

Friends

I recently read the unattributed thought: “Prayer is the key for the morning and the bolt for the evening”. I grew up in a time and place where doors were not locked all day, but the key would be turned at night as the last person went to bed, and then turned in the other direction in the morning, when the first person went out to get the milk in, so it made a lot of sense.

We know that starting and finishing our day with prayer is a good idea, but of course, we so often “hit the ground running” when the alarm goes off in the morning and fall into bed in the evening too tired to follow through on our night-time prayers, or wake in the morning with the faint realisation that we may have fallen asleep halfway through last night’s devotions.

Yet prayer at its best opens the day well and secures it for the night. Last Sunday, I was talking about the teaching of Jesus that says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. I spoke of the idea that the eye of the needle was a contemporary term for the postern gate at the side of the main city gates in the time of Jesus, and that it was just wide enough to let your camel in if you had taken off its load. The main gates were closed at night, but the postern gate could be opened by the guard to let late travellers through. There’s something about those night-time prayers that close the city gates, and although bad dreams do sometimes creep in through the side gate, mostly it seems our prayers protect us.

Paul tells us to “pray without ceasing” but Jesus seems to be content with the simple shortness of the Our Father, although he tells stories that encourage us to keep on going back with our requests if they don’t appear to be heard. A previous Archbishop of Canterbury once confessed on national radio that he only felt he really prayed for ten minutes a day, although it took him nearly two hours of attempt to get there. Prayer, it seems, is difficult. Nevertheless, it is the very life blood of our practice as Christians, and perhaps in that sentence is the clue. If we understand ourselves to be practising prayer, rather than expecting it to be perfect every time, perhaps we will become

better at it, and then our day really will be supported and strengthened as our spirit communes with the Holy Spirit of God.

God bless, Vicci