

Tuesday 15 October 2024

St Teresa of Ávila



Teresa was born into a noble Spanish family in 1515. She was educated by nuns. After briefly returning to her family, she ran away to enter a Carmelite convent when she was twenty.

Teresa initially found prayer was very difficult but, later, her intense mystical experiences attracted a great many disciples. She was inspired to reform the Carmelite rule and was assisted by St John of the Cross. They travelled throughout Spain together, founding many new religious houses for men as well as women.

Teresa's wrote widely, particularly about her own spiritual life and progress in prayer towards spiritual union with God. They include *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*, which are still acclaimed. She knew great physical suffering and died of exhaustion in 1582.

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The Collect for St Teresa

Merciful God,
who by your Spirit raised up your servant Teresa of Àvila
to reveal to your Church the way of perfection:
grant that her teaching
may awaken in us a longing for holiness,
until we attain to the perfect union of love
in Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus

I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to sceptres and thrones, and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her. Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem, because all gold is but a little sand in her sight, and silver will be accounted as clay before her. I loved her more than health and beauty, and I chose to have her rather than light, because her radiance never ceases. All good things came to me along with her, and in her hands uncounted wealth. I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them; but I did not know that she was their mother.

I learned without guile and I impart without grudging; I do not hide her wealth, for it is an unfailing treasure for mortals; those who get it obtain friendship with God, commended for the gifts that come from instruction. May God grant me to speak with judgement, and to have thoughts worthy of what I have received; for he is the guide even of wisdom and the corrector of the wise. *Wisdom 7:7-15*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from the St Paul to the Romans

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan

inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. *Romans 8:22-27*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.' *John 14:1-7*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

I get lost fairly often. In fact, it's a family joke that I can get lost in my own bedroom. That's why I think one of the greatest inventions of our modern age is the SatNav. The idea is simple: if you know where you need to go, simply type the address into the SatNav device and follow the instructions: turn left; at the next junction turn right; turn around where possible; and the words you hear with a sigh of relief, 'You have reached your destination'.

In the spiritual sense, all of us know where we need to travel—a spiritual address, the desire of every faith-centred life. It's eternal life with God which we often call 'Heaven'. On the principle of getting very lost easily, we need a SatNav of faith to find Heaven. The idea is simple enough: we need something, *someone* high above the earth, like a satellite or an omniscient God to whom we can appeal each time we want to reach a spiritual destination. I want guidance on this; I need spiritual help on that; how can I find Heaven?' Just as Thomas the disciple asks the question of how to go where Jesus is going, so we now ask Jesus, 'How can I reach Heaven?'

Today's gospel contains all the clues we could ever need as we overhear sound bites from Jesus, our SatNav, talking with his disciples. What's he saying?

First, he says, 'do not let your hearts be troubled'. This is wise advice because if we panic, we're likely to look at ourselves rather than look at Jesus, our SavNav whom we are to follow. After all, who can follow a guide when they look in the opposite direction? With cool deliberation, we are to look *from self to* Jesus (which is what the second reading is trying to say). We learn where Jesus is leading us in direct proportion as we learn the ability to transfer our gaze to him. That's why Jesus says, 'I am the way'.

Secondly, like a SatNav, Jesus not only knows the way: he knows the best route. My SatNav often says 'turn around where possible' which is an electronic way of saying 'Repent', start again, use a tried and trusted route, not our own choice. So the journey to Heaven is best followed with a trusted guide. A sure journey is pre-planned; a quicker journey uses a vehicle that was checked before we left. He also knows how to recognise the destination. In other words, we're not a group of the blind following the blind. That's why Jesus our direction tells us to live in him, when he says, 'I am the truth'.

Thirdly, Jesus says he is preparing a place in Heaven. A SatNav knows the place from whence we start, and in the same way Jesus knows we are each different and travel a different journey to Heaven. That's why Jesus describes heaven saying, 'In my Father's house there are many mansions,' which means Heaven is not homogeneous: it has different bits for different people of different backgrounds, different spiritualities. He's saying heaven is to some extent customised according to how we lived the life of holiness which God demands. But that life needs to have been a life lived for God. That's why Jesus, the SatNav of faith, says, 'I am the life'—the life what leads to Heaven.

Jesus invites us to spend eternity with Him. He knows that we might get lost *en route*. Therefore, like a SatNav, he helps us how to get there without getting lost.

Prayers of intercession

Dear loving Lord, thank you for calling us to eternal life. Please help us to follow Jesus as the way to heaven, the truth about heaven and the life in heaven.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for your Church. We ask you to inspire your Church to work for Heaven, instruct its members how to reach heaven, and work to remove all the obstacles that lie between us and heaven.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for your world. We ask that you to inspire and empower all those with power and influence in the world, to help change the world, and to help it become closer to heaven on earth.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for your people here on earth. We ask your help on those suffering in body, mind or spirit. We name them in our hearts. We particularly ask your help on medics everywhere as they work with those suffering from Covid.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Lord, we pray for your people who have passed from this life. And we ask your help on those suffering from bereavement and loss, and any aspect of coming to terms with the loss of a loved one.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**