



Memorial of Saint Cecilia, Virgin, Martyr



Date: Saturday, November 22, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: 1 Maccabees 6:1–13

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 9:2–4, 6, 16, 19 | **Response:** Psalm 9:16a

Gospel Acclamation: 2 Timothy 1:10

Gospel Reading: Luke 20:27–40

Preached at: the Chapel of Xolile Keteyi House in the Archdiocese of Durban, South Africa.

There are moments when we need to return to the heart's true direction, to that quiet place where God steadies us and fear loosens its hold. On this Feast of Saint Cecilia, patron saint of music, musicians and poets, the Scriptures lead us gently but firmly back to that place. They invite us to look honestly at our lives, to trust that God remembers us with mercy, and to let hope teach our hearts a new and clearer song.

Our first reading from the Book of Maccabees shows King Antiochus IV Epiphanes at the end of his power. Once fierce, certain and feared, he now lies weak and sorrowful. His title ('Epiphanes') meant "God Manifest," yet now he knows how far he has drifted. Rabbinical tradition often remembers him as a ruler whose pride smothered compassion, a warning that leadership without humility harms the very people it should protect.

His story speaks into our own land, South Africa. Families manage rising costs. Workers move through uncertainty. Students wonder about fees and the future. Communities endure load shedding and uneven services. Antiochus' regret invites an Ignatian pause. It calls us to the Examen: to look at our choices, our silences, our missed chances to help. Not to bring shame, but to clear space for God's steady guidance, so the heart can turn once more toward what is true.

Psalm 9 gives us another voice: a voice that has discovered God's faithful presence in a fragile world. The psalmist tells us, "The nations are sunk in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid has their own foot been caught" (Psalm 9:15). Human injustice traps those who set the snare. But the psalmist

does not stay there. He lifts his voice and declares, “I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High” (Psalm 9:2). In the face of fear, he chooses a song of trust. This movement from danger to praise mirrors Saint Cecilia’s quiet strength and shows us that faith can turn even heavy moments into prayer.

If we use Ignatian imagination, we might picture the Lord walking through our own streets: commuters gathering before dawn in Johannesburg, a grandmother in Limpopo stretching her pension to feed a family, a household lighting candles during load shedding in Durban, a student walking home after evening classes in Cape Town. And beyond our borders, in places weighed down by conflict, hunger or uncertainty, the same God listens. His remembrance reaches everywhere. The psalm becomes not only South Africa’s cry, but the world’s.

This thread of honesty and hope leads us to our Gospel. The Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a question about the levirate law from Deuteronomy, which was meant to protect widows from destitution. But they twist it to make belief in the resurrection sound foolish.

Jesus answers with clear and steady confidence. The resurrection, He says, is not a continuation of old arrangements. It is life transformed by God, life where death has no power. When He names God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He affirms that God is not the keeper of fading memories but the One who holds the living in His hands.

And this brings us naturally to Saint Cecilia. Her life is a quiet echo of everything Jesus teaches. Cecilia lived in Rome in the third century, when Christians faced real danger. She kept her faith, encouraged her household to follow Christ and offered her life rather than deny Him. Tradition holds that she sang to God in her heart even as she faced death. Whether or not she sang aloud, the early Church cherished her witness so deeply that she is named in the Roman Canon, one of the oldest Eucharistic prayers. She became the patron saint of music because her faith had a steady rhythm that endured through suffering.

One image gathers these readings and her witness: the image of an inner song. Antiochus loses his song through pride. The psalmist sings a song that lifts the poor. Jesus reveals a song that death cannot silence. Cecilia lives her song with

courage. And we, gathered here as Jesuits, families and students in South Africa, are invited to find our song and let it guide our steps.

A song does not need to be loud to be true. It can be a simple act of patience in a tense moment, a steady word of encouragement, or time given to someone who feels forgotten. Like the psalmist's cry for the lowly, offering presence to someone lonely lifts a hidden burden and becomes part of God's own remembering. Small actions like these rise together like harmonies. And in the liturgy, even silence carries this song. The pause before a hymn, the quiet prayer after Communion, the breath we take before the blessing: these moments become places where Cecilia's witness meets ours.

As we come to the altar, imagine, in the Ignatian way, standing beside Cecilia. A small lamp burns near her. Her expression is calm, not because life spared her difficulty, but because she trusted the One who holds every life. Listen as she says to you with quiet certainty: Keep your lamp lit. Keep your heart open. Keep your song alive.

For your prayer this evening, I offer three questions:

- Where is the Lord inviting me to make an honest review of my choices, so that I may begin again with clarity and humility?
- Who around me might be carrying a burden I have not noticed, and how can I offer real support this week?
- What simple, quiet song of faith is God placing in my heart today, and how will it shape my actions and words in the days ahead?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.