

Prayer during the night

Many people find it difficult to sleep through the night. Sometimes, this is the result of prolonged and painful medical conditions. The Rev. Donald Eadie, who suffers from sleepless nights because of a long-term degenerative illness, was introduced to the idea and practice of Prayer during the Night by Sandy Ryrie. who offered the following meditation as a way of understanding the potential of prayer in the night:

While darkness covers the earth, and all the world sleeps, we open our hearts to the mysteries of God.

In this time of no-day, between the close of yesterday and the dawn of to-morrow, when sights and sounds and activity have ceased, we seek the deep but dazzling darkness of God.

In the softness of the night, we rejoice in the mystery of presence, the nearness that dwells in silence, the enveloping serenity of God.

We remember the dark places of the earth that are haunts of violence, the situations of disaster, calamity and human distress, the dwellings of squalor, deprivation and want.

For ourselves and for all we seek God's protection, from the fears and terrors of the night, the pestilence that stalks in darkness, the prowling evil that devours and corrupts.

We hold before God those who lie awake in fear, anxiety, pain or grief, those who work through the night in service of others, those who to-night go down into death. We unite ourselves with those kindred spirits who share with us in the prayers of the night, who meditate upon God in the night watches, who keep solitary vigil in the hours of darkness.

In the depths of the night we rejoice in the silent praise of all creation, the deep unspoken adoration offered by earth and heaven, to the mystery of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Living God, united with kindred spirits in earth and heaven, we keep our nightly vigil. Remember, O Lord, the dark places of the earth that are haunts of violence; comfort those who lie awake in distress; protect us all from the fears and terrors of the night; deliver us from the evil that corrupts our hearts; and keep us united in your presence with all who stand by night before the dark mysteries of your presence.

The 2:0 am Vigil

Some of us inhabit 'the 2 am vigil,' that period of the dark night when we are at our lowest, most lonely, when our imaginations become twisted and distorted, when our thoughts tumble like a waterfall, when pain in the body and soul overwhelms, when the will to carry on and on diminishes. Our strategies to traverse these scary terrains vary. We could however help each other more.

Jo was born with cerebral palsy. She was in a wheel chair and communicated through a small light pointer attached to her head which beams onto a qwerty keyboard on her lap.

In a conversation among friends who also inhabit the 2:0 am vigil Jo listened intently, then indicated her wish to contribute. She spelt out two words: 'Offer it' and that was all. Her husband John asked: 'Is that it? Can you say more?' After a pause Jo spelt out two more words: 'Toward God,' and with no further explanation. And this is among those things which Jo taught us. She was not asking God to remove us from our reality but rather that we offer our experience of body and soul, our experience of chaos and disorder toward God.

We are learning not only to offer toward God our physical and soul pain, our anxiety and fear, we may also offer our 'stuff,' what we are ashamed of, our resentments and anger, our projections and disappointments, our messed up relationships.

And more- we are learning that we are being offered God's very self within everything that we find so hard to bear, within what we find so difficult to accept about ourselves. God does not remove us from our reality but rather transforms the way we live through it all.

Donald Eadie

Some practical advice for those who cannot sleep

- Look back into the day that is closing: what are the three things for which I am grateful? Savour them, give thanks for them.
- Listen for the birds that sing while it is yet dark.
- In the darkness go slowly, consent to it but don't wallow in it, know it as a place of germination and growth.
- Remember the light.
- Take an outstretched hand if you find one.
- Exercise unused senses.
- Find the path by walking it, practice trust.
- Wait for dawn.

Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

Reflections which you can use

An empty chair

Anthony de Mello writes of a priest who went to visit a patient in his home. 'He noticed an empty chair at the patient's bedside and asked what it was doing there.

The patient said, 'I had placed Jesus on that chair and was talking to him before you arrived ...For years I found it extremely difficult to pray until a friend explained to me that prayer was talking to Jesus. He told me to place an empty chair nearby, to imagine Jesus sitting on that chair and to speak with him and listen to what he says to me in reply.' The following exercise may at first seem childish but may help. Imagine you see Jesus sitting close to you. In doing so you are putting your imagination at the service of your faith: Jesus isn't here in the way you are imagining him, but he certainly is here and your imagination helps to make you aware of this.

Now speak to Jesus...if no one is around, speak out in a soft voice. Listen to what Jesus is saying to you in reply—or what you imagine him to say.'

Anthony de Mello Sadhana – A Way to God , (Gujarat Sahitya Prakash Anand, India) from an article in the Epworth Review by Donald Eadie

The Other

There are nights that are so still that I can hear the small owl calling far off, and a fox barking miles away. It is then that I lie in the lean hours awake, listening to the swell born somewhere in the Atlantic rising and falling, rising and falling wave on wave on the long shore by the village, that is without light and companionless.

And the thought comes of that other being who is awake too, letting our prayers break on him, not like this for a few hours, but for days, years, for eternity.

R S Thomas

from 'Redeeming the Dream'

So to claim back the night is to claim darkness as a time for growth and transformation. It is to free darkness of its overtones of evil and sin and see it as potential richness, fertility, hidden growth and contemplation, as nature broods and contemplates in winter, seemingly inactive, yet preparing for the birthing of spring. It is in darkness that new vision is born.....But just as the 'work of winter' is indispensable, so the period of darkness has its own tools and activity. Although there is no comfort and even no real hope experienced for the future, and memories of the past bring no security, the process demands that we move forward, with anger, rage and grief our tools, the solidarity of support groups our resource, trust in the absent God our guide- to an alternative we have no name for, only yearning.

Mary Grey