



**COMMUNITY OF
THE HOLY NAME**



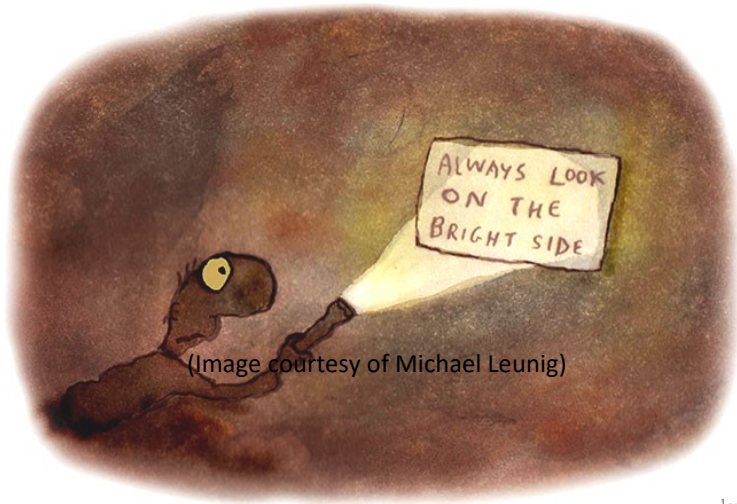
AID TO PRAYER AND REFLECTION:

Where is God in the darkness?

Last year, when I led a Prayer Day, I used the image of 'Light': God is Light and in him is no darkness at all. In Jesus' own words, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) Light is a true and beautiful image of the God we love and worship.

Let us reflect on the other side of light – darkness – and ask, "Where is God in the darkness?"

I came across a book recently, 'Learning to Walk in the Dark', written by an



(Image courtesy of Michael Leunig)

Leunig

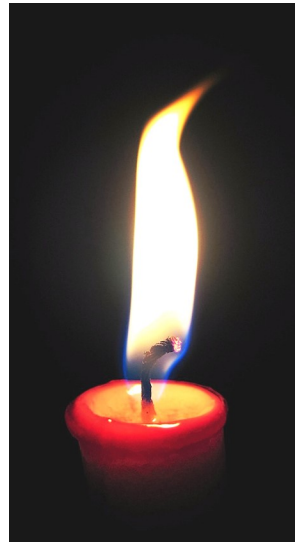
Episcopal priest, Barbara Brown Taylor*. As one commentator puts it, "She offers a different way of looking at darkness, not as something to be feared but as something to be embraced." She is a guide through a 'spirituality of the night-time', teaching us how to find God even in darkness, and giving us a way to let darkness teach us what we need to know.

The reality we know only too well is that life is not all 'sweetness and light' and we experience our full share of darkness – through grief, loss or sickness. Then there is the spiritual darkness, when our faith seems to fail us. These are the emotional and spiritual darkneses.



We may also have fear of physical darkness. After all, criminal activities often happen in the dark – robbery, murder, rape. Many a mother calls to her children, “Come inside! It’s getting dark!” She gathers her children inside the house, pulls the blinds and puts on all the lights so the family is safe and protected. Do we hear suspicious noises at night-time, when we are tucked up in bed with the light off? Children can imagine goblins or monsters live under the bed.

As adults, we usually don’t have the fear of darkness that small children so often do. In fact, when praying, we may seek out dark places, a dimly lit room with perhaps just a candle burning. We may shut our eyes, to shut out visual distractions in order to be more attentive to the Divine Presence.



If we look at the Bible references to the dark, in the story of Creation we read that there was darkness and God separated the light from the darkness. In the Psalms, darkness is often mentioned. “Clouds and darkness are round about him.” (97:2a) “The darkness is no darkness with you, but the night is as clear as the day.” (139:11)



In the New Testament, darkness is frequently mentioned. In John 1:4-5, we read about Jesus, ‘in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.’

In Matthew 10: 26-27 , Jesus says, “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.”

In 2 Peter 1:19, we read, ‘So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.



(Image courtesy of Michael Leunig)

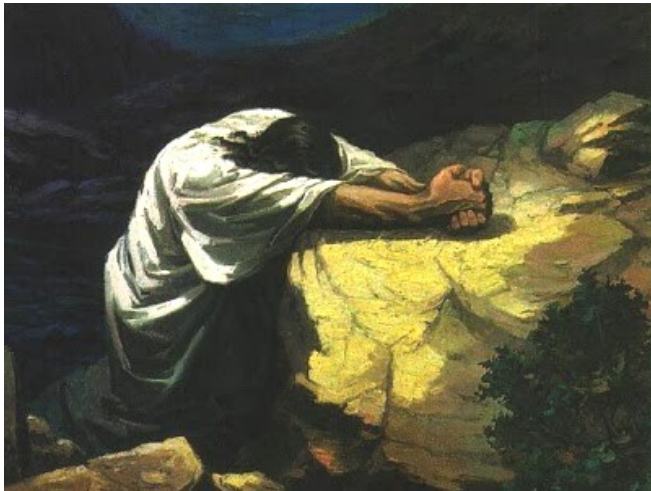
Even though Jesus is “the Light of the world”, he had many dark times. He was led to spend forty days and nights alone in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. He grieved in the savage death of his friend and mentor, John the Baptist. He endured desertion and rejection by his close followers, the suffering and humiliation of his trial and crucifixion, and most awful of all, His cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)



((Jesus tempted in the wilderness by James Tissot))

The account of his temptation in the wilderness is very detailed. The devil tempts Jesus three times and, each time, Jesus has an answer. See Luke 4:1-13. Let us go into that dark place. Here is Jesus, a young man filled with the Spirit, at last sensing the enormity of the task he is being called to. He is alone, day and night, in this wild place. The Tempter was clever: Jesus could do these things and, if he had, it could have been a way to show the world the greatness and power of God.

Can we imagine Jesus' struggle as he came to know and accept the will of God? In the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46), he must have been tempted not to go through that terrible death. To slip away in the dark from the garden would be easy for him, to find his way back to Galilee where he could safely continue to heal and teach and help many people.



We are told that the agony of that dark time was so extreme that great drops of blood fell from Jesus' forehead. And that was just the beginning of his suffering.

The devil did not win out. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." (v. 39b)

What about those times in our own lives when the Divine Presence is, or seems to be, totally absent? Perhaps even in times of sickness, grieving or depression. When, like Jesus, we too cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

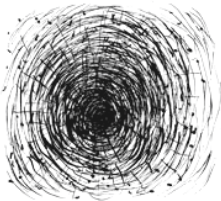
It is usually only in retrospect that we can understand and accept that what Barbara Brown Taylor says may be true, 'it is only in the dark that we can truly see' and, 'I have learned things in the dark, that I would never have learned in the light – so I learned that I need darkness as much as I need light'.

Recall a dark period in your life and identify, if you can, what God may have taught you in that time.

At the top of the tallest building in the world...



and inside the heart was the deepest pit in the world...



... sat the saddest man in the world:



and at the bottom of the pit was the blackest mud in the world...



and inside the man was the loneliest heart in the world



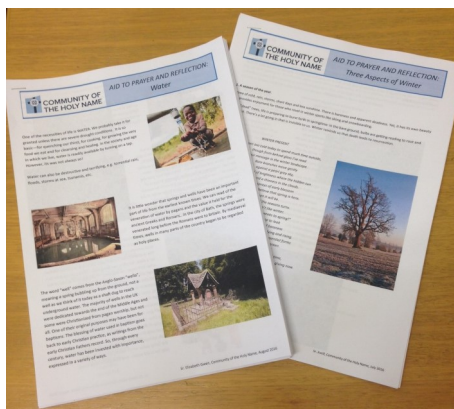
and in the mud lay the lightest, loveliest, tenderest, most beautiful, happy angel in the universe. So things weren't so bad, after all.



(Image courtesy of Michael Leunig)

The content of this booklet is from Sister Valmai, Community of the Holy Name., based on her work for the Prayer Day of September 2016.

It is part of a series of 'Aids to Prayer and Reflection' which have been developed from our monthly Prayer Days, for your personal use. You may pick up other Aids from Community House or simply download copies from our website.. We hope our readers find them helpful In their prayer lives.



You are welcome to join us for Days of Prayer and Reflection, which are held at the Community House, on the first Thursday of the month, from March till November, 10am until 3pm.

The Eucharist is celebrated at midday and there are opportunities to sit quietly, use our library and wander in the gardens. BYO lunch; tea and coffee are provided.

There is no charge but a donation is appreciated.

Community of the Holy Name, 40 Cavanagh Street, Cheltenham, Victoria 3192
Phone 03 9583 2087 Email chnmelb@bigpond.com www.chn.org.au