

Greeting the morning



Be with us, Lord, in the dark places of our lives and the dead of the night, when worries beset us and rational thought deserts us. Bring us safe to the light of the morning and show us a clear path. Amen.

The Shepherd of Souls – Jean-Baptiste Vianney (1786-1859)

by Alan Jefferies

Vianney is commemorated on Tuesday. Known as the Curé of Ars, he was a parish priest in rural France whose holiness is said to have transformed a village, and eventually the wider Church. His parish was small and poor, yet through prayer, compassion and tireless service, Vianney demonstrated what faithful ministry could look like.

He was not a scholar – he struggled with Latin and nearly

failed his seminary studies. But he is said to have had a deep love for God and for people. He spent many hours hearing confessions, and his church became a place of pilgrimage. His example reminds us that holiness has more to do with steadfast love than success or brilliance.

He once said, "The priest is not for himself; he is for you." His example speaks to every Christian who seeks to serve God through patience, humility and care for others. ☺

“In the dark night of the soul bright flows the river of God.”

John of the Cross (1542-1591), Carmelite friar and priest

Heather Smith *reflects on* Genesis 32:22-31

Jacob's family is complicated. His brother Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for some stew because he is hungry, but then he is furious with Jacob. Jacob pretends to be Esau in order to steal his father's blessing. Jacob's uncle cheats him of the wife he promised, Rachel, and gives him Leah instead, then insists that he serve him for a second seven-year term to pay for Rachel.

Now Jacob is concerned about what will happen when he meets his brother again. There is nothing like family relationships to make us feel internal conflict. We wrestle with love, loyalty, duty, jealousy, hurt, to name but a few emotions. Theologians have puzzled about the meaning of this passage in Genesis, where Jacob wrestles with an unknown stranger he presumes to be God. But in the circumstances, wrestling surely describes the uncomfortable feelings he must be feeling when he thinks about meeting Esau. Perhaps it is only the presence of a wrestling partner that prevents him from running away in the night.

The dead of night is exactly when we find ourselves at our most emotionally vulnerable, our minds not quite rational, unable to think things through logically and likely to find ourselves much more fearful than necessary. We may come through the night wounded, but God does not desert us and we are able to face whatever awaits us in the morning. ☺

Water

Part 1 – the element of life

by Caroline Hodgson

Water is so ordinary that we hardly notice it, yet without it nothing lives. It covers about seventy-one per cent of the Earth's surface and makes up around sixty per cent of our bodies. Apart from air, it is the element we meet most often – in rain, rivers, food – even our breath.

Water has been called the "universal solvent"; it shapes landscapes, carries nutrients

and regulates the planet's temperature. The Bible begins with water – "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2) – as if to remind us that this humble element lies close to the heart of creation.

St Basil called water "the simplest of elements, yet the most essential". Its presence in every part of life speaks of God's creativity and generosity. Water is not just a resource, it is a gift – a reminder that the world and all who live in it depend on the grace of God. ☺