

Nicholas Ferrar, Deacon and Man of Prayer (1592-1637)

Observed 1 December



Nicholas Ferrar was a precocious child, capable in all his studies at a very young age, and already a graduate of Cambridge at 18. His academic success was unfortunately paired with fragile health from childhood. Typical of the time, he was advised to go to the continent for the sake of his health. For five years he traveled and studied, spending time with scholars and

religious leaders of all sorts. Finally, he felt called to return home. At first he went in to Parliament to attempt to deal with the difficulties of the London Virginia Company, whose fortunes were closely tied to those of his family. Once that political and financial chaos was ended in court, the entire family moved to an abandoned estate called Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire. There, Nicholas and his mother, his brother James and sister Susanna and their spouses and children settled in the manor house, which they restored along with the little church nearby. They established a rule of life congenial to all of them, which included the practice of having at least one member at prayer in the church at all times. They dedicated themselves to the service of the people of the surrounding area, particularly looking to the education and healthcare of the children. This was of course a time of bitter conflict among factions of the English Church. Puritans excoriated the family life at Little Gidding as ‘a protestant nunnery’, but the reputation for real and lived holiness spread far and wide, and people of high degree and low made visits to experience it for themselves. Nicholas’ frail health led to his early death, but his sister and brother carried on the vowed life of Little Gidding until their own deaths twenty years later. Nicholas and his family were loved and honored by famous contemporaries like George Herbert, as well as more modern greats like TS Eliot, who named one of the four quartets ‘Little Gidding’ which helped to arouse new interest in both Dame Julian and Nicholas Ferrar. Many 20th and 21st century Christians have made pilgrimages to the church at Little Gidding and dedicated themselves to keep alive the family legacy of devotion. – *Raggs Ragan+*

You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.

(from Eliot’s poem)

Lessons Exodus 35:1-5a,24-29; Psalm 15; Galatians 6:7-10; Luke 10:38-42

Collect Lord God, make us so reflect 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.