

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 November is dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

"Gratitude is the first sign of a thinking, rational creature." +BLESSED SOLANUS CASEY

Monday, November 21 ~ Thirty-Fourth and Last Week in Ordinary Time
Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Gospel: Matthew 12:46-50 While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers appeared outside, wishing to speak with him. Someone told him, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you." But he said in reply to the one who told him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Meditation: In this optional reading for today, it would be fruitful to meditate on what it means to be a Christian, what the essence is of being an authentic follower and disciple of Christ. While we are called to live our lives faithfully to the laws of God and the teachings of Christ and His Church, it must first and foremost be grounded in a solid relationship with Christ – a relationship of mutual and reciprocal trust, affection, commitment, loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, thoughtfulness, compassion, mercy, helpfulness, encouragement, support, strength, protection, and so many other qualities that bind people of faith together in mutual love and unity as true disciples and follower of Christ, as Christians. God offers us the greatest of relationships - union of heart, mind, and spirit with himself, the very author and source of love (1 John 4:8,16). God's love never fails, never forgets, never compromises, never lies, never lets us down nor disappoints us. His love is consistent, unwavering, unconditional, and unstoppable. Nothing can deter him from ever leaving us, ignoring us, or treating us unkindly. He will love us no matter what. It is his nature to love. That is why he created us - to be united with him and to share in his love and unity (1 John 3:1). God is a trinity of persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - and a community of love. That is why Jesus challenged his followers and even his own earthly family to recognize that God is the true source of all relationships. God wants all of our relationships to be rooted in his true and genuine love.

Prayer: As we venerate the glorious memory of the most holy Virgin Mary, grant, we pray, O Lord, through her intercession, that we, too, may merit to receive from the fullness of your grace. 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: Who do you relate to as your closest family and friends? 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, note how he pointed to another higher reality of relationships, namely our relationship with God and with those who belong to God and His Son, Jesus Christ – our Lord, our Savior, and our Redeemer. As we celebrate Thanksgiving Day this week, let us give thanks for our family and friends, but our greatest thanks belongs to God, who has bestowed on us so many blessings, and to Jesus Christ, whose gift of faith and the sacraments are something to be truly thankful for.

Tuesday, November 22 ~ Thirty-Fourth and Last Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Cecelia, Virgin and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 21:5-11 While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All that you see here– the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?" He

answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them! When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky."

Meditation: Note how Jesus' prophecy is a two-edged sword, because it points not only to God's judgment, but also to his saving action and mercy. Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and the dire consequences for all who would reject him and his saving message. While the destruction of Jerusalem's temple was determined (it was razed by the Romans in 70 A.D.), there remained for its inhabitants a narrow open door leading to deliverance. Jesus says: "I am the door; whoever enters by me will be saved" (John 10:9). Jesus willingly set his face toward Jerusalem, knowing that he would meet betrayal, rejection, and death on a cross. His death on the cross, however, brought about victory and salvation, not only for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but for all – both Jew and gentile – who would accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Is your life securely submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ?

Prayer: O God, who gladden us each year with the feast day of your handmaid Saint Cecilia, grant, we pray, that what has been devoutly handed down concerning her may offer us examples to imitate and proclaim the wonders worked in his servants by Christ your Son. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Jesus foretold many signs of God's action and judgment. To the great consternation of the Jewish people, Jesus prophesied the destruction of their temple at Jerusalem. The Jewish people took great pride in their temple, a marvel of the ancient world. The foretelling of this destruction was a dire judgment in itself. They sought Jesus for a sign that would indicate when this would occur. Jesus admonished them to not seek signs but rather to seek God's kingdom. There will be plenty of signs – such as wars, famines, diseases, tidal waves and earthquakes – pointing to God's ultimate judgment. When that will actually take place is up to God, despite what grocery store tabloids might have to say.

Wednesday, November 23 ~ Thirty-Fourth and Last Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Clement I, Pope and Martyr; Saint Columban, Abbot;
Blessed Miguel Pro, Priest and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 21:12-19 Jesus said to the crowd: "They will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

Meditation: If the gospel message is good news, then why do so many oppose it with hostility and even violence? Jesus warns his followers that they will be confronted with persecution, wickedness, false teaching, and temptation. The real enemy of the Gospel is Satan who uses fear and hatred to provoke hostility in others towards those who follow Christ. And what is Jesus' response to this hostility and opposition? Love and truth. Only love can defeat prejudice, intolerance, and hatred. God's love purifies our hearts and minds of all that would divide and tear people apart. The truth is also essential for overcoming evil and tribulation in the world. Satan deceives and sin blinds the heart and mind. Only God's truth can free us from error and spiritual blindness. This Gospel is God's word of truth and salvation. That is why Jesus tells his disciples to proclaim the Gospel throughout the whole world, even in the midst of opposition and persecution.

Prayer ~ Saint Clement I: Almighty ever-living God, who are wonderful in the virtue of all your Saints, grant us joy in the yearly commemoration of Saint Clement, who, as a Martyr and High Priest of your Son, bore out by his witness what he celebrated in mystery and confirmed by example what he preached with his lips. 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 Columban: O God, who in Saint Columban wonderfully joined the work of evangelization to zeal for the monastic life, grant, we pray, that through his intercession and example we may strive to seek you above all things and to bring increase to your faithful people. 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.

Prayer ~ Blessed Miguel Pro: Our God and Father, who conferred upon your servant Blessed Miguel Agustin Pro the grace of ardently seeking your greater glory and the salvation of others, grant, through his intercession and example, that by faithfully and joyfully performing our daily duties and effectively assisting those around us, we may serve you with zeal and ever seek your glory. 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 word "martyr" in Greek means "witness." The Book of Revelation says that "Jesus was the faithful witness ...who freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev. 1:5). Tertullian, a second century convert who saw the early Christians singing as they went out to die by the hands of their persecutors, said: "The blood of the martyrs is seed." Their blood is the seed of new Christians, the seed of the church. The third century bishop, Cyprian said: "When persecution comes, God's soldiers are put to the test, and heaven is open to martyrs. We have not enlisted in an army to think of peace and to decline battle, for we see that the Lord has taken first place in the conflict." True martyrs live and die as witnesses of the gospel. They overcome their enemies through persevering hope and courage, sacrificial love and forbearance, kindness and compassion. God may call some of us to be martyrs for our faith. But for most of us, our call is to be 'dry' martyrs who bear testimony to the joy and power of the gospel in the midst of daily challenges, contradictions, temptations and adversities which come our way as we follow the Lord. What most attracts others to the truth and power of the gospel? When they see Christians loving their enemies, being joyful in suffering, patient in adversity, pardoning injuries, and showing comfort and compassion to the hopeless and the helpless. Jesus tells us that we do not need to fear our adversaries. God will give us sufficient grace, strength, and wisdom to face any trial and to answer any challenge to our faith. Are you eager to bear witness to the joy and freedom of the Gospel?

Thursday, November 24 ~ Thirty-Fourth and Last Week in Ordinary Time ~ Thanksgiving Day ~

Holy Gospel: Luke 17:11-19 As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voice, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" And when he saw them, he said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus said in reply, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Then he said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

Meditation: When we think about giving thanks to God, are you like the one leper who returned, or are you with the other nine who did not give thanks? Why would only one leper out of ten return to show gratitude? Gratefulness is related to "grace" – which means the release of loveliness. Gratitude is the homage of the heart which responds with graciousness in expressing an act of thanksgiving. The Samaritan approached Jesus reverently and gave praise to God. If we do not recognize and appreciate the mercy shown us we will be ungrateful. Ingratitude is forgetfulness or a poor return for kindness received. Ingratitude easily leads to lack of charity and intolerance towards others. It easily leads to lack of charity and intolerance towards others, as well as to other sins, such as discontent, dissatisfaction, complaining, grumbling, pride and presumption. How often have we been ungrateful to our parents, siblings, priests, teachers, co-workers, neighbors, waiters and waitresses, and so many others? How often have we failed individually and collectively to give thanks to God? Now ask yourself: Why do I act this way? Am I that self-centered? Is not giving thanks part of my being? Let us give thanks to God today and every day, and adopt a life expressing gratitude and thanks to all from the heart, beginning first and foremost with God.

Prayer: Father all powerful, your gifts of love are countless and your goodness infinite. On Thanksgiving Day we come before you with gratitude for your kindness: open our hearts to concern for our fellow men and women, so that we may share your gifts in loving service. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Contemplation: Is today, Thanksgiving Day, simply a day for feasting, "turkey trot" runs and football? Or have you given any thought to what this day is truly about – giving thanks to God for all that he has done for you, the great and the simple things in life, and life itself. Begin the day by giving true thanks to God – begin the day with Mass; family football games and community 5k runs and such can begin later, or our participation in them can be curtailed until *after* we have begun our day in prayer and in thanksgiving by attending Mass. As Americans, but more importantly as Catholics, may we be blessed with a fresh awareness of the loving Most Blessed Trinity from whom all good things come, may we give thanks for

what has been bestowed upon us. On this Thanksgiving Day, and as we quickly approach the Season of Advent, may all of us have a renewed interest in helping those who are less fortunate – especially those with inadequate food, clothing and shelter, and reach out to help our brothers and sisters in Christ through our parish and other worthy programs.

Excerpt ~ The First Thanksgiving, President Washington's Proclamation of October 3, 1789: *"By the President of the United States of America, a Proclamation. Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor -- and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness. Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be -- That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks -- for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country..."*

Friday, November 25 ~ Thirty-Fourth and Last Week in Ordinary Time Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Virgin and Martyr

Holy Gospel: Luke 21:29-33 Jesus told his disciples a parable. "Consider the fig tree and all the other trees. When their buds burst open, you see for yourselves and know that summer is now near; in the same way, when you see these things happening, know that the Kingdom of God is near. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

Meditation: Jesus used the image of a fig tree to teach his disciples an important lesson about reading the "signs of the times." The fig tree was a common and important source of food for the Jews. It bore fruit twice a year, in the autumn and in the early spring. The Talmud said that the first fruit came the day after Passover. The Jews believed that when the Messiah came he would usher in the kingdom of God at Passover time. The early signs of a changing season, such as springtime, are evident for all who can see and observe the changes. Just so are the signs of God's kingdom and his return in glory on the day of judgment. The "budding" of God's kingdom begins first in the hearts of those who are receptive to God's word. Those who trust in God's word will bear the fruits of his kingdom. And what are the fruits of that kingdom? "The kingdom of God ..is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).

Prayer: Almighty ever-living God, who gave Saint Catherine of Alexandria to your people as a Virgin and an invincible Martyr, grant that through her intercession we may be strengthened in faith and constancy and spend ourselves without reserve for the unity of the 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. Amen.

Contemplation: Despite the periodic headlines of supermarket tabloids, we do not know the day nor the hour when the Lord will return again in glory. But the Lord does give us signs, not only to "wake us up" as a warning, but also to "rouse our spirits" to be ready and eager to see his kingdom come in all its power and glory. The "Day of the Lord" will strike terror in those who reject God and his kingdom of righteousness, but it will be a day of joy and rejoicing for those who long to see the Lord face-to-face. The Lord wants us to be filled with joyful anticipation for his coming again. He surely comes to us each day and speaks to our hearts like a lover who whispers in the ear of the beloved. As he promised, the Lord will surely come again in all his glory. Do you look for the signs pointing to the Lord's return and do you pray that he come quickly to establish peace and justice on the earth?

Scripture passages (NAB translation) courtesy of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops;
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information about saints, solemnities, feasts and memorials courtesy of Catholic Culture.

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Prayer of Saint Gertrude for the Holy Souls in Purgatory

*Eternal Father, I offer Thee the Most Precious Blood of Thy Divine Son, Jesus, in union with the Masses said throughout the world today, for all the holy souls in Purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal church, those in my own home and within my family.
Amen.*