

Introduction page
of Prayers for a Planetary
Pilgrim - by Edward Hays

DAILY PRAYERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY



"Calls us out of a parochial way of praying
into one that is truly global."

Regardless of the calendar date, we have already entered into the 21st century, into another age. In this new era our attention is turned from this small planet outward to the boundless space that surrounds us. Our prayer needs a new vocabulary that reflects such new vistas, that helps us understand more correctly who we truly are.

Words like sunset and sunrise which still remain in our daily vocabulary are in reality pre-Galilean terms. They were logical for flat-earth people who saw themselves as the center of the universe. Earth was perceived as stationary and the sun, moon and stars as the objects that moved around our planet. Such an attitude is much like that of children who perceive themselves as the center of all life.

Today we realize that Earth and the sun in company with the other planets of our solar system are a cosmic colony moving outward into infinite space. Our earth is a living spaceship, a conscious interlocking organism on a voyage. From such a realization comes a flood of new prayers with new terms that fit our daily experience.

Instead of sunset, we might speak of an evening "turn-around," as our small planet slowly turns around to face the horizonless space into which we are moving. And night could be called "look-out," as we see before us the billions of stars and those limitless vistas of the universe.

Look-out is a sacred time, filled with mystery and also with fear. The hours of look-out, when the darkness of space engulfs our earth, is a time filled with crime and deeds of darkness, but it is also the time for love, prayer, relaxation and reflection. And we are among the living creatures who choose to use look-out as a time for sleep. The hours of look-out also give us an opportunity to see ahead to where we as a cosmic colony are traveling. But while we enjoy gazing outward at the stars, we can easily grow tired of looking through the windshield of look-out. At such times we wish to turn our attention back to the often trivial but necessary matters of our life aboard the space vessel. We then await the coming of the first signs of morning turn-around, or as it was called in olden days, sunrise.

A great relief for the sick person who has endured the restless hours of darkness, morning turn-around is a welcome happening for all of us. As the planet earth slowly turns around from its vision of the billions of stars in unlimited space, it is filled with the light of one single star, the brilliant and beautiful daystar that we call the sun. We are no longer exposed to that awesome vision which is beyond our comprehension. The light of day enables us to view our lives and the tiny ship upon which we are traveling with more definition. We rise from sleep and begin to go about our daily duties as crew members. The frontiers of the universe shrink to the manageable dimensions of that which touches only our personal lives. While this morning turn-around focusing-of-vision helps us to get on with our lives, it can also contribute to the narrow vision of envy, bickering, greed and the fighting that breaks out among the crew members of our tiny space vessel.

Look-back, as day might be called, turns our attention away from our larger destination and gives us an opportunity to look at that massive nuclear-powered star we call the sun. It is the engine that propels our cosmic colony of planets, the solar system, out into the darkness of space. We rely so fully on its majestic power and seemingly endless endurance that we have made this daystar divine, or at least a symbol of that mystery we call by countless names.

Countless ancient ones and many of our planet's present crew members have realized that they and the earth are somehow part of that mystery of God. Sacred—at one with the Divine Mystery—is the tiny earthen vessel and we the crew. So too are the billions of stars, planets, comets and other creations that travel together with our solar space colony. It seems that the Sacred Essence is at the heart of the interstellar interconnection of all space travelers. We can wonder, then, if the Divine Mystery is also our ultimate destination. We wonder at the God-seed buried deeply within each member of the crew, a compass and map of our final destination. Or perhaps the real mystery is that it is God who is on a journey into space, forever pushing outward the cellophaned confines of the cosmos, the transparent tissue of nothingness, ever expanding the edges of the universe by constantly casting outward newly created, wondrously beautiful galaxies and undiscovered worlds.

The prayers that follow could be a beginning toward the creation of a breviary, or prayer book, for those who see themselves as members of the space vessel Earth, part of a cosmic traveling colony. Such psalms and prayers serve as an inner compass for those who see themselves as co-explorers and co-creators with the Divine Mystery, which at this very moment is playing at the ever-expanding edges of the universe.

A FEAST DAY PSALM

O Blessed One who created calendars and clocks,
today is a feast day.
Come and show me how to make each hour a feast.

May the meals I share today
be true adventures of taste.
Let me delight in every flavor
as a special gift of the moment.

May this day be a feast for my eyes
as I drink in the vast range
of the colors, forms and textures
of all the things I see.

Gift me, on this day of celebration,
with fresh-cleansed eyes,
open to beauty and alive with wonder.

On this feast day
may my ears feast as well.

Unplug them of habit—the deafness of routine—
that the whisper of the wind,
the soft sounds of gentleness,
the magic of human speech
and the healing laughter of mirth
may enter my mind and heart.

On this feast (of _____)
may I also feast as never before
in the joy of those I love
and with whom I share my life.

May this feast day be a holiday of love
for my community of family and friends.

In these and in all ways,
may this day, created by you,
be truly a feast day.

PSALMS FOR PERSONAL SEASONS OF CHANGE



PSALM OF A WAKE FOR A CHANGING BODY

Wakes are for the dead;
even the term leaves me cold.
I usually prefer to deny my death,
which comes by inches,
but comes relentlessly all the same.

Another signal from my body,
another sign of age,
has visited me, with its foreboding forecast
that I'm growing older.

I look with envy at the young
and am often tempted to try
a wizard's wonder herb
to restore my aging body
to its former age of agility
that was free of aches and pains.

Today I must mourn,
aware that those who hold enough wakes
die with dignity
and even dance with death
in a Chronos childhood play.

To wake with great love each small death and loss
and then move on to what life offers next:
it is thus that I can honestly rejoice
at another's youthful beauty.

I sense that by observing enough wakes
I'll awaken, to my surprise,
to a new, mature magnetic beauty
that radiates from those
whom time has tanned into a *handsome* hybrid
of the eternal youth.

A PSALM AT SIGNS OF AGING

I see you,
time's messenger of maturing,
a hair grown gray.
You signal the ending
of my season of youthfulness.

I'm tempted to tone you
back to your original shade,
or to silence your prophecy
by pulling you out.
But I know too well
that you are only the first
of many gray messengers to come.

I sadly receive the turning of the seasons
and tend to reject the painful truth
that time is taking its toll!

Quietly, I rage within,
that my skin, with age,
begins to fold and crease,
no longer as resilient or tight
or as elastic with the yeast of youth.

I shall hold a wake, yes, and lament,
weeping within my heart at the passing
of the springtime and the summer of my short life,
so that I may embrace the autumn of age.

O Ever-youthful God,
make clear to me the ancient truth
that like the billion-year-old universe
I too grow younger each day as I grow older.
Within me, that which is beyond
the corroding clock of time—
at the core of my being—can implode,
traveling backwards to the beginning,
to the inner space that's forever young.

PSALM OF CHANGING WORK

In this erratic era of change,
this earthquake season of transition
which causes the crumbling and collapse
of social structures and traditions,
I personally am a victim of the upheaval
and must seek a new direction.
I am challenged to rise up out of the rubble,
not a victim but a victor.

Social scientists, like weather forecasters of the future,
predict in these tempest times
that career changes will occur
perhaps ten times within a lifetime.
But every sweeping storm of change
is so strenuous and fraught with fears,
so threatening at my age,
to begin afresh again.

O God of creations and transformations,
who constantly begets new beginnings,
inspire me by your perpetual creativity.

Call me to change,
to dig deeply within myself,
to find the uncultivated capabilities,
the undiscovered diamonds and reserves of resources
that you buried deep within.

And as I step out on the edge,
afraid and doubtful of my abilities,
come and support me with your hand
as my mother took me by the hand
to my first day of school,
and like my father's hand under my arm
as I sat upon my first bicycle,
that menacing machine of balance.

With your belief in me
and your great hand to support me,
all things are possible
as I seek once again to balance myself
and to learn something new.

A PSALM OF LOSS BY DEATH OR DIVORCE

Part of me is gone:
what years of love and affection
had fused in me as one
has now been cut away.

I stand now on a single leg,
and work with only one arm.

Every divorce is a death,
every death a divorce.

My heart has been split
by the stripping
of what I've learned to feel
as an integral part of my being.

By the surgery of separation
I've become an amputee,
disabled by my death-divorce.

O Divine Healer of hearts,
remind me daily not to expect
a miracle of quick recovery.

Guide me as I stumble,
blinded by my tears,
limping along from the loss
of the one I have loved.

Teach me that even cripples
can again learn to dance.

Enlighten me to see
that in my vault of memories
lies the healing herb
that renders pain less deadly:
the remembering and reliving
of my rosary of our many moments of love.

And grace me with your regenerating presence
so that I can begin again.

PSALM DURING A MENSTRUAL CYCLE

O Divine One,
Loving Source of sacred cycles,
Life-force of the rising and setting sun,
of the waxing and waning moon,
help me to celebrate the cycles
that are present within my own body.

May I listen to my bodily rhythms
and embrace my menstrual cycle
which I am experiencing today.

These are sacred days of the month:
as I welcome and accept the life-blood
which is flowing from within me,
may I also respect the full range of my feelings
and honor the difficulty of these days,
the low physical energy and deep sensitivity
during this time of my menstrual cycle.

Help me to create space during these days
for reflection, for quiet and dreaming,
realizing how thin at this sacred time
is the veil between you and me.

O Endless Fountain of all life,
may I embrace this time of my monthly cycle
with awareness and sensitivity,
reverencing the life-force
that is flowing through me.

PSALM OF THE JOBLESS

I'm naked, so please don't look:
I've been stripped of my identity
by the loss of my work.
I've been disrobed of my dignity,
of my purpose for rising from bed.

My life has lost its compass point,
for work gave order to my days.
Weekends were something to look forward to;
now every day is a hollow holiday,
a sad Sunday of idleness.

I stand in line and scan the want ads;
I stand in line and wait,
only to be met with a tinfoil smile
and "Sorry, check back again!"

I want what seems beyond my grasp,
a job, some decent work to do.
I want my dignity back, my purpose;
I want my children, my family,
to hold me in respect.
It's more than money that I need—
it's a return of my self-esteem.

God did not create us to be the styrofoam slaves
of the keepers of Dow and Jones,
who when the corporate world is finished with us
can cast us aside
like once-used coffee cups.

Who cares . . . who cares:
I'm no longer a useful cog in the machine
but only a percentile person.
I'm only one of the faceless idle millions
of the economy's kidnaped victims,
a statistic on the evening news.

PSALM OF THE DISEASE OF POVERTY

Unclean! Unclean!
Stand well upwind;
that my disease is easily caught
is among your greatest fears.
My soul is covered with repulsive sores:
there is no cure,
there is no cure.

You turn away to see no evil;
you are blind and deaf
to the plague of poverty.
Did you know that 85%
are only three paychecks away
from my lethal leprosy?

You hide from the fact
that you live so close to the edge
and could so easily
become homeless and hungry
for compassion's understanding.

You too so easily
could become infected
and quarantined in poverty's ward.

You too could become
one of the invisible ones,
never seen, never heard, abandoned,
jettisoned as useless baggage,
excommunicated from the flow
of the Good Life.

Stay upwind,
keep your distance,
for your immune system lacks an adequate defense
for my disease.

A PSALM OF ANGER

O God, I am so angry:
my small heart is filled
with as much energy
as a nuclear power plant,
and just as dangerous.

I fear the effects of the radiation
that surely leak outward
to all living things that surround me,
invisible energy of destruction
that leaves in its wake
the residue of death.

O Merciful One,
plunge my soul's raging inferno
into your cool, purifying water
to still the savage storm
that boils beyond control
with the heat of hell.

Calm my heart by filling it with peace;
filter all the way into the core,
to transform its deadly energies
into creative power,
into the light of love.

Come, O God,
for without your help
the danger to the life-force around me
may be beyond repair.

A PSALM OF PARDON

Pardon is your name,
Forgiveness your eternal title,
by "Mercy as vast as the universe" are you known.
Grant me, O Gracious One,
your great gift of pardon.

I have searched for it
in every pocket and hiding place;
I cannot find it, your gift of Self.
I know it is here,
buried beneath my pain,
somewhere in a back corner of my heart:
but for now it is lost.

Make me your messenger
of the good news I cannot now speak.
Give to me words of forgiveness,
the healing touch of pardon,
the love that weds two as one.

I know that to forgive is divine,
but I am no deity,
and I fear I will be a demon,
who, by failing to forgive,
will spread the kingdom of darkness.

Remind me ten times and more
of all that you have forgiven me—
without even waiting for my sorrow,
the very instant that I slipped and sinned.

Remind me ten thousand times and more
of your endless absolution,
not even sorrow required on my part,
so broad the bounty of your love.

Yes, I can—I will—forgive
as you have forgiven me.

A PSALM WHEN PARDON IS IMPOSSIBLE

It feels impossible, O God,
totally beyond my reach,
to forgive what has been done to me.
You know my pain,
you know the hurt I hold.

Surely you, O God—
who in a moment of anger
swept away all the earth in one great flood,
leaving only old Noah and his boatload of refugees
safe from your rain-soaked rage—
surely you know the storm within my heart.

But I'm doubly caught in this bind,
snagged on the sacred fence
of my friendship with your son Jesus,
who has told me that I **must** forgive,
seven times seventy times,
those who injure me,
who cause me pain.

Caught between pain and pardon,
I wish to choose his way of pardon.

Nailed by pain to his cross,
covered by the spit of scorners
and whipped by his torturers,
he prayed the impossible prayer.

This prayer is one I now desire to make mine:
"Father, forgive him, her, them,
for they know not what they do."

O Infinite Sea of Mercy,
make this unworthy servant
the channel of your gift of pardon,
that I also may be healed
as your forgiveness passes through me to others.

PSALM OF THE RAZOR'S EDGE

The path we walk to you, O God, is narrow,
as narrow as a razor's edge.
The Way is only as wide as a human hair,
and many are those who lose their balance
on such a thin and uncertain edge.

Each day, like a circus aerialist,
I walk the tightrope of the command,
"Come, follow me."
Who can stride safely on such a narrow bridge
which swings between heaven and earth?

Downward is the pull of self;
it tugs at me: "for me, for me . . . me."
Heavy the gravity of the urge:
"I want, I want, I want."

The Way is narrow and high:
holy and brave are those
who climb upon the razor's edge,
swaying from left to right or right to left,
straining too hard or relaxing too much.

Holy are those who fall
but rise again
and climb back upon the narrow edge
and begin again
and again.

The Way is narrow and high,
and high are those who walk it,
one small step at a time,
intoxicated by the risk,
joyous at the fine balancing line
of the razor's edge.

A PSALM OF MY WHERENESS

The question "Where have I come from?"
rises up and haunts me;
lingering, it floats like a flower
in the backwaters of my mind.

From somewhere deeper than I know,
in the place where I am held to the divine breast,
the voice of God echoes in reply:
"You, my beloved little one,
were hidden in my heart
before your sun burned bright.

You were the dream of my delight
before the earth was born
of the dust of long-dead stars.

Before I shaped a single star,
I nursed you for endless ages,
feeding you with the essence of my life.

"In my great lap I played with your infinite childlike form
and gazed with love upon your original face,
the mirror form of my own image.

I laughed with delight at the marvel of your being,
the flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.

"And you laughed with glee as I winked,
as the four winds sprang to life
and suns like dandelions
lit up the dark lawn of space.

"Where did you come from? O my child,
you in whom live all my hopes and loves,
you came from me."

A RAINY DAY PSALM

I greet you, Pilgrim Rain, mystic, ancient traveler,
visiting me today, washing over our land,
soaking the earth and enriching it,
nourishing growth with greenening gifts of life.

But you are only passing by,
briefly streaming past my door
on your pilgrimage to the sea.

You are a pilgrim who blesses all you touch;
O gentle yet powerful pilgrim,
stone-carver and sand-maker,
what hidden gift do you have for me?

"I teach you about illusions;
like brief bubbles riding tiny trickles
are your ideas that you control your life:
flick a switch and you create light,
turn a key and power fires,
just twist a dial and music plays.
You live in an illusion of control.

"But I, by my downpour descending from the sky
and flowing past your door,
have altered your life today:
your outdoor plans now rearranged,
your neat agendas put on hold.
Learn of me how little you control in your life;
yet, by changing your present plans,
I offer you entrance to a timeless reality,
a chance to listen and be present
to the One who is always beyond."

Thank you, Pilgrim Rain:
it's a small but beautiful gift
to be reminded of the reality of life.
Soon the fireball of my daystar sun
will pierce with long yellow fingers
your mobile home of gray clouds,
and the wind will push them onward
to send you on your restless way again.

Thank you for your holy pilgrim's gift:
may I live like you, always on the move,
my home the endless journey, sacred-sea-bound.
May I live like you, falling and rising;
nourishing always, till I ascend, once and for all.

A PSALM OF FLEXIBILITY

O Spirit of God's eternal springtime heart,
grant me the virtue of elasticity.
Make my heart as boundless as my Beloved's heart,
which at this moment is creating
new galaxies and infant suns.

Make me pliable and playful with your Spirit
as you teach me the alchemist's recipe
of how to keep my heart's skin
like baby's skin, ever-expansive,
able to hold the wildest of wines.

Stir my mind well with your sacred spoon
to awaken the fermentation of ideas
stilled by the ten thousand little compromises
required of me by the stiffness
of the old leathered skins of society and religion.

Gift me with elastic frontiers of heart and mind,
so I can see before my eyes,
both in the heavens and on earth,
how old and ever-new are those partners
passionately dancing together
in the perpetual birthing of your universe.

A PSALM FOR THE DYING

Relatives and friends, I am about to leave;
my last breath does not say "goodbye,"
for my love for you is truly timeless,
beyond the touch of boney death.
I leave myself not to the undertaker,
for decoration in his house of the dead,
but to your memory, with love.

I leave my thoughts, my laughter, my dreams
to you whom I have treasured
beyond gold and precious gems.
I give you what no thief can steal,
the memories of our times together:
the tender, love-filled moments,
the successes we have shared,
the hard times that brought us closer together
and the roads we have walked side by side.

I also leave you a solemn promise
that after I am home in the bosom of God,
I will still be present,
whenever and wherever you call on me.

My energy will be drawn to you
by the magnet of our love.
Whenever you are in need, call me;
I will come to you,
with my arms full of wisdom and light
to open up your blocked paths,
to untangle your knots
and to be your avenue to God.

And all I take with me as I leave
is your love and the millions of memories
of all that we have shared.
So I truly enter my new life
as a millionaire.

Fear not nor grieve at my departure,
you whom I have loved so much,
for my roots and yours
are forever intertwined.

A PSALM BEFORE BEGINNING WORK

To you, O Divine One, from whose hands
comes the work of creation, so artfully designed,
I pray that this work I am about to do
may be done in companionship with you.

May the work that I will soon begin
sing praise to you
as songbirds do.

May the work that I will soon begin
add to the light of your presence
because it is done with great love.

May the work that I will soon begin
speak like a prophet of old
of your dream of beauty and unity.

May the work that I will soon begin
be a shimmering mirror of your handiwork
in the excellence of its execution,
in the joy of doing it for its own sake,
in my poverty of ownership over it,
in my openness to failure or success,
in my invitation to others to share in it
and in its bearing fruit for the world.

May I be aware that through this work
I draw near you.

I come to you, Beloved,
with ready hands.

A PSALM BEFORE BEGINNING WORK

My day begins, O Gracious God;
let all my work be done as prayer
as I do it one with you.
May I, like your son Jesus,
be Emmanuel, "God among us,"
here in this place of work.
May I carry your presence
as I respond to all with kindness and warmth,
with joy and humble service.
Grant me the grace to love Christ
in all who will share my life this day.
O God, grant me this gift.