

Daily Prayer

Thomas Becket

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys—and remember Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1170.

We begin by saying

Zeal for your house has eaten me up; O Lord, be swift and answer me, for I am in distress.

Psalm 69.10a, 19b

The First Reading

Now after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king listened to them. They abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and served the sacred poles and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD; they testified against them, but they would not listen.

Then the spirit of God took possession of Zechariah son of the priest Jehoiada; he stood above the people and said to them, 'Thus says God: Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has also forsaken you.' But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD. King Joash did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. As he was dying, he said, 'May the LORD see and avenge!'

2 Chronicles 24.17-22

The Psalm

For your sake have I suffered reproach; ♦
shame has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my kindred, ♦
an alien to my mother's children.

Zeal for your house has eaten me up; ♦
the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.

I humbled myself with fasting, ♦
but that was turned to my reproach.

I put on sackcloth also ♦
and became a byword among them.

Those who sit at the gate murmur against me, ♦
and the drunkards make songs about me.

But as for me, I make my prayer to you, O Lord; ♦
at an acceptable time, O God.

Answer me, O God, in the abundance of your mercy ♦
and with your sure salvation.

Draw me out of the mire, that I sink not; ♦
let me be rescued from those who hate me
and out of the deep waters.

You know my reproach, my shame and my dishonour; ♦
my adversaries are all in your sight.

Reproach has broken my heart; I am full of heaviness. ♦
I looked for some to have pity, but there was no one,
neither found I any to comfort me.

They gave me gall to eat, ♦
and when I was thirsty, they gave me vinegar to drink.

Let the table before them be a trap ♦
and their sacred feasts a snare.

Psalm 69.7-14, 19-22

The Gospel Reading

‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;
and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;
and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 10.34-39

We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

The Reflection

Nate Wall

Today—the 29th of December, the 5th day of Christmas —the church calendar commemorates St. Thomas Becket.

Becket became Archbishop of Canterbury in June of 1162. For eight years, Becket played tug-of-war with the English king, Henry II, over the crown’s attempts to pull rank on the church. Finally, in June of 1170, sources say the king expressed his frustration with Becket in the form of an oblique death-wish. Four knights happily took the wish as a command. They rode to Canterbury cathedral, and confronted Becket, who was on his way to evening prayers. The four beat

Becket and killed him in a grisly fashion, right there in the church, as Becket pledged allegiance to “the name of Jesus” and the monks who lived on site began to sing vespers in the next room.

Sprinkled among the twelve days of Christmas are three commemorations of *martyrs*: St. Stephen, the Holy Innocents, and St. Thomas Becket.

The soft glow of Christmas quickly takes on a red hue. The baby born in a manger provokes violence—on the first Christmas, through the centuries, and this very Christmas, if you listen to [Christians elsewhere](#).

Is Christmas a failure then? “Unto us a child is born ... and he shall be called ... the prince of peace,” said the prophet Isaiah (Isa 9:6). And when the angels blaze over the shepherd’s working on the outskirts of Bethlehem, they say, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). But peace seems hard to come by—not only in our politics, and our history, and our hearts, but even *among those most devoted to Jesus*, the saints.

One stanza in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s carol “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” laments along these lines:

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

Christmas invites Longfellow’s lament, I think. But the season’s martyr feasts also push back against his despair.

Bloodshed somehow belongs to Christmas.

After all, the one Isaiah heralded as “prince of peace” grows up to say, “You must not think that I have come to bring peace to the

earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt 10:34). Jesus cut against the grain in his day, and the grain cut back. From the beginning he looked his followers in the face and told them they should expect the same: "Whoever gains his life will lose it; whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it" (Matt 10:39).

Jesus, whose mother Mary sang of the world turned upside down at his birth, would feel the world's pushback—unto death. Wherever Christians celebrate him faithfully, we can expect—should expect—the same. When we don't, it's worth asking whether we're following him. Jesus doesn't line up easily with any party's politics. Not with conservative fear-mongering. Not with progressive moral-contempt. Not with moderate pragmatism. Jesus has come to bring a 'sword' to Canada too, simply by asking to claim the beating centre of each of us—our *hearts*. "Come, let us adore him," leaves everything and everyone else in second place.

Former Archbishop Rowan Williams once said, "Christmas is a beauty that is the beginning of terror: the Burning Babe, who has come to cast fire upon the earth." Children force choices on the parents and adults around them; they demand to be *received*; they naturally bend life around them, becoming the gravitational centre of a household universe.

So with the baby Jesus.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ A Song of Trust

*Trust in the Lord for ever,
for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.*

We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and
bulwarks. ♦

Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps

faith may enter in.

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed
on you, ♦
because he trusts in you.

Trust in the Lord for ever, ♦
for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.

The way of the righteous is level; ♦
you who are upright make smooth the path of the
righteous.

In the path of your judgements, O Lord, we wait for you; ♦
your name and renown is the desire of our soul.

My soul yearns for you in the night, ♦
my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.

For when your judgements are in the earth, ♦
the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

O Lord, you will ordain peace for us, ♦
for indeed all that we have done you have done for us.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

*Trust in the Lord for ever,
for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.*

Isaiah 26.1-4, 7-9, 12

*We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions)
and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.*

The Intercessions

We pray for God's faithfulness to be known in our world.

In a world of change and hope,
of fear and adventure,
faithful God

glorify your name.

In human rebellion and obedience,
in our seeking and our finding,
faithful God

glorify your name.

In the common life of our society,
in prosperity and need,
faithful God

glorify your name.

As your Church proclaims your goodness
in words and action,
faithful God

glorify your name.

Among our friends
and in our homes,
faithful God

glorify your name.

In our times of joy,
in our days of sorrow,
faithful God

glorify your name.

In our strengths and triumphs,
in our weakness and at our death,
faithful God

glorify your name.

In your saints in glory
and on the day of Christ's coming,
faithful God

glorify your name.

Our prayers conclude

O God.

Whose servant Thomas Becket
was zealous even unto death
for the rights of your Church,
grant that, after his example,
we may live in your fear,
die in your favour,
and rest in your peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

Jesus, Lord of time,
hold us in your eternity.

Jesus, image of God,
travel with us the life of faith.

Jesus, friend of sinners,
heal the brokenness of our world.

Jesus, Lord of tomorrow,
draw us into your future. Amen.

Credits:

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The Concluding Sentence: Common Worship: For the Beginning of the New Year. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

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