

## Thought for the Day

*Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.*

*For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>*

*Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)*

*Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.*

**Wednesday 14 October**

**Teresa of Avila**

### ***Wisdom of Solomon 7.7-15***

*Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;*

*I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.*

*I preferred her to sceptres and thrones,*

*and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her.*

*Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem,*

*because all gold is but a little sand in her sight,*

*and silver will be accounted as clay before her.*

*I loved her more than health and beauty,*

*and I chose to have her rather than light,*

*because her radiance never ceases.*

*All good things came to me along with her,*

*and in her hands uncounted wealth.*

*I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them;*

*but I did not know that she was their mother.*

*I learned without guile and I impart without grudging;*

*I do not hide her wealth,*

*for it is an unfailing treasure for mortals;*

*those who get it obtain friendship with God,*

*commended for the gifts that come from instruction.*

*May God grant me to speak with judgement,*

*and to have thoughts worthy of what I have received;*

*for he is the guide even of wisdom*

*and the corrector of the wise.*

We often remark on how time flies, and how we can't believe it's autumn already, or how fast the summer is going... but it must have been very strange in 1582 when Teresa of Avila died. Her feast day is celebrated on 15<sup>th</sup> October although she actually died on 4<sup>th</sup> October; but the next day a reformed calendar was adopted which meant omitting 11 days from October that year! Imagine how suddenly November must have arrived that year!

Today's passage is provided in full for those whose Bibles do not include the Apocrypha. Wisdom in the Bible is consistently given the female gender, which is an exception to the prevailing use of male pronouns for aspects of God; we see this in Proverbs as well. This passage celebrating the Wisdom of God is an appropriate passage for a female saint and figure of great spiritual wisdom. It is attributed to Solomon, who was famous for his

wisdom; you'll remember how God offered him a gift and he asked for wisdom rather than choosing wealth or long life – so he got those as well. However it was written in Greek and reflects a much later period so it's more likely that the writer lived centuries later, between the testaments. It's made very clear that the source of wisdom is God and the way Wisdom is personified in Scripture shows that she is understood as an aspect of the divine. In the NT we find Paul describing Jesus as the Wisdom of God.

So wisdom is different from knowledge. It is not about facts; it is more a spiritual, mystical and philosophical concept. Wisdom gives insight and understanding at a deep level.

Teresa of Avila, born into an aristocratic Spanish family, was a nun and a mystic; she had intense mystical experiences in prayer and she wrote about it; you can still buy her books 'The Way of Perfection' and 'The Interior Castle'. She wrote 5 books, and she was very active in reforming the Carmelite order which meant dealing with a lot of conflict and opposition, politics and legal wrangles. Her health was poor, having been seriously ill as a child and never fully recovered.

Her refuge and source of strength was prayer, although it's hard to know when she found time to pray with so many pressures on her everyday life. For her prayer was a process of entering more deeply into oneself at the same time as developing an intimacy with God. The picture of the castle is of moving through a series of rooms, from the outside towards the centre, which represents complete union with God. When we reach that stage we have also arrived at the centre of ourselves.

If this sounds idealistic, it helps that Teresa was very honest in her writing about her own experience of prayer and how difficult it was. She spoke of disappointment, frustration, boredom, many struggles, and she was 20 years in the convent before she attained her deep mystical insight.

She repeatedly said, 'whatever happens, never stop praying'.

She warned us not to expect an easy path, after all, looking at Jesus and the trials he went through, as well as her own suffering, Teresa is reputed to have said to God, 'If this is how you treat your friends, it's no wonder you have so few!'

Perhaps the most famous quote from Teresa is this one, and its advice is timeless. It would be a mistake for us to think that people have never been through plague or social upheaval or widespread suffering before; there was plenty of all that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an age of upheaval. And in that world Teresa said:

*Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you. Though all things pass, God does not change. Patience wins all things. He lacks nothing who possesses God; for God alone suffices.*

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress. Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low; that we may rejoice in your comfort, knowing that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*