

A Blessing on Our Homes

DAY FIVE - BEDROOMS



Figure 1. Bedroom in Arles, Vincent Van Gogh 1889



Figure 2. Sleeping: Two Women and a Child, Henry Moore, 1940.

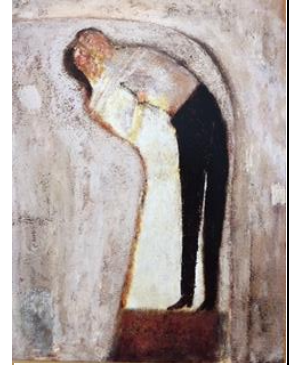


Figure 3. Lovers Entwined, Michael Rees.



Figure 4. Bedtime Prayers (unknown)



Figure 5. 2 am, Colin Smith 1984



Figure 6. The Doctor's Visit, Paul John Reid, 2000

SCRIPTURE: Jesus said: But when you pray, go away by yourself, all alone, and shut the door behind you and pray to your Father secretly, and your Father, who knows your secrets, will reward you.. (Mathew 6: 6)

Opening Prayer:

We give thanks for the gift that is home,
We bless the one who gave us life that we might experience love
We bless the ones with whom we live and share that love.
We bless this day and watch for the blessings it holds in wait.
We bless those we know and love now in their own homes.
May we always be truly grateful and ever-loving good Lord. Amen.

If any one room in a house deserves to be compared with the inner sanctum of the Temple in Jerusalem it would be the bedroom. This is the place privileged to witness the most intimate details of human life, including love making, birth, illness and death. And it is often party to our innermost thoughts. All of which justifies the fact that it is here that we turn to God in prayer.

Access to the Holy of Holies at the very heart of the Temple was strictly limited to those appointed to perform sacred rituals on behalf of the community. It was here that God was believed to dwell. Don't be offended if I remind you that Catholic sacramental theology considers a couple to be the ministers of the sacrament of marriage and this role extends to the bedroom. The union of a couple at its best has been compared to the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5: 29-32).

Of course, any holy place can be desecrated as can the human body, mind and soul when it is taken for granted, mocked or abused. The crimes we associate with this dimension of human experience do not qualify to enjoy the privilege of confidentiality. Of their nature they have defiled the Temple of the body and therefore cannot claim the privilege associated with the graceful, kindly and loving intimacy that our dignity deserves.

Returning then to the bedroom as a place that witnesses so many essential aspects of human life, it is not surprising that we sometimes retreat there to seek intimacy with God, as Jesus advised. A place where we do not need to put on a front, try to impress, or berate ourselves. We can stand metaphorically as well as physically naked, and NOT be ashamed. This gives meaning to Jesus' words that if we address God in the secrecy of our inner room we will be rewarded. And what might this reward be if it is ours alone to receive, surely something akin to a deeper contentment.

Contentment is the mood coursing through one of the Church's night prayers when we echo the words of Simeon, himself addressing God in the Temple: *Now Lord, let your servant go in peace, according to your promise, for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all peoples, the light of revelation for the gentiles and the glory of your people, Israel.*

Speaking of contentment, one human activity that helps us nurture contentment is sleep. The bedroom is first and foremost associated with sleep. The converse of this of course would be sleeping disorders, insomnia, nightmares, anxieties and fears. If we are troubled by such things then we

would do well to seek help where possible or adjust our bedtime routine and its build up to enhance the prospect of a decent night's sleep.

Then, if we do manage to get something approaching the blissful eight hours of sleep, and assuming we do not get kicked out for snoring, or, banished for some other misdemeanour; the bedroom is also the place of our waking. A time to greet the opportunities and blessings of a new day, even when they come disguised as challenges.

Hymn Verses:

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment,
Whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping,
And give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord,
At the end of the day.*

*Lord of all hopefulness,
Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like,
No cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking,
And give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord,
At the break of the day.*

Prayer for the Day

Here we acknowledge the intimacy
without which life would be devoid of love.
The intimacy of lovers,
The parents' bed invaded by boisterous children.
Here too we experience tender nursing when we are ill,
And reassurance as life ebbs to a close.
This then is a place to be embraced by God's love too,
To speak trustingly of our deepest desires and hurts
to the one in whom intimacy is our final destiny.
Knowing that we are heard not judged
Amen

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Notes on Artworks

Odds on our bedroom is perhaps more likely to be a mixture of personal items too important to share with others, more likely than the more open access rooms, to be a tad untidy, No wonder when our lives are so busy that we often leave in a hurry. It has to be said that Van Gogh's *Bedroom at Arles* (Figure 1) is rather tidy, if rustic, but then wouldn't you smarten it up a bit if someday it would hang on gallery walls. The great thing about it is that he painted in an era when artists were willing to celebrate the ordinary, the simple and the everyday.

Henry Moore, is better known for his distinctive and monumental sculptures, a good number of which, incidentally, represent small family groups in one solid mass (a good metaphor for families at their best). During the war he worked as an at home war artist documenting, in his drawings and paintings, the lived experience of civilians. Several drawings depict scenes in air raid shelters, of which *Sleeping Shelterers: Two Women and a Child*, (Figure 2) is one example.

No experience compares (so I'm led to believe) with truly mutual love expressed in the intimacies we associate with bedrooms, it is something deserving of delight, enjoyment and respect. The image of *Two Lovers Entwined* (Figure 3) captures the combined tenderness and passion of such moments.

At the opposite end of human emotion, is the anguish of a midnight call bringing unwelcome news that can alter life in an instant. Colin Smith's *2 am* (Figure 5) depicts such a moment with the shadowed darkness of the hour suggesting dark news and anguish.

Bedtime has long been associated with prayers. As children many of us were encouraged to spend a few moments reciting prayers most likely passed on over several generations. In recent times children have been encouraged to formulate their own prayers. Look at the two sisters in *Bedtime Prayers* (figure 4). It is a delightful scene. The older girl has evidently reached the point where her prayers have a degree of seriousness, she is oblivious to her younger sibling who has yet to pass through the stage of imitation. So, she half kneels, while her eyes wander to beneath the bed, where something much more interesting might, just might, be happening. Yet here, in exercising her imagination, a skill much better honed in children than in adults, she has potential to develop a deep spiritual life.

There comes a time for many as life draws to a close, when the bedroom becomes a different kind of sanctuary. But it need not always be traumatic. There are those like Simeon, who reach a point where they would be happy to let go. At this point listening becomes vital. Listening to what our elderly relative really desires. Laying aside at times, our own understandable reluctance to see them go. Sensitive and pastorally minded doctors and nurses sometimes pick up the signals quicker than we do (Figure 6). Our conversations can swerve what's really going on, denying the person whose opinion really matters at this moment, the opportunity to exercise autonomy of the will; when many of their physical, mental and emotional strength is ebbing away.



CRAFTY KIDS

Jesus gave some very helpful advice about praying, he reminded us that there are some things we want to speak to God about in private. Our bedroom can be a great place to do this. This is what Jesus Said:

When you pray, go away by yourself, all alone, and shut the door behind you and pray to your Father secretly, and your Father, who knows your secrets, will hear you. (Matthew 6: 6)

Some of the ideas you could begin today are:

1. Putting together a **Prayer Box** – find a handy box that you can use for some of the things that help you to pray. Things that remind you of happy days, pictures of the people you love, things you have picked up out and about in our beautiful world; like pebbles, shells, pressed flowers, pinecones, etc... Other things that can go in the box would be a set of rosary beads, a battery candle, any crosses, statues or prayer books and cards you have been given or collected. Try to find a small piece of coloured cloth. This can be used for displaying one or some of these things when you decide to have your own quiet prayer time. You might even find one of those egg timers a bit like an old-fashioned hourglass that lasts about three minutes, you could use this to help have short quiet moments. If you can decorate the box all the better.

2. Make your own **Book of Prayers**. These can be prayers that you write yourself, prayers that you have learned or prayer cards that you glue in. This book could become a bit of a diary as well in which you write a little bit about the things you pray for. Like with the Prayer Box, this will be a special book so decorate it as colourfully as you like.

3. If you stay in a hotel you often see door hangers with words like “Do Not Disturb” written on them, so how about making a **Prayer Time Door Hanger** of your own that you can hang on the door handle or perhaps use blue-tac. It can have words like “*Quiet Please*” on it as a message to other people that this is your prayer time. There is a template for a door hanger on the parish website, or if you are making a sign then it can be just as you want to make it.