

Readings for Thursday, January 29, 2026

Marcella of Rome – *Monastic and Scholar*, 410

Psalm 124

- 1 If the LORD had not been on our side, *
let Israel now say;
- 2 If the LORD had not been on our side, *
when enemies rose up against us;
- 3 Then would they have swallowed us up alive *
in their fierce anger toward us;
- 4 Then would the waters have overwhelmed us *
and the torrent gone over us;
- 5 Then would the raging waters *
have gone right over us.
- 6 Blessed be the LORD! *
he has not given us over to be a prey for their teeth.
- 7 We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler; *
the snare is broken, and we have escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the Name of the LORD, *
the maker of heaven and earth.

1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, 'Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.' So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.' As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' But she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.' Elijah said to her, 'Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.' She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

Collect:

O God, who satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry with good things: Grant that we, like your servant Marcella, may hunger and thirst after you above the vain pomp and glory of the world, and delight in your word above all manner of riches; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Marcella of Rome

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“How much virtue and ability, how much holiness and purity I found in her,” said Jerome of Marcella, “I am afraid to say, lest I may exceed the bounds of men’s belief.” Marcella was born in Rome in 325 to Albina, a noblewoman noted for her piety and learning. When Marcella was a child, her mother invited Athanasius of Alexandria to sojourn in her home during his exile. At his feet, Marcella studied the lives of the holy monastics of the Thebaid, and Athanasius gave her a copy of his *Life of Antony*.

After being widowed as a young woman, Marcella devoted herself to the asceticism of Antony. Trading her costly array for a simple brown dress, she made her home into a house of prayer and refuge. Her example inspired other women to form a community, sometimes called the Brown Dress Society, that was devoted to chastity, poverty, fasting, prayer, studying the scriptures, and serving the poor and needy. Together with Paula (September 28), Marcella is one of the mothers of Roman monasticism.

In 382, Pope Damasus invited Jerome to Rome, where he lodged in Marcella’s Aventine Hill estate. During those three years a friendship developed between Marcella, Paula, and Jerome, without which Jerome’s Latin translation of the scriptures (later called the Vulgate) would not have been written. Marcella and Paula were both remarkably erudite; Jerome found in them not only friends but colleagues with whom to discuss the challenges of interpreting and translating the scriptures. After the death of Damasus, Jerome, joined by Paula and her daughter Eustochium, left for Jerusalem; although they urged Marcella to join them, she was determined to remain in Rome. She and Jerome corresponded for the remainder of her life. After his departure, scholars came to her to seek her insight on obscure matters in the Greek and Hebrew scriptures.

In 410 the Visigoths invaded Rome. Alaric’s soldiers pillaged Marcella’s home in search of wealth. They scourged the eighty-five-year-old woman, demanding that she surrender her hidden treasures, all of which she had long since spent in charity. She only pleaded with the soldiers not to harm her protégé Principia. They were both eventually taken to St. Paul’s Church, which had been designated a sanctuary. The following day, Marcella died in Principia’s arms.