April 3

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Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769) witness

During the night between April 2 and 3, 1769, Gerhard Tersteegen, a witness to the Gospel, died in voluntary solitude.
Gerhard was born in Moers, Germany, into a family of the Reformed tradition. At the age of twenty he began to sense his vocation to live in solitude at the margins of society, and he realized that only an intense spiritual life could fill the empty space that had appeared in his existence.
Influenced by the strongly biblical formation that had been part of his Protestant upbringing, as well as by the writings of the medieval mystics, Tersteegen began to lead a life that was similar in many ways to monasticism. He wrote a brief rule to help him integrate his work as a weaver into a daily schedule that also allowed him time for study and prayer, and he was soon joined by a friend who asked to live a celibate life of fellowship with him. Tersteegen saw this life of fellowship as a form of hiddenness in Christ in accordance with New Testament teachings on Christian life.
As the years passed, Tersteegen grew in discernment and began to share his gifts with many people, who wrote to him or came in person to receive spiritual guidance.
Aware that there was a strong need for religious renewal in Germany and the Netherlands, Gerhard decided to give up some of his time in solitude in exchange for a ministry of itinerant preaching. He alternated preaching and solitude for the rest of his life, and during his travels he helped many people create 'pilgrims' houses,' small communities of work and prayer similar to the one he himself had founded.
The evangelical purity of Tersteegen's experiential theology and preaching influenced Kierkegaard, Bultmann and Barth, and Bonhoeffer found great comfort in his poetry.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (25 baramhat/maggabit):
Onesiphorus (1st cent.), one of the 70 disciples (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Gerhard Tersteegen, witness to the faith in Rhineland

MARONITES:
Sistus I (2nd cent.), pope

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Nicetas of Medikion (d. 824), igumen and confessor