

The Collect of the Day: God of liberating power, who called Thecla to proclaim the gospel and did not permit any obstacle or peril to inhibit her: Empower courageous evangelists among us, that men and women everywhere may know the freedom that you offer us in Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Psalm 123 said responsively by the half-verse

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- 1 To you I lift up my eyes, * **to you enthroned in the heavens.**
- 2 As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, *
so our eyes look to you, O Lord our God, until you show us your mercy.
- 3 Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy, * **for we have had more than enough of contempt,**
- 4 too much of the scorn of the indolent rich, * **and of the derision of the proud.**

First Reading: A Reading from the Second Letter of Paul to Timothy (3:10-12)

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Second Reading: A Reading from the Gospel of Luke (24:1-11)

On the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Thecla of Iconium, Proto-Martyr Among Women, c.70: Thecla, who according to tradition was a disciple of the apostle Paul, was one of the most popular female saints in the early church. Her story is told in the second-century *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. According to this narrative, upon hearing Paul preach the gospel, Thecla abandoned her plans for marriage and followed Paul. Condemned to burn at the stake, her life was saved by a miraculous thunderstorm. As her adventures continued, she was thrown to the beasts in the local arena. There she was protected by a fierce lioness. Finally, thinking this was her last chance to be baptized, she threw herself into a pool of ravenous seals and baptized herself in the water, while the seals were struck dead by lightning. The governor then released her, and she went on to travel and preach the gospel. Although the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* unabashedly incorporates many of the tropes and styles of ancient fiction, which makes it difficult to disentangle history from myth, Christians in late antiquity largely believed that there was indeed a historical Thecla behind all of the legends, and devotion to her was very widespread, especially among women. According to Tertullian (writing around the year 200), early Christian women appealed to Thecla's example to defend women's freedom to teach and to baptize. A shrine to Thecla in Seleucia (Asia Minor) became a popular pilgrimage site in the fourth and fifth centuries. Devotion to Thecla from Gaul to Palestine is also evident in literature, art, and in the practice of naming children after her. Her image appeared on wall paintings, clay flasks, oil lamps, stone reliefs, textile curtains, and other materials. In the Orthodox Church she is given the title "Proto-Martyr Among Women" because, just as Stephen is believed to have been the first male martyr, so Thecla is believed to have been the first female martyr.