

Hymn of the week: Before the ending of the day



A memorial stained glass window to J M Neale at St Swithun's, East Grinstead, where he is buried.

This week we remember the hymn writer and translator, J M Neale (1818-1866). In the New English Hymnal, he is credited with 39 hymns, of which he is either the author or the translator. These include: *Around the throne of God a band*, *Christ is made the sure foundation*, *O happy band of Pilgrims and Light's abode*, *Celestial Salem*, to name but a few of the more well-known.

Our hymn for this week is *Before the ending of the day*, which is a hymn most often sung during Night Prayer (also known as Compline).

J M Neale was the son of a clergyman. Brought up in the Evangelical tradition, he read classics at Trinity College, Cambridge. He became the chaplain of Downing College and was ordained in 1841. He served for a short time as the incumbent in Crawley, but poor health caused him to leave. A priest of the High Church tradition, who was influenced by the Oxford movement, he had a keen interest in ministering to the poor and in the importance of good church architecture which spoke of the beauty of God. His ministry was spent not in traditional parish life but as warden of Sackville College, an almshouse in East Grinstead, where he served until his death, at the age of 48. He co-founded the Society of Saint Margaret, a community of sisters dedicated to nursing the sick in 1854.

Neale was an accomplished poet, who won the Seaton poetry prize eleven times. As a classicist, Neale's gift to the church was as a translator. His fluency in Latin and Greek gave him the skill to make accessible texts from the Eastern liturgies and it is this for which he is chiefly remembered. The text for *Before the Ending of the Day* has been re-translated in more up-to-date versions, which may be now more familiar, yet retains the overall shape of his text.

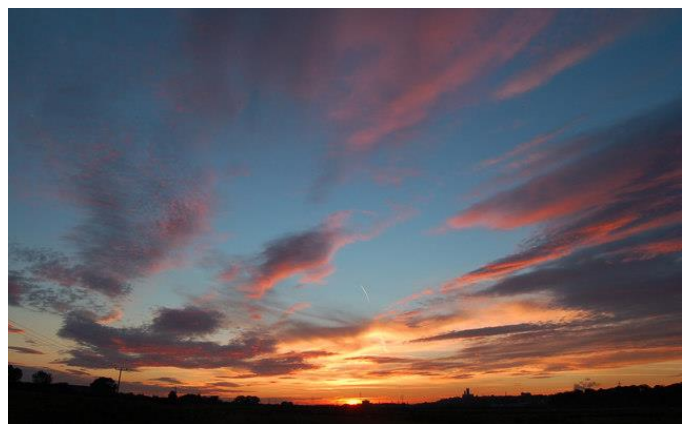
Of all the forms of daily prayer, Compline (Night Prayer) is the one that I crave most often. It is the perfect way to end the day and these words capture for me something of the stillness and yet the fragility of the late night which make it such a natural time for prayer. The tune to which this is now most often sung is a plainsong chant, which adds to the sense of stillness that late night prayer carries.

Since the beginning of lockdown, The Revd. Jackie-Dee Thornton and Gary Fleming, our ordinand, have been livestreaming Night Prayer (Compline). They are on holiday in August but we will resume this in the autumn. If Compline is unfamiliar to you, make it an aim to discover it. You will not be disappointed. Find an order for Compline at: <https://www.chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk/uploads/coronavirus/compline.pdf> On Fridays in Lent, we sing Compline in the cathedral: this is a real treat in the somewhat solemn time of Lent. Make a date with it for next year!

**Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That with thy wonted favour thou
Wouldst be our guard and keeper now.**

**From all ill dreams defend our eyes,
From nightly fears and fantasies;
Tread under foot our ghostly foe,
That no pollution we may know.**

**O Father, that we ask be done,
Through Jesus Christ, thine only Son;
Who, with the Holy Ghost and thee,
Doth live and reign eternally. Amen.**



The Youtube version that I have chosen this week is sung by Schola Magdalena, a female choir. Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrnLkrEUQg> Do also try tuning in to Compline when it returns, which you can find on our Chelmsford Cathedral Youtube page.