

Grace Notes in Miniature

Friday, October 2nd, 2020

On Sunday when I took my dog to run in the dog park we were surrounded by a gorgeous display of goldenrod (please don't confuse it with ragweed; they aren't the same!) and Michaelmas daisies. These purple flowers with their golden centres have always been for me one of the undeniable signs of Fall. Tied to the Feast of Saint Michael (September 29th), they marked one of the terms of the British university and



legal calendars. The year was made up of Michaelmas – September and October; Martinmas – following the Feast of Saint Martin on November 11th, and covering November and December; Candlemas – February and March, with the namesake feast day, also known as the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, on February 2nd; and, Whitsun –

mid-April to June and in which fell Whitsunday, an old name for Pentecost. I also recall Lammas, August 1st, but it was different as it fell during the summer holidays. This was a day on which, traditionally, a loaf of bread made from the first wheat harvest of the year was taken to the church to be blessed; Lammas derives from “hlaef” – Old English for loaf. In Scotland, rents were paid on Whitsun, Lammas, Martinmas and Candlemas, whilst in England the days were March 25 (Lady Day), June 24 (Midsummer Day), September 29 (Michaelmas Day), and December 25 (Christmas Day).

Saint Michael has always been an important patron saint, with many churches named for him. He is often teamed with Saint Gabriel and Saint Raphael, the best-known of the Archangels. (Others are Joel, Saraqael, Raguel, Uriel and, of course, Lucifer who fell from grace.) The prayer to St Michael was always said after Low Mass in the days before Vatican II:

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls.

Amen.



As I am writing this it is still October 1st, the Feast of Ste-Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, and I am reminded that about twenty-five years ago I worked with a Carmelite priest who would always present his staff each with a red rose on this date. It got me thinking about the significance of flowers in our symbology of saints. The Blessed Virgin Mary and many other saints are often depicted with lilies for purity (or represented by them) but, did you know that Our Lady is also seen with a blue iris – known as a ‘sword lily’ – because of the sword which pierced her heart? Others, like Sebastian Thecla and Agnes, are shown with palm fronds which have come to be associated with martyrdom. Dorothea, Cecilia, Elizabeth of Hungary, St Rose of Lima, and Ste-Thérèse, are associated with roses, and Mary is known in some countries as “the Mystic Rose” or “the rose without thorns. The perfume of violets is associated with sanctity and the flowers stands for modesty, shyness and innocence. In indigenous tradition, there is a Haudenosaunee legend that claims that the violet is a child born of both sky and earth. Therefore, it is often considered to be a symbol of harmony, balance, and opportunity.



Jesus has become associated with gardens because of references in scripture: the Garden of Gethsemane, or being mistaken by Mary Magdalene by the tomb as the gardener (John 20:15). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KoN-MbSBhY>

Even as we prepare our gardens to survive the stresses of winter may we as lovingly tend the precious flower of our faith so that we can “bloom where we’re planted” and weather the stresses of our current storms. A little feeding and weeding go a long way!

Peace be with you,

Gillian

Jesus Appearing to the Magdalene by [Fra Angelico](#). Jesus is shown holding an axe, symbolizing Mary’s thinking of him as a gardener.

