

The reflection for this month (October 2018) continues to consider different aspects of our annual pilgrimage to Walsingham.

Our first evening typically ends with a form of late evening prayer specially prepared by members of our joint parish group. This is an opportunity for a quiet and recollected time of worship together designed to “settle” us after a busy day travelling and prepare us for the days ahead. With so much of the weekend focused on the objective facts of what God does for us in Christ, and specifically what God did by choosing Mary to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word, this peaceful moment of prayer together helps us think for a while about ourselves and the needs we bring with us.

Of course, we have already laid much of that out in Shrine Prayers (see the reflections for August and September 2018) but most people will probably have used that time to intercede for others, so this “night prayer” is one of the moments in the weekend to allow our own situation to come to the surface before God and be laid before God in the peaceful setting of the All Souls’ chantry chapel. Although this can be a time of comfort, it may also make us aware of issues and concerns we normally keep hidden, even (or perhaps especially) from ourselves. This can be troubling, but it is far better that we should know what is going on beneath the surface of our lives than to let it affect us unconsciously.

This short service brings us close to the heart of pilgrimage and prepares us for the rest of the weekend. We try to be calm, to enter into ourselves, and above all ask God’s Holy Spirit to show us just how much we have to be grateful for and also what needs to be healed. It is an opportunity to “count our blessings”, to recognise the parts of our lives that are hurting, whether physically, psychologically or spiritually and to identify matters calling for repentance and amendment of life.

All this will be helpful preparation for later elements in the pilgrimage: the Eucharist (thanksgiving), sprinkling and anointing (healing) and repentance (confession).

Because this time of quietness may make us aware not only of God's many good gifts but also of some of the more troubling aspects of our lives, we may begin to feel the need for some personal support and encouragement. It may be important to seek someone out in whom to confide - it may be a fellow pilgrim, one of our own priests, the shrine clergy or sisters. Although the expectation is that after night prayer we shall go to bed in silence, you shouldn't hesitate to ask for a listening ear if needed.

I leave you with some words from the traditional order for Night Prayer (Compline) which might be an appropriate prayer to say as we prepare for sleep:

*Preserve us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ,
and asleep we may rest in peace.*