

Comforting Darkness

by Mary Ann Archer

Several decades ago, I was going about my everyday business, eating lunch at the cafeteria at my workplace and “worry-praying” about possible money problems. Suddenly, I saw in my mind a tall channel of darkness extending from my head up to God, to infinity. I was surprised, to say the least. I had never thought of or experienced anything from God that seemed like darkness. But my next, immediate response was ... *comfort*.

The darkness surrounding me seemed to mean that I did not have to know the outcome of my worries, what the future might bring, or how I might deal with it. The overwhelming feeling of this comfort, if I can put such a non-verbal experience into words was, *You do not know. You do not need to know right now. REST.*

Today I deliberately entered that channel again. I am in the second week of a 32-week journey through Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. Many morning meditations are hard to navigate, with distractions and worries and a general dryness of inspiration creeping in. So today I decided to simply sit in the “dark” and wait.



One inspiration came— hand over to God each new challenge of marketing my latest book, and let God accomplish each task in ways yet unknown. But mostly, I sat in that dark channel until I could feel the comfort of those familiar words, *You do not know. You do not need to know. REST.*

I thought of how those words are also found in one of my favorite evening prayers. I first found this prayer in the *Presbyterian Book of Common Worship*, in the “Prayer at the Close of Day” section. After years of searching, I found its origin in an out-of-print book called *The Art of Ministering to the Sick*, by Richard C. Cabot, M.D. and Russell L. Dicks, B.D.

Here is the prayer. Notice the wonderful, comforting word-pictures of wild things resting in the dark, along with the fabulous image of our souls reflecting confidence in God as a quiet stream reflects stars at night.

A Prayer for Sleep

*Eternal and everlasting God,
In the growing quietness of the evening and the
 deepening shadows of the night,
Grant us sleep and rest.
With the stilling of the day's doings, and the
 end of coming and going about us,
Make us to be sleepy with heavy eyes and tired limbs.
As your creatures are lying down in the wood,
As the bird is quiet in its nest
And the wild thing in its hole,
As the steam is still in its bed
Reflecting the great expanse of stars above,
May we in our sleep reflect our confidence in you,
And our assurance in your constant peace.
In our sleep give us that deeper communion of our souls
With you who restores unto health.
For your name's sake. Amen*

When you are unsure of your next step, you might try sitting in this comforting darkness.

Mary Ann Archer is an author, spiritual director (guiding Rev. Dr. Robin for 15 years), retreat leader, and professional flutist/piccoloist. Her book, *Shared Imagination; A Channel to God and with Each Other*, uses first-person stories to illustrate the wondrous benefits of using Ignatian-style imagination in meditation.