

# 21. Prayer



When night is at its deepest and dawn still seems impossibly remote, monks and nuns all over the world gather to pray. Staring down the darkness, holding human pain before God, calling God's mercy into tortured but forgotten corners of the world - this is the task of the hour. Dr Erik Varden, former Abbot of Mount St Bernard's in Leicestershire, says this: "The intercessions offered at this time are for the suffering, those who are afraid of the day about to dawn, who can see no possibility of tomorrow."

There is a good precedent for praying before dawn... After the sick and distressed had been thronging around Jesus looking for healing, Mark tells us that "in the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went to a deserted place to pray" (1.35).

The Nigerian artist Gbenga Offo has titled this vibrant painting *Fervent Prayer*. The effort we see in his little community of praying figures illustrates the fact that 'prayer demands labour' as Sr Wendy Beckett once said, and in the unselfconscious absorption of these lovely faces we also see that what matters most about praying is simply showing up, just as we are.

## Today...

...as we thank you for all who pray for a suffering world,  
grace us, O Holy Spirit, with the fortitude to join them.

**Amen**