

A Year

with the

CHURCH FATHERS

Meditations for Each Day of the Church Year



Scott R. Murray



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PREFACE

Why read a book of devotions featuring the words of really old, really dead guys? These really old, really dead guys, called the ancient Church Fathers, were teachers of the Church from the end of the first century through the ninth century AD. Why should we care what someone dead more than a thousand years thought about the Bible? Because Christianity is a historical religion. History matters because Christ became incarnate of Mary when Caesar Augustus was Roman emperor (Luke 2:1). Christ was born at a real time, in a real place in the past. What's past may be past, but it is not forgotten nor is it irrelevant just because it is old. God has ordered His salvation of the world in historical terms. Much of the same could be said about reading the words of those who were servants of Christ since the apostles.

My dear father was killed some years ago in an automobile collision. I am still deeply influenced by his views and leadership. What faithful child would not be? So it is for the Church. We Christians have many spiritual fathers, both living and dead (1 Corinthians 4:15). Their teaching is important to us. Like many maturing adults who have come to appreciate the wisdom of their earthly fathers, I have come to increasingly appreciate the Church Fathers as I age. The Church Fathers, the fathers in the faith, free us from spiritual adolescence. I am beginning to understand what Daniel means when he calls God the "God of my fathers" (Daniel 2:23); we share a great confession with previous generations.

The ancient Church Fathers draw us out of ourselves. Their context is radically different from our own. What they see in the Word of God and how they apply it has a freshness for us. They show us how the people of another cultural context sought to be faithful to the divine Word. They surprise us in their faithfulness to the Word, even despite myths to the contrary. They taught and believed justification by faith and they witness to the Gospel message in a way that is unmistakably clear (Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV 103), even to the point of putting modern theologians to shame. In comparison to contemporary preaching, theology, and biblical commentary, ancient specimens are positively vibrant. The Church Fathers have often interpreted a biblical text or exposed some aspect of Christian doctrine that is new and fresh to me. When I read the Church Fathers, I feel like I am going back to the future. The vibrancy comes from their involvement in the text itself. The Fathers are not above the text like our modern commentators, but under it, in it, and subject to it. Indeed, for the Fathers all things are subject to the text that claims to be the very speaking of God.

I am continually amazed by the courage and true leadership displayed by the ancient Fathers. Upon reading the work of these saints, bishops, presbyters, and theologians, I have often prayed for leaders like them who, conversant with Scripture as their meat and drink, would write sublimely Gospel-centered sermons, letters, and courageous defenses of the faith of the Church. Upon reading their words, I repent of my arrogant modernism that presumes that what was written before I was born is unimportant, stuffy, and faded. Upon studying them, I grieve for the lack of immediacy in my own expression and my inability to paint a picture Christ crucified with sufficiently compelling colors (Galatians 3:1). Their speech is full of the Gospel. They are clear that salvation comes not from us but from God. John Chrysostom, the great preacher and bishop, testified that "Nothing is from ourselves" (John Chrysostom,

Homilies on 2 Corinthians, 11.4). Everything comes from God. No wonder then that the Fathers often exhibit such powerful insights into the Word of God.

The Fathers exhibit the application of the Word of God to the needs of the real Church. They are not professors or university teachers, but pastors and bishops intimately involved in the daily shepherding of the Christian Church. The Word of God was not a datum to be scrutinized and judged, but the speaking of God to His holy bride, the Church. The Fathers did not interpret the Bible. The Bible interpreted them—telling them what they meant and who they were in God’s plan. Such living vibrancy bursts out of the writings of the Fathers.

I pray that you will get a glimpse of that vibrancy in your reading of these devotions and be motivated to read deeper into the writings of the ancient Church Fathers. Pray along with them, rejoicing in their words testifying to the Word.

Scott R. Murray
Non nobis, non nobis, Domine
Sed nomini tuo da gloriam.

4 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 110

Additional Psalm: Psalm 108

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 5:1–19

New Testament Reading: Matthew 22:23–46

Prayer of the Day

O God, You have commanded us to love You above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Grant us the Spirit to think and do what is pleasing in Your sight, that our faith in You may never waver and our love for one another may not falter; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (A83)

Meditation

God graciously takes the opportunity of our fleshly weakness and wickedness to work our salvation through the incarnation of our Lord. Tertullian recognized that God's command to love our neighbor was given because it was the way things ought to be. If that is so, then the Lord Himself would fulfill even His own command, not because He must but because it is the right thing to do. He chooses to take human flesh so that He might choose humans. He chooses to be born in the flesh so that He might choose those fleshly born. In this He loves a world whom He has counted as His neighbors because of the world's need (Luke 10:36–37), for which He chooses to die a fleshly death. In this way, the Lord one-ups the Law by loving us even more than He loves Himself, willing as He is to be our substitute. He takes our flesh to become our closest neighbor and to love us in a way no other could.

“We know by experience the goodness of God. From His Christ we learn that He is the only God, and the very Good. Now, as He requires from us love to our neighbor after love to Himself (Matthew 22:37–40), so He will Himself do that which He has commanded. He will love the flesh that is, so very closely and in so many ways, His neighbor. He will love it, although infirm, since His strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9); although deranged, since ‘those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick’ (Luke 5:31); although not honorable, since ‘on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor’ (1 Corinthians 12:23); although ruined, since He says, ‘[I] came to seek and to save the lost’ (Luke 19:10); although sinful, since He says, ‘Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?’ (Ezekiel 18:23); although condemned, for says He, ‘I wound and I heal’ (Deuteronomy 32:39). Why reproach the flesh with those conditions which wait for God, which hope in God, which receive honor from God, and which He rescues? I venture to declare that if such casualties as these had never befallen the flesh, the bounty, the grace, the mercy, [and indeed] all the beneficent power of God would have had no opportunity to work” (Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 9).

5 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 38:9–22

Additional Psalm: Psalm 38

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 7:1–29

New Testament Reading: Matthew 23:1–12

Prayer of the Day

Merciful and gracious Lord, You cause Your Word to be proclaimed in every generation. Stir up our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may receive this proclamation with humility and finally be exalted at the coming of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (A84)

Meditation

We should be comforted that our pastors have been placed into their office by God Himself. Their authority comes from Him, and they are responsible to Him for their teaching. The position they occupy is bequeathed to them by God’s Son, and those who hear them hear Christ (Luke 10:16). This does not guarantee the holiness of their lives. In fact, God is notorious for harnessing to His Gospel those whose lives are less than exemplary (1 Timothy 1:15). While they seek their own good by defecting from the way of Christ in their own lives, they have no choice but to preach the Gospel of Christ to us so that we might have joy and peace. When their lives are wicked, we ought not to emulate them. When they speak for God, we should hear the Lord who sends them and establishes them in their place.

“It is true that the man who speaks wisely and eloquently, but lives wickedly, may instruct many who are anxious to learn; although, as it is written, he ‘is unprofitable to himself’ (Sirach 37:19). Therefore also the apostle says, ‘Whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed’ (Philippians 1:18). Now Christ is the truth; yet we see that the truth can be preached, though not in truth, that is, what is right and true in itself may be preached by a man of perverse and devious mind. Thus it is that Jesus Christ is preached by those who seek their own, and not the

things that are Jesus Christ’s. But since true believers obey the voice not of just any man but of the Lord Himself, who says, ‘Practice and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice’ (Matthew 23:3). Therefore, men who themselves lead unprofitable lives are heard with profit by others. Although they seek their own goals, they do not dare to teach their own doctrines, sitting as they do in the high places of ecclesiastical authority, which is established on sound doctrine. Therefore our Lord Himself, before saying what I have just quoted about men of this stamp, made this observation: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat’ (Matthew 23:2). The seat they occupied, which was not theirs but Moses’, compelled them to say what was good, though they did what was evil. They followed their own course in their lives but were prevented by the seat they occupied, which belonged to another, from preaching their own doctrines” (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 4.27).

6 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 118:25–29

Additional Psalm: Psalm 118

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 8:18–9:12

New Testament Reading: Matthew 23:13–39

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, heavenly Father, the holy city of Jerusalem rejected the prophets and stoned those who were sent to her, killing Your Son, the final prophet sent to redeem her and the whole world from their sins. Through His innocent suffering and death, gather Your Church into His loving embrace that we may truly be the Body of Christ; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (1103)

Meditation

How passionately Jesus longs to gather under His gracious care even those who persecuted the prophets and sought to kill Him. Even their murderous hatred of Him will not cause His love for them to flag. He desires not to punish them but to protect them under the shelter of His wings. Their stubbornness leads Him to call out to them with the plaintive cry of the lover seeking his beloved. Nothing will stop His keening after them. He wants to protect them no matter what it costs Him; even if He must cast Himself about them to gather them into His arms.

“Christ directs His speech to the city, in this way also being minded to correct His hearers: ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem’ (Matthew 23:37). What does this repetition mean? This is the behavior of one pitying her, bemoaning her, and greatly loving her. As with a woman who is beloved, herself indeed ever loved, but who has despised Him that loved her, and who therefore is on the point of being punished, [with her] He pleads, being now about to inflict the punishment. This He does in the prophets also, using these words: ‘I thought, “After she has done all this she will return to Me,” but she did not return’ (Jeremiah 3:7).

“Then having called her, He also tells her bloodstained deeds: she ‘kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not’ (Matthew 23:37). In this way He is also pleading for His own dealings, [as if to say,] ‘Not even with these things have you turned Me aside, nor withdrawn Me from My great affection toward you, but it was My desire even so, not once or twice but often, to draw you to Me.’ ‘How often would I have gathered

your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!’ (Matthew 23:37). This He said to show that they were ever scattering themselves by their sins. His affection He indicates by the similitude; for indeed the creature is warm in its love toward its brood. And this same image of the wings is everywhere in the prophets, in the song of Moses (Exodus 19:4), and in the Psalms (17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7; 91:4), indicating His great protection and care” (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 84.3).

7 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 121

Additional Psalm: Psalm 135

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 11:1–23

Additional Reading: Jeremiah 12:1–19:15

New Testament Reading: Matthew 24:1–28

Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus, when you were lifted up on the cross to die, the world was rocked with the birth pains of Your new creation. Focus our eyes on Your holy cross that we may see it as a tree of life preparing us for Your final coming in judgment as the Son of Man; for You live and reign with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1104)

Meditation

The incarnate Lord kills the antichrist. In the meantime, our enemy entices us to “false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice” (Small Catechism, Sixth Petition), using his cadre of false christs. They will try to deceive us by taking on the appearance of the Lamb, while speaking with the voice of the dragon (Revelation 13:11). False christs

will arise. We are warned against them by the true Christ. Our Lord calls on us to listen carefully to hear the voice of the Lamb so that we might be defended by the Word of God alone. That is the sword of the Spirit, by which our Lord Christ rescues us.

In the face of this wickedness, our Father sends His Son as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Because we know this, the stealth of the enemy will not surprise us.

“We are warned by the Lord so that if anyone were to come to us falsely in His name, none of us would believe in such a person, having already been prepared. Henceforth how great will be the signs by which the faith of the elect is demonstrated! Whoever builds his house on the rock, that is, establishes his faith on Christ, cannot be destroyed by winds or rains. The rock represents Christ, the floods are the kings, and the winds are the kings’ orders to persecute the servants of God (Matthew 7:24–25).

“The holy reading continues: ‘False christis and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand’ (Matthew 24:24–25). See what great love the Lord displays toward us. He carefully instructs each one of us individually regarding the future so that even if we see all these signs come to pass (having been forewarned by Him) we will be wise to the enemy and accept nothing contrary to Christ and the catholic faith. In the Acts of the Apostles, Simon declared himself to be the power of God (Acts 8:10). Likewise, in the last days, the antichrist will declare himself to be God, as the apostle says, ‘He takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. . . . The lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of His mouth’ (2 Thessalonians 2:4, 8). The Day of

Judgment will come upon the antichrist also, and the Lord will kill him with sword of His mouth (Revelation 1:16)” (Epiphanius the Latin, *Interpretation of the Gospels*, 33).

8 NOVEMBER

Johannes von Staupitz, Luther’s Father Confessor

Psalmody: Psalm 143

Additional Psalm: Psalm 144

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 20:1–18

New Testament Reading: Matthew 24:29–51

Prayer of the Day

Almighty, everlasting God, for our many sins we justly deserve eternal condemnation. In Your mercy, You sent Your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who won for us forgiveness of sins and everlasting salvation. Grant us a true confession so that dead to sin we may hear the sweet words of Absolution from our confessor as Luther heard them from his pastor, Johannes von Staupitz, and be released from all our sin; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1105)

Johannes von Staupitz, Luther’s Father Confessor

Johannes von Staupitz (ca. 1469–1524), vicar-general of the Augustinian Order in Germany and friend of Martin Luther, was born in Saxony. He studied at the universities in Leipzig and Cologne and served on the faculty at Cologne. In 1503, he was called by Frederick the Wise to serve as dean of the theological faculty at the newly founded University of Wittenberg. There Staupitz encouraged Luther to attain a

doctorate in theology and appointed Luther as his successor to professor of Bible at the university. During Luther's early struggles to understand God's grace, it was Staupitz who counseled Luther to focus on Christ and not on himself.

Meditation

Lawyers prefer not to ask a question in court to which they do not already know the answer. God certainly asks in this way every time. Sometimes, Christ our Lord chose not to know certain things for our benefit. When He said He did not know, it was not out of ignorance but because He hid knowledge for us. All that He knows or chooses not to know is ordered by Christ for our salvation. Jesus refused to divulge the day and hour of His glorious return so that we might focus on His work in the present and see to the needs of His kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

We must not become like children in elementary school who, as Christmas approaches, become increasingly impervious to instruction and finally stop learning altogether. If we knew the day, our anticipation might keep us from our service to the world and the Church.

"Jesus said, 'Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only' (Matthew 24:36). You then say, 'He is ignorant of it, as He said'; 'Who then would know, if not Jesus?' What would you say? Is He ignorant of this too? Perish the thought. Not even one of the fanatics would say this. . . . What? When He asked, 'Simon [Peter], son of John, do you love Me?' (John 21:16), did He not know even so much as this? Or when He said, 'Where have you laid him?' (John 11:34), [did He not know this]?"

"The Father also says such things. He [called to Adam], 'Where are you?' (Genesis 3:9). . . . In the Gospel too, [as in the parable of the wicked tenants]: 'Perhaps they will

respect [My son]' (Luke 20:13). These are all expressions of ignorance. But He did not say these things in ignorance, because they involve matters as becoming His honor. In the case of Adam, He asked to drive him to a confession of his sin. In the parable in the Gospel, [He asked] so that He might show that they ought to have done this and respected the Son. Here (Matthew 24:36), so that they may not be curious nor overly occupied. He was indicating that this was a rare and precious thing. See what great ignorance this saying indicates, if even He who is set over it did not know. He blesses him indeed, but He did not say who this blessed one is. 'Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions' (Matthew 24:46-47)" (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 77.3).

9 NOVEMBER

Martin Chemnitz (birth), Pastor and Confessor

Psalmody: Psalm 147:1-11

Additional Psalm: Psalm 147

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 22:1-23

New Testament Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, heavenly Father, through the teaching of Martin Chemnitz, You prepare us for the coming of Your Son to lead home His Bride, the Church, that with all the company of the redeemed we may finally enter into His eternal wedding feast; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1106)

Martin Chemnitz, Pastor and Confessor

Aside from Martin Luther, Martin Chemnitz (1522–86) is regarded as the most important theologian in the history of the Lutheran Church. Chemnitz combined a penetrating intellect and an almost encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture and the Church Fathers with a genuine love for the Church. When various doctrinal disagreements broke out after Luther’s death in 1546, Chemnitz determined to give himself fully to the restoration of unity in the Lutheran Church. He became the leading spirit and principal author of the 1577 Formula of Concord, which settled the doctrinal disputes on the basis of Scripture and largely succeeded in restoring unity among Lutherans. Chemnitz also authored the four-volume *Examination of the Council of Trent* (1565–73), in which he rigorously subjected the teachings of this Roman Catholic Council to the judgment of Scripture and the ancient Church Fathers. The *Examination* became the definitive Lutheran answer to the Council of Trent, as well as a thorough exposition of the faith of the Augsburg Confession. A theologian and a churchman, Chemnitz was truly a gift of God to the Church.

Meditation

It is hard to discern who these wise and foolish virgins are in the parable (Matthew 25:1–13). Augustine presumes that they are collectively the Church. But this is hard to account for, because many persons in the Church are not virgins in the sexual sense of the word, even if they are legitimately married. Yet, God applies the term *virgin* to His Bride, the Church. His marriage to her makes her, and all the believers in her, virgins; holy in the sight of the Lord. Our marriage to the Bridegroom by faith changes things for us. It gives us a status that we

would not have had otherwise. In faith we strive to remain under the righteousness of Christ. Our status is that we are His virgin Bride.

“The name *virgin* is not usually applied to married persons. Yet even in them there is a virginity of faith, which produces marital chastity. You may know that every soul is not unsuitably called ‘a virgin’ as touching the soul. This virginity is the incorruption of faith through which abstinence from unlawful things is practiced and through which good works are done. The whole Church, which consists of virgins— [including] boys, married men, and married women—is by one name called a virgin. How do we prove this? The apostle says, not to the continent women only but to the whole Church together, ‘I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ’ (2 Corinthians 11:2). Because the devil, the corrupter of this virginity, must be guarded against, after the apostle had said, ‘I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ,’ [the apostle] added, ‘But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ (v. 3). Few have fleshly virginity. All ought to have it in the heart. If, then, abstinence from what is unlawful is good, so that it has received the name of virginity, and good works are worthy of praise, and those works are signified by the lamps, why [then] are five admitted and five rejected? If there is a virgin, and one who carries lamps, who yet is not admitted; where shall he see himself, who neither preserves virginity from things unlawful, and who, not wishing to have good works, walks in darkness?” (Augustine, *Sermons on the New Testament*, 43.4).

10 NOVEMBER**Psalmody: Psalm 24****Additional Psalm: Psalm 25:12–22****Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 23:1–20****New Testament Reading: Matthew 25:14–30*****Prayer of the Day***

Almighty and ever-living God, You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. Dispel from us the works of darkness and grant us to live in the light of Your Son, Jesus Christ, that our faith may never be found wanting; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (A86)

Meditation

This passage from Jeremiah means a great deal to me personally. It was the Old Testament Reading on the day of my ordination. I am not sure that I fully understood what it meant. At various times in my ministry, I thought that the congregation should rescue me from conflicts or problems that had befallen me. I sometimes felt bitter because the congregation seemed incapable of this. Later in my ministry, I realized that this expectation was ridiculous on the face of it. What true shepherd could ever expect the sheep of the flock to protect him? It is risible to imagine the sheep beating off the wolf while shepherd cowers or snoozes. The Lord has called His undershepherd to protect, pasture, and lead His flock. The flock is to depend on him, not vice versa.

Pastors need to get over themselves and their feelings of betrayal, offense, and bitterness. They have a much greater responsibility than to take care of their own

hurt feelings. They are to take care of the flock, which the Lord has committed to them. The Lord will want to see that they are caring for that which is His and not theirs. Woe to the shepherds who are not gathering and caring for the flock of Christ's pasture (Jeremiah 23:1). They are the shepherds of the sheep and need to act like it. The pastors of our churches need to care for the flock and be ready to render an account for sheep in their care, because the sheep belong to the Good Shepherd.

“Be clothed with simplicity, and do not take offense or remain in wickedness. Therefore, lay aside the recollection of your offences and bitterness, and you will be formed in one spirit. Heal and take away from you those wicked schisms, so that if the Lord of the flocks comes, He may rejoice concerning you. He will rejoice if He finds all things sound, and none of you will perish. But if He finds these sheep strayed, woe to the shepherds (Jeremiah 23:1)! And if the shepherds themselves have strayed, how will they answer to Him for their flocks (Jeremiah 23:1–4)? Will they perhaps say that they were harassed by their flocks? They will not be believed, because it is not credible that a shepherd would suffer from his flock. Rather, he will be punished on account of his falsehood. I myself am a shepherd, and I am under a most stringent requirement to render an account of you” (*The Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 9.31).

11 NOVEMBER**Martin of Tours, Pastor****Psalmody: Psalm 143:1–10****Additional Psalm: Psalm 105:1–10****Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 23:21–40****New Testament Reading: Matthew 25:31–46**

Prayer of the Day

Lord God of hosts, Your servant Martin the soldier embodied the spirit of sacrifice. He became a bishop in Your Church to defend the catholic faith. Give us grace to follow in his steps so that when our Lord returns we may be clothed with the baptismal garment of righteousness and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1107)

Martin of Tours, Pastor

Born into a pagan family in what is now Hungary around the year AD 316, Martin grew up in Lombardy (Italy). Coming to the Christian faith as a young person, he began a career in the Roman army. But sensing a call to a church vocation, Martin left the military and became a monk, affirming that he was “Christ’s soldier.” Eventually, Martin was named bishop of Tours in western Gaul (France). He is remembered for his simple lifestyle and his determination to share the Gospel throughout rural Gaul. Incidentally, on St. Martin’s Day in 1483, the one-day-old son of Hans and Margarete Luther was baptized and given the name “Martin” Luther.

Meditation

Both our final rest and the final torment are eternal. It is eternal for the blessed dead who die in the Lord and eternal for Satan, all his demons, and the damned. There is a “Get out of Hell Free” card. It cost the Son of God His life. It costs you nothing, because you can’t pay for what is already paid.

“It is right for us to inquire and to recognize why the Church has not been able to tolerate the idea that promises cleansing or indulgence to the devil even after the most severe and protracted punishment. So many holy men, imbued with the spirit of the Old and New Testament, did not grant to angels of any rank or character that they should enjoy the blessedness of the heavenly kingdom after being cleansed by suffering. Rather, they perceived that they could not invalidate nor evacuate the divine sentence that the Lord predicted that He would pronounce in the judgment, saying, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matthew 25:41). Here it is evident that the devil and his angels shall burn in everlasting fire. . . .

“Then what flight of fancy it is to suppose that eternal punishment means long continued punishment, while eternal life means life without end, since Christ in the very same passage spoke of both in similar terms in one and the same sentence: ‘These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life’ (Matthew 25:46). If both destinies are ‘eternal,’ then we must either understand both as long-continued but at last terminating, or both as endless. For they are correlative. . . . Therefore, as the eternal life of the saints shall be endless, so, too, the eternal punishment of those who are doomed to it shall have no end” (Augustine, *City of God*, 21.23).

12 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 137

Additional Psalm: Psalm 130

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 25:1–18

New Testament Reading: Matthew 26:1–19

Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (A87)

Meditation

Our Lord Christ is always open to our approach. He desires to see to our every need. We often struggle to make this approach, thinking our sin and weakness puts us outside His compassion. We should be comforted when we see other sinners such as us embraced by His grace. When He is seen to be approachable, many more approach Him. Let us go together to receive His mercy.

“It is not without purpose that the evangelist mentioned the leprosy of Simon, in order that He might show how the woman took confidence to approach Jesus. Leprosy seemed a most unclean and repulsive disease, yet she saw Jesus had both healed the man (for else He would not have chosen to tarry with a leper) and had gone into his house. She became confident that He would also easily wipe away the uncleanness of her soul. The evangelist names the city, Bethany, also for a purpose, so that you might learn He chooses His Passion. Before this He was fleeing through the midst of them (Luke 4:30), so completely was His former withdrawing Himself a part of the divine plan. Now at the time when their envy was

most kindled, He comes within a half mile [of Jerusalem].

“The woman, therefore, having seen Him, and having taken confidence from this, came to Him. If the woman who had the issue of blood (although conscious to herself of nothing like this, yet because of that natural-seeming uncleanness) approached Him trembling and in fear, much more was it likely that this woman should be slow and shrink back because of her bad conscience. Therefore also it is after many women—the Samaritan, the Canaanite, the woman who had the issue of blood, and other besides—that she comes to Him, being conscious of her great uncleanness; and then not in public but in a house. By contrast, the others were coming to Him for the healing of the body. She came to Him by way of honor only, for the amendment of the soul, for she was not afflicted in body. For this reason one might especially marvel about her.

“She did not come to Him as a mere man, for then she would not have wiped His feet with her hair. She came to Him as one greater than man. Therefore that which is the most honorable member of the whole body, her head, she laid at Christ’s feet” (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 80.1).

13 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 116:12–19

Additional Psalm: Psalm 50:7–15

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 26:1–19

New Testament Reading: Matthew 26:20–35

Additional Reading: Revelation 13:1–18

Prayer of the Day

O Lord, in this wondrous Sacrament You have left us a remembrance of Your passion. Grant that we may so receive the sacred mystery of Your body and blood that the fruits of Your redemption may continually be manifest in us; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (L32)

Meditation

What great benefits have become ours through our being fed on the Lord's body and blood (Matthew 26:26–28)! The Supper He gave on the night of His betrayal confers the benefits of His suffering and death to us forever. He has created us to be His Body by giving us His body. He so desires to feed us that He gives us His blood to drink. No greater food could be offered to us than that which comes from His suffering and joins us with Him. Just as those who crucified the Lord also did not recognize whose body they manhandled, so also we treat it as though we do not recognize whose blood reddens our lips. We must recognize what we receive if we are to benefit. In this body and blood are given forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Let's act like it.

“Consider how angry you are at a traitor, such as those who crucified Him. Watch, therefore, that you yourself do not become guilty of the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:27). They slaughtered the most holy body. But do you receive it in a filthy soul after receiving such great benefits? It was not enough for Him to be made man, to be smitten and slaughtered, but He also joins Himself with us, and not only by faith but also in very deed He makes us His body. Who would not desire to be exceptional in purity who has the benefit of this sacrifice?

The hand that severs this flesh, should it not be more pure than a sunbeam? The mouth that is filled with spiritual fire, the tongue that is reddened by that most awesome blood? Consider with what sort of honor you received and what sort of table you are partaking. When angels behold this, they tremble and dare not so much as look up at it without awe on account of the brightness that comes from it (1 Peter 1:12). With this we are fed; with this we are commingled and are made one body and one flesh with Christ. Who will declare the mighty works of the Lord and cause all His praises to be heard? What shepherd feeds his sheep with his own limbs? And why do I say shepherd? There are often mothers that after the travail of birth send their children to other women as nurses, but He does not do this. He feeds us with His own blood, and by all means entwines us with Himself” (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 82.5).

14 NOVEMBER

Emperor Justinian, Christian Ruler and Confessor of Christ

Psalmody: Psalm 53

Additional Psalm: Psalm 55:12–19

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 29:1–19

New Testament Reading: Matthew 26:36–56

Additional Reading: Revelation 14:1–20

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, heavenly Father, through the governance of Christian leaders such as Emperor Justinian, Your name is freely confessed in our nation and throughout the world. Grant that we may continue to choose trustworthy leaders who serve You faithfully in our generation and make wise decisions that contribute to the general welfare of Your people; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (1108)

Emperor Justinian, Christian Ruler and Confessor of Christ

Justinian was emperor of the East from AD 527 to 565, when the Roman Empire was in decline. With his beautiful and capable wife, Theodora, he restored splendor and majesty to the Byzantine court. During his reign, the empire experienced a renaissance, due in large part to his ambition, intelligence, and strong religious convictions. Justinian also attempted to bring unity to a divided Church. He was a champion of orthodox Christianity and sought agreement among the parties in the Christological controversies of the day as the groups disputed the relation between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. The Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in AD 533 was held during his reign and addressed this dispute. Justinian died in his eighties without having accomplished his desire to forge an empire that was firmly Christian and orthodox.

Meditation

Jesus goes out to meet the arresting mob on the night of His betrayal. He could easily have fled into the dark and disappeared as He had previously. Yet He would not fail to bear His cross for us, even though He could call down legions of supporters to fight for Him. Instead, He offers Himself for us.

“Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” (Matthew 26:53–54). By these words He quenched their anger, indicating that to the Scriptures this seemed good. Therefore He prayed there, so that they might take meekly what befell Him, by learning again that this was done according to God’s will.

“By these two things He comforted them, both by the punishment of those who were plotting against Him, ‘For all who take

the sword will perish by the sword’ (v. 52), and by His not undergoing these things against His will, for He said, ‘For I can appeal to My Father’ (see v. 53).

“Why did He not say, ‘Don’t you think that I can destroy them all?’ Because He was more likely to be believed by saying what He did say; because they did not yet have the right belief concerning Him. A little while before, He had said, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death’ (v. 38), and ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me’ (v. 39). He had appeared in agony and sweating, and He was strengthened by an angel.

“Since He had shown forth many tokens of His human nature, He did not seem likely to speak so as to be believed, if He had said, ‘Don’t you think that I can destroy them all?’ Therefore He said, ‘Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father?’ And again He speaks it humbly by saying, ‘He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels.’ If one angel slew 185,000 soldiers (2 Kings 19:35), what need was there of twelve legions against a thousand men? But He frames His language with a view to their terror and weakness, for indeed they were dead with fear. Therefore He also brings against them the Scriptures, saying, ‘How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?’ alarming them by this also. For if this is approved by the Scriptures, are you going to oppose and fight against them?” (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 84.1).

15 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 51:10–19

Additional Psalm: Psalm 51

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 30:1–24

New Testament Reading: Matthew 26:57–75

Additional Reading: Revelation 15:1–8

Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, the temple of Your body was destroyed on the cross and three days later raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father. Visit us now with this same body, that we may not deny that we know You but in faith hear in our ears Your life-giving voice and receive on our lips Your very body and blood to strengthen us in times of temptation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1109)

Meditation

As the head goes, so goes the body. Just as Christ suffered, so Christ's body the Church will likewise suffer. This puts us into fellowship with God's own Son, who offered Himself in our place. His suffering gives ultimate meaning to ours. We can be no more exalted than when we are degraded and abused for the sake of Him who was degraded and abused for our sakes. The marks of our suffering are marks of His glory. We follow on with Peter and John to see our suffering given meaning in Him, who is our Head.

"He needed to teach these things by what happened to Him, giving His back to whips and His cheeks to fists and not turning His face away from insults and spitting (Isaiah 50:6). Thus by suffering these things in our place, He delivered us who were worthy to suffer all that disgrace. Truly He died for us (Romans 5:8), not that we might not die but that we might not die for ourselves. He was spat upon, beaten, and mutilated for us, so that we, who were worthy of all these things because of our sins,

might not only suffer them but also, suffering them for the sake of justice, patiently and gracefully accept them. Paul makes it clear that the Savior 'humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him' (Philippians 2:8-9). . . . God exalted Him not only because of the death He underwent for our sake but also because of the battering and the spitting and all the rest. . . .

"Christ did not turn His face away from insult and spitting (Isaiah 50:6) so that His face might be glorified more than the face of Moses (Exodus 34:29), with so great a glory that comparatively the glorification of Moses' face was outshone, even as the light of a lamp is outshone by that of the sun, and even as knowledge, which knows in part, is outshone 'when the perfect comes' (1 Corinthians 13:10). But they also battered the holy Head of the Church. . . .

"Not content with spitting in His face and battering Him, they even struck His face with the palms of their hands, and mocking Him, they said, 'Prophecy to us, You Christ! Who is it that struck You?' (Matthew 26:68). . . . Now whoever harms anyone in the Church and does these things to him spits on the very face of Christ, and battering Christ, they slap Him with the palms of their hands" (Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 113).

16 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 54

Additional Psalm: Psalm 139:7-18

**Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 31:1-17,
23-34**

New Testament Reading: Matthew 27:1-10

Additional Reading: Revelation 16:1-21

Prayer of the Day

Almighty, everlasting God, through Your only Son, our blessed Lord, You commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, and to pray for those who persecute us. Therefore, we earnestly implore You that by Your gracious working our enemies may be led to true repentance, may have the same love toward us as we have toward them, and may be of one accord and of one mind and heart with us and with Your whole Church; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (110)

Meditation

By grace all persons shall know God in Jesus Christ. This is the promise of God, and what He promises, He carries out. He makes seed by grace through the knowledge of the One who is the Seed according to promise.

“They shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest’ (Jeremiah 31:34): [this saying] refers to all who belong spiritually to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. . . . This is the house of the children of promise, not by reason of their own merits but by the kindness of God. What God promises, He Himself performs. He does not promise and another perform, which would no longer be promising, but prophesying. Hence it is ‘not because of works but because of Him who calls’ (Romans 9:11), lest the result should be their own, not God’s, and the reward should be ascribed not to His grace but to their due. In this way, grace would no longer be grace, which was so earnestly defended and maintained by him who, though the least of the apostles, labored more abundantly than all the rest, yet not himself, but the grace

of God that was with him (1 Corinthians 15:9–10).

“By ‘all’ (Jeremiah 31:34), He means the house of Israel and the house of Judah. However, ‘all’ doesn’t necessarily mean that ‘all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel’ (Romans 9:6), but only those to whom it is said in ‘The Psalm Concerning the Morning Aid,’ that is, the psalm concerning the new refreshing light, meaning that of the New Testament: ‘All you [seed] of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you [seed] of Israel!’ (Psalm 22:23). This speaks of all seed without exception, even the entire seed of the promise and of the called, but only ‘those who are called according to His purpose’ (Romans 8:28). ‘That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law [that is, which comes from the Old Testament into the New] but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations” ’ (Romans 4:16–17). Now all the predestined, called, justified, and glorified ones shall know God by the grace of the New Testament, from the least to the greatest of them” (Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 1.41).

17 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 148:1–6

Additional Psalm: Psalm 148

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 33:1–22

**Additional Reading: Jeremiah 34:1–36:32;
45:1–51:64**

New Testament Reading: Matthew 27:11–32

Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, as the healer of nations, You released many from their bondage to sin, death, and the devil, but when it came time to release You, the crowd chose a murderer instead. Through our co-crucifixion with You in the waters of our Baptism, may we continually be released from our sins as we confess You to be our everlasting King; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1110)

Meditation

The Christian Church publicly proclaims the death of God's Son by crucifixion. Not only does the church publicly preach Christ crucified, it does so at its best attended worship services during the Easter season. No, nothing is hidden. The church does not hide the degradation of God's Son, because He underwent all this to cover the world's sins.

"The things that were done [to Him] go beyond all language. For as though they were afraid that they should fall in any way short in the crime and having killed the prophets with their own hands, this man with the sentence of a judge, they kill in every deed. They make it the work of their own hands and condemn and sentence Him both among themselves and before Pilate, saying, 'Let his blood be on us and on our children!' (Matthew 27:25). By insulting Him, treating Him spitefully, binding Him, and leading Him away, they render themselves authors of the spiteful acts done by the soldiers, and nail Him to the cross. They revile Him, spit at Him, and deride Him. For Pilate contributed

nothing in this matter, but they themselves did everything, becoming accusers, judges, executioners, and all.

"And these things are read among us when we all meet together. For unbelievers may not say that you display to people and nations only the things that are glorious and illustrious, such as the signs and miracles, but you hide these matters of reproach. The grace of the Spirit brought it to pass that in the full festival, when masses of men and women are present, when all are together at the Great Vigil of Easter, then all these things should be read. When the whole world is present, then all these acts are proclaimed with a clear voice. This is read and made known to all, that Christ is believed to be God and, besides all the other things, is worshipped, especially because of this that He chose to stoop so low for us as actually to suffer these things and to teach us in every kind of virtue.

"These things then let us read continually. For indeed great is the gain, great the advantage to be obtained from it. For when You see Him, both by gestures and by words, mocked and worshipped with so much derision, and beaten and suffering the most extreme insults, though you be stone itself, you will become softer than any wax and cast out of your soul all pride" (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 87.1).

18 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 22:1–5

Additional Psalm: Psalm 22:12–26

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 37:1–21

New Testament Reading: Matthew 27:33–56

Additional Reading: Revelation 17:1–18

Prayer of the Day

O God, creator of heaven and earth, grant that as the crucified body of Your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (L34)

Meditation

The universe shudders to look upon the death of God's Son. Had His glory fled when He hung upon the cross? Was His reputation sullied by His sacrifice? No, the cross is His glory and our salvation.

"How was the Son to be glorified? He had been born of a virgin; from cradle and childhood He had grown to man's estate; through sleep and hunger and thirst and weariness and tears He had lived man's life: even now He was to be spat on, scourged, and crucified. And why? These things were ordained for our assurance that in Christ is pure man. But the shame of the cross is not ours; we are not sentenced to the scourge, nor defiled by spitting. The Father glorifies the Son. How? He is next nailed to the cross. Then what followed? The sun, instead of setting, fled. How so? It did not retire behind a cloud but abandoned its appointed orbit, and all the elements of the world felt that same shock of the death of Christ. The stars in their courses, to avoid complicity in the crime, escaped by self-extinction from beholding the scene. What did the earth do? It quivered beneath the burden of the Lord hanging on the tree, protesting that it was

powerless to confine Him who was dying. Yet surely rock and stone will not refuse Him a resting place. Yes, they are rent and split, and their strength fails. They must confess that the rock-hewn sepulcher cannot imprison the body that awaits its burial.

"And next? The centurion of the cohort, the guardian of the cross, cries out, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' (Matthew 27:54). Creation is set free by the mediation of this sin-offering; the very rocks lose their solidity and strength. They who had nailed Him to the cross now confess that truly this is the Son of God. The outcome justifies the assertion. The Lord had said, 'Glorify Your Son' (John 17:1). He had asserted by that word *Your* that He was God's Son not only in name but even in nature. Multitudes of us are sons of God; He is the Son in another sense. He is God's true and own Son, by origin and not by adoption, not only by name but even in truth, born and not created. After He was glorified, that confession touched the truth; the centurion confessed Him the true Son of God, so that no believer might doubt a fact that even the servant of His persecutors could not deny" (Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 3.10–11).

19 NOVEMBER**Elizabeth of Hungary**

Psalmody: Psalm 20

Additional Psalm: Psalm 18:25–34

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 38:1–28

Additional Reading: Jeremiah 39:1–44:30

New Testament Reading: Matthew 27:57–66

Prayer of the Day

Mighty King, whose inheritance is not of this world, inspire in us the humility and benevolent charity of Elizabeth of Hungary. She scorned her bejeweled crown with thoughts of the thorned one her Savior donned for her sake and ours, that we, too, might live a life of sacrifice, pleasing in Your sight and worthy of the name of Your Son, Christ Jesus, who with the Holy Spirit reigns with You forever in the everlasting kingdom. (1111)

Elizabeth of Hungary

Born in Pressburg, Hungary, in 1207, Elizabeth was the daughter of King Andrew II and his wife, Gertrude. Given as a bride in an arranged political marriage, Elizabeth became the wife of Louis of Thuringia in Germany at age fourteen. She had a spirit of Christian generosity and charity, and the home she established for her husband and three children in the Wartburg Castle at Eisenach was known for its hospitality and family love. Elizabeth often supervised the care of the sick and needy and at one time even gave up her bed to a leper. Widowed at the age of twenty, she made provisions for her children and entered into an austere life as a nun in the Order of Saint Francis. Her self-denial led to failing health and an early death in 1231 at age twenty-four. Remembered for her self-sacrificing ways, Elizabeth is commemorated through the many hospitals named for her around the world.

Meditation

Our Lord Jesus tells us that His generosity exceeds all human conceptions of fairness and equity (Matthew 20:15-16). The formerly timid disciple Joseph of Arimathea finds his courage only in the most

dire straits, and yet he has the privilege of embracing the body of his Lord in death. He is smeared with the life-giving blood as the body of Christ is lovingly taken down from the cross. Those who come late still receive all that the Lord can bestow. He never begrudges them the fullness of His gifts, which we can then return by bestowing them on others as upon Him.

“Joseph, who had been concealing his discipleship, now had become very bold after the death of Christ. He was not an obscure person, nor among the overlooked; rather, he was one of the council, and highly distinguished, from which one may see his courage. He exposed himself to death, taking upon him enmity with all, by his affection to Jesus, both having dared to beg the body and not having desisted until he obtained it. By not only taking it and burying it in a costly manner but also laying it in his own new tomb, he showed his love and courage. And this was not so ordered without purpose but so that there should not be any suspicion that one had risen instead of another.

“‘Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb’ (Matthew 27:61). For what purpose do these wait by it? As yet they knew nothing great and high about Him. Therefore they brought ointments and were waiting at the tomb, so that if the madness of the Jews should relax, they might go and embrace the body. See the women’s courage, their affection, their noble spirit in their generosity, and even unto death!

“Let us men imitate the women. Let us not forsake Jesus in trials. Even when He was dead, they spent so much and exposed their lives, but we neither feed Him when hungry nor clothe Him when naked, but seeing Him begging, we pass Him by (Matthew 25:35-40). If you saw Jesus Himself, everyone would strip themselves of all their goods. But

even now it is the same. He Himself has said, 'I am He.' Therefore, would you not strip yourself of everything? Even now you hear Him say, 'You did it to Me' (Matthew 25:40). There is no difference whether you give to this man or to Him" (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 88.1).

20 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 118:19–29

Additional Psalm: Psalm 118:1–2, 15–24

Old Testament Reading: Daniel 1:1–21

New Testament Reading: Matthew 28:1–20

Prayer of the Day

O God, for our redemption You gave Your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross and by His glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of the enemy. Grant that all our sin may be drowned through daily repentance and that day by day we may arise to live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (L37)

Meditation

Human naming does not make things so, because we have become children of the lie. We use the divinely given name to cover all kinds of evil. We are more than capable of hollowing out the sound of the name and filling it with echoing emptiness. When God speaks a name, it comes to be. It is never an empty title. He calls us sons of God, and that is what we are, because His naming is never a lie. He hands over to our care His name, not as an empty title but as a giving of Himself to us poor sinners in the gift of Baptism.

"The Lord said that the nations were to be baptized 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19). The words of the faith are clear. The heretics do their utmost to involve the meaning in doubt. On this account nothing must be added to the appointed form, but a limit must be set upon their audacity of interpretation. Since their malice, inspired by the devil's cunning, empties the doctrine of its meaning while it retains the names that convey the truth, we must emphasize the truth which those names convey. We must proclaim, exactly as we shall find them in the words of Scripture, the majesty and functions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and so debar the heretics from robbing these names of their connotation of divine character, and compel them by means of these very names to confine their use of terms to their proper meaning. . . .

"As for me, the task of answering them fills me with anxiety; my brain whirls, my intellect is stunned, my very words must be a confession; not that I am weak of utterance but that I am struck silent. Yet a wish to undertake the task forces itself upon me; it means withstanding the proud, guiding the wanderer, and warning the ignorant.

"What is being considered is immeasurable, what is being dared incomprehensible: that there would be speech about God going beyond the limits set by God. He has assigned the names—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—which are our information of the divine nature. Words cannot express or feeling embrace or reason apprehend the results of inquiry carried further; all is ineffable, unattainable, and incomprehensible. Language is exhausted by the magnitude of the theme, the splendor of its effulgence blinds the gazing eye, and the intellect cannot measure its boundless extent" (Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 2.5).

21 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 114

Additional Psalm: Psalm 16

Old Testament Reading: Daniel 2:1–23

**New Testament Reading: Revelation
18:1–24**

Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus, You call heaven and all the saints and apostles and prophets to rejoice when those who pretend to be the true Church are brought to judgment. Help us to discern between what is true and what is false, always knowing that Your kingdom comes through humility and suffering and that the truth of the Gospel is found in You alone; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1112)

Meditation

Even though we are citizens of Jerusalem, the city created by God's peace, we still live in the midst of Babylon the fallen. Babylon is the kingdom of our enemy, the devil. If it were not for the clarity of the divine Word about the ultimate triumph of Christ's kingdom (Revelation 18:10), we might well despair while living here in the world. But the Lord Christ has sent the message that she is "fallen, fallen" (v. 2). The evil done in her cannot touch us, for we are redeemed by the Lamb. She has no power over us, for she is a fallen city. Her kings can persecute the children of God, but they will not overcome them. Jerusalem's King promises.

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), is the gift of God's city and is the possession of all who live in it. We Christians live in the city

of peace even though we are surrounded by Babylon the fallen with every wickedness and all its confusion. Jerusalem is the city in which Christ is the King and where there is no wickedness, for her King is the source of her holiness. She is counted clean because the Lamb is her lamp and His blood protects her from her enemies. Those enemies can do their worst, and she will suffer, but she will not be overcome. Nor we with her, for Babylon is fallen, fallen!

"Can the ruins of a single city contain every unclean spirit or every foul bird, or at the time when a city falls, is the whole world made devoid of impure spirits and birds so that they inhabit the ruins of a single city (Revelation 18:2)? There is no city that contains every unclean soul except the city of the devil, the uncleanness of which dwells in wicked persons through the whole earth. Those whom it calls 'kings,' because they persecute Jerusalem, are the evil people who persecute the Church of God. Whenever you hear Babylon named, do not think of it as a city made of stones, for *Babylon* means 'confusion.' Rather, understand that the name signifies those people who are arrogant, plunderers, dissolute and impious, and who persevere in their wickedness. However, whenever you hear the name *Jerusalem*, which refers to the vision of peace, understand that it refers to people who are holy before God" (Caesarius of Arles, *Exposition on the Apocalypse* 18.2).

22 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 111

Additional Psalm: Psalm 92:1–8

Old Testament Reading: Daniel 2:24–49

**New Testament Reading: Revelation
19:1–21**

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, heavenly Father, send forth Your Son, we pray, to lead home His bride, the Church, that with all the company of the redeemed we may finally enter into His eternal wedding feast; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (H88)

Meditation

The ultimate consummation of the Church's marriage with the Lamb is yet to come. Until then, we experience invitations to the ultimate marriage feast at the altar of the Church.

"In the present age, the marriage of the Lord with the Church is still in the stage of courtship and is not yet a consummated marriage. The divinely appointed apostle indicates this when he writes his second letter to the Corinthians and says, 'I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ' (2 Corinthians 11:2). Therefore, the time of courtship remains. For 'I betrothed' refers to courtship, and we receive the pledge of the Spirit as a sign of courtship. However, when the Church becomes one spirit with Christ, as a husband becomes one body with his wife, then the marriage will be complete. Indeed, the wise apostle has spoken wisely concern bodily marriage when he wrote, 'The two shall become one flesh' (Ephesians 5:31; see also Genesis 2:24). But then he continues, 'This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church' (Ephesians 5:32). For this reason, the holy angels say, 'The marriage of the Lamb has come' (Revelation 19:7), signifying that

the marriage, which is now in the stage of courtship, will then be consummated.

"The Gospel also clearly gives this understanding to us. On one occasion, it introduces the wedding festivities of a son, given by his father, the king. Although many have been invited to the banquet, some partake of the wedding feast, while others excuse themselves from the supper, and one person is excluded because he is not dressed in a wedding garment (Matthew 22:1-14). On another occasion, the Gospel speaks of ten virgins, five of whom [Christ] calls wise, who enter with the bridegroom into the blessed bridal chamber. The others are locked outside, since they did not fill up their lamps with sufficient oil (Matthew 25:1-13). It is not suitable to regard any of this as referring to the present time; it rather refers to that which is coming. Therefore, the marriage of Lamb has come, and His Bride, the Church, is presented as ready to receive those ineffable gifts that come by union with Christ. [The Church] is clothed, it says, with fine linen, that is, with a robe made of excellences. It is linen because it is bright and of fine texture, bright from her incomprehensible manner of life, and fine because of her teachings and convictions concerning God" (Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 19.6-9).

23 NOVEMBER

Clement of Rome, Pastor

Psalmody: Psalm 39:4-12

Additional Psalm: Psalm 38:12-22

Old Testament Reading: Daniel 3:1-30

New Testament Reading: Revelation 20:1-15

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, Your servant Clement of Rome called the Church in Corinth to repentance and faith to unite them in Christian love. Grant that Your Church may be anchored in Your truth by the presence of the Holy Spirit and kept blameless in Your service until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1113)

Clement of Rome, Pastor

Clement (ca. AD 35–100) is remembered for having established the pattern of apostolic authority that governed the Christian Church during the first and second centuries. He also insisted on keeping Christ at the center of the Church’s worship and outreach. In a letter to the Christians at Corinth, he emphasized the centrality of Jesus’ death and resurrection: “Let us fix our eyes on the blood of Christ, realizing how precious it is to His Father, since it was poured out for our salvation and brought the grace of repentance to the whole world” (1 Clement 6:31). Prior to suffering a martyr’s death by drowning, Clement displayed a steadfast, Christlike love for God’s redeemed people, serving as an inspiration to future generations to continue to build the Church on the foundation of the prophets and apostles, with Christ as the one and only cornerstone.

Meditation

I remember being terrified when I stumbled upon the biblical texts about the thousand-year reign of Christ and the time of tribulation to follow it. A thousand confusions arose in my mind. Andrew of

Caesarea puts our minds at rest. He points out that it is the perfect span of time in which the Gospel of grace is freely proclaimed. That is what the reign of Christ consists of, for God’s kingdom comes “when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity” (Small Catechism, First Petition).

“Some interpret the period of a thousand years to be the three and a half years from the Baptism of Christ to His ascension into heaven, and they believe that after this the devil is to be loosed. Others say that after the completion of six thousand years the first resurrection of the dead will occur for the saints alone, so that on this very earth on which they endured suffering they might enjoy temporal largesse and glory for a thousand years, and that in this [period] the general resurrection will occur, which will be not only of the righteous but also of the sinners. It is unnecessary to say that the Church receives nothing of this.

“Rather, we listen to the Lord when He says to the Sadducees that the righteous will be ‘like angels in heaven’ (Matthew 22:30). We listen also to the apostle who says, ‘The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking’ (Romans 14:17). And so we interpret the thousand-year period to be that of the preaching of the Gospel. . . . It is not necessary to think of these thousand years in terms of a number. When it is said in the Song of Solomon, ‘Each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver,’ and again ‘You, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred’ (Song of Solomon 8:11–12), the precise number is not indicated, but rather the full and complete harvest. So also here, the harvest of faith in its entirety is meant, after which ‘the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, . . . in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the

truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness' (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 12), as the apostle says. And the Lord said, 'I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him' (John 5:43)" (Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 20.7–8).

24 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 41:7–12

Additional Psalm: Psalm 41

Old Testament Reading: Daniel 4:1–37

New Testament Reading: Revelation 21:1–8

Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus, Alpha and Omega, in Your suffering and death You were making all things new, and from that tree You brought Your work of redemption to an end by declaring, "It is finished." Be our beginning and our end, that our weeping now at Your table here below may prepare us to feast at Your heavenly banquet, where You will wipe every tear from our eyes and death will be no more; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (1114)

Meditation

The Bible appears to be of two minds in regard to what happens to the creation at the end of the world. On the one hand, it describes the destruction of heaven and earth (Luke 21:33; 2 Peter 3:7–8), and on other it describes the end of things as a renovation of heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1). So which is correct? As it often happens in the divine revelation, both are. The infection in creation caused by the fall will be fully purged from

it and destroyed, and a brand-new heaven and earth will be our possession at the consummation of the age. At the end, we are at the beginning again. That which God created in pristine holiness and perfection and which our first parents perverted and left groaning until the consummation will return again in that perfection as the new heaven and the new earth. What was will be again, only better: the home of glory.

This new heaven and new earth is given to us because God almighty has created them and because Christ, the truth incarnate, has promised them to us.

"This passage announces the power and strength of the Lord with the words, 'He established them forever and ever; He gave a decree, and it shall not pass away' (Psalm 148:6). This is to remove all doubt that Lord is almighty, for what He has established continues in being without change, since this conclusion is applied to the things of heaven. But we read of the world to come: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelation 21:1), so how can you say of the present heaven 'He established them forever'? There is, however, no doubt that all things have been established by God. Though man himself dies, he is 'established' in God's eyes when he rises again. Similarly, heaven and earth remain in God's sight when they are made new. Once they have laid aside their roughness or corruptible character, nature itself is made better and abides, since it has been commanded to exist in eternity. As Paul says about the transformation of our bodies, 'The perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality' (1 Corinthians 15:54). A 'decree' (Psalm 148:6) means a law or condition, so that we may realize that all things are in His power. It cannot pass away, because the Almighty established it, and truth has promised it

in return” (Cassiodorus, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 148.6).

25 NOVEMBER

Psalmody: Psalm 48:9–14

Additional Psalm: Psalm 48

Old Testament Reading: Daniel 5:1–30

Additional Reading: Daniel 7:1–8:27

New Testament Reading: Revelation 21:9–27

Prayer of the Day

Merciful God, You have promised to those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life that they will dwell in the New Jerusalem, where the temple is the Lamb whose lamp lights the world. Prepare us to enter this heavenly city at the Supper You prepared for us here of the very body and blood of the Lamb, even as we participate now in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. (1115)

Meditation

The unity of the faith is an article of faith. Our experience is fragmentary. By contrast, we confess our belief in one faith (Ephesians 4:5). Therefore, all the saints and patriarchs believed one faith. Our forefathers believed in the Christ who was to come, or the Christ who came. They dwell together in one city: the city of God.

“[The city of God] had a great, high wall. Zechariah prophesied, ‘I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD’ (Zechariah 2:5). What is so great and high as the Lord of majesty, who with the protection

of His presence surrounds the holy city? ‘It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates angels [Apringius reads ‘corners’ here], and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed’ (Revelation 21:12). Therefore, Christ is the door. The ancient people of our faith are named together not as doors, but their names are written on the gates, that is, the doors. Thus our Lord shows to all the saints that He is the door of truth and freedom. This shows that the whole band of the patriarchs belonged to the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: the twelve corners of the gates, the twelve gates, and the twelve foundations on which the names of the apostles and the Lamb are written. . . .

“This demonstrates that the host of leaders who came beforehand and the chorus of apostles who came after had been redeemed by the one faith and Passion of the Lord, and that they have come to the knowledge of the omnipotent God through the one entrance of faith in Christ, who is the door. For also the names of the apostles themselves are said to be written upon the twelve foundations, because Christ is the foundation, as Paul says, ‘For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ’ (1 Corinthians 3:11). And He Himself is in each and each in Him. The Lord says, ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church’ (Matthew 16:18). And it is written in the words of the most blessed Paul that “the Rock was Christ’ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Therefore, it is Peter to whom the Lord spoke: ‘On this rock I will build My church,’ that is, that the Church is built upon faith in the incarnation, Passion, and resurrection of the Lord” (Apringius, *Tractate on the Apocalypse*, 21.12).