

Today the Church offers us two lady saints for their intercession and our imitation. Last year I chose to honor St. Margaret at my Mass, and so this year I am using the Mass of St. Gertrude “the Great”, as she is known. The only female saint, I think, to be given that title. Sunday was the Memorial of St. Albert the Great. who got “bumped” by Sunday Mass in 2020. Less than a half dozen male saints have been given the title “the Great.”

In 2017 I was in the German state of Saxony visiting many of the major sites in the life of Martin Luther. It was 503 years ago this month that he began what we usually term the “Protestant Reformation.” My American cousin who lives in Munich and I were leaving the village of Eisleben, where ironically Luther both was born and would later die in 1546, when I noticed a small village sign a mile or so from it marked HELFTA, and I saw a few old brick buildings, some of which looked somewhat restored. I remarked that centuries before Luther lived, the greatest convent in what today is Germany was at a Helfta. It had produced a number of canonized saints, including one we know today as Gertrude the Great. The other three saints were another Gertrude and two Mechtilds. Incidentally the usual German nicknames for Gertrude and Mechtild are Trudy and Tilly.

Why “the Great?” Because Church historian tell us that as consequence of her many mystical visions of Jesus and her writings, Gertrude was the first one to begin devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus -- this some 400 year before the French mystic, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. Luther’s Reform movement closed this convent in the mid-1500’s, as it did so many others. Luther’s wife, Katharina von Bora, was an ex-nun, but not from Helfta. After Saxony became Lutheran, the convent buildings at Helfta would stand idle for over 450 years. But in 1999, eight Benedictine nuns from Bavaria, now numbering 20, returned to occupy the buildings and establish a monastery and retreat center. May St. Gertrude the Great bless them!

## MONDAY OF THE 33<sup>ND</sup> WEEK IN OT - Siebenand - 2

Our Gospel today is one of the many occasions where Jesus restores sight to someone who is blind. The healing pattern is usually the same in each case. Someone tells the blind person that Jesus of Nazareth is in the vicinity. He calls out to Him asking for “pity” in this case. Bystanders bring the blind man to Jesus who then restores his sight. The verbal response of Jesus is often identical in each case: YOUR FAITH HAS SAVED YOU.

As we near the end of this liturgical year, it is quite fitting that our daily Mass Readings be taken from the final book in our Bibles: The Revelation to John, or as it was formerly known, The Book of the Apocalypse. It is very much one-of-a-kind among New Testament writings. It is often difficult to understand, because it abounds in unfamiliar and extravagant symbolism, often requiring a thorough knowledge of events and terms found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Few scholars today believe that it was written by the person who wrote the Gospel of John, and it may well be one of the last books found in the New Testament to be penned, quite likely during a period of intense Christian persecution especially in Asia Minor, our present-day Turkey. Some commentators describe it as “resistance literature” intended to firm up communities being savaged by Roman and other persecutors. The various references throughout to “Babylon” are really a code name for Rome.

As one contemporary Scripture scholar puts it: this Book had its origin in a time of crisis, but it remains valid and meaningful for Christians of all centuries faced with evil and corruption, confusion and sin of every kind, both from within and from outside the Church. It is a “Book of Hope”! Finally, Christians are called upon here in Revelation to trust in the promise of Jesus who said: BEHOLD I AM WITH YOU UNTIL THE END OF THE AGES.

