

**COTLE 2023 Devotional Reflections
Reader
January 9 -January 31**

January 9

Somebody Who?

We have two bits of evidence about the Somebody [behind the Moral Law]. One is the universe He has made. If we used that as our only clue, then I think we should have to conclude that He was a great artist (for the universe is a very beautiful place), but also that He is quite merciless and no friend to man (for the universe is a very dangerous and terrifying place). The other bit of evidence is that Moral Law which He has put into our minds. And this is a better bit of evidence than the other because it is inside information. You find out more about God from the Moral Law than from the universe in general just as you find out more about a man by listening to his conversation than by looking at a house he has built.

—from *Mere Christianity*¹

The Holy Martyr Polyeuctos

Polyeuctos served as an officer along with his close friend Nearchus in the Twelfth Legion, stationed in Melitene in Armenia in the middle of the third century. Nearchus was a Christian, but Polyeuctos was still a pagan. When the persecution broke out against the Church, the army officers were required to prove their loyalty to the state by offering the customary sacrifices to the pagan gods. Nearchus told his friend that he would have to refuse to do so and therefore expected to pay the inevitable penalty of martyrdom. Thus, he said, the two dear friends would be separated forever.

Nearchus's witness to Christ must have been working on the soul of his friend Polyeuctos, and the pagan Polyeuctos shared how he had a dream of Christ appearing to him, exchanging his military uniform for a shining robe and giving him a winged horse on which he could ride up to heaven. Convinced now of the Faith, he was eager to join his Christian friend in martyrdom and was determined himself to defy the imperial order to sacrifice to the pagan gods.

When the fateful day came, the two friends approached the place where the emperor's edict was posted, ordering the sacrifices to be made. To the great astonishment of the gathered crowd, Polyeuctos pulled down the edict and tore it to pieces. He rushed into the midst of the pagan procession and smashed the idols carried by the pagan priests. He was instantly arrested and condemned for the crime of being a Christian.

¹ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 11.

At his trial, his family gathered to try to induce him to deny Christ, offer the sacrifices, and save himself. His wife Pauline especially was in tears and cried out, “What madness has got into you?”

He refused to be moved by these entreaties and replied, “There is nothing for it, Pauline, but to join me in worshipping the true God and hurry to exchange this passing life for heavenly and eternal life.” Since he refused to recant, the judges condemned him to death. He was executed by beheading, thus experiencing Christian baptism in his own blood. His friend Nearchus later joined him the Kingdom, suffering martyrdom and winning the robe of victory.

St. Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow

The future St. Philip was born to aristocratic Russian parents in 1507 and baptized with the name Theodore. In accord with family wishes, he began a military career, serving in the Crimea. But though he advanced in the world, his soul could find no rest, for he had a heart to seek God as well and felt himself torn between these two desires. Then, while in church, he heard a priest cite the Savior’s words, “No one can serve two masters.” He decided at length to resign his commission at the age of thirty, leave the world, and seek God in the remote monastery on Solovky Island in the White Sea. In humility, the new monk took an assignment as gardener and woodcutter. He fulfilled his novitiate, and the abbot tonsured him with the name Philip.

At the abbot’s death, Philip succeeded to the office, donating his share of his family estate to the monastery. Under his astute administration, the monastery grew and was soon known all over Russia for its wealth and piety. As the pride of Russia, Philip became well known to the government and in 1566 was appointed Metropolitan of Moscow by Tsar Ivan (“the Terrible”).

For a while all went well, and the tsar allowed himself to be counseled by Philip. But when the tsar began a reign of terror, in paranoia jailing all he feared would be a threat to him, Philip challenged him. While the tsar was in church, in his royal pew, Patriarch Philip pointed an accusing finger at him and called for an end to the reign of terror. “Silence lays sin upon my soul,” he said. “Here we are offering up the bloodless sacrifice to the Lord while behind the altar flows the innocent blood of Christian men!”

The tsar stormed out of the church and ordered his patriarch to preach no more sermons on the subject, but Philip refused to comply, continuing his public denunciation of the tsar. For this he was stripped of all rank and, as a mere monk, banished to a monastery, to be later assassinated there by being smothered with a pillow in 1569. After twenty-one years, Philip’s body was disinterred, and his relics found to be incorrupt. They remain in the Cathedral of the Assumption in Moscow.²

² Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today’s North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 13–15.

The Book That Endures

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Matthew 24:35.

He [Christ] pointed to the Scriptures as of unquestionable authority, and we should do the same. The Bible is to be presented as the word of the infinite God, as the end of all controversy and the foundation of all faith.

The infidel Voltaire once boastingly said: "I am weary of hearing people repeat that twelve men established the Christian religion. I will prove that one man may suffice to overthrow it." ... Millions have joined in the war upon the Bible. But it is so far from being destroyed, that where there were a hundred in Voltaire's time, there are now ten thousand, yes, a hundred thousand copies of the Book of God. In the words of an early Reformer concerning the Christian church, "The Bible is an anvil that has worn out many hammers." Saith the Lord, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." Isaiah 54:17.

At this time, before the great final crisis, as before the world's first destruction, men are absorbed in the pleasures and the pursuits of sense. Engrossed with the seen and transitory, they have lost sight of the unseen and eternal. For the things that perish with the using, they are sacrificing imperishable riches.... From the rise and fall of nations as made plain in the pages of Holy Writ, they need to learn how worthless is mere outward and worldly glory.

The Word of God is the only steadfast thing our world knows. It is the sure foundation. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," said Jesus, "but my words shall not pass away."

"The word of God shall stand forever." "All his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever and are done in truth and uprightness." Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 111:7, 8. Whatever is built upon the authority of man will be overthrown; but that which is founded upon the rock of God's immutable Word shall stand forever.³

³ Ellen Gould White, [*The Faith I Live By*](#) (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 15.

January 10

A Good Time Was Had by All

By the goodness of God we mean nowadays almost exclusively His lovingness; and in this we may be right. And by Love, in this context, most of us mean kindness—the desire to see others than the self happy; not happy in this way or in that, but just happy. What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happened to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they are contented?’ We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence who, as they say, ‘liked to see young people enjoying themselves’, and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, ‘a good time was had by all’. Not many people, I admit, would formulate a theology in precisely those terms: but a conception not very different lurks at the back of many minds. I do not claim to be an exception: I should very much like to live in a universe which was governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don’t, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction.

—from *The Problem of Pain*⁴

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa

St. Gregory lived as a man of peace and simplicity of spirit, a joyful lover of God who hated the strife of high politics and worldly administration. He was born about 335, being five or six years younger than his older brother Basil (January 1). He also loved his beautiful and devout sister Macrina (later St. Macrina). His father died when he was young, and he lived on his share of his father’s estate.

His mother, an enthusiastic Christian and devotee of relics, obtained the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste and prepared to house them in a chapel built for them on her estate in Annesi. Young Gregory, not yet fervent, was bored by the all-night vigil of psalm-singing and at length, annoyed and angry at it all, left the garden chapel and fell asleep elsewhere. There he dreamed of the Forty Martyrs and was converted. He returned to the vigil and prayed for God’s pardon.

Though Basil and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus had taken vows of chastity, our present Gregory chose to be married to a girl named Theosebia, though they lived together as man and wife for only a short while. Gregory lived in Caesarea, then joined Basil for a while at his monastic community. Basil soon appointed him to the nearby see of Nyssa so that he might help him in his struggle against Arianism.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 12.

Gregory hated the strife and responsibility he knew the episcopate would bring—he later said the day of his consecration (in 372) was the most miserable of his life. As Gregory had no tact and no head for money, two years later his Arian foes were able to trump up false embezzlement charges against him, and he was dismissed from his see and arrested. He escaped, however, and went into hiding until the Arian emperor responsible for his imprisonment died. He helped Basil to further monasticism by writing his treatise *On Virginity*.

In 377 Gregory was restored to his see, and after Basil's sad death two years later, he began a brilliant career as a teacher and theologian. Soon, his sister Macrina died. He was present with her on her deathbed, where they spoke of the soul and the hope of resurrection. (He later condensed her teaching into a book, *On the Soul and Resurrection*.) He also wrote against Arianism and composed the brilliant *Great Catechism*, as well as a commentary on the Song of Songs (at the suggestion of the deaconess Olympia) and a mystical *Life of Moses*. He was acclaimed by the emperor's court, and the work in the Creed on the Holy Spirit is probably his own composition. He died in peace in about 395.

Gregory loved to pray; he wrote, "Prayer is the delight of the joyful, the consolation of the weary, the crown of the bride, the feast on the birthday, the shroud that covers us in our graves." So great was he that the fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council called him "the Father of fathers."⁵

The Evidence Of Experience

O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Psalm 34:8.

There is an evidence that is open to all—the most highly educated, and the most illiterate—the evidence of experience. God invites us to prove for ourselves the reality of His Word, the truth of His promises. He bids us "taste and see that the Lord is good." Instead of depending upon the word of another, we are to taste for ourselves.... And as we draw near to Jesus, and rejoice in the fullness of His love, our doubt and darkness will disappear in the light of His presence.

The Christian knows in whom he has believed. He does not only read the Bible; he experiences the power of its teaching. He has not only heard of Christ's righteousness; he has opened the windows of the soul to the light of the Sun of Righteousness.

Everyone who has passed from death unto life is able to "set to his seal that God is true." John 3:33. He can testify, "I needed help, and I found it in Jesus. Every want was supplied, the hunger of my soul was satisfied; and now the Bible is to me the revelation of Jesus Christ. Do you ask why I believe in Jesus? —Because He is to me a divine Savior. Why do I believe the Bible? —Because I have found it to be the voice of God to my soul." We may have the witness

⁵ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 15–17.

in ourselves that the Bible is true, that Christ is the Son of God. We know that we are not following cunningly devised fables.

Let the youth make the Word of God the food of mind and soul.... Thus, through faith they will come to know God by an experimental knowledge. They have proved for themselves the reality of His Word, the truth of His promises. They have tasted, and they know that the Lord is good.... It is our privilege to reach higher and still higher for clearer revealings of the character of God.... In His light shall we see light, until mind and heart and soul are transformed into the image of His holiness.⁶

⁶ Ellen Gould White, [*The Faith I Live By*](#) (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 16.

January 11

More Than Mere Kindness

There is kindness in Love: but Love and kindness are not coterminous, and when kindness (in the sense given above) is separated from the other elements of Love, it involves a certain fundamental indifference to its object, and even something like contempt of it. Kindness consents very readily to the removal of its object—we have all met people whose kindness to animals is constantly leading them to kill animals lest they should suffer. Kindness, merely as such, cares not whether its object becomes good or bad, provided only that it escapes suffering. As Scripture points out, it is bastards who are spoiled: the legitimate sons, who are to carry on the family tradition, are punished [Hebrews 12:8]. It is for people whom we care nothing about that we demand happiness on any terms: with our friends, our lovers, our children, we are exacting and would rather see them suffer much than be happy in contemptible and estranging modes. If God is Love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness. And it appears, from all the records, that though He has often rebuked us and condemned us, He has never regarded us with contempt. He has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.

—from *The Problem of Pain*⁷

St. Theodosius the Great

Theodosius was born of pious parents at Mogarisses in Cappadocia in 423 and later became a cantor in his village church. In about 456 he was reading of the call of God to Abraham to “get out of your country ... to a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1), and he felt as if God was speaking to him. He said goodbye to his family and departed for a life of monastic holiness in Palestine, taking a side trip on the way to visit the famous St. Simeon the Stylite to ask for his blessing.

Theodosius spent some time in a monastic community on the road to Bethlehem before setting out on his own. He lived in a cave, and soon others joined him. In seeking the place God willed, it is said he went into the wilderness swinging an unlit censer, and at the place where it spontaneously lit and smoked, he founded his community. This was in 479—a year after St. Sabbas founded his hermit community nearby.

Theodosius’s community (called a cenobium) soon developed and grew, containing hostels for travelers and hospitals for the sick, a residence for mentally ill monks, and an old-age home. By the time of his death, the community included over four hundred monks, who came from all over. There were also several churches—one for Armenians, one for Georgians, and the largest one using Greek, which was then the international language. Each

⁷ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 13.

group met on its own for the liturgy up until the end of the Gospel, then came together for the Eucharist in the Greek language.

Abbot Theodosius was a model of piety. Once when two brothers were quarreling, he fell down at their feet and would not rise until they had reconciled. As abbot, he strove to keep remembrance of death before the minds of his monks, and he had a common grave dug for them in clear view that it might serve as a daily reminder.

He was also a man of faith and miracles. One Lent, with Pascha soon approaching, the monks had no food, not even bread for the liturgy. Some murmured, but he told them God would provide—which He did, as mules soon arrived bearing the monastery's provisions. The Bishop of Jerusalem, under whom Theodosius served, appointed him leader (or "archimandrite") of all cenobitic communities (even as Sabbas was appointed leader of all hermit communities). Theodosius often met with Sabbas as the two friends consulted together.

In 513, the emperor supported the Monophysite heresy (which denied the full humanity of Christ), banished the Bishop of Jerusalem, and appointed his own man in his place. Theodosius (with Sabbas also) refused to recognize the new heretical replacement, despite imperial pressure. The emperor once sent Theodosius a "gift for the poor"—in reality a bribe—to win him over. Theodosius kept the money and spent it on the poor but refused to agree with the emperor's false profession of faith. Instead, he wrote him refuting his heresy and proclaiming himself ready to die for the truth.

As the controversy heated up, Theodosius traveled throughout Palestine, urging monks to hold fast to Orthodoxy and the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, which condemned the Monophysite heresy. At Jerusalem, he and Sabbas supported the Orthodox patriarch, proclaiming in church, "If anyone receives not the four councils as the four Gospels, let him be anathema!" Theodosius was eventually banished but was later recalled when the emperor died. Theodosius lived in continued austerity and peace, dying at last in the year 529.⁸

⁸ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 17–18.

Christ The Living Word

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John 1:14.

Jesus is called the Word of God. He accepted His Father's law, wrought out its principles in His life, manifested its spirit, and showed its beneficent power in the heart. Says John: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

All that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son....

Taking humanity upon Him, Christ came to be one with humanity and at the same time to reveal our heavenly Father to sinful human beings. He was in all things made like unto His brethren. He became flesh, even as we are. He was hungry and thirsty and weary. He was sustained by food and refreshed by sleep. He shared the lot of men, and yet He was the blameless Son of God....

Tender, compassionate, sympathetic, ever considerate of others, He represented the character of God, and was constantly engaged in service for God and man.

The followers of Christ must be partakers of His experience. They must assimilate the Word of God. They must be changed into its likeness by the power of Christ and reflect the divine attributes.... The spirit and work of Christ must become the spirit and work of His disciples.

In the study of the Bible the converted souls eats the flesh and drinks the blood of the Son of God, which He Himself interprets as the receiving and doing of His words, that are spirit and life. The Word is made flesh, and dwells among us, in those who receive the holy precepts of the Word of God. The Savior of the world has left a holy, pure example for all men. It illuminates, uplifts, and brings immortality to all who obey the divine requirements.⁹

⁹ Ellen Gould White, [*The Faith I Live By*](#) (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 17.

January 12

War in Heaven

The *Screwtape Letters* is a fictional correspondence between a senior tempter, *Screwtape*, and his protégé, *Wormwood*. In this letter *Screwtape* attempts to explain the great Quarrel between the Enemy (God) and the “father” of all tempters, *Satan*:

What does He stand to make out of them? That is the insoluble question. I do not see that it can do any harm to tell you that this very problem was a chief cause of Our Father’s quarrel with the Enemy. When the creation of man was first mooted and when, even at that stage, the Enemy freely confessed that He foresaw a certain episode about a cross, Our Father very naturally sought an interview and asked for an explanation. The Enemy gave no reply except to produce the cock-and-bull story about disinterested love which He has been circulating ever since. This Our Father naturally could not accept. He implored the Enemy to lay His cards on the table, and gave Him every opportunity. He admitted that he felt a real anxiety to know the secret; the Enemy replied ‘I wish with all my heart that you did.’ It was, I imagine, at this stage in the interview that Our Father’s disgust at such an unprovoked lack of confidence caused him to remove himself an infinite distance from the Presence with a suddenness which has given rise to the ridiculous Enemy story that he was forcibly thrown out of Heaven. Since then, we have begun to see why our Oppressor was so secretive. His throne depends on the secret. Members of His faction have frequently admitted that if ever we came to understand what He means by love, the war would be over and we should re-enter Heaven. And there lies the great task. We know that He cannot really love: nobody can: it doesn’t make sense. If we could only find out what He is *really* up to!

—from *The Screwtape Letters*¹⁰

Holy Martyr Tatiana of Rome

In about the early third century, Tatiana was born of wealthy and eminent parents in Rome. She became a Christian and served as a deaconess in the Church. When persecution broke out against the Church there, she was among those arrested. Refusing to worship the gods (but praying instead to Christ, to the rage of her interrogators), she was sentenced to be tortured and killed.

Her torture was particularly drawn out—she was flogged, disfigured, and torn with iron hooks. Seeing the courage and steadfastness of the woman, some of her guards were themselves converted. When she was at last brought to the public arena to meet the lion, the

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 15.

public was especially anxious to see the daughter of a distinguished citizen suffer. But the lion, when released, did her no harm. She was at length executed by beheading in about the year 225.

St. Sava, Archbishop of Serbia

Sava was born in 1169, one of three royal sons of Stephan Nemanja, King of Serbia. As a youth, he had a great desire to serve God as a monk on Mount Athos. In 1191, when some Athonite monks came to visit his father, he secretly slipped away with them to live on Mount Athos. At length his father found out where he was and pleaded with him to return to his royal destiny in the world. He wrote back to his father, telling of the joys he had found there—a letter, it is said, some four hundred pages long! His father came down to the Holy Mountain himself to see his son and was so moved by what he found there that he too embraced the monastic way, resigning his throne to his two remaining sons. Together Sava and his father founded an Athonite monastery for their Serbian countrymen—Chilandari—which still exists as one of the ruling houses on the Holy Mountain.

The tumultuous times would not leave Sava in the peace he desired: strife and anarchy in his homeland sent him back there in 1208 at the request of the Patriarch of Constantinople. He established himself at Studenitsa, built monasteries, schools, and churches throughout the land, and strove to bring political peace. To consolidate the work, he asked for and gained the autocephaly of his church from Constantinople and was himself consecrated its first archbishop in 1219. He strove to serve his church, founding a hospice for Serbs in Jerusalem and arranging for Serbian monks to be received in Mount Sinai and other monasteries.

Depending not on the princes of men but on God, Sava would often withdraw to an inaccessible hermitage in Studenitsa for prayer and divine guidance. He died in Trnovo, Bulgaria, in 1236, on his way back from a journey to the east. He is rightly hailed as the true founder of the Serbian church and nation.¹¹

¹¹ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 18–20.

Worshipping Jesus

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

Mark 14:3-9, NASB

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

John Newton, 1725-1807¹²

¹² Martin Manser, ed., [Daily Guidance](#) (Martin Manser, 2015), 19.

January 13

Blurry Visions of God

When you come to knowing God, the initiative lies on His side. If He does not show Himself, nothing you can do will enable you to find Him. And, in fact, He shows much more of Himself to some people than to others—not because He has favorites, but because it is impossible for Him to show Himself to a man whose whole mind and character are in the wrong condition. Just as sunlight, though it has no favorites, cannot be reflected in a dusty mirror as clearly as in a clean one.

You can put this another way by saying that while in other sciences the instruments you use are things external to yourself (things like microscopes and telescopes), the instrument through which you see God is your whole self. And if a man's self is not kept clean and bright, his glimpse of God will be blurred—like the Moon seen through a dirty telescope. That is why horrible nations have horrible religions: they have been looking at God through a dirty lens.
—from *Mere Christianity*¹³

The Holy Martyrs Hermylus and Stratonicus

Hermylus was a deacon in the church in Singidunum (modern Belgrade) in the early fourth century. When the persecution ravaged the church there, the deacon was arrested and asked to renounce the Christian Faith. This he refused to do, answering his interrogators with such spirit that they slashed his cheeks before throwing him into the dungeon. When he was next interrogated, he was even more defiant. Six men beat him with rods, but he did not seem to feel the pain, being rapt in prayer and asking Christ that He would allow him to partake of His Passion.

The jailer, Stratonicus, observed all this and was won over to the Faith by the constancy and faith of Hermylus, though he did not dare to confess it. The next day, his captors led Hermylus from his cell, stretched him upon the ground, and beat him relentlessly with sharp rods while his entrails were gashed with eagle's claws. Stratonicus could bear it no longer. He was overcome by his crisis of faith and conscience and began to weep uncontrollably. When asked the reason, he finally confessed himself a Christian. For this he too was arrested and imprisoned.

At length the two martyrs, Hermylus and his new convert friend Stratonicus, were tied up in a net and thrown into the Danube River to be drowned. Filled with joy, they began singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill to men!" They perished in

¹³ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 16.

the river, and their souls were received by the Most High God in the Kingdom. When their bodies were found washed up on the shore after a few days, the local Christians buried them with honor. The martyrs suffered and were glorified with Christ in the early fourth century.

St. James, Bishop of Nisibis

James was born in Nisibis in about the late third century. Tired of the world's pomp and vanity, he sought out a life of solitary holiness and asceticism, living in the high mountains in a cave in the winter and in the woods in the summer. His holiness and austerities were soon discovered, and his fame grew, especially his reputation for prophetic insight and miracles. James visited churches in pagan Persia and strengthened the brethren there. He suffered for the Faith in the persecution of the pagan Emperor Maximinus. For his reputation for holiness, the Christians of Nisibis elected him as their bishop. James continued in his great personal austerity. As Bishop of Nisibis, he built a stately church there whose majesty greatly impressed visitors.

When the city was under siege by the nearby pagan Persian Empire, it was more than once safeguarded by the prayers of the church and its saintly bishop within. After an initial siege in 338, a second siege was attempted in 350. Bishop James encouraged his flock to hold out against the invaders, praying all the time in church for their deliverance.

A deacon, Ephraim (later St. Ephraim the Syrian), visiting from nearby Edessa, brought the bishop up to the walls to see the enemy and urged him to pray for their overthrow. St. James went then to the top of a high tower and prayed, "O Lord, You are able by the weakest means to humble the pride of Your enemies—defeat these multitudes by an army, not of men but of gnats!"

Soon a swarm of gnats and flies afflicted the foe, throwing them into confusion. Famine and pestilence soon followed, so that after a three-month siege, the Persian king abandoned his attempt and returned home. St. James reposed peacefully in his Lord soon after, in about the year 350.¹⁴

"The prosperity of fools shall destroy them"—1:32.

Interpretation. —By "prosperity," we may understand a successful career in general, or success in some particular scheme, or a long spell of impunity. Any one of these tends, in the case of ungodly and vicious men, to bring about their undoing.

Illustrations. —See Nebuchadnezzar so intoxicated with prosperity as that his brain reels, and he falls to the condition of a beast. See King Saul so misunderstanding and misusing the success God gave him, as, after having conquered Amalek, to destroy his own fortunes. See the inhabitants of the well-watered plain of Sodom, tempted, through "fulness of bread,"

¹⁴ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 20–21.

to evils which called for fire from heaven. What shall we say of Haman, whose success in self-aggrandizing schemes emboldened him to take one fatal step too many? What of Ahab and Jezebel, and Herod and the rulers in our Lord's time, who, relying on their impunity, added sin to sin till they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, and provoked their ruin?

Application. —There is a prosperity which God bestows as the reward of virtue, which may be accepted thankfully and without distressing fears; though in all cases the prayer should ascend from the heart against temptations engendered by "wealth." But the warning of to-day's text is specially directed against success in evil doing and should make me tremble if I am prospering in any wrong way. Better far to be found out in my sin, and brought through shame to repentance, than to go on in it to my utter destruction. For impunity, though it may seem to be a gain, is really a deadly snare. The young pilferer undetected goes on (how often!) to become a systematic thief. A few successful throws of the dice, and an honest trade has been exchanged for the ruinous profession of the gambler. Secret sins, unknown to all but God, have burst forth at last into open transgressions, to the irretrievable loss of character. Or, again, there is a prosperity which, not being justly earned, or not gratefully accepted at the hands of God, tends to harden the heart and to lull into a false security. Those rich men who oppress the poor or allow them to lie starving at their gates, while they congratulate themselves on having the means to eat and drink and be merry, — will they not wish one day that they had been rather in the place of Lazarus? To be "let alone," "without chastening," in enjoyment of unmixed prosperity, — what more dangerous than this?

Far, far from me be the short-lived triumph of sin! Rather, O my God, pluck me from the "seat of folly," and give me present shame with future glory!¹⁵

¹⁵ Chr. Ridley Pearson, [*Counsels of the Wise King; Or, Proverbs of Solomon Applied to Daily Life*](#), vol. 1 (London: W. Skeffington & Son, 1880), 13.

January 14

Our Highest Activity

If the world exists not chiefly that we may love God, but that God may love us, yet that very fact, on a deeper level, is so for our sakes. If He who in Himself can lack nothing chooses to need us, it is because we need to be needed. Before and behind all the relations of God to man, as we now learn them from Christianity, yawns the abyss of a Divine act of pure giving—the election of man, from nonentity, to be the beloved of God, and therefore (in some sense) the needed and desired of God, who but for that act needs and desires nothing, since He eternally has, and is, all goodness. And that act is for our sakes. It is good for us to know love; and best for us to know the love of the best object, God. But to know it as a love in which we were primarily the wooers and God the wooed, in which we sought and He was found, in which His conformity to our needs, not ours to His, came first, would be to know it in a form false to the very nature of things. For we are only creatures: our role must always be that of patient to agent, female to male, mirror to light, echo to voice. Our highest activity must be response, not initiative. To experience the love of God in a true, and not an illusory form, is therefore to experience it as our surrender to His demand, our conformity to His desire: to experience it in the opposite way is, as it were, a solecism against the grammar of being.

—from *The Problem of Pain*¹⁶

The Holy Martyrs of Mount Sinai and Raithu

Before the Emperor Justinian built the fortress-like monastery at its present site on Mount Sinai, many monks lived there in the desert, scattered in the wilderness. A Saracen chief was encamped in the area at that time, near the place where the monks gathered for Sunday liturgy. When the chief suddenly died, the Saracens blamed the monks and massacred Doulas, the head of the community, along with thirty-eight of the monks. The slaughter was particularly terrible: some of the monks' heads were chopped off almost completely, hanging only by some skin. Other monks lay cut in half; others had been disemboweled or dismembered. The monks were found soon and buried with tears.

Only two monks survived the carnage. One died of his wounds that evening. The other (by the name of Sabas) lingered somewhat longer, in great distress. He could not stand to survive alone, when so many of his beloved brothers had fallen. He prayed, "Woe is me, wretched and unworthy sinner that I am, alone excluded from the eternal blessedness acquired by these martyrs today!" The Lord evidently heard his prayer, for he expired soon after from his trauma and distress, a martyr like his brethren.

There was another monastic community near Raithu on the shores of the Red Sea, led by their abbot, Paul. This community contained several monastics of exceptional holiness:

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 17.

Moses of Pharan, who had lived in the desert for seventy-three years, keeping vigil all through the night, and having a gift for exorcism; and Joseph of Aila, who, it was said, was covered by a divine fire from head to foot while he prayed.

The villagers of nearby Pharan had mobilized against the Blemmyes from Ethiopia, and in retaliation, three hundred of the Blemmyes came ashore to destroy and pillage the town of Raithu. Forty-three of the monks fled before them to take shelter in the fortified church in the city. The Blemmyes killed one hundred forty-seven villagers and besieged the church. Eventually they burst into the church, massacring its inhabitants. One monk was dragged into the courtyard and shot with arrows; another had his head split with a sword. A fifteen-year-old novice seized a sword and struck one of the invaders on the shoulder, whereupon they hacked him to pieces. One monk alone escaped the slaughter to bring news of the disaster to the wider Christian world. These massacres occurred in about the fourth century.

St. Nina, Enlightener of Georgia

In the late third century, a girl, Nina, was captured and taken to Georgia as a slave. She was a girl of goodness and great faith in the healing power of Christ. The pagan Georgians had a custom of taking a child, when sick, from door to door, hoping to find a cure at some house. A child of a wealthy woman fell dangerously sick, and in desperation the mother resorted to the old custom. She thus came at last to the house where Nina was.

Nina's owners, aware of her faith in her God, let her pray. She prayed in faith, and the sick child was instantly healed. News spread to the queen of Georgia, who was herself ill with a painful and incurable disease, and it was arranged for the queen to visit young Nina. She did, and Nina prayed long and hard for the queen. She touched her with a cross of reeds she had made (seen often in her icon). The queen too was instantly healed, and she converted in her heart to Nina's God, Jesus Christ.

King Mirian, however, was not converted despite his wife's entreaties until, lost in the woods while hunting, he found his way to safety after calling upon Christ for help. The king too was then converted, and he helped Nina and her church in the work of converting the Georgian people. He built a church in the capital city with miraculous help from God. The king sent to Emperor Constantine to ask for bishops to be sent to evangelize the people.

Nina herself continued to bear witness, traveling throughout Georgia, telling everyone about Christ. She died in peace in 338, not in her old home from which she was taken, but in her new home in Georgia, which she had brought to Christ.¹⁷

¹⁷ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 21–23.

Food For My Soul

And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. Luke 4:4.

The Word of God is to be our spiritual food.

The life of Christ that gives life to the world is in His word. It was by His word that Jesus healed disease and cast out demons; by His word He stilled the sea and raised the dead....

As our physical life is sustained by food, so our spiritual life is sustained by the Word of God. And every soul is to receive life from God's Word for himself. As we eat for ourselves in order to receive nourishment, so we must receive the Word for ourselves....

In His promises and warnings, Jesus means me.... The experiences related in God's Word are to be *my* experiences. Prayer and promise, precept, and warning, are mine.

The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. The word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One....

The life thus imparted is in like manner sustained. "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4) shall man live. The mind, the soul, is built up by that upon which it feeds; and it rests with us to determine upon what it shall be fed. It is within the power of every one to choose the topics that shall occupy the thoughts and shape the character.

Youth, in the name of Jesus I appeal to you whom I shall soon meet around the throne of God, Study your Bible. It will prove to you not only the pillar of cloud by day but the pillar of fire by night. It opens before you a path leading up and still upward, bidding you go forward. The Bible—you do not know its worth! It is a book for the mind, for the heart, for the conscience, the will, and the life. It is the message of God to you, in such simple style that it meets the comprehension of a little child. The Bible—precious Book!¹⁸

¹⁸ Ellen Gould White, [*The Faith I Live By*](#) (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 20.

January 16

Our Three Responses to God

It is not simply that God has arbitrarily made us such that He is our only good. Rather God is the only good of all creatures: and by necessity, each must find its good in that kind and degree of the fruition of God which is proper to its nature. The kind and degree may vary with the creature's nature: but that there ever could be any other good, is an atheistic dream. George Macdonald, in a passage I cannot now find, represents God as saying to men, 'You must be strong with my strength and blessed with my blessedness, *for I have no other to give you.*' That is the conclusion of the whole matter. God gives what He has, not what He has not: He gives the happiness that there is, not the happiness that is not. To be God—to be like God and to share His goodness in creaturely response—to be miserable—these are the only three alternatives. If we will not learn to eat the only food that the universe grows—the only food that any possible universe ever can grow—then we must starve eternally.

—from *The Problem of Pain*¹⁹

The Chains of the Holy Apostle St. Peter

The Church has always venerated its martyrs, especially revering the chains they wore. Thus, it was that the Church kept the chains St. Peter wore after he was imprisoned by Herod in Jerusalem (Acts 12:7). Later the Patriarch of Jerusalem, St. Juvenal, made a gift of these relics to the Empress Eudoxia. Together with the chains with which he was shackled by Nero in Rome before his death, they were placed in the Church of St. Peter in Rome. Some were also sent and placed in the New Rome, in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.²⁰

God, the compassionate one

He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

Psalms 103:9–14, ESV

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*, ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 18.

²⁰ Lawrence R. Farley, *A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 24.

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:18-19, KJV

Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Are matchless, godlike, and divine;
But the fair glories of Thy grace,
More godlike and unrivalled shine:

*Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

Samuel Davies, 1723-61²¹

²¹ Martin Manser, ed., [Daily Guidance](#) (Martin Manser, 2015), 23-24.

January 17

Just a Bit of Colored Paper?

I remember once when I had been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, 'I've no use for all that stuff. But mind you, I'm a religious man too. I know there's a God. I've felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's just why I don't believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who's met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal!'

Now in a sense I quite agreed with that man. I think he had probably had a real experience of God in the desert. And when he turned from that experience to the Christian creeds, I think he really was turning from something real to something less real. In the same way, if a man has once looked at the Atlantic from the beach, and then goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic, he also will be turning from something real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of colored paper. But here comes the point. The map is admittedly only colored paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks on the beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America.

—from *Mere Christianity*²²

Our Holy Father St. Anthony the Great

Anthony was born of wealthy parents in middle Egypt, in a village near Herakleopolis, in 251 and was raised a Christian. Anthony's parents died when he was about twenty, and he was left with the care of his sister. At liturgy one day he heard the Savior's words, "If you would be perfect, sell all you have and give it to the poor." Struck to the heart by these words, he sold all his property, arranged for the care of his sister, and gave all the rest to the poor. The young man then moved to live in a tiny hut on the edge of his parents' estate, devoting himself to poverty, fasting, and prayer according to the custom of those days.

There Anthony began a struggle with the demonic enemy. He left his hut for a cave used as a tomb and was so set upon by the spiritual enemy that he was found unconscious and

²² C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 20.

carried to a nearby church. Anthony insisted on returning to the cave to finish the struggle. When at length he won and Christ's light chased the horrors away, he asked, "Where were you, Lord? Why didn't you come earlier to relieve me of my agony?"

The Lord replied, "Anthony, I was there, but I was waiting to see you in action. Now, because you have triumphed, I will always help you and make your efforts known everywhere."

Anthony soon left for the great solitude of the desert—a novelty in those days. He lived in an abandoned fort for the next twenty years, being brought his supply of bread only twice a year. Afterwards, friends broke down the door and Anthony came forth— "neither dried up nor fat through idleness but as God-borne and standing in his natural condition." Word spread everywhere, and crowds came to see him. The desert soon became populated with those emulating the man of God and looking to him as their father.

As St. Anthony's fame grew, he found it harder to find solitude, so in 313, he moved further into the desert—to the foot of a mountain near the Red Sea, his "Inner Mountain." He returned to Alexandria only twice: once in 311 to strengthen the Christians arrested in the persecution, and once in 338 to strive publicly against Arianism, supporting St. Athanasius, who invited him. In the desert, he continued to pray and care for the monks. So it was that he came, at the age of ninety, to meet St. Paul of Thebes, another hermit who lived in complete solitude.

Anthony was visited by many from the world as well. When challenged by some pagan philosophers as to how he could claim wisdom though he was not educated, he answered, "Which is older—the mind or the book? And which is the source of the other? So, to the man whose mind is sound, there is no need for books to attain wisdom." He was known as one who had frequent visions and revelations, who drove out demons and healed the sick by his prayer, and who lived in cheerfulness and joy. Anthony died in peace after a full eighty-five years in the desert.²³

In the today of Jesus,
there is no room
for fear
or uncertainty
or anguish
or conflicts
because in the Lord's today
*"love overcomes
fear and uncertainty,
anguish and conflicts."*²⁴

²³ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 25–26.

²⁴ Pope Francis, [*A Year with Pope Francis: Daily Reflections from His Writings*](#), ed. Alberto Rossa (New York; Mahwah, NJ; Toronto, ON: Paulist Press; Novalis, 2013), 36.

January 19

Traveling Without a Map

Now, Theology is like the map. Merely learning and thinking about the Christian doctrines, if you stop there, is less real and less exciting than the sort of thing my friend got in the desert. Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But that map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God—experiences compared with which any thrills or pious feelings you and I are likely to get on our own are very elementary and very confused. And secondly, if you want to get any further, you must use the map. You see, what happened to that man in the desert may have been real, and was certainly exciting, but nothing comes of it. It leads nowhere. There is nothing to do about it. In fact, that is just why a vague religion—all about feeling God in nature, and so on—is so attractive. It is all thrills and no work: like watching the waves from the beach. But you will not get to Newfoundland by studying the Atlantic that way, and you will not get eternal life by simply feeling the presence of God in flowers or music. Neither will you get anywhere by looking at maps without going to sea. Nor will you be very safe if you go to sea without a map.

—from *Mere Christianity*²⁵

Macarius the Great

Macarius was born in Upper Egypt in about the year 300. As a child he stole some figs and ate one of them—a sin for which he ever after berated himself. As a young man, Macarius devoted himself to asceticism and prayer. When a young girl in his village falsely accused him of being the father of her unborn child, Macarius did not deny it, but accepted the unjust slander and beating from her family and undertook to support the girl. During a hard labor, the girl at length cried out the truth—that the true father was not Macarius but someone else. Macarius refused to accept the adulation of the village for his patient endurance of injustice and fled to Scetis in the vast desert to escape it. He was then about thirty years old, and he remained there for the rest of his life.

Macarius lived a life of great austerity—it is said that he never ate, drank, or slept as much as nature required. Yet his austerity was coupled with mildness, patience, and humility. A demon once confessed, “There is only one thing in which I cannot exceed you—not in fasting, for I never eat; nor in vigils, for I never sleep—but you conquer me by your humility.”

In his humility, Macarius was immune to vanity. When a young man came to him for a spiritual word, he directed him to go to a cemetery to insult the dead, and then to flatter them. The young man did so, and Macarius asked him what response he got from them. “None at all,” said the young man.

“Then,” replied Macarius, “go and learn to be moved neither by insults nor by flatteries.”

²⁵ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 21.

But though reluctant to discuss his virtues with those who were in awe of him, Macarius would gladly talk with those who treated him without awe. If any of the monks asked, “Abba, when you were a camel-man and used to steal, didn’t the wardens beat you?”—to these he would gladly talk about anything.

He would travel forty miles across the desert each week to attend liturgy with the nearby priest Pambo. After ten years, however, he finally allowed himself to be ordained priest to care for the needs of his little community. In 374, the Arians triumphed in Alexandria, and Macarius with other Orthodox was exiled to a small island in the Egyptian delta. Eventually, though, he was allowed to return to his beloved Scetis. He died there in peace in 390.

St. Mark of Ephesus

St. Mark was born to a distinguished family in 1392 and rose in the Church until he became Archbishop of Ephesus. He was with the Orthodox delegation that met with the Roman Catholics at the Council of Ferrara and Florence in 1438. Rome had said it would not give the much-needed military help to defend Constantinople against the invading Turks unless the Orthodox East submitted to the papal faith. So great was the political pressure that the Russian Orthodox delegates unilaterally made their submission to the Pope. Mark, however, refused to betray the Faith and stormed out of the council to rally forces against the false union. Though banished by the beleaguered Eastern emperor for his refusal to submit, he was recalled after two years. He died in peace in Constantinople in 1444.²⁶

Nature Speaks of God

Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Luke 12:27.

In their original perfection all created things were an expression of the thought of God. To Adam and Eve in their Eden home nature was full of the knowledge of God, teeming with divine instruction. Wisdom spoke to the eye and was received into the heart; for they communed with God in His created works.... The earth is now marred and defiled by sin. Yet even in its blighted state much that is beautiful remains.

Why did not our heavenly Father carpet the earth with brown or gray? He chose the color that was most restful, the most acceptable to the senses. How it cheers the heart and refreshes the weary spirit to look upon the earth, clad in its garments of living green! ... Every spire of grass, every opening bud and blooming flower, is a token of God’s love, and should teach us a lesson of faith and trust in Him.

²⁶ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today’s North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 27–28.

The beauties of nature have a tongue that speaks to us without ceasing. The open heart can be impressed with the love and glory of God, as seen in the works of His hand. The listening ear can hear and understand the communications of God through the things of nature. There is a lesson in the sunbeam, and in the various objects of nature that God has presented to our view. The green fields, the lofty trees, the buds and flowers, the passing cloud, the falling rain, the babbling brook, the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens—all invite our attention and meditation.

You who are sighing for the artificial splendor which wealth alone can purchase, for costly paintings, furniture, and dress, listen to the voice of the divine Teacher. He points you to the flower of the field, the simple design of which cannot be equaled by human skill.

He is a lover of the beautiful, and above all that is outwardly attractive He loves beauty of character; He would have us cultivate purity and simplicity, the quiet graces of the flowers.²⁷

²⁷ Ellen Gould White, [*The Faith I Live By*](#) (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 25.

January 20

Gradually the Truth Condenses ...

Theology, while saying that a special illumination has been vouchsafed to Christians and (earlier) to Jews, also says that there is some divine illumination vouchsafed to all men. The Divine light, we are told, “lighteneth every man.” We should, therefore, expect to find in the imagination of great Pagan teachers and myth makers some glimpse of that theme which we believe to be the very plot of the whole cosmic story—the theme of incarnation, death, and rebirth. And the differences between the Pagan Christs (Balder, Osiris, etc.) and the Christ Himself is much what we should expect to find. The Pagan stories are all about someone dying and rising, either every year, or else nobody knows where and nobody knows when. The Christian story is about a historical personage, whose execution can be dated pretty accurately, under a named Roman magistrate, and with whom the society that He founded is in a continuous relation down to the present day. It is not the difference between falsehood and truth. It is the difference between a real event on the one hand and dim dreams or premonitions of that same event on the other. It is like watching something come gradually into focus; first it hangs in the clouds of myth and ritual, vast and vague, then it condenses, grows hard and in a sense small, as a historical event in first century Palestine.

—from “Is Theology Poetry?” (*The Weight of Glory*)²⁸

Euthymius the Great

Euthymius was born in Melitene in Armenia in 376. He was tonsured a reader in the Church early in life and raised by the local bishop. Ordained priest at the age of twenty, Euthymius was given care of all the monks of the diocese. But he craved solitude, and so, in the year 405, at the age of thirty, he left for Jerusalem to seek a life of monasticism.

Every year, as was the local custom in Armenia, he would leave his cell to spend all of Great Lent in the desert to fast and pray, returning to the community on Palm Sunday. So he settled in the Palestinian desert with a companion, Theoctistus. One day in the desert, a pagan Arab sheik, led by divine revelation, sought out Euthymius on behalf of his sick paralyzed son. Euthymius healed the boy, and the sheik and his entire tribe converted and were baptized. Fleeing increasing attention from the world, Euthymius soon settled at a distance from Theoctistus and the other monks, though he did return to them on Saturdays and Sundays for the Divine Liturgy.

The monastic settlement grew, and a church was built. As more and more monks desired to join them, Euthymius offered a synthesis of the two forms of monasticism: some monks would live the communal life (under Theoctistus), and some the eremitic, solitary life (under himself). This way soon became characteristic of Palestinian monasticism: the communal life

²⁸ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 22.

under Theoctistus became the training ground for monks who, when ready, would proceed to the solitary life with Euthymius.

Euthymius was known for his wonders and his wisdom. Regarding those who wished to move from place to place, he said, “A tree that is frequently transplanted does not bear fruit.” Siding with those who remained true to the Orthodox Council of Chalcedon of 451, Euthymius was persecuted for his staunch defense of the council. He rallied many to the support of Chalcedon. When the government began to persecute defenders of Chalcedon, he was forced to flee to the desert of Rouba for two years. He never relented in his godly austerity, completing his course and dying in peace in 473. At the moment of his death, a lightning bolt was seen to turn to a pillar of light as his soul rose to heaven.²⁹

The coming of the Spirit

‘When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.’

John 15:26–27, NIV

So, Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”

John 20:21–23, NASB

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Acts 1:8, NKJV

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew
That I may love what Thou dost love
And do what Thou wouldst do.
Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine;
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Edwin Hatch, 1835–89³⁰

²⁹ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 28–29.

³⁰ Martin Manser, ed., [*Daily Guidance*](#) (Martin Manser, 2015), 28.

January 21

From Poetic Myth to Humble Fact

The essential meaning of all things came down from the “heaven” of myth to the “earth” of history. In so doing, it partly emptied itself of its glory, as Christ emptied Himself of His glory to be Man. That is the real explanation of the fact that Theology, far from defeating its rivals by a superior poetry, is, in a superficial but quite real sense, less poetical than they. That is why the New Testament is, in the same sense, less poetical than the Old. Have you not often felt in Church, if the first lesson is some great passage, that the second lesson is somehow small by comparison—almost, if one might say so, humdrum? So, it is and so it must be. That is the humiliation of myth into fact, of God into Man; what is everywhere and always, imageless, and ineffable, only to be glimpsed in dream and symbol and the acted poetry of ritual becomes small, solid—no bigger than a man who can lie asleep in a rowing boat on the Lake of Galilee. You may say that this, after all, is a still deeper poetry. I will not contradict you. The humiliation leads to a greater glory. But the humiliation of God and the shrinking or condensation of the myth as it becomes fact are also quite real.

—from “Is Theology Poetry?” (*The Weight of Glory*)³¹

St. Maximus the Confessor

Maximus was born at Constantinople in about 580 as a member of the aristocracy. He was appointed chief secretary to the emperor but resigned his career in the world to seek God in monastic solitude at Chrysopolis. Maximus was elected abbot of the community, but when the community had to flee before the Persian invasion in 626, he went to Alexandria and eventually to Rome.

When the heresy of Monothelism arose (which asserted that Christ had only one will, the divine will, and so was not fully human), he opposed it with all his might, supporting the Bishop of Rome. When the emperor espoused this heresy and commanded all to submit, Maximus refused, and like the Bishop of Rome, he was arrested and taken prisoner to Constantinople. There he suffered years of torture and harassment. Though the church at Constantinople espoused this heresy and Rome joined with them, he still refused to enter into communion with them, saying, “Even if the whole world enters into communion with them, I alone will not!”

For his refusal to submit, his tongue was cut out and his right hand cut off. He was then sent into exile to a lonely fortress at Skhemaris at the far end of the Black Sea. There he died for the truth, having suffered as a confessor for the Faith. The saint was a brilliant and

³¹ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 23.

original theologian. He also wrote mystical and ascetical works, such as his *Four Centuries of Charity*. He died in the Lord in 662.³²

The Heavens Are Telling

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Isaiah 40:26.

God's great book of nature is open for us to study, and from it we are to gain more exalted ideas of His greatness and unexcelled love and glory. He ... would have His children appreciate His works, and delight in the simple, quiet beauty with which He has adorned their earthly home.

God calls upon His creatures to turn their attention from the confusion and perplexity around them and admire His handiwork. The heavenly bodies are worthy of contemplation. God has made them for the benefit of man, and as we study His works, angels of God will be by our side to enlighten our minds, and guard them from satanic deception.

Go out, dear young man, at night, and behold the glories of the firmament. Look up to the gems of light which like precious gold stud the heavens. There is a wealth of glory there, but millions of minds are so obtuse they cannot appreciate this treasure. It is a little bit of heaven hung out before our senses to testify of the surpassing glories within.

We are not merely to gaze upon the heavens; we are to consider the works of God. He would have us study the works of infinity, and from this study, learn to love and reverence and obey Him.

Every shining star which God has placed in the heavens obeys His mandate, and gives its distinctive measure of light to make beautiful the heavens at night; so let every converted soul show the measure of light committed to him; and as it shines forth the light will increase and grow brighter. Give out your light, ... pour forth your beams mirrored from heaven. O daughter of Zion, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Isaiah 60:1.³³

³² Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 29–30.

³³ Ellen Gould White, [*The Faith I Live By*](#) (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 26.

January 23

On Authority

There are three things that spread the Christ-life to us: baptism, belief, and that mysterious action which different Christians call by different names—Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord’s Supper. At least, those are the three ordinary methods.

I cannot myself see why these things should be the conductors of the new kind of life. But though I cannot see why it should be so, I can tell you why I believe it is so. I have explained why I have to believe that Jesus was (and is) God. And it seems plain as a matter of history that He taught His followers that the new life was communicated in this way. In other words, I believe it on His authority. Do not be scared by the word authority. Believing things on authority only means believing them because you have been told them by someone you think trustworthy. Ninety-nine per cent of the things you believe are believed on authority. I believe there is such a place as New York. I have not seen it myself. I could not prove by abstract reasoning that there must be such a place. I believe it because reliable people have told me so. The ordinary man believes in the Solar System, atoms, evolution, and the circulation of the blood on authority—because the scientists say so. Every historical statement in the world is believed on authority. None of us has seen the Norman Conquest or the defeat of the Armada. None of us could prove them by pure logic as you prove a thing in mathematics. We believe them simply because people who did see them have left writings that tell us about them: in fact, on authority. A man who jibbed at authority in other things as some people do in religion would have to be content to know nothing all his life.

—from *Mere Christianity*³⁴

Hieromartyr Clement, Bishop of Ancyra

Clement was born in Ancyra in 258 to a pagan father and a Christian mother. He was orphaned at age twelve and brought up by the local church. So great were his zeal and piety that he was chosen by the church to be their bishop when he was only twenty. When persecution broke out soon after, Clement was arrested. He suffered imprisonment and periodic torture as he was transferred from city to city. He was put to public scorn and torture in hope of demoralizing the Christian Church at large.

During one period of torture, when they were hitting his face and breaking his teeth, Clement cried out to his torturers, “You honor me, for the mouth of my Lord Jesus Christ was struck like this and His cheeks were slapped too, and I, unworthy as I am, am now made worthy of this!”

³⁴ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 25.

Throughout his imprisonment he was horribly tormented—he was stretched on the rack, seared with hot iron, flung upon a bed of nails, and his flesh was flayed until his bones showed through. At last, he was beheaded in Ancyra and was received to heavenly glory in the year 312.³⁵

Our life in Christ

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:3, NASB

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18, ESV

Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

1 John 3:2-3, NRSV

Our life is hid with Christ
With Christ in God above
Upward our hearts would go to Him,
Whom, seeing not, we love.

When He who is our life
In glory shall appear
We too shall be revealed with Him,
And His bright raiment wear.

In Him we then shall be
Transformed and glorified
For we shall see Him as He is,
And in His light abide.

*Horatius Bonar, 1808-89*³⁶

³⁵ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 31.

³⁶ Martin Manser, ed., [*Daily Guidance*](#) (Martin Manser, 2015), 31.

January 24

Finding Comfort

All I am doing is to ask people to face the facts—to understand the questions which Christianity claims to answer. And they are very terrifying facts. I wish it was possible to say something more agreeable. But I must say what I think true. Of course, I quite agree that the Christian religion is, in the long run, a thing of unspeakable comfort. But it does not begin in comfort; it begins in the dismay I have been describing, and it is no use at all trying to go on to that comfort without first going through that dismay. In religion, as in war and everything else, comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth—only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair.

—from *Mere Christianity*³⁷

Mother Xenia of Rome

St. Xenia was born in the fifth century with the name Eusebia, a daughter of a noble Christian Roman family. Though she wanted to dedicate herself to holy chastity, her family arranged for her to marry. On her wedding night, Eusebia fled with two of her maidservants, taking a ship bound for Alexandria and calling herself Xenia (meaning “a stranger”).

When she reached the island of Kos, she disembarked. Remembering the story of how God had sent St. Paul to help Thekla, she prayed that God would help her too. And God indeed sent her help: a monastic (also named Paul) met her and took her to the city of Mylassa, where his monastery was. He offered her and her two maidservants cells nearby. They accepted his offer and lived there in holy asceticism for many years. Soon others came to be with Xenia, seeking her prayers, and her fame grew.

In the year 450, Xenia died in peace while praying, a true bride of her heavenly Bridegroom, and her soul ascended to heaven. Her two maidservants who had followed her so loyally into the life of monasticism at length died also and were buried, according to their request, at her feet.

Mother Xenia of St. Petersburg

Xenia of St. Petersburg was born early in the eighteenth century. She married Andrei, a singer in the royal choir. Suddenly, her husband died and left Xenia a widow at the age of twenty-six. She then took up her husband’s persona, using his name and wearing his military uniform. The widow began to sell her husband’s house in order to distribute the money to others. Her friends, distressed at her renunciation of wealth, had her medically examined to

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 26.

declare her insane and thus not competent to give away her wealth. But when the doctors examined her, they found Xenia to be quite sound of mind and thus legally entitled to dispose of her property as she wished. So, she sold all she had and went to live in the cold streets of St. Petersburg as a fool-for-Christ.

Though mocked by the locals as an insane woman, she went about doing good in secret. For example, when a new stone church was being built, night after night, after all the workers had gone, she would carry bricks up to the roof to be used by them the next day. She accepted only the smallest of alms, often giving them away to her fellow poor.

God granted her the gift of prophetic foresight. Eventually, Xenia's true worth began to become known to the local people, and they would bring themselves and their children to be blessed by her. After forty-five years of prayer and life in the streets, she fell asleep in Christ in the year 1803 and was buried in Smolensk Cemetery.³⁸

*"He knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell!"—*9:18 (or *vide* p. 189).

Interpretation. —With these words the first division of the Proverbs closes. Wisdom and Folly have both uttered their invitations. The first is personified as a chaste queen; the second as a brazen harlot. Each takes pains to address arguments and offer inducements to the passers-by. But the first invites to a spiritual banquet within a temple and offers life to the soul at the cost of present self-denial. The other invites to a feast of sensuality in her own house, which is, indeed, the abode of death. The temptations of Folly embrace every kind of sinful self-indulgence, its great attraction being that it is forbidden, and must be enjoyed secretly. But no doubt sins of impurity are here specially alluded to, and this passage may be compared with that in ch. 7:7, etc.; and the words before us with verse 27, "Her house is the way to hell."

Illustrations. —Death in life is said to be the portion of all who choose "the pleasures of sin for a season," rather than the life-giving privileges of the Christian. Thus our Lord speaks of those who have "a name to live, but are dead" (Rev. 3:1); and St. Paul of one who, living in pleasure, "is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6). Samson and David, and Solomon himself, all hearkened to the invitation of the syren, and for a while at least, became her guests in the depths of hell. St. Augustine, an inmate at one time of the same dead-house, bewails his folly, and owns that, as a boy, he was tempted to rob an orchard, not for the gain of the fruit, but for the mere pleasure of *sin as sin*—of doing what was forbidden secretly.

Application. —Let me remember that such temptations are "common to man." That they meet those who go "right on their ways," even in the path of duty, as well as others who go to seek them. That the "simple" may fall, no less than "scorners"—absence of religious principle, as well as positive irreligion, being alike dangerous. The void in the heart will be

³⁸ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 31–32.

filled by Folly if not by Wisdom. To some the mere offer is enough: "Turn in hither." To others, whose conscience suggests, "It is forbidden," the tempter whispers, "So much the sweeter;" or "It must be done secretly and will be the more exciting." But let me ask myself, "*Is there such a thing as secret sin?*" And again, "With life and glory set before me, shall I choose death, and shame, and the depths of hell?"

*Lord, show me Thyself, the true Wisdom, that, having tasted of Thy sweetness, I may abhor sinful delights!*³⁹

³⁹ Chr. Ridley Pearson, [*Counsels of the Wise King: Or, Proverbs of Solomon Applied to Daily Life*](#), vol. 1 (London: W. Skeffington & Son, 1880), 24.

January 25

We Couldn't Make It Up

Besides being complicated, reality, in my experience, is usually odd. It is not neat, not obvious, not what you expect. For instance, when you have grasped that the earth and the other planets all go round the sun, you would naturally expect that all the planets were made to match—all at equal distances from each other, say, or distances that regularly increased, or all the same size, or else getting bigger or smaller as you go further from the sun. In fact, you find no rhyme or reason (that we can see) about either the sizes or the distances; and some of them have one moon, one has four, one has two, some have none, and one has a ring.

Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up. But, in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up. It has just that queer twist about it that real things have.

—from *Mere Christianity*⁴⁰

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, the Theologian

Gregory was born in Arianus in 329, son of the bishop of nearby Nazianzus. He received a fine education, culminating at Athens, where he went to school with his lifelong friend Basil (later St. Basil the Great). Gregory, being a sensitive and quiet man, longed for the prayerful solitude of monasticism and so joined his friend Basil at his monastic community at Ibora in the year 358. He joyfully devoted himself to monastic rigor: he slept on the ground, ate only bread and salt, and drank only water, spending half of each night in prayer and meditation.

Gregory's father, however, called him back home and compelled him to accept ordination as a priest in 361 to serve him as his assistant. Gregory thought himself unworthy for such work and soon fled back to his monastic retreat with his friend Basil. After ten weeks, though, he returned home to Nazianzus to work with his father.

In 370, Basil became Bishop of Caesarea and soon needed his Orthodox friends around him as allies against Arianism. Thus he persuaded Gregory to accept ordination as bishop of the town of Sasima, a small town nearby—“a detestable little place,” Gregory wrote of it, “without water or grass or any mark of civilization.” He tried to work there but soon thought it futile and returned again to Nazianzus. After the death of Basil, he ended up at Constantinople and, for his famed poetic eloquence, was given charge of the Orthodox community there (all of the other churches of the capital being Arian).

Here Gregory gave many lectures proclaiming the Orthodox Faith, and crowds flocked to hear him. When the Arians were expelled from the churches there, Gregory was elected the

⁴⁰ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 27.

archbishop of the city. He contributed greatly to the Second Ecumenical Council held there in 381. But he still had no taste for all the politics and intrigue that attended so powerful an office, and so he withdrew back to Nazianzus a few months later, spending his remaining days in prayer and in writing. Because of the profundity and power of his teaching, he has been given the title “the Theologian.” Gregory died in peace in 388.⁴¹

Instituted at Creation

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. Genesis 2:2, 3.

The great Jehovah had laid the foundations of the earth; He had dressed the whole world in the garb of beauty and had filled it with things useful to man; He had created all the wonders of the land and of the sea. In six days, the great work of creation had been accomplished. And God “rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made....” God looked with satisfaction upon the work of His hands. All was perfect, worthy of its divine Author, and He rested, not as one weary, but as well pleased with the fruits of His wisdom and goodness and the manifestations of His glory.

After resting upon the seventh day, God sanctified it, or set it apart, as a day of rest for man. Following the example of the Creator, man was to rest upon this sacred day, that as he should look upon the heavens and the earth, he might reflect upon God’s great work of creation; and that as he should behold the evidences of God’s wisdom and goodness, his heart might be filled with love and reverence for his Maker....

God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness. He needed a Sabbath, to remind him more vividly of God, and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator.

When the foundations of the earth were laid, ... then was laid the foundation of the Sabbath. Well may this institution demand our reverence: it was ordained by no human authority, and rests upon no human traditions; it was established by the Ancient of days and commanded by His eternal word.⁴²

⁴¹ Lawrence R. Farley, *A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today’s North American Church* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 33.

⁴² Ellen Gould White, *The Faith I Live By* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 31.

January 26

Not Like a River but Like a Tree

We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a river but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good.

—from *The Great Divorce*⁴³

Father Xenophon, Mother Maria, and their sons, John and Arcadius

In the fifth century, a wealthy senator named Xenophon had a wife, Maria, who bore him two sons, John, and Arcadius. It was decided to have them finish their education in Beirut, but on the way there, the boys' ship was lost in a storm. John and Arcadius both survived separately, clinging to timber from the wreck. They reached shore miles from each other, each thinking the other lost.

John, coming ashore north of Tyre and barely alive, was nursed to health by the monks of a desert monastery. In his devotion to God, he decided to stay at the monastery as one of its monks. Two years later, Arcadius also, in his devotion to God, decided to become a monk, and so the brothers lived and served God in separate monasteries, unknown to each other.

Later, a monk visiting Constantinople suggested to Xenophon and Maria (who thought themselves bereaved of their two sons) that one of the monks at St. Sava's in Jerusalem was their son Arcadius. Immediately they set out for the Holy Land to see if this was so. By Divine Providence, John also decided to visit Jerusalem as a pilgrim to the holy places. Thus, by God's grace, they all came together and met in a joyful reunion at our Lord's Tomb in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. The surprise and joy of their unexpected reunion led them to a fresh dedication to God. Xenophon resigned from the senate and joined his sons as a monk at St. Sava's Monastery. Maria also became a nun at a women's monastery not far from there. They died in the fifth century in peace.⁴⁴

⁴³ C. S. Lewis, *A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*, ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 28.

⁴⁴ Lawrence R. Farley, *A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 34.

“The upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it.”—2:21, 22.

Interpretation. —By “*the land*” and “*the earth*” is meant here, as in many other places in the Old Testament, Canaan, the land promised to the patriarchs, given to Israel. The highest earthly prosperity is implied by the promise to dwell in the native land. For the Israelite was attached, above other men, to his fatherland with a religious intensity. Bound up with the covenant and the theocracy was his native soil, and as to dwell under his own fig-tree and eat of his own vine was an Israelite’s idea of temporal happiness, so to be torn from it would be to be strained and broken in the inmost roots of his being. Hence the form of expression here employed implies that temporal well-being will be, as a rule, the result of a virtuous and God-fearing life, while vice and ungodliness will usually entail misfortune and misery.

Illustrations. —Jacob, setting out on his journey to a far-off land as a consequence of his unfilial fraud, is a melancholy individual instance of the fulfilment of this proverb. In the heart-broken captives who hung their harps on the willows of Babylon, we see the threat fulfilled in a nation. And what is the present condition of the Jews, as a people, but a perpetual witness to the truth of these words? Their wickedness and their transgression in killing the Prince of Life have cut them off from the land and rooted them out of it.

Application. —But is it still God’s plan, under the Gospel dispensation, to reward and punish by temporal prosperity and misfortune? Undoubtedly, as a rule, though with exceptions as formerly (*vide* Ps. 73). The fifth commandment is still “the first with promise.” In the Sermon on the Mount, many of the promises have reference to this world, and one of them corresponds very nearly to the one before us (Matt. 5:5). A competency is promised to those who “seek first the kingdom of God.” “Godliness” is said to have “the promise of the life that now is.” Bodily life loved above Jesus is to be forfeited. True, the higher and more spiritual motives brought to light by the Gospel are far more commonly urged. But cause and effect are allowed to work as a law; and how often do we *see* that what men call “misfortune” dogs the steps of vice, nay, banishes from the native land! An opposite course of life brings its own reward.

*Mine be the good and wise choice that I may be blessed on the earth, and may inherit the true Canaan!*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Chr. Ridley Pearson, [*Counsels of the Wise King; Or, Proverbs of Solomon Applied to Daily Life*](#), vol. 1 (London: W. Skeffington & Son, 1880), 26.

January 27

Being Good

Even the best Christian that ever lived is not acting on his own steam—he is only nourishing or protecting a life he could never have acquired by his own efforts. And that has practical consequences. As long as the natural life is in your body, it will do a lot towards repairing that body. Cut it, and up to a point it will heal, as a dead body would not. A live body is not one that never gets hurt, but one that can to some extent repair itself. In the same way a Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble—because the Christ-life is inside him, repairing him all the time, enabling him to repeat (in some degree) the kind of voluntary death which Christ Himself carried out.

That is why the Christian is in a different position from other people who are trying to be good. They hope, by being good, to please God if there is one; or—if they think there is not—at least they hope to deserve approval from good men. But the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us; just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright but becomes bright because the sun shines on it.
—from *Mere Christianity*⁴⁶

Translation of the Relics of St. John Chrysostom

St. John's feast day is November 13. This day commemorates his relics being brought with honor from Armenia to the capital city of Constantinople.

St. John died in exile far away in the village of Comana in Armenia, having been banished there by the spiteful Empress Eudoxia for his fearless stand for righteousness and his denunciation of the empress's sins. On unjust and trumped-up charges, he was deposed and banished to Cucusus in Armenia in 407.

In order to further isolate John from his supporters and to pursue him even to death, he was banished further out to Pityus in Iberia in the dead of winter. In his old age and ill health, St. John died from exhaustion along the way. Thirty years later, the Patriarch Proclus roused the people and the Emperor Theodosius to vindicate John's memory and return his venerable relics with glory to the capital. His relics—which had healed the sick even before their translation—were carried with honor back to the patriarchal throne in the Church of

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: Harper One, 2003), 29.

the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, while the emperor begged forgiveness over them in the name of his mother, Eudoxia.

To show how complete was his vindication and how he now dwelt among them as formerly, the story is told of how, when his relics were brought to the patriarchal throne (as John himself used to ascend the throne at the start of each liturgy and bless the people), his voice was heard from the relics, blessing the people, and saying, “Peace be with you!”—even as he blessed the people from there in former days. The translation of his relics took place in 438.⁴⁷

Christ’s second coming

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Matthew 24:30, KJV

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:16–18, NASB

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

Revelation 1:7, NKJV

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favored sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of His train Hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign

Every eye shall now behold Him
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at nought and sold Him
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree
Deeply wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see.

John Cennick, 1718–55 and Charles Wesley, 1707–88⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today’s North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 34–35.

⁴⁸ Martin Manser, ed., [*Daily Guidance*](#) (Martin Manser, 2015), 36.

January 28

Finding a Balance

Screwtape offers ways to cleverly exploit the Patient's dry spell:

But there is an even better way of exploiting the trough; I mean through the patient's own thoughts about it. As always, the first step is to keep knowledge out of his mind. Do not let him suspect the law of undulation. Let him assume that the first ardors of his conversion might have been expected to last, and ought to have lasted, forever, and that his present dryness is an equally permanent condition. Having once got this misconception well fixed in his head, you may then proceed in various ways. It all depends on whether your man is of the desponding type who can be tempted to despair, or of the wishful-thinking type who can be assured that all is well. The former type is getting rare among the humans. If your patient should happen to belong to it, everything is easy. You have only got to keep him out of the way of experienced Christians (an easy task nowadays), to direct his attention to the appropriate passages in scripture, and then to set him to work on the desperate design of recovering his old feelings by sheer will-power, and the game is ours. If he is of the more hopeful type your job is to make him acquiesce in the present low temperature of his spirit and gradually become content with it, persuading himself that it is not so low after all. In a week or two you will be making him doubt whether the first days of his Christianity were not, perhaps, a little excessive. Talk to him about 'moderation in all things'. If you can once get him to the point of thinking that 'religion is all very well up to a point', you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing.

—from *The Screwtape Letters*⁴⁹

St. Ephraim the Syrian

Ephraim was born at Nisibis around 306, of Christian parents. Early on he had an interest in monastic endeavor. Ephraim was made a catechetical teacher by his bishop, St. James of Nisibis, with whom perhaps he attended the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325. Eventually he was also ordained deacon. While in Nisibis, Ephraim wrote seventy-seven hymns designed for popular use and to teach the people to resist false doctrines. He became very famous for these—people said, "Ephraim teaches as if a fountain were flowing from his mouth." The people called him "the lyre of the Holy Spirit."

When the emperor signed a peace treaty in 363 giving Nisibis to the Persians, the Christians of the city were forced to move elsewhere. Ephraim settled in Edessa, taking a job as a bathkeeper. Soon he met a monk who persuaded him to join some hermits living in the nearby hills. There, he continued to study and to write, producing many Old and New

⁴⁹ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 30.

Testament commentaries. Ephraim's fame grew, and disciples gathered around him. He continued to write hymns to glorify God and to oppose heretical doctrines.

Ephraim heard of the fame of St. Basil in faraway Caesarea. He went there to visit him, arriving at Theophany in 371. Though they could only speak through an interpreter (Ephraim spoke no Greek), Basil still recognized his worth: when Ephraim referred to himself as a sinner, Basil replied, "A sinner! I would that your sins were mine!"

Ephraim was a great ascetical master: the Lenten prayer, "O Lord and Master of my life," is testimony to his ascetic humility and his peaceable spirit. Once, when he had fasted several days, a brother brought him some pottage to eat but accidentally dropped it so that the food was strewn all over the floor and the dish itself was broken. Seeing the brother upset, Ephraim said cheerfully, "Never mind—if the supper won't come to me, I will go to the supper!" and began to eat it from the floor as best he could.

Toward the end of his life, a severe famine struck Edessa. Though seventy years of age, Ephraim undertook famine relief work, caring for the sick, arranging for the burial of the dead, and distributing food to the starving. A month after the crisis, Ephraim died in peace in 373.⁵⁰

"If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."—2:3, 4, 5.

Interpretation. —To lift up the voice for Understanding is to call her to thee, invite her, not only to heed her when she calls thee. The search must be as diligent as the tireless search of the miner after the hid treasures of metals, etc., concealed in the earth, following up the vein discovered. Such real efforts will be rewarded by that knowledge of God, His nature, His ways, His revelations, which is of all treasures the most valuable.

Illustrations. —Our Lord's parable of the man who, finding a treasure hid in a field, went and sold all that he had and bought that field, illustrates the earnestness of purpose here recommended. Examples of it we meet with in the story of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:27, etc.), and of the Bereans (Acts 17:11, etc.), who, seeking diligently for the truth, found it and made it their own.

Application. —How much of life is spent in the search after things which are of comparatively small value and very perishable! But the knowledge of God, the understanding of true religion, —these are treasures worth seeking for, they are satisfying and eternal. I may not hope to acquire them, however, without painstaking and self-sacrifice. But is not this true of any human service or any worldly emolument? How much more, then, is it reasonable in regard to "theology," or the science of God, and to the possession of God Himself! Of that treasure-house God keepeth the key in His own hand! For this He will be

⁵⁰ Lawrence R. Farley, [*A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church*](#) (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 35–36.

inquired of, wouldst thou have Him open it unto thee. “Surely there is a vein for the silver” (Job 28:1). Yet what miner would be satisfied not to pursue it below the surface? Wouldst thou get the best treasures? Go down on thy knees, and dig for them. Pursue the vein, bring all skill and appliances to bear upon thy undertaking. Only by earnest prayer, only by patient meditation, only by diligent study, and not without self-sacrifice, is divine knowledge to be won. The heart, too, must be purified, examined by the candle of an enlightened conscience, and swept with the besom of reform. The life of Christian obedience is a life of continual progress in spiritual understanding. To follow on to know the Lord is the way to know Him now. To know Him now by faith prepares the way for revelations which shall never cease.

*O God, incline my heart to seek after, that I may find, Thee!*⁵¹

⁵¹ Chr. Ridley Pearson, [*Counsels of the Wise King; Or, Proverbs of Solomon Applied to Daily Life*](#), vol. 1 (London: W. Skeffington & Son, 1880), 28.

January 30

Proceed with Great Caution

I mean this sort of thing. I say my prayers, I read a book of devotion, I prepare for, or receive, the Sacrament. But while I do these things, there is, so to speak, a voice inside me that urges caution. It tells me to be careful, to keep my head, not to go too far, not to burn my boats. I come into the presence of God with a great fear lest anything should happen to me within that presence which will prove too intolerably inconvenient when I have come out again into my “ordinary” life. I don’t want to be carried away into any resolution which I shall afterwards regret. For I know I shall be feeling quite different after breakfast; I don’t want anything to happen to me at the altar which will run up too big a bill to pay then. It would be very disagreeable, for instance, to take the duty of charity (while I am at the altar) so seriously that after breakfast I had to tear up the really stunning reply I had written to an impudent correspondent yesterday and meant to post today. It would be very tiresome to commit myself to a programme of temperance which would cut off my after-breakfast cigarette (or, at best, make it cruelly alternative to a cigarette later in the morning). Even repentance of past acts will have to be paid for. By repenting, one acknowledges them as sins—therefore not to be repeated. Better leave that issue undecided.

The root principle of all these precautions is the same: to guard the things temporal.

—from “A Slip of the Tongue” (*The Weight of Glory*)⁵²

The Three Holy Hierarchs

This feast was instituted in the eleventh century. At that time there was a quarrel among the people about which of these three hierarchs was the greatest—St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, or St. John Chrysostom. The quarrel was resolved by a dream divinely sent to Bishop John of Euchaita. In his dream, each of the three hierarchs appeared to John, and then all three of them appeared together, saying to him, “We are one in God, as you see, and there is no dispute among us. Neither is there a first or a second.” They advised him to celebrate a common feast for them. This day is testimony to the great heavenly unity of all the saints in Christ.⁵³

⁵² C. S. Lewis, *A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*, ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 32.

⁵³ Lawrence R. Farley, *A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today’s North American Church* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 37.

The “yes” of Nazareth
given by Mary
in faith turns into charity.
She who by the work
of the Holy Spirit
was made the mother of the Son,
being moved by that same Spirit,
was transformed into a servant
of all for love of her Son.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, [*A Year with Pope Francis: Daily Reflections from His Writings*](#), ed. Alberto Rossa (New York; Mahwah, NJ; Toronto, ON: Paulist Press; Novalis, 2013), 49.

January 31

My Lifeline to the Temporal

This is my endlessly recurrent temptation: to go down to that Sea (I think St. John of the Cross called God a sea) and there neither dive nor swim nor float, but only dabble and splash, careful not to get out of my depth and holding on to the lifeline which connects me with my things temporal.

It is different from the temptations that met us at the beginning of the Christian life. Then we fought (at least I fought) against admitting the claims of the eternal at all. And when we had fought, and been beaten, and surrendered, we supposed that all would be fairly plain sailing. This temptation comes later. It is addressed to those who have already admitted the claim in principle and are even making some sort of effort to meet it. Our temptation is to look eagerly for the minimum that will be accepted. We are in fact very like honest but reluctant taxpayers. We approve of an income tax in principle. We make our returns truthfully. But we dread a rise in the tax. We are very careful to pay no more than is necessary. And we hope—we very ardently hope—that after we have paid it there will still be enough left to live on.

—from “A Slip of the Tongue” (*The Weight of Glory*)⁵⁵

Holy Unmercenaries Cyrus and John

Cyrus lived in Alexandria and worked as a physician. As a Christian, he not only treated the bodies of the suffering with his skill but also prayed for them, and by this healed many with the sign of the Cross. When the Emperor Diocletian began his persecution of the Church, Cyrus fled to Arabia, where his ministry of healing continued. There he met John, a former Roman officer from a noble family in Edessa, who had heard of his ministry. They became close friends, and John decided to leave the army and join Cyrus so they could live the ascetic life together.

When they heard of a Christian woman named Athanasia who, with her daughters, was suffering for the Faith in Canopus, they went there to encourage her, fearing that the women might otherwise apostatize. Cyrus and John tried to slip into the prison and minister to the women unseen by the authorities, but they were apprehended as Christians. They were tortured in full sight of the women, in the hope that Athanasia and her daughters might themselves lose heart and recant. Such were the faith and constancy of Cyrus and John that the women did not weaken. All of them were led together to the place of execution, where they were beheaded.

⁵⁵ C. S. Lewis, [*A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*](#), ed. Patricia S. Klein, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2003), 33.

This occurred in 311. In the next century, the holy relics of Cyrus and John were translated to Menuthis so that the miraculous power of the saints might overcome the cult of Isis there. Their relics worked many miracles. The saints abide in the Church, a testimony to the healing love of Christ.⁵⁶

To Be Kept in Eternity

And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. Isaiah 66:23.

How beautiful the earth was when it came from the Creator's hand! God presented before the universe a world in which even His all-seeing eye could find no spot or stain. Each part of the creation occupied the part assigned to it and answered the purpose for which it was created. Peace and holy joy filled the earth. There was no confusion, no clashing. There was no disease to afflict man or beast, and the vegetable kingdom was without taint or corruption. God looked upon the work of His hands, wrought out by Christ, and pronounced it "very good."

The Sabbath was hallowed at the creation. As ordained for man, it had its origin when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Job 38:7...

The Sabbath was not for Israel merely, but for the world. It had been made known to man in Eden, and, like the other precepts of the Decalogue, it is of imperishable obligation. Of that law of which the fourth commandment forms a part, Christ declares, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law." Matthew 5:18. So long as the heavens and the earth endure, the Sabbath will continue as a sign of the Creator's power. And when Eden shall bloom on earth again, God's holy rest day will be honored by all beneath the sun. "From one sabbath to another" the inhabitants of the glorified new earth shall ... "worship before me, saith the Lord."

God teaches that we should assemble in His house to cultivate the attributes of perfect love. This will fit the dwellers of earth for the mansions that Christ has gone to prepare for all who love Him. There they will assemble in the sanctuary from Sabbath to Sabbath, from one new moon to another, to unite in loftiest strains of song, in praise and thanksgiving to Him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Lawrence R. Farley, *A Daily Calendar of Saints: A Synaxarion for Today's North American Church* (Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith Publishing, 2018), 37–38.

⁵⁷ Ellen Gould White, *The Faith I Live By* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 37.