

broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take. Eat. This is my body.'"¹⁰

Darkness can also bring great challenges and struggle. Jesus was betrayed and condemned at night: "They seized Jesus and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. A fire had been lit in the centre of the courtyard."¹¹

Jesus died in darkness: "It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last."¹²

But as Christians, we are essentially a hope-filled people. We believe that death is not the end. We believe in new and eternal life. And so, even and maybe especially in the darkness, we *know* that life exists.

Jesus conquered death and sin by his rising in the dim light of dawn: "After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.... 'Do not be afraid,' he said, 'I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said.'"¹³

Lord Jesus, we have pondered darkness through the actions of your life. This weekend, as we explore the mysterious unknown in our own lives, help us to realise the gift that you have given us. Help us to be thankful for the abundant potential that the dark embraces. Help us to have faith in nights.

Amen!



Friday Evening Prayer I Have Faith in Nights



One lone candle is lit at the centre of the room. When all are comfortable and still and a prayerful silence has settled, we begin. Each retreatant in turn reads a paragraph.

Lord, we are surrounded by your night; we are submerged in your darkness.

A dark of night. A dark of winter. A dark of questioning. A dark of the unknown.

St. John of the Cross wrote of the "dark night of the soul" as a time "more obscure and dark and terrible," a time profound uncertainty which "seem[s] to blind the spirit"¹ to God's presence.

In childhood, we fear the dark. We see monsters lurking in every blind corner, ready to pounce. The unknown, the unfamiliar threatens us.

But as we mature, we begin to appreciate the night. Darkness is a gift: a gift of peace and power, of dreams and imagination, of great and limitless potential.

All remain silent as we listen to the poem. After, retreatants resume the reading, pausing after each proclamation for a few moments of reflection.

*You darkness, that I come from,
I love you more than all the fires
that fence in the world,
for the fire makes
a circle of light for everyone,
and then no one outside learns of you*

*But the darkness pulls in everything:
shapes and fires, animal and myself,
how easily it gathers them!--
powers and people--*

*and it is possible a great energy
is moving near me.*

I have faith in nights.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

“In the beginning when God created the universe, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.”²

Father, we, too were created in the darkness of our mothers’ wombs, and sheltered and nurtured there until you called us forth first to birth and then to life in Christ.

Lord, when you walked among us, you, too, seemed to value the gift of darkness. Many of the key events of your life took place while surrounded by darkness.

Jesus chose to be born at night: “While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.’”³

Jesus, Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt at night: “Now after the Magi had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt.... Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt.’”⁴

Jesus found solace and strength in the darkness for prayer: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed”⁵.... “After saying farewell to the people, Jesus went up on the mountain to pray. When evening came, the boat was out on the lake, and he was alone on the land.”⁶

Sometimes darkness surrounded Jesus as he healed his people: “After the sun had set and evening had come, people brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.... Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.”⁷

Jesus calmed the storm at night: “When evening came, the boat was out on the lake, while Jesus was alone on the land. When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake.... Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’ Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased.”⁸

Jesus fed his people miraculously in the evening: “When it grew late, Jesus’ disciples came to him and said, ‘This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send the people away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat.’ But he answered them, ‘You give them something to eat.’”⁹

Jesus gave us himself in the Eucharist at night: “When it was evening, Jesus took his place with the twelve.... While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he

- 1 E. Allison Peers, "Introduction" to *The Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross, http://www.ccel.org/j/john_of_the_cross/dark_night/dark_night0.9.htm
- 2 Genesis 1:1-2
- 3 Luke 2:6-11
- 4 Matthew 28:1-2, 5-6
- 5 Mark 1:35
- 6 Mark 6:46-47
- 7 Mark 1:32,34
- 8 Mark 6:47-48, 51
- 9 Mark 6:35-37
- 10 Matthew 26:20, 26
- 11 Luke 22:54-55
- 12 Luke 23:44-46
- 13 Matthew 28:1-2, 5-6