This year Memorial Day falls on Monday of the 7th week of Easter. It is also the Memorial of Saint Bede the Venerable, Saint Gregory VII and Saint Mary Magdalen de'Pazzi.

Since I only have time for one, please allow me to focus on Saint Bede the Venerable who lived from 672 to 735. As a Benedictine Monk, he was ordained a deacon at age 19. He became a priest at age 30. He spent much of his childhood and all of his adult life in a Monastery trying to comprehend the thoughts of God. During his 33 years as a priest, he wrote 45 books. Two/thirds were commentaries on books of the Bible. ii

In our Gospel from Matthew, he tells us: “The crowds were astonished at [Jesus’s] teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” (Matthew 7:29). Known as the father of British history, Bede the Venerable was deeply respected for both his biblical teaching and historic writing.

As a monk, Bede’s life was devoted to prayer. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches us to be persistent in prayer: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened” (Mt 7:7-8). Bede’s scholarly work then is both a tribute to his keen intellect and his prayerful seeking of God’s wisdom so that he might share it with us.

At the end of his life, Bede sensed the end was near. He spent his final days teaching others of God’s glory and giving thanks to God. Bede died the day before the Ascension. His thoughts that day were filled with hope and joy:

If it so please my Maker, it is time for me to return to him who created me and formed me out of nothing when I did not exist. I have lived a long time, and the righteous Judge has taken good care of me during my whole life. The time has come for my departure, and I long to die and be with Christ. My soul yearns to see Christ, my King, in all his glory. iii

Bede sang “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.” And when he had named the Holy Spirit, he breathed his last breath.

In his 1st letter to the Corinthians, St Paul raises the question: “For what person knows a man’s thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him?” (2:11) We might flip that question around and ask, if a man dedicates his life so that Christ lives within him, might he not humbly search the mind of God for wisdom and insight? Certainly, Bede fits that the description.

Venerable Bede shares these insights on the calling of Matthew the Tax Collector. Jesus saw more than a man who was shunned in Jewish society. Jesus saw him through the eyes of mercy and knew that Matthew was capable of conversion. Jesus’s call to follow him was so compelling, that Matthew gave up a life of material wealth to embrace spiritual wealth. Our Lord summoned Matthew by speaking to him in words. By an invisible, interior impulse flooding his mind with the light of grace, he instructed him to walk in his footsteps. In this way Matthew could understand that Christ, who was summoning him away from earthly possessions, had incorruptible treasures of heaven in his gift. iv

Matthew’s yes to Jesus had an impact in helping other tax collectors and sinners to do the same. Jesus calls each one of us as well: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20). In the words of Venerable Bede: “On hearing Christ’s voice, we open the door to receive him, as it were, when we freely assent to his promptings and when we give ourselves over to doing what must be done.” The words of the Lord indeed are spirit and life.

i franciscanmedia.org/saint-bede-the-venerable/
ii catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saaint_id=574
iii Liturgy of the Hours - From a letter on the death of Venerable Bede by Cuthbert
iv crossroadinitiative.com/media/articles/the-call-of-st-matthew-the-tax-collector/