

Readings: *Song of Songs 8: 6 – 7; Psalm 148:1,2, 11 – 14; (123); Luke 10: 38 – 42.*

The story of Saint Scholastica, who lived in the sixth century, is known to us only through the writings of Pope Gregory the Great, some forty years after her death. She was the sister of Saint Benedict, the Father of Monasticism in the Western Church, and Gregory tells us that, like her brother, she retired from the world – a world that was in great confusion and disorder.

When Benedict moved from Subiaco to Monte Cassino in about AD 525 Scholastica followed him to Plombariola, some five miles away. There she founded and supervised a community of nuns, under the direction of Benedict. Once a year she travelled to Monte Cassino, where she stayed in a house outside the enclosure. Benedict came to the house each day with some companions.

Brother and sister spent the time in discussion and in worship.

Gregory tells us about their final meeting (now dated AD 547). As the day drew to an end, Scholastica begged her brother not to return to his monastery, but to stay the night so that they could continue their spiritual discussion. Benedict was unwilling, saying that his Rule required him and his companions to return to his monastery. Scholastica bowed her head in prayer, and immediately a terrific thunderstorm broke out, preventing Benedict and the other monks from leaving the house.

Benedict accused Scholastica of invoking the storm. She replied “I asked a favour of you, and you refused it. I asked it of God, and he has granted it.” Brother and sister spent the night conversing on the joys of heaven.

In the morning Benedict and his companions returned to their Monastery. Three days later Benedict was praying in his cell, when he had a vision of her soul rising to heaven in the form of a dove. He sent some monks to bring her body to Monte Cassino, and buried her in the tomb he had prepared for himself.

Benedict himself died in 540 and was buried in the same tomb. Despite the allied bombing in 1944 of the monastery (as part of the assault on Rome, which was occupied by German troops), the tomb survives. However, it is widely believed that the relics of both saints were removed to France in the 7th century – Benedict’s to Fleury, and Scholastica’s eventually to Le Mans.