**DAY 16**

**REST ON THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT**

*Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, oil on canvas
Federico Fiori (known as Barocci), Vatican Pinacoteca, 1570

**THEME:** The flight into Egypt

**FOCUS OF THIS MEDITATION:**
The hidden years of the Holy Family are veiled in mystery, still we are invited to prayerfully enter.
Like a window, this painting images the family of Jesus in flight. May we imitate the virtues and lives of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as we endure our own personal trials and tribulations.

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Federico Barocci (c. 1533–1612) is considered to be one of the most talented artists of late sixteenth-century Italy. This star of artistry came upon the scene after Antonio Allegri da Correggio and before Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. He was born a little more than ten years after the death of Raphael into the same town as this Renaissance giant. The century claims both artists with their masterworks. Briefly in Rome, Barocci was inspired by the works of Raphael and admired the elderly Michelangelo, taking council from Thaddeus Zuccari.

Rome was taken with the holiness and zeal of the lively Philip Neri, a future saint who arose during this artist’s era. In the simple gestures of daily life, Barocci sought to derive artistic form from the teachings of this holy man. In fact, Philip was said to have experienced ecstasy by merely looking upon Barocci’s *The Visitation*, painted for the future saint’s new church.

In 1563, Federico fled from Rome, having fallen ill with intestinal problems. He suspected that rivals had poisoned him out of jealousy. So he returned eventually to his hometown of Urbino. There he was sought out by patrons from all over the world and continued his painting and design work. More than 2,000 sketches survive from that era.

Fascinated by the elegance and variety of the human form, Federico Barocci fused charm and compositional harmony with an unparalleled sensitivity to color. Tenderness, sweetness, and intimacy are common sentiments experienced by the artist’s mix of color, form, and composition.
SCROLL VERSE MEDITATION  
MATTHEW 2:13-23 

When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.”

Joseph rose and took the Child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.

He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.

Then was fulfilled what had been said through Jeremiah the prophet:

“A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.”

When Herod had died, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.”

He rose, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee.

He went and dwelt in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazorean.”
Barocci focuses his delightful brush on a blissful moment in the life of the Holy Family: *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*. This flight would not have been easy for the young Jewish couple and their toddler. Still, joy and peace reigned in their hearts as they continued to trust in the unfolding of God’s plan. Though their story remained incomprehensible, the Holy Family was content to know that the Lord was directing their path.

The artist magnificently captures for us a day in the life of the young family. They partake of a simple meal while making their arduous journey as if to remind us of Jesus’ words: *My yoke is easy, and my burden light.* And their example lights the way for us by encouraging us to carry our daily crosses with grace.

Imagine that after a few hours journey at the start of the day, the little group stops under a cherry tree to enjoy some moments of rest. The sun is rising, but its effects are still to be felt as both Mary and Joseph carry their coats around them. Mary is seated comfortably at the center of the family scene where she busies herself by collecting some water. Will she offer the water to Jesus, or maybe she will use it to wash his little hands? Perhaps she will use the water to wash the cherries before they eat.

Examine Mary’s face in Barocci’s painting. See how her countenance is full of serenity and joy, even though the woman seems to be lost in thought or contemplation. She is a mother who carries so many things in her heart. What wondrous daily events had broken into the lives of Mary and Joseph, and what must have the *blessed one* have pondered within her own being? A wellspring of wisdom graced this young maiden *highly favored* by the Lord, and yet God’s plan still must have perplexed her in its unfolding. Still she trusted and remained faithful. Speak to the Blessed Mother about her life at this moment. *What mysteries did she contemplate, and what struggles*
would she have endured? Ask Mary to share her interior life with you. Now, take a few moments in prayer to share your own questions and struggles, asking Mary to intercede for you and help you trust more deeply in her Son, Jesus.

St. Joseph is visualized standing behind the Madonna, reaching up into the tree in order to offer a branch to the Child Jesus. His strong arm and hand extend straight downward toward the Child, both hands grasping the wood from opposite ends—one giving and the other receiving. This simple domestic gesture enacted by Joseph foreshadows events to come. The heavenly Father will one day offer Jesus the wood of the cross, asking him to sacrifice himself for the world. And Jesus will joyfully embrace the excruciating task before him. The Virgin remains at Jesus’ feet, witnessing the exchange of love between Jesus and his stepfather, an exchange that will likewise be seen between Jesus and the heavenly Father at the cross when her Son suffers and dies for all the world.

The cherry tree that is providing the family with shade often symbolizes heaven while the sweetness of its fruit denotes the delights of the blessed. Yet in this context, we can also relate its deep red hue to the suffering and passion that awaits the Holy Family. Joseph’s vestments are also a strong red, creating a tonal balance along with the small fruits against Mary’s blouse and dress. Although there is a pervading sense of joy and familial warmth in this painting, it also hints at this family’s special vocation to bear the cross—something we, too, must do if we are to follow Jesus.

The playful Child sits up energetically, reaching happily toward Joseph, who offers him a new toy that is at once both food and fun. Yet Jesus’ gaze as he looks toward his stepfather is one of understanding, composed of maturity beyond his years. This simple family picnic reminds us that every act in the life of Christ was salvific. Small and large events in the daily life of Jesus have
shifted our story. This is why we must encounter the events in Jesus’ life as if we were present there. His Incarnation, birth, life, passion, and resurrection all brought us our salvation—making us part of Jesus’ story.

Jesus’ saving work took place on earth—Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, Jerusalem—each playing its contributing note as the whole movement of love swelled to a climax on the cross. Similarly, our experiences are fused with God’s goodness. There are no acts in our daily lives that are inconsequential if we but love and accept God’s graces. Offer this day to God with your whole heart, mind, and strength. Become aware of God throughout your day. How is the Lord moving you, inviting you, and calling to you: You are my beloved one?

Two details in this painting hint toward the future of this most special of families. First, an observant beast stands guard in the background—a donkey. This creature that carries the family from the Promised Land to Egypt reminds us of the animal that will eventually transport Jesus on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Driven out by an envious king, Jesus will one day be acclaimed as the son of David, Messiah, King of Glory. Still, the family will enjoy many years of simple living between now and then. Jesus will receive formation and loving instruction from his blessed parents before entering into his public ministry, for Mary and Joseph were entrusted with the care of the holy one of Israel.

Secondly, notice how the artist places the heel of the Virgin’s foot in full view, likely alluding to how her seed will crush the serpent’s head. It is Mary’s humility that crushes the serpent, for she willingly submitted to God’s plan for her throughout her life.
The new Eve rests with her Son, the new Adam, at the base of another tree in a new garden. This time they obediently partake of the fruit of this tree, a bitter journey at times as they are exiled to Egypt even now. But because this Holy Family allowed God to enter their lives, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for all.
PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Jesus, provide us with the courage to travel alongside you and your blessed parents on their obedient flight into the foreign land of Egypt. We desire to learn the virtues of your Holy Family in order to live these virtues, though imperfectly, in our own. Amen.

Though the Holy Family is pictured here at rest, we recall the Gospel passage that tells us that they left during the night in haste. Think about the family’s flight to Egypt—the place where the Israelites were enslaved. What might those years have been like for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph? What joys and struggles would they have endured?

Do you have beloved friends or family members who are currently away from you in other cities, states, or countries? Spend a few moments thanking God for the gift of friendship and family. Ask God to bless your relationship with one another by kindling your love for one another, keeping it aflame.

Jesus entered the world that all might have life in abundance. Yet our world is filled with broken hearts and lives. Abuse, violence, tragedy, cruelty, and arrogance erupt around every corner, even in our own homes. How might you imitate the Holy Family today and restore order by loving those closest to you? Name or list some simple activities that will help you serve your family, co-workers, friends, and enemies.

Spiritual Exercise

Decide to keep the Lord’s day holy by making each Sunday a day of family rest and renewal. Go on a picnic, out to lunch, or visit an elderly relative after Mass.