

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Good morning. Welcome to morning prayers at the Memorial Church. I invite you please to rise and join me in saying the responsorial psalm which is number 78 in your black psalter. Give ear, O my people, to my teaching. Turn your ear to what I say.

Congregation:

I will expound a theme, hold forth on the lessons of the past.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Things we have heard and known that our fathers have told us.

Congregation:

We will not withhold them from their children, telling the coming generation the praises of the Lord and his might, the wonders he performed.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

He established a decree in Jacob, ordained a teaching in Israel, charging our fathers to make them known to their children.

Congregation:

That a future generation might know—children yet to be born—and in their turn tell their children.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

That they might put their confidence in God and not forget God's great deeds, but observe God's commandments.

Speaker 2:

And no be like their fathers, a wayward and defiant generation, a generation whose heart was inconstant, whose spirit was not true to God.

Choir:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

This is a reading from the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew beginning at the fifth verse. "Jesus said whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Here endeth the lesson."

Today in our calendar of saints, we remember Scholastica of Norcia. I say we because it's just us. Scholastica actually had a feast last week and I thought I was going to be here on Wednesday so I prepared a sermon and I wasn't here last Wednesday. So I saved those remarks for today. Also, the saint we're supposed to remember for today in the church calendar is not somebody I want to remember. Those of you who are curious about that, any students who are curious about that at the student Eucharist tonight, I will reluctantly remember this saint here in the [inaudible 00:06:50] Chapel at 8:00 PM, but I'm not going to talk about it now because he doesn't deserve it.

Scholastica was born to a wealthy family in central Italy, in Umbria in the late 5th century and we don't know much about Saint Scholastica. We have a little bit of information about her that was written in Pope Gregory the Great's Dialogues. Mostly, Scholastica is known because she was the brother, possibly the twin, of Benedict, also of Norcia. Benedict established the Benedictine rule and the Benedictine order, an incredibly influential person in the history of the church, the rule he established which was influenced by others, by John Cassian and some of the monks of the East. That rule became the most important monastic rule in Western Christendom and was adopted by most Medieval European Christian communities. So what we know about monasticism in the West, what we think about when we think about monasticism in the West comes from Benedict's rule. Scholastica was his sister.

We know that Scholastica was raised with her brother in their home until he went off to Rome to study. We know that after his studies, he established this important monastic community at Monte Cassino. At some point, she moved to be close to him, most probably because her father had died and this was the safest and best thing for her to do, move close to him. So she established a convent, the first Benedictine convent, at the foot of the mountain there. We do have some legends of the power of her prayer. There's a story about her discussing theology with her brother. He came down from monastery and went to her room and they were discussing theology. To follow his own rule, he had to go back to his community and join in the evening prayers and she asked him to stay and Benedict said no. So she prayed to God for a storm and a storm came and Benedict was unable to go back up the mountain. She said to Benedict, "I asked you and you said no. So I asked God and God said yes." That's about all we know.

Your Father knows what you need before you ask him, Jesus says. If this is true, then prayer is not about conveying information to God. It's not about letting God know. Unless we have an uncomfortably futile image of God as the fickle Lord of our lives who bestows his grace only under the influence of flattery, prayer is also not about getting what we want either. It's not about telling God what we want so God will know. It's not about persuading God that we ought to have what we want. So what is prayer then? It's many things of course, but I like to think of prayer as a posture, a placing of ourselves within the order of creation right where we belong which is as very small and very vulnerable and very finite creatures. It's not a comfortable place to be, but to name to God what we want and what we hope for and what we need is to say to God that we have wants and hopes and needs. The subtext of every prayer to God is, "I am not God. You are God."

This is why the pious performance of prayer in high places is so contrary to the true spirit of it. To perform prayer piously for the witness of others is to project an association with the most high to imply to people, "I am good with God. God will do what I ask." It is to deny, in fact, that we are vulnerable and finite creatures in need of grace even for our every breath. There is something truly tragic in losing the

stories of women like Scholastica whose influence upon the lives of religious women in the Christian West has been so foundational. Because religious communities of women have been literally the bedrock of the church's ministry for generations despite their exclusion from the hierarchies of the church, Scholastica's influence upon Christianity in general is absolutely foundational. It is tragic and it makes me sad that so much of her story, so much of her life is secret to us, but it also makes me glad that her saintliness is so great that even in this secrecy, she teaches us what it means to stand as dependent creatures before the God of the universe and to pray.

Please rise with me as we pray. The Lord be with you.

Congregation:

And also with you.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us pray. Assist us, O God, to love one another as sisters and brothers and siblings and to balance discipline with love and rules with compassion according to the example shown by your servant Scholastica, for the sake of your son Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory now and forever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Now, let us pray the words Jesus taught us, saying our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. Our concluding hymn is number 16.

Congregation:

(singing)

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God from generation to generation in the church and to Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

The Rev. Matthew Potts:

Let us bless the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This transcript was exported on Feb 16, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Congregation:

Thanks be to God.