

Readings for Thursday, May 28, 2026

Mechthild of Magdeburg – *Mystic, c. 1282*

Psalm 119:41-48

- 41 Let your loving-kindness come to me, O LORD, *
and your salvation, according to your promise.
- 42 Then shall I have a word for those who taunt me, *
because I trust in your words.
- 43 Do not take the word of truth out of my mouth, *
for my hope is in your judgments.
- 44 I shall continue to keep your law; *
I shall keep it for ever and ever.
- 45 I will walk at liberty, *
because I study your commandments.
- 46 I will tell of your decrees before kings *
and will not be ashamed.
- 47 I delight in your commandments, *
which I have always loved.
- 48 I will lift up my hands to your commandments, *
and I will meditate on your statutes.

Song of Songs 3:1-5

Upon my bed at night
I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
'I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.'
I sought him, but found him not.
The sentinels found me,
as they went about in the city.
'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?'
Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him, and would not let him go
until I brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

Mark 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, 'Can you see anything?' And the man looked up and said, 'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.'

Collect:

Draw the souls of your people into your love, O God, that like your servant Mechthild, we may yearn to be fully yours, for you know us better than we can know ourselves; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. *Amen.*

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Mystic, c. 1282

Mechthild of Magdeburg was one of the most original medieval mystics, and the first to write in the German language. She was a Beguine, a member of a group of women who lived in a quasi-monastic community but did not take formal vows. Instead, they pledged to be bound by the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience only for as long as they lived in the community. Typically, Beguines lived in a communal house and supported themselves through their own work, such as nursing, weaving, embroidery, burial of the dead, and housework.

Mechthild is known to us primarily through her work *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, which consists of seven books written over a period of thirty years. It is clear from the work that she was familiar with courtly poetry and vernacular literature, but she does not seem to have had any formal training in theology or in Latin.

Her work alternates between passionate descriptions of her love for God and scathing denunciations of many clergy and of the laxity that she perceived in the official church of her time. Because of these criticisms, her work was at times controversial. Shortly after her death, a Latin translation of her work was produced by Dominican priests, who faithfully conveyed the majority of the text, but significantly toned down both her erotic imagery and her critiques of the vices of the clergy.

Mechthild spent the last years of her life at a Cistercian convent in Helfta, whose nuns were famous for their education and scholarship. It is clear that she felt somewhat uncomfortable in this very different environment, but the sisters seem to have warmly welcomed her and protected her from anyone who criticized her work. During the last years of her life, she became blind, and so the last chapters of her book were dictated to one of the sisters of the convent.

In one famous passage of her book, she writes:

“A fish cannot drown in water,
A bird does not fall in air.
In the fire of creation,
God doesn’t vanish:
The fire brightens.
Each creature God made
must live in its own true nature;
How could I resist my nature,
That lives for oneness with God?”