

A Blessing on Our Homes



Figure 1 Untitled Phyllis Milne 1986

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Introduction

Responding to the Times

For the first time in living memory the Corvid 19 Pandemic has required most of us to stay home as much as we can. Others are facing even stricter restrictions on movement. Instead of allowing familiarity with these four walls to breed contempt for the most expensive investment or highest budget item we have it seems a good moment to renew our appreciation of the gifts that home represents, the memories it evokes and the joys it imparts.

Responding with Blessings

These prayer services invite a Blessing on areas of the home in turn. Each day a different place is given the spotlight. After a scripture reading and opening prayer the reflection offers prompts for the day's prayer and pondering. Much more important however, will be any personal and family memories and insights that come to mind. The reflection is followed by a verse from a hymn then a blessing prayer, finishing with an exclamation of praise.

Symbols of Appreciation

It would be a good thing if we could **make each place special for a day. This can be done by placing a symbol there** to be moved day by day to its new location. This could be a candle (careful if there are children in the house), a family photo, a significant ornament or statue, a cross, a vase of flowers etc... This will help to bring your attention to that place each time you pass or enter.

It's Our Home Too

Children have their own contribution to offer in creating the unique atmosphere of each home. Therefore, suggestions are included reflecting each theme under the title **Crafty Kids**. Hopefully, these will encourage children to explore some aspect of the theme of each day.

Artists' Responses

An additional feature will be selected artworks some of which are referenced in the reflection material others are offered simply to invite further thoughts and responses to the theme of each day. Notes on the artworks are also provided with some information and further pointers for reflection.

1. Entrance

Scripture Reading: Jesus said: *When you enter a house, greet it; and if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it.* (Matthew 10: 13)

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 at 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.**

Reflection: For the time being this might seem like a prison door, but even here some people who really care for us might be leaving the supplies we need to sustain our lives (as someone who receives a readymade meal every Saturday I can testify how good this feels). Here is a place for comings and goings, welcomes and farewells. We bring across the threshold those things that improve and sustain our lives and remove the things that we no longer need and free ourselves of any rubbish. Sometimes these activities are routine but some of them are full of significance. So, it's worth remembering some of the comings and goings. What opening the door and coming in or closing it behind us at the end of the day might mean. Think of the people who have made unexpected but welcome visits. Those invited to share the hospitality of our home. Then there are the visitors whose presence is required by illness, frailty, or other need bringing us comfort, relief and companionship.

Recall also, the days that leaving has been full of anticipation, a holiday, a wedding, a party, etc... How about our feelings when we set out for church, do we give any thought to the fact that those who choose to take part in the Mass do so not only for themselves but as representatives of the neighbourhood. For now, of course, these prayers are ours to pray at home. But let's look forward to when we have an opportunity to meet once again for the gift of Eucharist.

Either now or perhaps better still later in the day or the evening, you might like to look at the pictures in the light of today's prayer focus. Allow them to help you ponder a little more deeply on the thoughts arising from today's focus. There are some short notes at the end of this article to give a little background.

Hymn Verse

*Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions.
All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome, in this place.*

(Marty Haugen © GIA Publications)

Blessing Prayer

May the door of this home
And the door of my/our heart(s)
Always be open to welcome
Both friend and stranger. Amen

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

Think of the different members of your family and the ways they help you feel at home in your house or apartment. Remember special times when you come through the door and someone says hello, or gives you a hug saying "*Welcome Home, I hope you had a nice day at school*" or "*Did you enjoy playing with your friends?*", or "*Would you like a drink and a biscuit?*" Or perhaps they help you feel better when you come home sad, upset or angry. Christians believe that we all bring Jesus with us wherever we go. When we help each other feel safe,

or understood and cared for we are being kind to Jesus who told us: “*If you do one little thing for one of my children you do it for me*”. Feeling welcome and safe is one of the best things about a happy home, it’s something we can all help come true.

Something we do when Christmas is coming is put out a sign asking: “Santa to Stop Here!”, how about drawing a picture or making a model of your house with a big “WELCOME JESUS” mat in front of the door.

Artworks



Figure 1. Contemporary artist and craftsman Nicholas Mynheer created this new doorway for the 13th *ambry* in Iffley Church Oxford in 2011. An ambry is more known by Catholics as the tabernacle, itself a word recalling the tents in which the ark of the Covenant was sheltered as the People of Israel journeyed through the desert. In a style reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts movement the ambry has a simple dignity using wooden doors quietly guarded by two 21st-century angels. Light shines from within, indicating that the bread and wine of the Eucharist lie

ready for service. This work reflects Nicholas Mynheer’s mystical approach to art and theology executed with characteristic simplicity.

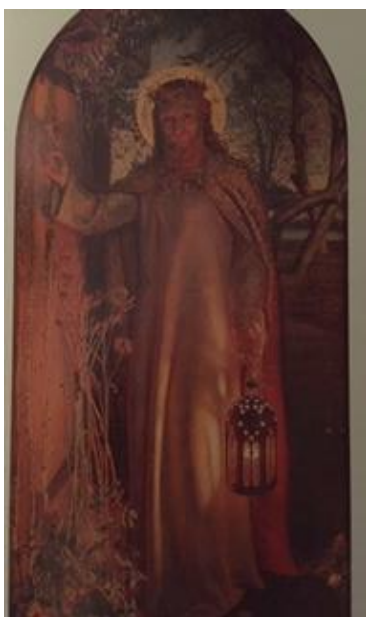


Figure 2. One of the most recognisable religious images of the Victorian era, *The Light of the World*, by William Holman Hunt is to be found at Keeble College in Oxford. In the Book of Revelation we read “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” and this painting imagines the door as the soul of a Christian that has been so firmly shut for a long time that brambles have grown up around it. But still he waits, gently tapping with lantern at the ready.



Figure 3. **Entrance of Saint John Henry Newman Church, Warrington** (David Horne, Hume Upright Architects 2010) is consistent with the intention of offering a place bathed in light. The doors can be opened wide to encourage visitors to know they are welcome. Some people find it difficult to cross the threshold of a church so these doors are trying to help people make that last step. But we also include those who are reluctant for we recognise the sincerity of their hesitation. For as the psalmist says: I prefer the threshold of the house of God to the dwellings of the ungodly

(Psalm 84: 10)



Figure 4. **Tabernacle Doors Saint John Henry Newman Church, Warrington** (Angela Godfrey 2010) metal cast presenting texts from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel:

For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

2. Living Area

Scripture Reading

Jesus said: *Make your home in me as I make mine in you.* (John 15: 4)

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.

Reflection

As a child I can remember we had the luxury of two living rooms, one was called the 'front room', that's where our first TV was, and we children were expected to keep to this room. The 'lounge' was different; it was reserved for grown-ups and 'special guests' and was kitted out with the very best 1970's look. On those rare occasions we were admitted we had to wear our slippers. A living room represents relaxation, a safe space where we can be ourselves, a place we have to negotiate with other members of the family about what to watch, who sits where, or these days, whether it's permitted to bury our heads in smart phones.

It's also the place where visitors gain access for a while to the inner sanctum of the family. Tea is served (best china if the guest is regarded as worthy of such an honour). Or if this is a living room kitted out with its own bar or cocktail cabinet, something else might be offered.

At its best our living room lives up to its name as a place where we talk, share news, share troubles, resolve matters of disagreement or sit contentedly in that homely silence where being together is enough.

It might be called the 'living' room but in some cultures, it can become a temporary shrine for the dead when the body of a deceased family member spends the last night before the funeral. The coffin's unavoidable presence intrudes on one kind of normality to replace it with another as we remind one another of our loss and our blessings. As we recall such memories they draw

out tears and laughter in equal measure, bestowing as if by magic the reassurance we all need that death is not the end.

Even if we don't follow this ritual the living room remains a place in which our memories and relationships are enshrined in picture frames. The "Family Gallery" is a particularly egalitarian feature of a living room allowing the generations exist side by side. For along with images of generations past hang celebratory photos of more recent generations (maybe including a professionally taken family portrait photograph), a holiday snap or a graduation pose, images that remind us of our experiences, achievements and our validate our pride. Good things to cherish.

Hymn Verse

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And as symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.
All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome, in this place.

(Marty Haugen © GIA Publications)

Blessing Prayer

Here in this place,
may we know that we are truly valued,
Our thoughts respected and our memories shared.
Here may we open our hearts and minds
To listen and to learn, to own our mistakes
And gain forgiveness.
So we bless the one who calls us his children,
We bless the ones who bear Christ's name
We bless those who share our stories. Amen

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

Saint Matthew thought it was important to let us know the names of Jesus' ancestors. The family that Saint Joseph was part of was rather famous because it included a very famous person who first became known as a boy when he stood up to someone much bigger than him who was threatening everyone. This boy later became King David and although he lived a long time before Jesus his family were always proud of him.

If you go into some old churches you might see a big window with a picture of a tree that starts at the bottom with King David's father whose name was Jesse. The tree grows from the side of Jesse and in its branches there are pictures of King David and of some of the other ancestors of Jesus and in the very middle or at the top comes a picture of Jesus being held by his mother Mary. These windows or sometimes paintings on walls are known as a Jesse Tree. It's the Family Tree of Jesus.

So how about making your own Family Tree with a trunk and lots of big sturdy branches, enough to draw a picture or put a photograph of the people in your family. Like the Jesse Tree it can include people from the past. This becomes your very own Family Tree.

Artworks



Figure 1. *Monsieur, Madam et le chien* (1893) by Toulouse-Lautrec could be set in a public lounge as there are more people present than the main two characters and their dog. But it might easily be a domestic scene with no obvious communication between the man and the woman who cradles the dog in her lap.



Figure 2. Next comes a piece by Bridget MacDonald who presents us with a classic late 20th century image of family, hence the title, *Family Group* (1980-88). Two adults and two children, but how did the young boy acquire the armchair? Who is left holding the baby? Has the man struggled to let go of the 1970's?



Figure 3. Narthex Saint John Henry Newman Church Warrington Parish life requires more than the annual and weekly cycle of worship with its engrossing revisiting of the mysteries of Christ's life, death and resurrection. The church that gathers, are the people who accept or at least intuit that the significance and value of Christ's proclamation of God's kingdom is

also to be found in the everyday exchanges and relationships of human community. We belong with and for one another. Sometimes our needs are profound, complicated, even troubling, and a community of faith at its best offers at least some degree of comfort, solidarity and support; but we also receive more subtly from each other in the social, charitable, devotional and educational encounters that also form part of parish life.



Figure 4. Janet and Jacob by Winifred Nicholson (1929) poses fewer questions than the first two pieces. Many of us have been a Janet and Jacob; as child being held and entertained with a story and as an adult taking pleasure in such moments of one to one intimacy, our minds wandering beyond the story on the page and imagining the future story yet to unfold in a life just starting out.

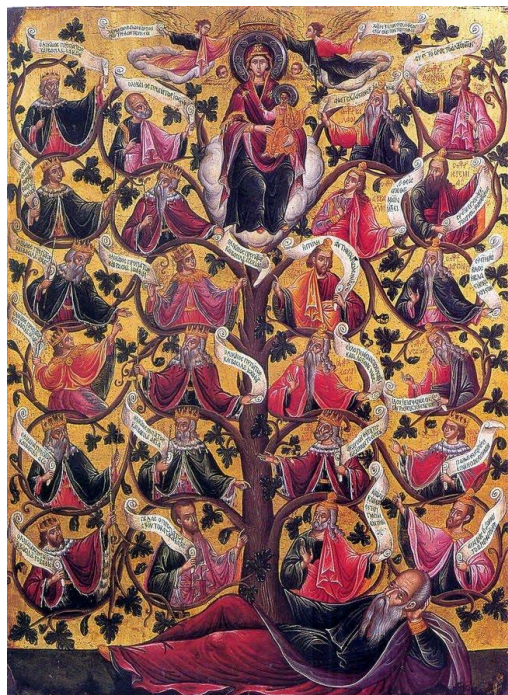


Figure 5. Jesse Tree Location and Artist Unknown - Sorry to say I have no information to provide on the image of a Jesse Tree however it acts as a good example of the type.

3. Kitchen

Scripture Reading

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food. (Isaiah 25: 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.

Reflection

I am not the only priest who asked his family to bring forward the chalice and paten (cup and plate) at the Mass of ordination; and on this occasion it was my Mum and one of my aunties. Looking back and specifically looking at the William Scott painting *Still Life on a Black Table*, (Figure 3.) the symbolism of this gesture becomes more meaningful and transparent. Both women fed me. One daily, as she developed her culinary repertoire, the other when we went to visit our cousins for “Sunday Tea”, invariably a ham salad.

Abstract painting is not to everyone’s taste and while it is not entirely abstract Scott’s painting is getting there. For me abstraction permits us to see deeper than the surface. In this picture everyday kitchen utensils are arranged on a table as the chalice and paten I received all those years ago almost daily rest on the altar.

Jesus is a master of abstraction. He chose a commonplace food and commonplace drink to focus our attention on what they become, a real presence of God’s banquet. Of course, we associate banquets with rich, expensive and exotic food and drink in plentiful supply. A banquet often separates the servers from the served. Jesus reverses this expectation, expands the guest list, chooses not to be served but to serve and in doing so

fulfils Isaiah's prophecy in a manner Isaiah may not even himself have envisioned. That said it would be wrong to take away the subversive element in Isaiah of a God who takes it upon them to prepare food for us.

So, it's hats off to those who undertake the role of preparing and presenting our food. And the kitchen is the shrine in which their devotions are performed.

Hymn Verse

Let us build a house
Where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground,
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus
Is revealed in time and space.
As we share in Christ the feast that feeds us.
*All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome, in this place.*
(Marty Haugen © GIA Publications)

Blessing Prayer

Here we acknowledge the hidden love
That blesses every day
The love that needs hands
which sometimes pay the price
That comes with toil
and exposure to abrasive substances.
Here we recognise and bless too
Those who farm, grow, harvest,
Process and transport the food; here transformed
To provide nourishment in this home. Amen

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

It is not surprising that we sometimes think that the way people show us that they love us is by giving us presents. At special times like Christmas and Birthdays people give presents to the people they love. But love is not only shown on two days a year. Real love is shown to us every day, but we don't always realise it straight away. Real love is when people do lots of very ordinary things but things that make our lives healthy and happy. One of the most important things is food. So, the people who feed us are very special. Lots of loving happens in kitchens but even the people doing the loving don't always realise it. They just get on with things and often it is just another chore like tidying up, shopping and washing clothes. So, it is a good idea every so often to let those who do these things of us know that we appreciate it. How about taking over in the kitchen sometimes, helping a little with some of the jobs that need to be done. Once you get started you sometimes find out that it isn't all that bad, especially when we share the chores with the people we love.

Another suggestion would be to make some biscuits in the shape of a heart or decorate them to look like hearts so we can give them to the other people in our family. This might be something we have to let the grown-ups join in. We will call them *Agape Biscuits*. *Agape* is a word from the Greek language. It is a word used to talk about this kind of love, the love that really cares and shares things.

The idea is to use the recipe on the BBC Good Food Website and to either shape the biscuits into hearts or decorate them afterwards with heart shaped icing.

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/easiest-ever-biscuits>

When the biscuits are ready get everyone together and talk about the helpful things, we do for each other and say thank you, then share the biscuits.



Artworks

Figure 1. Diego Velazquez (1599-1660) interprets the *Kitchen Scene with Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* as many of us

would. Martha is preparing food in the kitchen while her sister Mary sits attentively at the feet of Jesus. But what are the other characters doing? Well Martha's companion is perhaps easier to read. The giveaway is a finger pointing accusatively in the direction of Mary. So, both women in the kitchen are stirring. Martha has the laudable intention of providing food for her friend and house guest. But perhaps she paid too much heed to her companion provoking Jesus to invite her to set aside worry and fretting. He is not so unappreciative of her care to imply that her efforts in the kitchen will pass without appreciation. But for now, he is impressed by Mary's ability to focus her attention on their guest, another valued act of hospitality.



Figure 3. *In many a household the kitchen also performs the task of a laundry, so it's appropriate to consider the **Woman Ironing** in Edward Degas' painting. She comes across as someone who might be discovering that such mundane tasks can be commandeered as opportunities to reflect contemplatively on other things or completed as a silent gesture of love.*

Figure 3. William Scott's *Still Life on a Black Table II* (1956) and the accompanying photograph of my chalice and paten have already been commented on.



4. Dining Area

Scripture Reading

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:2)

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.

Reflection

A strange one this, because there has been something of a move away from dining rooms in recent times. The recognition of the kitchen as the hub for family togetherness has to some extent superseded the living room. And there is another phenomenon called grazing or snacking. For a variety of reasons there seem fewer occasions when a household will gather at the same time around the family table to partake of one menu. But, come Christmas and perhaps Easter and other "special occasions" we "make the effort."

Has something been lost? I only ask the question. The answer can only be discovered within the context of each family or household. Many external factors prevent family meals, not least of which is the move away from a 9-5 working day. A shared meal has become even more a gesture of determined togetherness. This is something positive. Making a conscious effort to spend time over the sharing of a meal is one of our primal bonding rituals. For this reason, different cultures, religions and tribes adopted formal gestures, prayers, table settings and "manners" (now there's a word I haven't heard used in a long time). Such things enhance any meal, turning it into a piece of performance art in which everyone has a role to play.

The experience of a genuinely shared meal, engaging in meaningful conversation, storytelling and banter with loved ones, is a blessing in itself; a grace within meals as it were. Such meals become the stuff of memory and strengthen our bonds of affection.

Where such meals take place is of only secondary importance. A dedicated dining room allows for one kind of meal with greater formalities perhaps, or, sitting around a 'kitchen island' (where did that come from?) for a Saturday brunch. Personally, many of my happiest meals have been picnics, so much so that we even had an indoor picnic for my 50th birthday.

As Christians we follow one who revealed a great deal about God's priorities in the context of meals. One who fully endorsed the practice of welcoming the stranger; especially one who has not the means to reciprocate: Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14: 12-14)

No wonder, then, that a meal became heart of Christian worship, a bonding of God's people in Christ here on earth and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

Hymn Verse

No gifts have we to offer for all thy love imparts
But that which thou desirest,
our humble thankful hearts!
All good gifts around us Are sent from Heaven above.
So, thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord for all his love.

Blessing Prayer

Here we acknowledge the celebration of love
That blesses each, and every day
The love that nourishes both body and soul.
Here we serve each other, share our stories,
Deepen our bonds, and fashion memories.
So, thank you God, for this home,

Bless too those without the security of
Knowing how their next meal will come.
May we never receive from this table,
Without expressing gratitude for your gifts. Amen

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

Jesus said: Where two or three of my followers are together, I am with them. So, when we share a meal with our family it is always good to remind ourselves that Jesus is with us. Not spying on us but gently reminding us that it is good to be alive, it is good to be loved and it is good to be cared for by each other. One way we do this is by praying a prayer before we eat. We call this prayer Grace Before Meals.

Sometimes we pray the words together, but it is also a good thing sometimes for one person to lead. choosing which prayer to pray can be tricky. So how about we make a Blessing Our Meals Dice. There is a template for this on the FAMILY CHURCH page of the parish website. Another idea would be to make our own prayer card with a choice of six prayers we would like to use at our meals. Then we can throw an ordinary dice to pick the one to use before our meal begins.

Artworks



Figure 1. A young Henri Matisse starting out in his illustrious career painted *The Dinner Table*, 1896-7. Note the pride and precision of the maid adding the finishing touches to this formal table setting. She has a natural inner self-respect matched perhaps with real affection for those who will enjoy the pleasure in eating at her meticulously prepared table. Looking at the table itself invites us

to think of the times someone in our family has prepared a meal for us with great care and attention to detail. Perhaps we have discovered for ourselves the delight to be gained from presenting a well-prepared feast for others.



Figure 2. Marc Chagall spills the beans with his portrayal of his real-life household, where *Our Dining Room*, rather than being a sanctuary reserved for special occasions, is shown to be commandeered by all sorts of activities. All well and good, for a home is a home after all, not a palace, thank goodness. No need for affectation or pretence.

Yes, we can transform somewhere into

a banquet hall for special occasions, but families need space to be themselves and to interact freely.

Figure 3. None of which means we cannot use it for more sedate and restful moments such as having a cup of tea while playing a game, *Woman and Two Children*, William Scott.



Figure 4. 14th Century carved statue of *a beggar*. Part of a set telling of Saint Martin of Tours care for the poor). Those of us fortunate to have a roof over our heads, a place to relax, and interact with those we love, can never become entirely complacent. Misfortune can befall anyone, as demonstrated by the shameful presence of so many homeless people on our streets, and the inadequate accommodation endured by families. It is wise therefore to always remember this, and rather than criticising the Beggar, to sympathise as best we can, and support agencies dedicated to resolving the real-life issues that land people in such terrible circumstances. 14th Century carved statue of a beggar. Part of a set telling of Saint Martin of Tours care for the poor).



Figure 5. Carravagio's *Supper at Emmaus*. Sometimes it's the simplest, most familiar acts that capture our attention and cause us to wonder at the gift of life. Being in company with those we love while sharing a leisurely meal provides opportunities to observe each other without any acrimony, and simply appreciate what we have in one another. No wonder Jesus chose the context of meals as the optimal manner for his followers to discover the depth underlying the events of their lives, lived constantly under the gratuitous love of God. This surely struck the disciples as Jesus addressed them on their mournful walk to Emmaus and uplifted their hearts with the mere act of breaking bread.

5. Bedroom

Scripture Reading

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.

Reflection

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*

Blessing Prayer

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

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.

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). ***The Doctor's Visit*** Paul John Reid (2000). 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.

6. Bathroom

Scripture Reading

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1: 27)

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.

Reflection

My Mother's name is Veronica, so I have a personal interest in that name. And as Catholic Christians we recognize her as the woman who rushed out of the crowd to wipe Jesus's bloodied and sweaty face as he made his way to Calvary. According to legend the imprint of Christ's face was left on the cloth and retained as a relic.

The name itself is a Latin version of the name and is formed of two words: the Latin *vera* (true) and the Greek *eikona* (image). Strange that a woman called true icon should be the one that ends up possessing a precious image of the Christ. But that's how legends work. They invite us to consider that there are deeper meanings to some of the seemingly innocuous the events of human history. Legends employ characters like actors in a play, whose names sometimes signal the part they play as the story unfolds. Christopher is another example. His name means bearer of Christ. His story subverts the Greek myth of Atlas who bore the whole world on his shoulders. As Christopher carries his small charge across the river the weight becomes almost; but not quite unbearable. For this child bears the weight of all the world's sins and we are asked to play our part as Christopher did. Although we carry Christ within us rather than on our shoulders.

But returning to Veronica, Christian legend also identifies her as the woman suffering from a haemorrhage who approached Jesus in a crowd and reached out to touch his cloak. Jesus's response was to commend her faith saying: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed." (Mark 5: 34)

What's all this got to do with bathrooms? A very good question indeed. So, let's begin with Veronica's name. *True Icon* echoes the words used in the creation account. For God willed to create humanity as an image of the divine. There are no qualifications here, no criteria for deciding if one human being rather than another is more divine. So, when we look ourselves in the mirror God's true image reflects back at us. We are all Veronica's.

Our value is not measured by the way others see us. Not even by the way we see ourselves. But truth be told, we worry about these things. Or perhaps we throw in the towel (excuse the pun) and neglect our welfare, taking no interest at all in how we present ourselves or keep our body clean and healthy.

Perhaps it would help if we were to prioritize how we reflect God's image rather than some idealized, photoshopped image glaring out of a magazine. Nor is salvation to be discovered in the gym. None of which is to suggest that we cannot find a particular delight in taking exercise or how we dress, the tone of our skin and the brightness of our smile. I will never forget the joy a friend of mine expressed when after years of mediocre shoes for her size eight feet she finally chanced upon some beautiful pink shoes.

Hymn Verses

Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside,
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around
Through my sight and touch and
sound
In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you,
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps
show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow
In you, and you in me.
(John Bell and Graham Maule
©Wild Goose Worship)

Blessing Prayer

We bless the face we encounter each time we gaze into the mirror
Watching it change with the seasons of life
Rediscovering again and again our inner beauty and strength.
We bless the joy that is to be found in a smile, the wink of an eye.
And as we wash away all that clings to our bodies after an exerting day.
We bless the water that cleanses and restores us.
We bless too those who recognize our personal charm,
Those who pay us compliments and notice our new look.
Blessings to those who pass by too easily unnoticed.
We pray for the resurrection of the bodies that hide away
through shame or anxiety.
That they will bask in the warmth of our creator's first compliment,
You are beautiful. So be it for us all. Amen.

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

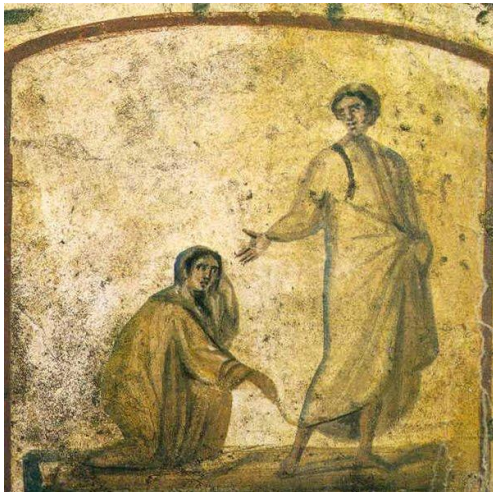
Crafty Kids

Mirrors can be fun. We get to pull funny faces to ourselves. We can take a close look at what is unique about us and what is similar to other members of the family. Have you worked out yet what colour your eyes are? Who else in the family has the same colour of eyes? This way we can begin to see some of the ways we look at bit like Mum and a bit like Dad, only the best bits of course. But we are also the children of God, we share his love, his kindness and his freedom from being influenced by false ideas and insults.

Many hurtful and unkind things can be said in school playgrounds and on social media. Sometimes we let these things have too much power over how we look at ourselves. At times like this it is extra important to remember what we learn from the Bible. The very first book of the Bible tells a story intended to underline some important things. First, whatever we look like, we are made in God's image. We are absolutely unique, a one off, and that's part of what God loves about us. Nothing anyone says can take that away from us.

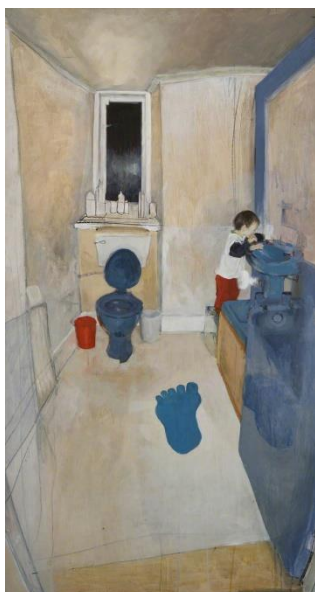
So, how about sending this message to everyone who uses the bathroom. We can make a small sign, not much bigger than a fridge magnet. We can put a smiley face on it or a message like: "You are perfect just as you are!" or "Say hello to God's Image!"

Artworks



If Veronica was the woman who approached Jesus in the midst of a crowd; (Figure 1 *Haemorrhissa, Woman with a Haemorrhage*. Early 4th century fresco in the Catacomb of Saints Marcellinus and Peter, Rome) then she surely had some bottle. Her affliction marked her out as unclean. No self-respecting woman suffering such a condition would leave the relative safety of her home. Hitherto she had complied perhaps; being messed about with quack remedies from charlatans. So, taking matters into her own hands, she sought out the one person who could see her true nature and potential. When Jesus commended her for her 'faith,' he was, I suggest, affirming her self-belief as much as her trust in God.

As with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we enter this world blissfully unaware of the shame that came to be associated with the human body. Being bathed in the sink was not at all uncommon until recent times (figure 2 *Mother Bathing Child*, Jack Smith, 1953). Infancy is a time of life when running on the beach liberated from clothing and especially nappies is sheer joy for many a child.

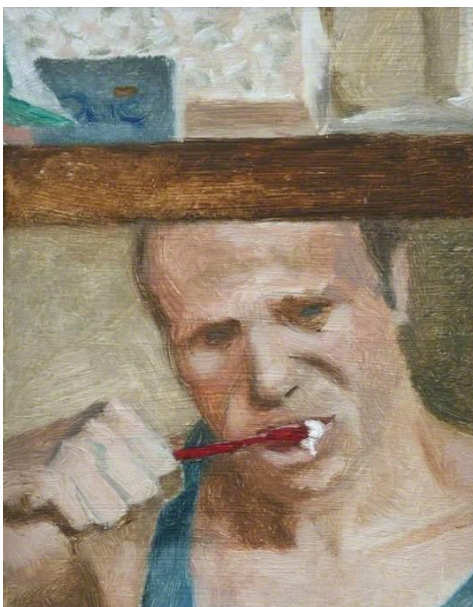


Eventually we establish a degree of autonomy in the bathroom (figure 3, *Blue Bathroom*, Nicole Bennet). This presents an opportunity to become acquainted with the idea of respecting ourselves. Taking pride in our appearance without succumbing to slavery to the image industry. All too sadly, this same industry has already intruded deeply into the lives of the young.

One saying that hangs over from Victorian times is “Cleanliness is next to Godliness”, at least to the extent that regular bathing and showering is *de rigueur* for the modern, although it is not God’s approval many seek today. (Figure 4 **Man Taking a Shower**, David Hockney)



Paying attention to ourselves is not always negative, indeed it can be a very healing exercise. For self-respect is the very opposite of vanity, which Frederick Nietzsche described as “the fear of being original”. (Figure 5. **The Earring**, Ambrose McEvoy, 1911)



Most days however, visits to the bathroom can be a rather hurried affair, a splash of water to wipe the sleep from our eyes, a brush through the hair, teeth attended to with a few brisk strokes, a blast of deodorant and we’re ready for the day (Figure 6. **Self Portrait: Brushing My Teeth**, William Ashley Hold)

Such speed cannot be maintained indefinitely however, and there comes a time when the ritual of ablutions becomes more time consuming for the simple fact that our body slows down. (Figure 7. **Aging Man Washing**, Louis Le Brocqy,1954). But preserving our self-worth and dignity into old age is a sign of grace. Our elegance and stature can endure when we live under the gaze of truth. We need not take our cue from others, we know our bodies better than anyone, and they remain beautiful in the eyes of the creator in whose image we are made.



7. Study (including working from and for the home)

Scripture Reading

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. Genesis 1: 31 -2: 3

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.

Reflection

One phenomenon that has been turbo-charged by the restrictions imposed to combat the Corvid 19 virus is “working from home”. The advent of computer technology has been the great driver of this practice. It brings advantages for business in reducing the overheads incurred in providing office space, car allowances etc. It can also have benefits for the employee; especially a saving of the time, money and stress associated with commuting. Other possible advantages might be greater flexibility in working hours and sometimes assisting with childcare in some instances etc.

Some homes enjoy the luxury of a dedicated space to act as a study, home office or craft-room. Most however, are having to commandeer spaces already in use for other purposes and this is less than ideal in many instances and can be regarded as an intrusion on home life that breaches the sanctity of home as a “work free zone”

So, over time the home has been drawn into the functioning of the economy in ways previously unknown. Although of course this statement is not entirely true. The manner of work and the instruments that enable some work to be done at home may have changed; but working from home has always existed. And like those other unsung and unpaid contributions to the welfare and prosperity of society: child-care, housekeeping and care of elderly or needy relatives, this work has mostly been undertaken by women. That said other activities related to DIY, gardening and motor mechanics, again not solely the preserve of men, were once type cast as such.

This reflection ranges a little wider than previous ones in addressing activities over locations. Some of these activities we call earning a living; and although many of them take place beyond the home they form part of our contribution to the household. We can lose sight of this and either become obsessed with the work and our own personal satisfaction, ambition or career in ways that might eventually imperil the stability of home. Or the work we do may be so tiring, tedious, time consuming and unrewarding financially that it is hard to give ourselves the credit we are due for doing it all for the benefit of those we love.

Our relationship with the idea of work has always been ambiguous. Even in the Book of Genesis we hear of how God works to bring creation into being and takes a deserved rest on the seventh day. Yet when Adam and Eve fall foul of God's plans the prospect of perpetual manual labour is imposed as one sanction.

Jesus, as we know was raised by an artisan; for Joseph was a craftsman. The word we tend to translate as carpenter encompasses all kinds of trades related to building. Joseph was an all-rounder; and it is more than likely that Jesus picked up many of these skills too.

Jesus' first preference for followers was among fishermen, but he also welcomed someone with a more tarnished occupation, Matthew the tax collector. This call incidentally is captured beautifully in a famous Caravaggio painting found in the church of Saint Louis in Rome.

Saint Paul was proud of the fact that his work as a tent maker ensured that he wasn't beholden to other benefactors when he was on his missionary tours.

This idea of self-sufficiency lay behind the way of life adopted by the earliest monks and has been most clearly expressed in the phrase *ora et labora*, prayer

and work sitting side by side in the Rule of Saint Benedict. Work in this context was never the main purpose of the monastic life but nonetheless an essential part of it. It was more than a matter of utility. Work was seen as a means of strengthening the monk against tendencies to idleness. More positively it was invested with a spiritual meaning. Work is a good, even Godly part of a balanced human life. It contributes to fulfilling the mandate we received to be good stewards of creation and in doing this we share in the gifts of creativity, ingenuity and collaboration.

It is entirely appropriate to invest the tasks we perform in the home with dignity. And we have good reason to develop our skills in hobbies and crafts and see them as more than pastimes and as a way of expressing our creativity.

Taking this perspective comes into its own, in a particular way, in the context of preparing for and adjusting to the, often stressful processes associated with retirement. If we have already embraced the home as a valid and enjoyable place to spend productive time. This can include intellectual development. Engaging if we choose in true life-long learning.

Hymn Verse

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe:
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Blessing Prayer

There may not be a place dedicated to work in this home
But we take the opportunity to acknowledge
The contribution of everyone to the family budget,
Earning income from outside work or at home.
But because it's a home we want to say thank you
for the other kinds of work, we do.

Children who discover that homework is not just a chore,
But part of enabling us to live happier, healthier and more interesting lives.
Tasks like cleaning, cooking, washing, decorating and gardening
Also deserve a thank you and a willingness to play our part.
So, we give thanks today not for a room or a place,
But for what we do to help provide this home
With so many of the things we enjoy, need and value. Amen.

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

Today you are invited to think about children who live in countries where there are no supplies of water in their homes. They sometimes have to risk drinking water that can make them very ill. Some children are given the job of walking long o to collect water for the family. We are very lucky to live in a home where water is available all the time and that is something to be very grateful for. It makes us think about so many of the things we have that make our lives healthier, happier and more interesting. So perhaps it is a good day to say thank you to our parents for the work they do at home and at work to help us. Use your imagination to come up with a way of saying thank you. How about giving them a small book of IOU's that promise to do some small but tasks around the home, so you play your part.

Artworks



Figure 1. *Fareham Borough Council, Civic Offices* (1992) Ted Baker, © the copyright holder. Photo credit: Fareham Borough Council.

The juxtaposition of a C20th tower block of Council Offices with a row of cottage style properties handily suggests how life has changed exponentially from one in which many people lived in a rural setting and try to recreate it even in urban settings. It also acts helps to illustrate one of the points made above namely that there has also been a shift over recent days and months in the opposite direction with domestic dwellings assuming a larger role in the pattern of working life. How permanent this may become for some remains to be seen.

Figure 2. **Expresso** P. J. Crook (b.1945) County Hall, Leicestershire County Council Artworks Collection © the artist / Bridgeman Images. Photo credit: Leicestershire County Council Artworks Collection.

One aspect of working away from home that won't be missed by many is commuting. What is interesting about this scene is the possibility that the railway travellers are heading in the opposite direction from the similarly suited hoard outside the carriage. I once remember reading a quote saying that when you are going in the opposite direction of the majority you will probably be accused of running away. But every so often economies and societies make big shifts that only a few perceive are going on.



Figure 3. **Woman Spinning** by Thomas Stuart Smith (1813–1869), The Stirling Smith Art Gallery & Museum, Photo credit: The Stirling Smith Art Gallery & Museum

Finally, we reach an image that reflects more specifically on the artisan activities that have long been associated with a domestic setting, many like spinning are tasks undertaken by women. Now, the Old Testament may not be the obvious place to look for too many positive images or attitudes towards women; but one comes close in this regard and it is the final chapter of the Book of Proverbs 31: 10-31.

Given the social context it at least demonstrates some appreciation of the too easily disregarded and disparaged contribution of women in strictly patriarchal societies. There is even a hint here of women as canny entrepreneurs.



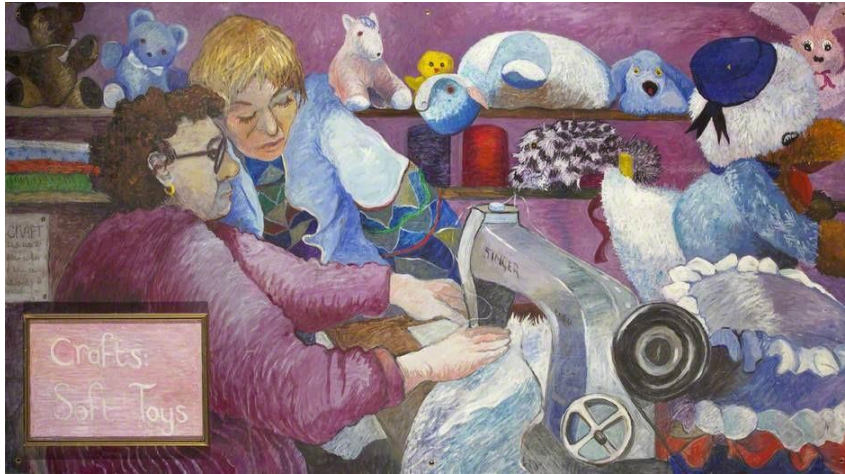


Figure 4. **Crafts- Soft Toys** unknown artist

Glenside Hospital Museum.

© the copyright holder.

Photo credit: Glenside

Hospital Museum

The fact that this painting forms part of a collection associated with a hospital suggests

that the women making crafted toys were volunteers. But it still allows us to recognise the entrepreneurial spirit that motivates many small businesses today. Some make it on to the Dragon's Den to be put through the ringier even humiliated in pursuit of their dreams. A great number of these ideas germinate in a domestic setting and again illustrate that home economics does not only refer to cookery lessons at school. Providing for the family and fulfilling our own potential can demand a great deal and it deserves recognition.

Figure 5. **Interior Study**, Mary Dawson Elwell (1874–1952),

Ferens Art Gallery. © the copyright holder. Photo credit: Ferens Art Gallery

And yes, some people do enjoy the luxury of a room dedicated to their work, be it the artist's studio, the writer's garret, a 'gentleman's study' as in this painting, a n office in the box room, space on a landing or, as in my case, a bedroom converted into a study/library. Indeed, it is a luxury to have more space than many others enjoy and is best not taken for granted. But such rooms represent the potential we all have, especially when circumstances allow or even by sheer determination, to pursue activities which may not produce Family income but still allow us the joy, the satisfaction and the pleasure of using our skills, our interests and our creativity.



8. Play

Scripture Reading

Jesus said: 'But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her children'. Matthew 11: 16-19

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.

Reflection

As with the Study, not so many homes can dedicate a room as a playroom. This is a good thing really because it means that everywhere else becomes available for play. Play is far too important to be confined to one place or restricted from any. Anyhow, it's pointless trying to tidy playthings away. Toy Story tells us a great truth when it reminds us that toys have minds of their own, they are the tellers and makers of stories. The heroines and heroes of fantastic adventures. They also play a crucial part in rescuing us from fear, sadness, loneliness, powerlessness. So, we put our toys away at our peril. And sadly, this is precisely what we do.

I was looking for the reference to the great monster Leviathan being God's toy, God's plaything. You know, the plastic duck turning into a menacing foe, surfacing to terrify the toy soldiers in the plastic boat. Or toys, not even intended for the bath somehow find their way into the bathroom and fall "accidentally" beneath the bubbles to emerge as combatants in a mighty

conflict in which shampoo bottles are employed as laser jets. And if the devastation exceeds the walls of the bath creating a soggy mess on the bathroom floor all the better...

Anyhow, I found what I was looking for in Psalm 104:

"You stretch out the heavens like a tent.
On the waters you establish your dwelling.
You make the clouds your chariot;
You ride on the wings of the wind.
You make the winds your messengers,
And flame and fire your servants.

You set the earth on its foundation,
Immovable from age to age.
You wrapped it with the depths like a cloak;
The waters stood higher than the mountains etc...

Then...

Vast and wide is the span of the sea,
With its teeming things past counting,
Living things great and small.
The ships moving there,
And Leviathan you made to play with"
(Psalm 104: 3-7, 25-26)

What a brilliant bath-time is that!

For a moment let's remember that the psalmist was praising the God who is both creator and champion of justice. But rather than turning to the language of science, law, or history they reach for the language of the imagination. Language and images honed as a child at play. If you don't believe me then read it again and remember things like dressing up boxes and all those other things, including 'official' toys and the improvised ones we make ourselves and which carry all the more significance for that.

During my search for the above reference to Leviathan its other appearances in the Bible also emerged. This is not the place to pursue these as well. However, I would encourage you to do the exercise for yourselves. Take these

two examples and see if you can read them through the lens of play: Psalm 74 in which Leviathan is mentioned in verse 14. Then Isaiah 27: 1.

Then there is, for me at least, the intriguing possibility of rereading the whole of the Book of Job in a totally new way. Early on, as he laments the misfortune that has befallen him Job curses the day he was born. How tragic is that; to look back on life with an attitude that can no longer remember any of its blessings. Yet we all suffer this kind of amnesia to some degree. We can all too easily fall into the trap of setting aside the gifts, skills and flashes of insight we received in childhood, most especially those unlocked by joy of play. It is as if we are saying with Job that none of that counts anymore. It's as if childhood and play have no abiding relevance in later life other than in our memories. The thought of re-engaging with that playfulness that defies our woes and challenges our fears by playing our way into a better future; doesn't suggest itself. Or, worse still we see the possibility but reject it in a fit of adult pique as Job does when he rages: "Let those curse it who curse the day, who are prepared to rouse Leviathan. (Job 3:8)

Unsurprisingly, God reminds Job of this when, having allowed all of Job's adult, rational, devout and philosophical comforters to have their say, to no effect. (Job 40 - 42: 6) Again, read it for yourselves as the language of play. Not play as mere amusement; but play and the language of imagination as being a more effective medium in dealing with even the deepest mysteries of suffering.

Supertramp, lament the enforced abandonment of childhood's particular skill set in *The Logical Song*:

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful
A miracle, oh it was beautiful, magical
And all the birds in the trees, well they'd be singing so happily
Oh joyfully, playfully watching me

But then they sent me away to teach me how to be sensible
Logical, oh responsible, practical
And they showed me a world where I could be so dependable
Oh clinical, oh intellectual, cynical

There are times when all the world's asleep
The questions run too deep

For such a simple man
Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned
I know it sounds absurd
Please tell me who I am...

Songwriters: Richard Davies / Roger Hodgson
The Logical Song lyrics © Universal Music Group

That's a good question to ponder deeply and at great length. Who am I when I allow a whole range of skills, experiences, and memories to be side lined as if inferior or less necessary to others? Let's commit ourselves to recovering our playfulness, delighting in movement, colour, music, dance, scissors, paint, cardboard, mud... the list goes on. We could all come up with our own list, but one Brazilian grandad did a great job:

*"You know, Ana Carolina, I'm building a house for my grandchildren: you, Mariana, Camila, and others who may be coming. In that house I'm placing all my things for children, all my toys. They are the only things I find worth keeping. There you will find spinning-tops, marbles, kites, kaleidoscopes, puzzles, dolls, marionettes, a world of useless things that have the power to make dreams, story books, poetry books, song books, picture books, little gardens, fountains, plants, bonsais, paintings, posters, CD's. This is my house, my legacy: a house of toys for you. Now that you have arrived, even before seeing your face I look at my toys and imagine you playing with them. This makes me happy. And who knows, even your parents and other grown-ups turned children, may join us."*¹

Hymn Verse

Did Jesus Play?
We'd have to say
It's very likely so.
For ev'ry child that's born you see;
Deserves to set imagination free
To run, to jump, to skip and hide
Give birth to all the joy inside.
(I searched for a hymn mentioning play but in vain.
So, here's a verse as Ernie Wise would say: "wot I wrote")

¹ *Transparencies of Eternity*, Rubem Alves, Convivium Press 2010, Miami, Florida, USA. Pages103-4.

Blessing Prayer

We bless our home for allowing us to reimagine its purpose
and potential, again and again.
We bless the thoughts that cross our minds in dreams and imaginings.
We bless the moments when care is cast aside
Responding to the body's need to sway and dance.
We bless those who makes us laugh, smile and cry with joy and affection.
We bless the family jokes, the stories and rituals that bond us together.
We invoke God's Spirit to dwell in this place,
Disturbing our complacencies,
Releasing our gifts,
Impelling our creative impulses
And deepening our appreciation of all that is beautiful, true and good.
Amen.

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

Now it seems to me that children are the experts in this subject so I can only make a suggestion or two. So, how about taking a good look at the toys you have. Remember the pleasure they have given you and say thank you. See if you can arrange them in an interesting display and then take a selfie with them for your keepsake box.

Then ask the toys if they can help you think about the strange things happening at the moment; like not going to school, not meeting up with friends or elderly relatives. See what ideas the toys help you come up with and perhaps get them to act it out around the house. Or if you are good at writing stories you could write one about how your toys would deal with the present situation. What kind of mood would each toy have? Would they work together or fall out with each other? I don't know. Only the toys can answer that one.

Artworks

Figure 1. *Behemoth and Leviathan* – William Blake

God is pointing at the two beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan, as he addresses Job about the extent and power of His creation. Behemoth, the land monster, and Leviathan, a monster of the deep oceans.

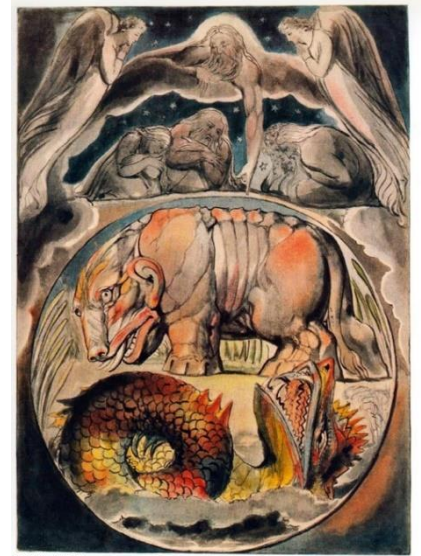


Figure 2. *Woman Drawing beside Her Children* – (1950) Pablo Picasso

Picasso may have been one of the most successful and prolific European artists of the 20th. The way he treated his lovers and family was less admirable; chauvinistic indeed. This painting shows the mother of two of his children. Françoise Gilot received no help in the home although she aspired to be an artist herself. The painting shows her minding the children while still drawing. Sadly, it was only after a series of affairs and eventual separation that she managed to

carve out a successful artistic career for herself. In this respect she is perhaps a better illustration of the points being considered in this reflection than her erstwhile Behemoth of a lover.

Figure 3. *Next* – Michael J Excell (1991)

Disturbance of domestic bliss is not the preserve of adults alone. Sibling rivalry can reach boiling point in disputes over all kinds of things; and play is no exception. We can only imagine the motivation for the girl wielding the scissors over the puppet strings, but most of us have been there one time or another. This image is a necessary counterweight to the idealised picture in the preceding reflection on the importance of play. Play does not relieve us of our less kindly traits, well not straight away.





Figure 4. *Sunshine and Diversion* (1976) William Scott (Private Collection)

William Scott slipped somewhat under the radar among 20th British painters and artists. Yet he produced a wide range of work that canny and discerning collectors purchased at more reasonable rates than his more well-known

artists. This picture makes into this collection because it has a ship and what I like to think of as a puppet. This is where personal nostalgia creeps in as I remember having a toy boat that I was very fond of as well as a puppet show complete with a stage akin to those used for Punch and Judy shows. Here again we encounter how art can assist us in treating of the darker side of life without terrifying the life out of its audience. Can there be a more brutal exhibition than a Punch and Judy Show?



Figure 5. *Two Young Artists* – J R Everdon 1960-62

Note how the title remains unambiguous. Not two aspiring or would be artists. Not even two children painting. No this is a painting of *Two Young Artists*. And rightly so. There is an underlying if not

explicit insistence here that there is a creative dimension to every human life. Sometimes this can be snuffed out, discouraged or abandoned. The contention of this reflection is that this dimension of human life cannot be eradicated altogether, but it can remain dormant without ever being roused from its slumbers, which is such a great pity.



Figure 6. *I Giocatore di Carte* (The Card Game) – 1894-5 Paul Cezanne

Adult pastimes do exist; and they provide hours of quiet enjoyment and socialising well into our years. The question I would want to pose; and I don't presume to have a definite answer to this is. Do such pastimes really qualify as play? Or is play something that breaks rules rather than following them? Imagination, creativity and spontaneity cannot and ought not to follow rules too slavishly which is why art in all its manifestations changes over time. That which is enduring deserves our respect and we continue to take delight in it. But those currently engaged in the arts are entitled, even duty bound to break with conventions and assist us in imagining our way beyond the dilemmas of the present times in a way only they can do.

9. Attics, Lofts, Cellars and Sheds

Scripture Reading: The Transfiguration

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Matthew 17: 1-9

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.

Reflection

This topic is not all that different from our reflection on play, at least in part. But whereas, play is permitted or tolerated in the main body of a house, the idea of disappearing from supervision is a little transgressive. At least, that's how it felt for me, growing up in a rather large house that had once served as a presbytery, how spooky is that?

The house had a loft that was accessed by a step ladder kept in a cupboard sized room that was itself a repository for all kinds of stuff. A convenient store for things that would seem out of place anywhere else. If I recall things correctly, it was where winter coats and the like hung on one wall, there were shelves for miscellaneous boxes, room for the vacuum cleaner and its accoutrements, brooms etc. And, lurking at the back, lagged in its own padded anorak, a huge hot water tank. But I digress, although I also used to do that in this room; it always invited a bit of a rummage to see if anything interesting had been deposited since the last visit. Eventually, the ladder legs were safely splayed and seven or eight steps later the plywood board that served as a trap door pushed upwards.

Then came the slightly perilous bit for a small boy, heaving myself from the platform at the top of the ladder into the loft. Here the eyes had to adjust to the much dimmer light emerging from the room below and small gaps elsewhere. Then there was the strict discipline of walking only on the joists to avoid a size six shoe penetrating the ceiling into any of the bedrooms below. Like many a loft this one was full of odds and sods considered to deserve residing in a place even more remote from the main living area of the house than those in the room below. The trunk that acted like a Tardis to pack all our clothes when we went on holiday. Some toys that were considered too childish for any of us at that point.

But the treasure I was really in pursuit of were postage stamps. To someone whose pocket money rarely reached his pocket but aspired to be a successful philatelist, this was like finding a new seam in a coalmine. My precious quarry was contained in a cardboard box and were still attached to letters that my Father had written to Mum (but before you ask, I never read any of them). They were of zero interest at that stage of life, and even if they still existed when we cleared Mum's loft a couple of years ago, I would not have intruded into their privacy. It's enough to remember that Dad was assiduous in bearing romantic gifts on birthdays and Valentine's Day.

So, the loft, despite being the most above ground space in the family home served as a mine as far as I was concerned, a place where things might be found or stashed. It was not a place to set up camp.

So how about the cellar? Well strictly speaking it was what you call a half cellar in that its footprint was only half that of the ground floor. Half was another

mini mine, where, as ridiculously dangerous as it was, I once in a while did make my way with an unshielded candle in one hand as I tried to crawl on all threes.

The more conventional cellar had its own attractions. You could limbo dance through a space under a sink into an outside shaft. This became very handy to know when the door was locked, and you had to get in undetected. There was a rather basic downstairs loo, a main area for bikes, fishing tackle, wellies and other outdoorsy kinds of things. Best of all was a smaller room which really was quite interesting; because my older brother kept his chemistry set in there as well as his own arms stash (illicitly retained bangers and other fireworks). But because my older brother is wiser and more sensible than me, these were kept in a metal biscuit tin. The other principal purpose of this room was to keep any tools. So, all in all a rather exciting room this one.

Next door was where the coal used to be dumped through a shaft that was now bricked up. For some reason or other this room was always damp with a small puddle at one end. This proved particularly attractive to amphibians, frogs I think or perhaps toads (biology was not a strong point). Anyhow there must have been enough woodlice and the like to provide ready meals because these creatures were often to be found lurking in the corner.

Almost 800 words in (788 to be precise), and I don't know whether you've noticed but I haven't mentioned anything spiritual or theological at all. So, let me take you back to the gospel telling of the Transfiguration. This took place, we have to assume, because Matthew tells us so, "up a high mountain". Jesus had taken three of his companions for a bit of 'us time'. It was a withdrawal from the everyday places of commerce, preaching, miracle working and joshing with the Pharisees. Then, when four became six, Peter was so delighted that he proposed a permanent settlement. Once again 'impetuous Peter' had allowed his enthusiasm to get the better of him. In other company he would have been rebuked or teased; but on this occasion Jesus probably recognised that standing alongside two Old Testament heroes was likely to elicit excitement.

Ultimately there was no avoiding a return to normality, if you can dare to call being in the company of Jesus normal. Certainly, his destiny beckoned; and here's the rub. Peter and the other disciples had been granted a privileged moment in a place set apart from the ordinary to witness something out of the

ordinary. Indeed, they were sworn to secrecy, and so denied even the kudos of letting the other disciples or anyone else for that matter know what they had experienced.

The loft and the cellar in our home held a similar attraction for me. They were places where I would go, but the things I did were best not spoken about. But they haven't been forgotten as you can see. But perhaps they also provided a foretaste of the joy and adventure to be discovered in solitude, detachment, independent thinking and imagination.

Of course, grown-ups with imaginations know how to make good use of these kinds of places. Be it the writer's garret, the painter's studio (atelier), the crafter's workshop or the potting shed. Places on the periphery that perform a vital task of offering space for the kind of solitary creativity and reflective thinking that takes time to come to fruition. Such places have a half in half out relationship with the ordinary domestic spaces, but it is one to be cherished, and is cherished at least by their occupants.

So, if you are lucky enough to have such places, be grateful, keep some of it to yourself of course, but don't be selfish, share the things that bring joy to your life; pass on the things you make, or grow or write, who knows what fruit they might bear.

Hymn Verse

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome, in this place.

(Marty Haugen © GIA Publications)

Blessing Prayer

We bless the hidden,
private places in our home,
places set aside and respected
for creativity, self-expression,
solitude and reflection.

Even if we do not have specific areas for these activities

We pray a blessing that will encourage us to be mindful

Of those with whom we share our home.

Support them in the things that bring pleasure,

Relaxation and artistry to fruition.

Amen.

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

As this goes to press my sense of responsibility prevents me from suggesting that any children climb up ladders or crawl in tight spaces. Such limitations seem to have acted as a constraint on all ideas for the time being, but who knows; children are probably, almost certainly exercising the same degree of experimental autonomy and ingenuity; and that in most instances must make their lives more interesting, don't you think?

Artworks

A different approach to previously here. Each of the images is paired with a quote from the French Phenomenologist and Philosopher **Gaston Bachelard** whose most influential work ***The Poetics of Space*** discussed and analysed our relationship with intimate places, principally domestic dwellings. Returning to this book over fifteen years after first reading it and not being too sure if I made head nor tail out of it, it's surprising to discover how my own thoughts may have been subliminally influenced. Particularly the childhood recollections above, which appear to live up to Bachelard's prediction when he wrote: *So, like a forgotten fire, a childhood can always flare up again within us.*

Then, considering an increasing appreciation of poetry it is easy to concur when he writes that: *Poetry is one of the destinies of speech... One would say that the poetic image, in its newness, opens a future to language.*

See what thought, memories and ideas these images and Bachelard's words conjure up in your mind:

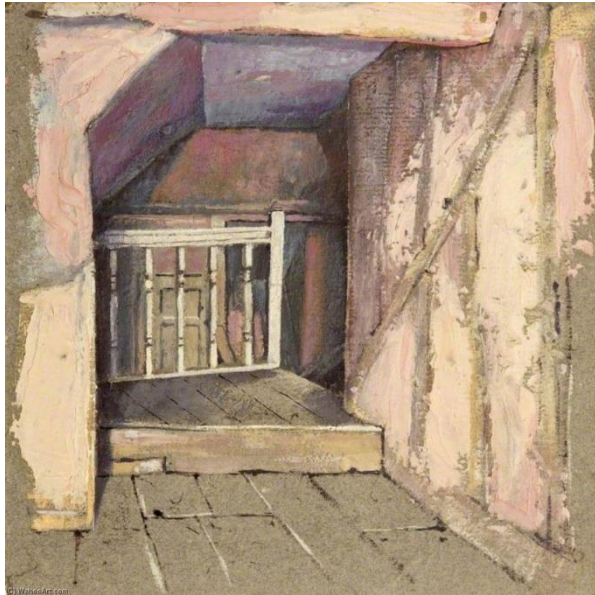


Figure 1. *The Attic Stairs at Elmsley, Yoxford* - Charles Paget Wade

"We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a

poetry that was lost."



Figures 2 and 3. **Corrie Ten Boom** shows where her family hid Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Teenage Diarist **Anne Frank** who also had to hide.

"If the child is unhappy, however, the house bears traces of his distress. In this connection, I recall that Françoise

Minkowska organized an unusually moving exhibition of drawings by Polish and Jewish children who had suffered the cruelties of the German occupation during the last war. One child, who had been hidden in a closet every time there was an



alert, continued to draw narrow, cold, closed houses long after those evil times were over."

What is truly astonishing about Anne Frank is that writing her thoughts provided her with something to do and a future to anticipate even if sadly the one she imagined never arrived. She has also bestowed on those who would pay heed, an insight into the mind of a teenager living in such isolation and remaining creative and engaged with life.



Figure 4. ***The Cellars at 5 Great Newport Street*** – John Frederick Lewis

"A creature that hides and "withdraws into its shell," is preparing a "way out." This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from the resurrection of a man in his grave, to the sudden outburst of one who has long been silent. If we remain at the heart of the image under consideration, we have the impression that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being."

Figure 5. ***L'Atelier Rose*** - Henri Matisse

"We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection. Something closed must retain our memories, while leaving them their original value as images. Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost."





Figure 6. ***A Garden Scene a Figure in a Shed*** – Arthur Segal

“And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired, and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative; that even when it is forever expunged from the present, when, henceforth, it is alien to all the promises of the future, even when we no longer have a garret, when the attic room is lost and gone, there remains the fact that we once loved a garret, once lived in an attic. We return to them in our night dreams. These retreats have the value of a shell.”

10. Gardens

Scripture Reading - *The River of Life*

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22: 1-5)

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.

Reflection

Don't tell England's enthusiastic gardeners, but the patron saint of gardeners is an Irish monk Fiacre, his reputation as a gardener and herbalist became so widespread that he was inundated by people in search of his healing remedies.

In an effort to regain some solitude he left Ireland for France, where the local bishop agreed to give him some land to site a new hermitage by the River Marne. Legend tells that the offer was for as much land as he could clear in one day and that Fiacre, having commended his plans to God covered an astonishingly large area. Here he built an oratory dedicated to Our Lady and a hospice so that he could continue to provide healing care to the sick. But his hermit's cell and garden remained his refuge and place of prayer.

Over time his reputation led to being joined by followers and a monastery was established. This became a magnet for those trading in plants and its garden was one of the most famous in the whole of Europe. Of course, every monastery had a garden and herbal remedies were a stock in trade of monks and nuns alike. Indeed, the reputation of Fiacre and the monastery in France is easily matched if not outshone by the German mystic Hildegard of Bingen. Her range of knowledge and skills was much greater than Fiacre; including musical composition and counsel of church and civic leaders as well as publishing her learning about the healing properties of plants in *The Physica*.

So, gardening has a long and honourable history in Christian communities and has always been closely associated with healing, remedies and solitude. The experience of many gardeners matches these monastic traits. If the ancient proverb “physician heal thyself” could be applied to anyone other than a doctor, gardeners could make a plausible claim although the healing involved here is largely emotional and psychological which of course is no less important than matters of physical wellbeing. In our own times community gardens such as our own a Walton offer a friendly, safe and healthy environment for people with a whole range of needs. The success comes not from the application of any complicated theory, but as a direct result of the hands on engagement with the earth, elements, wildlife and plants that make up the ecological community within which even those unaware of any need find healing.

A garden nurtures the gardener far more than the gardener nurtures the garden. By force of habit the gardener lives with anticipation. Each day’s task looks to the future with hope. The task itself might be arduous, repetitive, tedious but it contributes towards something bigger than itself. A future filled with surprises, delights, and it has to be said, the odd disappointment and set back along the way. More than most other human enterprises gardening is a partnership in which human beings flourish alongside nature rather than by manipulating nature.

This healing dimension points towards a reframing of the usual story we tell about the Garden of Eden. This imagines that the Garden of Eden represents an earlier, more blissful existence for the human species. A bliss forfeited as a direct consequence of human sinfulness. Indeed, as a story it emerged in our quest to discover the origins of human suffering and sin which are both undeniable aspects of the human experience.

The error comes in forgetting that it is a story and always has been a story. It is not and was not conceived of as history, still less as scientifically grounded.

So, what becomes of the beautiful image of humanity walking in the cool of the morning as Adam and Eve do in the Genesis story? Are we to mourn something we've lost even though we never actually had it? Or does the Garden of Eden invite us to imagine the prospect of humanity becoming responsive to God's love to such an extent that human society and the planet become more peaceable and mirror the vision presented in the Book of Revelation.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that Mary Magdalen mistook Jesus for a gardener, because his Resurrection heralds this new creation. The garden which had served as a burial ground becomes a witness to God's death defying love.

Hymn one verse simply won't do, so...

Morning has broken
Like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken
Like the first bird
Praise for the singing
Praise for the morning
Praise for them springing
Fresh from the world

Sweet the rain's new fall
Sunlit from Heaven
Like the first dewfall
On the first grass

Praise for the sweetness
Of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness
Where His feet pass

Mine is the sunlight
Mine is the morning
Born of the one light
Eden saw play
Praise with elation
Praise every morning
God's recreation
Of the new day

Songwriter: Eleanor Farjeon
Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group

Blessing Prayer

It seems appropriate on this occasion to turn to nature's great friend and advocate Saint Francis whose delight and appreciation flowed into that great paean of praise and blessing to God known as *The Canticle of Creation*. Weather permitting, or perhaps even if the weather is not so obliging it would be good to pray or sing this blessing outside. Out loud is fine too, your neighbours will not be surprised by anyone doing something out of the ordinary in the current circumstances.

Canticle of Creation by Saint Francis of Assisi

Most High, all powerful, good Lord.
Yours are the praise, the glory and the honour
and every blessing.
To you alone, Most High, they belong
And no one is truly worthy to pronounce your name.
Be praised, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is day and by him you shed light upon us.
He is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the Stars,
in the heavens you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Wind
and through Air and Cloud and fair and all Weather,
by which you nourish all that you have made.
Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and pure.
Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
by whom you light up the night;
he is beautiful and merry and vigorous and strong.
Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and guides us,
and produces diverse fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.
Be praised, my Lord, by those who pardon for love of you,
and endure sickness and trials.
Blessed are they who endure them in peace,
for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
From whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom she will find in your most holy will,
for the second death will do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord
and give him thanks and serve him with great humility.

(The hymn *All Creatures of our God and King* is a version of this Canticle)

Praise to the one who dwells with us! Amen

Crafty Kids

There is still time I think to sow some **Sunflower Seeds** either in pots or in the ground. Not surprisingly they grow best of all in a place where they can see the sun for a lot of the day. As they grow taller they sometimes need a little help from a garden cane or stick. Make sure that you put something on top of the stick to make it safe so that people don't poke their eyes with it. Sunflowers are just like human beings some grow taller than others, they come in a variety of shades and the flowers can be as big as dinner plates or as small as saucers. Most produce just one flower while some have more. Wouldn't it be great if our neighbourhood had lots of sunflowers to keep us smiling later in the year?

More and more people are doing all they can to make their gardens places that are kind and friendly to all God's creatures, even slugs and snails. Every creature has its place and because some are food for the birds a garden that looks after its bugs and slugs gets more of these beautiful flying visitors. There are some flowers and plants that butterflies really like and don't forget the moths who also need food even though they fly around mostly at night. There are lots of ideas to help you on the following link provided by the RSPB:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/>

Artworks



Figure 1. *Pathway into the Garden at Giverny* – Claude Monet

The most well-known garden in the world of art is the one developed by the Impressionist Claude Monet. This was where he found his own solace and inspiration and as beautiful as the garden is it retains an imprint of his presence not only in the house and gift shop but as you walk through its extensive layout. Despite the

great number of visitors it holds on to atmosphere he created and can be consider along with his many paintings of it, a living work of art in itself.

Monet's Garden is of course most famous for its lily ponds. Figure 2. ***Giverny Lily Pond*** – Photograph 2019

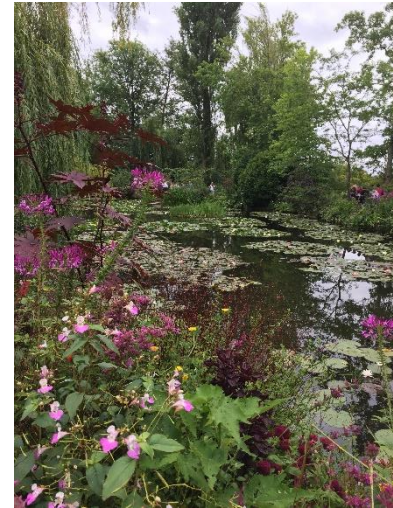


Figure 3. ***A Flemish Kitchen Garden*** – Henri De Braekeleer

For centuries the primary purpose of many gardens has been the provision of food to sustain the household. Scratched out from a plot of land around the dwelling of peasants who also had to work the land on behalf of the landowner, they developed into a thing of

pride and in better times a place could be found to plant flowers to brighten the interior. Perhaps some were placed as a votive gift to an image of Our Lady in the house or local church.

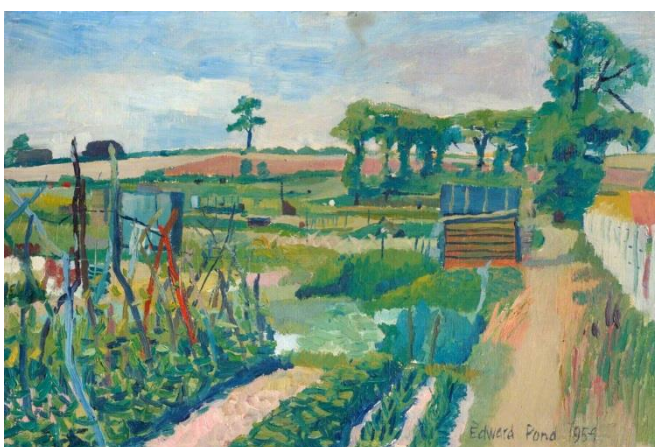


Figure 4. ***Allotments at Chadwell Heath*** - Edward Pond

In places where housing lacked gardens of a sufficient size, people might be allotted somewhere else in the neighbourhood. This practice continues to this day and allotments have become prized assets and a focus for communities to develop

and (forgive the pun) blossom. The skills and the folk lore still being handed on from generation to generation.



Figure 5. *Tatton Park NHS Trust 2009* Chris Cyprus

Another great passion for gardeners is visiting gardens on large country estates to draw inspiration for use on a smaller scale. The calendar is also full of garden shows and festivals, one of which takes place close by at Tatton Park. Of course there is a commercial dimension to these activities but they help to maintain such places as part of a wider national heritage.



Figure 6. *Saint Fiacre Statue* - Cathedral at Lisieux (see above)

EPILOGUE

The Finished House

By George Mackay Brown

In the finished house a flame is brought to the hearth.
Then a table, between door and window
Where a stranger will eat before the men of the house.
A bed is laid in a secret corner
For the three agonies – love, birth, death –
That are made beautiful with ceremony.
The neighbours come with gifts –
A set of cups, a calendar, some chairs.
A fiddle is hung at the wall.
A girl puts lucky salt in a dish.
The cupboard will have its loaf and bottle, come winter.
On the seventh morning
One spills water of blessing over the threshold.

This series began with a simple idea in response to an unprecedented situation. For several weeks, the great majority of the population in the U.K. abiding by the instructions of the government, minimised activities away from our homes. As a result, we spent more time in them than has been the custom for many a long year.

The simple idea was to welcome the opportunity these unsought restrictions presented to renew the appreciation of our homes. To identify the many, many good things of home. To find cause for celebration, creativity, and thankfulness, and then give expression to these in whichever way occurs to us.

The material presented was intended as a springboard to bespoke responses to each unique situation and the very personal spaces we call home.

None of which even begins to suggest that the bricks and mortar alone represent home. Home is not entirely a place at all. Home is an attitude, an

experience, a grace, a set of behaviours and shared priorities. Home is something we create with the help of others and by God's grace. Therefore, home can also be fragile, unstable, or precarious. We never have complete control over what we call home. Some aspects of home making are dependent on security of income, and the avoidance of the effects of fire, storm, and flooding.

Nor can human relationships be taken for granted. No family remains static either physically or psychologically. Much of this is foreseen and welcome, the natural developments coming with time. However, just as personal tastes and styles affect the look of our home; so too our moods, our health physical and mental, and our personal circumstances are never entirely reliable. For our homes to be a haven in times of difficulty requires a common acceptance of priorities and aims, willingness to compromise, and heartfelt support during times when one family member or another needs additional help and understanding.

Perhaps this is a time to watch a re-run of *The Royle Family*, Caroline Aherne and Craig Cash's beautifully observed comedy, about a fictional yet still plausible family. It is beautiful precisely because the characters each have flaws and weaknesses. Some pull their weight more than others, and not everyone considers paid employment an attractive proposition. Who among us would want to be glued to the TV as much as Jim, well Jim obviously; but then this is the device used to keep most of the scenes on one set.

But the kitchen is also important. It is where the sharing of confidences takes place. The bathroom is mostly Jim's place of retreat from sticky situations. But in one of the series' most touching scenes it is where a father melts with affection for his daughter when her labour pangs begin. Likewise, the scene before the wedding discloses a rich seam of love. The hard-pressed mother, Barbara, is undoubtedly taken for granted, as is Anthony. But the important thing to recognise is that we are being made to observe it. There is a subtle agenda here by which we are nudged towards thinking whether we too might take others in our homes for granted and if there might be a fairer way to live.

The value of spending time thinking and praying about all these things is that we become more realistic and considerate in our expectations of those with whom we live. We can put a check on some of our own failings without being

harsh on ourselves. We can learn to practice gratitude both to God and to members of our family. We can create new rhythms and rituals to increase our potential for joyous living. We can cherish our memories and look forward to fashioning new ones, day by day.



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Prayers, Reflections, Commentary on Artworks and Crafty Kids Suggestions

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