

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

10th February 2021

Do you ever wake up in the night and struggle to go back to sleep? I'm not thinking here about the times when there is something troubling us or when we are in pain. They raise different issues. I'm talking about the times when we are awake but don't really know why. We probably all have our strategies for coping with such times but I suspect that many of us get up to make a hot drink and perhaps read. Nevertheless there's often a sense of frustration or even anxiety about not getting back to sleep.

Why not embrace that time positively instead and turn it into a time of prayer? There can be something very special about those night hours - the silence, the sense of being awake when others are not. We perhaps get a glimpse of it as we set off to Midnight Mass at Christmas when many people are settling down to bed - even more so as we come back from church. An early Christian document dating from the third century, suggests that the middle of the night is particularly a time when all creation stops for a moment to praise God. In the monastic tradition, the day's cycle of prayer starts with Vigils as early as 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning with the community getting up to pray the psalms and to keep watch in the darkness of the night praying for the protection and safety of the world.

The middle of the night is a good time to remember others who are awake and to pray for them. I find this prayer by St Augustine a helpful starting point, stopping to focus on each group in turn. It feels especially appropriate at this time of pandemic when so many people are ill in hospital or at home and others are anxious or afraid for their loved ones.

*Keep watch, O Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight,
and give your angels and saints charge over those who sleep.
Tend your sick ones, O Lord Christ;
rest your weary ones;
bless your dying ones;
soothe your suffering ones;
pity your afflicted ones;
shield your joyous ones;
and all, for your love's sake. Amen.*

The middle of the night can also be a good time to remember those people who work through the night caring for others, manning our emergency services, maintaining the essential services which we so easily take for granted or transporting goods so there is food in our shops in the morning. You can probably add to the list. Perhaps too we might pray for those whose work means that they need to rise early, that they may do so refreshed and ready for the day's tasks.

Then in due course, we can return to our beds and, hopefully, to sleep with a sense of gratitude for the gift of this special time in the silent watches of the night and knowing that elsewhere this hidden stream of prayer will be continuing.

With my love and prayers
Camilla

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