jesus through unbelief. (See also Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree in Luke 13:6-9). Jesus' cursing of a fig tree is a prophetic action against the faithlessness of those who rejected his message. For faith to be fruitful and productive, it must be nourished with the word of God (ref. 2 Tim. 3:16; Col. 3:16) and be rooted in love (ref. Galatians 5:6).

Prayer: O God, who through the folly of the Cross wondrously taught Saint Justin the Martyr the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ, grant us, through his intercession, that, having rejected deception and error, we may become steadfast in the 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: Two words difficult for people to sometimes hear or to accept when they have been harmed in one way or another – "I'm sorry." After we've been harmed, the pain can sometimes cloud our capacity to think rationally, to be calm and collected, and to accept one's apology and forgive. The next time you find yourself in this situation, remember in the Lord's Prayer when we pray to God: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." In other words we're praying for a form of parity when it comes to forgiveness: "forgive me, God, the same way that I forgive others." So if we are not forgiving of others, we are asking for trouble. If we seek God's mercy and forgiveness, and expect to receive it (especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation) should we not also be forgiving of others? Learn a simple rule of life – forgive, forget, and move on.

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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