

The theme of this month's reflection on different aspects of our pilgrimage to Walsingham may seem a bit odd. It is "sleep", following naturally and (we hope quickly) on the night prayer we have just celebrated in the All Souls chapel. Rather than seeing the hours of darkness and sleep as an interruption of the pilgrimage I think it would be better to think of this as a time when God can work on us undisturbed, as it were, by the noise of our thoughts and words and actions. Of course, rather as we reflected last month about night prayer, this may be a time when troubling anxieties come to the surface, things we prefer not to think about. But this too can be a moment of grace: we may not be able to do anything about these worries while we are asleep and dreaming, but God doesn't rest and we can trust him to care of us. In Psalm 127 there is a verse which reads *"It is but lost labour that ye haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness: for so he giveth his beloved sleep."* That is the version in the Book of Common Prayer and it contrasts the fretfulness of everyday activity with the peaceful sleep which God gives. I don't think it is meant to encourage us to be lazy, but rather to recognize that we need a rhythm of work and rest. There is another translation of the same verse however with a subtly different meaning: *"In vain is your earlier rising, your going later to rest, you who toil for the bread you eat, when he pours gifts on his beloved while they slumber."* The emphasis here is not on sleep itself as a gift of God, but on how God works on us for our good at a time when there is nothing at all we can do about it. Whichever version you prefer, the main point is the same and it reminds us of one of the main reasons for coming on pilgrimage - to lay ourselves open to a new encounter with God in which God will take the initiative and refresh us.