

Readings for Thursday, August 27, 2026

Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle *Priests, 1902 and 1890*

Psalm 119:1-6

- 1 Happy are they whose way is blameless, *
who walk in the law of the LORD!
- 2 Happy are they who observe his decrees *
and seek him with all their hearts!
- 3 Who never do any wrong, *
but always walk in his ways.
- 4 You laid down your commandments, *
that we should fully keep them.
- 5 Oh, that my ways were made so direct *
that I might keep your statutes!
- 6 Then I should not be put to shame, *
when I regard all your commandments.

Isaiah 35:1-7

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
'Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.'

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;
the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Mark 7:32-37

They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

Collect:

O Loving God, whose will it is that everyone should come to you and be saved: We bless your holy Name for your servants Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle, and we pray that you will continually move your church to respond in love to the needs of all people; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Winter Syle

Priests, 1902 and 1890

Ministry to the deaf in the Episcopal Church begins with Thomas Gallaudet and his protégé, Henry Winter Syle. Without Gallaudet's genius and zeal for the spiritual well-being of deaf persons, it is improbable that a history of ministry to the deaf in the Episcopal Church could be written. He has been called "The Apostle to the Deaf."

Gallaudet was born June 3, 1822, in Hartford. He was the eldest son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, founder of the West Hartford School for the Deaf, and his wife, Sophia, who was deaf.

After graduating from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, Thomas announced his desire to become a priest in the Episcopal Church. His father, who was a Congregationalist minister, prevailed upon him to postpone a final decision, and to accept a teaching position in the New York Institution for Deaf-Mutes. There he met and married a deaf woman named Elizabeth Budd.

Gallaudet was ordained as a deacon in 1850 and served his diaconate at St. Stephen's Church, where he established a Bible class for deaf persons. Ordained as a priest in 1851, Gallaudet became Assistant Rector at St. Ann's Church, where he conceived a plan for establishing a church that would be a spiritual home for deaf people. This became a reality the following year, with the founding of St. Ann's Church for Deaf-Mutes. The congregation was able to purchase a church building in 1859, and it became a center for missionary work to the deaf continuing into its merger with the parish of Calvary-St. George in 1976. As a result of this ministry, mission congregations were established in many cities. Gallaudet died on August 27, 1902.

One fruit of Gallaudet's ministry was Henry Winter Syle. Born in China, he had lost his hearing as a young child as the result of scarlet fever. Educated at Trinity College, Hartford; St. John's College, Cambridge, England; and Yale University, Syle was a brilliant student, who persisted in his determination to obtain an education in spite of his deafness and fragile health. He was encouraged by Gallaudet to offer himself for ordination as a priest, and was supported in that call by Bishop William Bacon Stevens of Pennsylvania, against the opposition of many who believed that the impairment of one of the senses was an impediment to ordination. Syle was ordained as a deacon in 1876, the first deaf person to be ordained in this church, and later ordained as a priest in 1883. In 1888, he built All Souls Church for the Deaf in Philadelphia, the first Episcopal church constructed especially for deaf persons. He died on January 6, 1890.