

In Paradise
(Faust)

What to start with, today? It's one of those, perhaps few enough, days and dates that suggest a number of different starting points for some minutes of prayer and reflection. And points that aren't immediately reconcilable with one another.... A bit like those Sunday readings of scripture at Mass during the "ordinary" time of the year, when there's no correlation intended between the gospel and the New Testament selections, both of which are simply continuous, consecutive readings through different books. Sometimes an interesting juxtaposition does happen, and it's helpful: most of the time one has to choose whichever best helps or sparks one's reflection and prayer. So today you've a choice: take the one that you find most helpful and inspiring for opening your heart to God now. Of course, if you're American then you won't need to be reminded what day it is today, Thanksgiving. And that's surely an obvious invitation to pray, even if perhaps the occasion is not any longer the religious act that the Founding Fathers celebrated. But today's date has another American memory too, one that maybe it already beginning to fade — the date, I mean, rather than the event of the assassination of President Kennedy. This November month is an occasion of remembering those who have died, and of prayer in the communion of all the saints. For various reasons, President Kennedy's death was one that shook the world and affected millions of people everywhere, not only his fellow Americans: it was, perhaps, through the then very new satellite TV, the first time that so many people the world over felt as one family of humankind and were united in mourning together for one man. Let us

pray for all our departed brothers and sisters, and with gratitude to God for the lives among us of those especially who've taught us, personally or publicly, about the reality of the Communion of Saints and God's Fatherhood for us all. Another man who, I think, did that in his attractive Christian writing, was C.S. Lewis who also, as I remarked a few weeks ago, died on this day sixteen years ago. Next, to a martyr saint who's been celebrated on this date for hundreds of years and whose cult goes back to at least the 5th century, St Cecilia. She's the patroness of musicians, and of music, a title it seems she acquired about the 16th century, and her emblem in Christian art is the organ. The title seems to have arisen from a phrase about a Roman virgin who "sang to God in her heart", though it isn't at all clear if the Cecilia of today's festival was the same person: indeed, beyond the name, historical facts are extremely scanty. Anyway, the point is (as a later Christian writer put it), to sing is to pray twice-over: music, song, like poetry and painting, can say for us so much that we just can't put into words. Praise of God and our own expression of joy and thankfulness in His presence comes through in song, in hymns and canticles and spiritual music, (to paraphrase St Paul). But before our prayer is song today, a last point of note as, maybe, a beginning to prayer — the celebration this coming Sunday of the Feast of Christ the King, Christ who has risen from death for us, ascended to His Father, become our Lord, our Master, our brother, whose reign takes in all of us and the whole of creation... and music too. "We Thank You Father": a song for today MUSIC - PRAYERS ||| → MP 602 p.3