



'Year of the Sister'

Well-Read Mom Family Supplement

Well-Read Mom's Guide to Bringing the Great Books into Your Home

December: The Contemplative Life

Discuss along with *The Way of Perfection* by Teresa of Avila

St. Teresa of Avila knew that there is no task or person or relationship too small for God. God is near. Because He is near, his presence transforms the ordinary. Ordinary persons and circumstances might become extraordinary, even miraculous. This wakefulness to the presence of God is contemplation, a disposition common in the Medieval period. The following suggested readings reveal how contemplation, with its receptivity and acceptance, was thematic to life in the Middle Ages.

***The Hidden Treasure of Glaston* by Eleanore M. Jewett**

A fiery knight leaves his crippled son Hugh at a monastery in order to flee England. Hugh is given over to the monastery not only because he is crippled but also because Hugh has a potent love for books and learning. Hugh navigates two powerful dimensions of the Middle Ages—the making and writing of books to preserve knowledge and the mandatum that a noble life must be characterized by deeds of valor.

Discussion Questions:

1. Hugh has both a visible and an invisible “wound” when he arrives at Glaston. What are these wounds?
2. Hugh’s father does not see a purpose to books but rather to noble deeds of action. How is Sir Hugh right? How is he wrong?
3. How does the friendship of Hugh with Dickon begin to bring healing to both of Hugh’s wounds? How does sharing the discovery of the tunnels unite the friends? Do they leave the monks in ignorance of their secret too long?
4. The monks rarely leave the monastery. Do you think they lead a narrow and boring existence? Why or why not?
5. The story gives us an idea that the Medieval person lived with the expectation that reality is permeated by God, that miracles are possible at any moment. What do you think of this? What would it take for you to live this way now?
6. How are others around me—my friends and family—my opportunity to encounter God?

More for older readers:

My Side of the Mountain and *On the Far Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George



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For Younger Readers

***The Holy Twins: Benedict and Scholastica* by Kathleen Norris and Tomie dePaola.**

Benedict and Scholastica understood as well as St. Teresa that a life dedicated to God is characterized by fraternal charity, detachment from temporary things, and honest humility. Benedict and Scholastica grow up loving and challenging one another. When the juncture arrives such that the twins are separated for their vocation and education, they grow wiser and more prayerful. They each long to bring peace to a troubled society through a life ordered by dedication to God. Scholastica gives warm-hearted spiritual advice to Benedict as he crafts his humane Rule.

Discussion Questions:

1. St. Benedict and St. Scholastica loved each other as twins do. They also bickered with one another as twins do. Do you think that St. Benedict included in his Rule anything he learned from St. Scholastica?
2. Do you think it is possible that saints, people who live in deep friendship with God, can work miracles?
3. Scholastica says, "Isn't it funny, Brother, that you had to travel all over Italy to learn some of the things that I discovered by staying in one place?" Is it possible to learn things by staying in one place? What great things have you learned without leaving home?
4. What do you think it means to "listen to others with the 'ear' of the heart"?

More for younger readers:

Brother Hugo and the Bear by Katy Beebe

Brother Juniper by Diane Gibfried

The Ink Garden of Brother Theophane by C. M. Millen

Saint Francis of Assisi by Demi