

The Collect of the Day: Lord God, make us worthy of your perfect love; that, with your deacon Nicholas Ferrar and his household, we may rule ourselves according to your Word, and serve you with our whole heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Psalm 127 *Read responsively by the half-verse, breaking at the asterisk.*

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- 1 Unless the LORD builds the house, * **their labor is in vain who build it.**
- 2 Unless the LORD watches over the city, * **in vain the sentries keeps their vigil.**
- 3 It is in vain that you rise so early and go to bed so late; * **vain, too, to eat the bread of toil, for God gives to the beloved sleep.**
- 4 Children are a heritage from the LORD, * **and the fruit of the womb is a gift.**
- 5 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior * are the children of one's youth.
- 6 Happy are they who have their quivers full of them! * **they shall not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.**

First Reading: A Reading from the Book of the Proverbs (1:20-33)

Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused, have stretched out my hand and no one heeded, and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Second Reading: A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew (13:47-52)

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Nicholas Ferrar, Deacon, 1637 (Dec. 1): Nicholas Ferrar was the founder of a religious community at Little Gidding, Huntingdonshire, England, which existed from 1626 to 1646. His family had been prominent in the affairs of the Virginia Company, but when that company was dissolved, he took deacon's orders and retired to the country. At Little Gidding, his immediate family and a few friends and servants gave themselves wholly to religious observance. They restored the derelict church near the manor house, became responsible for services there, taught many of the local children, and looked after the health and well-being of the people of the neighborhood. A regular round of prayer according to the Book of Common Prayer was observed, along with the daily recital of the whole of the psalter. The members of the community became widely known for fasting, private prayer and meditation, and for writing stories and books illustrating themes of Christian faith and morality. The community also prepared "harmonies" of the gospels, one of which was presented to King Charles I by the Ferrar family. The community did not long survive the death of Nicholas Ferrar. However, the memory of the religious life at Little Gidding was kept alive, principally through Izaak Walton's description in his *Life of George Herbert*: "He (Ferrar) and his family ... did most of them keep Lent and all Ember-weeks strictly, both in fasting and using all those mortifications and prayers that the church hath appointed ... and he and they did the like constantly on Fridays, and on the vigils or eves appointed to be fasted before the Saints' days; and this frugality and abstinence turned to the relief of the poor ..." The community became an important symbol for many Anglicans when religious orders began to be revived. Its life inspired T.S. Eliot, and he gave the title, "Little Gidding," to the last of his *Four Quartets*, one of the great religious poems of the twentieth century.