

## **Readings for Thursday, November 21, 2024**

### **Mechthilde of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great *Mystics and Theologians, 1298 and 1302***

#### **Psalm 119:41-48**

- 41 Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord,  
your salvation according to your promise.
- 42 Then I shall have an answer for those who taunt me,  
for I trust in your word.
- 43 Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,  
for my hope is in your ordinances.
- 44 I will keep your law continually,  
for ever and ever.
- 45 I shall walk at liberty,  
for I have sought your precepts.
- 46 I will also speak of your decrees before kings,  
and shall not be put to shame;
- 47 I find my delight in your commandments,  
because I love them.
- 48 I revere your commandments, which I love,  
and I will meditate on your statutes.

## **1 Samuel 1:21-28**

The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there for ever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time.' Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the Lord establish his word.' So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.'

She left him there for the Lord.

## **Luke 10:38-42**

### **Jesus Visits Martha and Mary**

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

### **Collect:**

Almighty God, who gave to your servants Mechthilde and Gertrude special gifts of grace to understand and teach the truth in Christ Jesus: Grant that by their teachings we may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

# **Mechthilde of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great**

*Mystics and Theologians, 1298 and 1302*

Mechthilde of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great were both Benedictine nuns at St. Mary's Monastery in Helfta, which was renowned for fostering the intellectual gifts of its sisters.

Mechthilde was born to a pious and noble family in Germany around 1240. Her older sister was already the abbess of a convent, and when Mechthilde was seven years old the family went to visit her. Mechthilde was so enchanted with the convent, particularly its extensive library, that she refused to go home again, and her parents eventually yielded to her pleas. In the convent, Mechthilde received a superb education, and eventually directed both the convent choir and its library, illuminating manuscripts and writing her own original works. In time, the convent was transferred to her family's estate at Helfta as it continued to grow.

Mechthilde's most famous work is her *Book of Special Grace*. Only translated into English in 2017, it is an account of how she was consoled after going through a spiritually difficult time in her fifties.

Gertrude was also a nun at Helfta, but seems to have come from a very different social background. She came to the convent as a five-yearold child of unknown parentage. Although the nuns were not willing to accept a child so young as a sister, she was given to Mechthilde to raise, and would formally enter the community several years later.

Gertrude's writings indicate how thorough an education she must have received. She writes in fluent Latin, and shows extensive familiarity with the Scriptures, early Christian authorities such as Augustine and Gregory the Great, and even more contemporary theologians, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard and Hugh of St. Victor, and William of St. Thierry. She was given the title "Gertrude the Great" because she was among the most prominent theological writers of her age, either male or female.

Gertrude wrote a number of works, touching on both mysticism and theology. Her most famous book is *The Herald of Divine Love*. Gertrude died in 1302, but the exact date is unknown. She is therefore often commemorated together with her foster mother and teacher Mechthilde.