My journal entry for November 16, 2026.

Maria writes more on seeing Cecilia in early Christian Rome: this idea hits hard because it challenges the notion that love is just about feelings or comfort. The text uses Cecilia as an example: she didn't force her husband Valerian to change through arguments or threats; she used the perfume of virtue. She became so radiant with goodness and peace that he was naturally drawn to match her level. It's a provocative take on influence, suggesting that your character is contagious. If you are messy, angry, or selfish, you drag your partner down. But if you cultivate patience, kindness, and faith, you act like a magnet for those same traits in others. It places a huge responsibility on the individual to be good not just for themselves, but as a tool to save their partner's soul.

This might sound intense or even old-fashioned, but it offers a practical solution to relationship stagnation. Most people stay in relationships out of habit or fear of being alone, often tolerating bad behavior because they think that's just how things are. This perspective argues that you should never settle for mediocrity in your partner if you have the power to help them rise. It turns marriage into a partnership for self-improvement rather than a trap. While not everyone will agree with the religious framing, the core message is powerful: true love isn't passive; it's an active effort to lift each other up, making the relationship stronger and more meaningful than just sharing a life together.

Would that I had known this, believed this, before my marriage, looking for, finding, in my partner the same outlook. In any case, I know it now. I know what love should be and despite the difficulties, I can still love, God help me...

I am *Anonymous*

The Notebooks 1944
July 23
The goodness of the Lord grants me a continuation of the vision.

I thus see the baptism of two brothers ' undoubtedly instructed by Pope Urban and Cecilia. I understand this because Valerian, on greeting Urban, says, "Now, therefore, since you have given me knowledge of this glorious Faith, while my Cecilia has given me its sweetness, open to me the door of Grace. May I belong to Christ so as to be like the angel that He has given to me as a wife and that has opened for me the heavenly ways on which I proceed, forgetting all of the past. Do not delay any longer, O Pontiff. I believe. And I am burning to confess it for the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord."

He says this in the presence of many Christians, who seem to be deeply moved and festive and who smile at the new Christian and at the happy Cecilia, who is holding his hand, standing between her husband and her brother-in-law and radiant with the joy of this hour.

The church in the catacomb is entirely decorated for the ceremony. I recognize pieces of fabric and precious cups which were in Valerian's house. They have clearly been donated for the occasion and as a beginning of the new Christians' life of charity.

Valerian and Tiburtius are dressed in white, without any adornment. Cecilia, too, is entirely in white and looks like a beautiful angel.

There is no real baptismal fount. At least in this catacomb there is not. There is a large, ornate basin resting on a low tripod. Perhaps it was originally for burning fragrances in some patrician household or an incense-burner. It now serves as a baptismal fount. The gold laminations lining the heavy silver of the basin with Greek frets and rosettes shine in the light of the numerous little lamps the Christians are holding.

Cecilia leads the two near the basin and remains at their side while Pope Urban, using one of the cups brought by Valerian, draws the holy water and sprinkles it on their heads, bending over the basin, and pronounces the formula for the sacrament. Cecilia weeps with joy, and I could not say exactly where she is looking, for her gaze, though resting tenderly on her redeemed husband, seems to be seeing further and smiling at what she alone observes.

There is no other ceremony. And this one ends with a

hymn and the Pontiffs blessing. Valerian, still with drops of water in his brown, curly hair, receives the fraternal kiss of the Christians and their congratulations on having received the Truth.

"I was incapable of so much -- I, an unhappy pagan shrouded in error. Every merit belongs to this sweet wife of mine. Her beauty and her grace seduced me as a man. But her faith and purity have seduced my spirit. I did not want to be unlike her, so as to be able to love and understand her even more. She has made me, wrathful and sensual, what you see: meek and pure, and I hope, with her help, to grow more And more in these ways. I now see you, an angel of virginal whiteness, the angel of my wife, and smile at you because you smile at me. I now see you, angelic splendor...! The joy of contemplating you is quite superior to all the harshness of martyrdom. Cecilia, holy woman, prepare me for it. On this stole I want to write the name of the Lamb with my blood."

The assembly dissolves, and the Christians return to their homes.

Valerian's reveals many changes. There is still a wealth of statues and furniture, but already greatly reduced and, above all, more modest. The lararium and braziers for incense in front of the gods are gone. The more immodest statues have been replaced with other pieces which, since they are representations of festive children or animals, satisfy the eye, but do not offend a sense of decency. It is a Christian house.

In the garden many poor people have gathered, and the neo-Christians distribute food and bags with alms. There are no longer slaves in the house, but free, happy servants.

Cecilia passes by, smiling and blissful, and I later see her sit down between her husband and brother-in-law and read them sacred passages and answer their questions. And then, at Valerian's request, she sings some hymns which her husband must like very much. I understand why she is the patron saint of music. Her voice is supple and harmonious, and her hands glide swiftly over the cithara or lyre, as the case may be, drawing out chords like pearls falling on thin crystal and arpeggios worthy of the throat of a lark.

And I see no more, for the vision ceases with this harmony.

I then find Cecilia alone and understand that she is already persecuted by Roman law.

The house appears to be devastated, stripped of all that was wealth. But this could also be the work of the Christian spouses. The disorder, however, leads one to think that the persecutors have entered with violence and wrath and rummaged through and ransacked everything.

Cecilia is in a vast, half-bare hall and is praying fervently. She is weeping, but without despair. A weeping occasioned by a Christian pain to which supernatural comfort is also fused.

Some people enter. "Peace be with you, Cecilia," says a man about fifty years old, filled with dignity.

"Peace be with you, brother. My husband...

"His body is resting in peace, and his soul is rejoicing in God. The blood of the martyr – or, rather, of the martyrs -- has risen like incense to the throne of the Lamb, joined to that of the converted persecutor. We were not able to bring you the relies so as not to let them fall into the hands of the profaners."

"It is not necessary. my crown is already descending. I shall soon be where my husband is. Pray, brothers, for my soul. And go. This house is no longer safe. Act so as not to fall amidst the claws of the wolves so that the flock of Christ will not be without shepherds. You will know when it is the time to come, for me. Peace be with you, brothers."

From this I intuit that Cecilia was already in a state of arrest. I don't know why she has been left in her house, but she is already a prisoner, virtually.

The virgin prays, enveloped in a very bright luminosity, and while some tears fall from her eyes, her lips open in a heavenly smile. It is a very beautiful contrast in which human pain is seen to be fused to supernatural rejoicing.

I am spared the scene of the martyrdom. I find Cecilia again in a kind of tower -- I say this because the environment is circular, like a tower. An environment that is not large and is rather low, or at least it seems so from the mist of vapor filling it and, particularly above, forming a cloud which keeps me from

seeing clearly. She is alone now as well. Already exhausted, but not yet in the pose in which she has been immortalized in Maderno's statue (I think it was).

She is on her side as if she were sleeping. Her legs are slightly bent; her arms, crossed over her chest; her eyes, closed; a slight gasping in her respiration. Her cyanotic lips are slightly moving. She is certainly praying. Her head rests on the mass of disheveled hair on a silk cushion. Blood is not visible. It has drained off through the holes in the floor, which is entirely perforated, like a sieve. Only towards her head does the white marble display reddish rings at every hole, as if these holes were tinged on the inside with red-lead paint.

Cecilia does not moan or weep. She prays. I get the impression that she fell like this when she was wounded and has remained like this, perhaps because she was unable to raise her head, especially her neck, with her cut nerves. But life withstands. When she feels her life is about to flee, she makes a superhuman effort to move and get on her knees. But she manages only to make a half turn and fall in the position in which we see her, involving both her head and arms, on which she propped herself to no avail, and which slid on the shiny marble without supporting her bust. In the place where the head previously was there appears a red stain of fresh blood, and her hair on that side of the wound is like a skein of purple threads, soaked in blood as they are.

The saint dies without tremors in a final act of faith performed with her fingers for her mouth, which can no longer speak. I do not see the expression on her face because it is against the ground. But she certainly died with a smile.

Jesus says:

"Faith is a power which carries one away, and purity is a seductive song. You have seen the miracle.

"Marriage should be a school, not of corruption, but of elevation. Do not be inferior to the beasts, that do not corrupt the action of procreation with useless lusts. Marriage is a sacrament. As such, it is, and must remain, holy in order not to become sacrilegious. But even if it were not a sacrament, it is always the most

solemn act in human life, whose fruits almost put you on a par with the Creator of lives, and as such it should at least be contained in a healthy human morality. If it is not like this, it becomes offensive and lustful.

"It is rare to find two who love one another in a holy way from the outset, for society is too corrupt. But marriage is mutual elevation. It must be this. The better spouses should be a source of elevation and not limit themselves to being good, but work so that their husband or wife will arrive at goodness.

"There is a sentence in the Song of Songs which explains the gentle power of virtue: 'Draw me to yourself! Behind you we shall run in the fragrance of your perfume.'

"The perfume of virtue. Cecilia used nothing else. She did not go to Valerian with threats and haughtiness. Like a bride to be presented to a king, she went steeped in her merits, as in many sweet-smelling oils. And with them she carried Valerian to goodness.

"'Draw me to Yourself,' she said to Me throughout her life, and especially in the hour when she went to her marriage. Lost in Me, she was no longer anything but a part of Christ. And as in the fragment of a Host Christ is entirely present, so I was present in this virgin, working and sanctifying, as if I had presented

Myself again along the ways of the world.

"'Draw me to Yourself, so that Valerian will feel You through me, and *we (this is the true love of a wife)* shall run behind You.' She does not limit herself to saying, 'And I shall run behind You because I can no longer live without feeling You.' But she wants her husband to run to God together with her because he, too, has a holy yearning for the fragrance of Christ.

"And she succeeds. Like a captain on a ship assailed by breakers -- the world -- she saves her dearest ones and is the last to leave the ship, only when the harbor of peace is already open for them. The task is then finished. It only remains to continue to bear witness to one's faith, beyond life.

"There is no more need for weeping. It involved loving concern for the two going to martyrdom, who, as human beings, could be tempted to abjure. Now that they are saints in God, there

is no more weeping. Peace, prayer, and a cry, the mute cry of faith: 'I believe in the Triune God.'

"When one lives by faith, one dies with the splendor of faith in one's heart and on one's lips. When one lives by purity, one converts without many words. The fragrance of the virtues makes the world turn to notice. Not all are converted. But the best in the world are. And this is enough.

"When men's actions become known, it will be seen that the virtues of the saints scattered over the earth have benefited sanctification more than high-sounding preaching. The saints: those who love God."