



SILENT HOMILIES

The Night He Sometimes Uses

What the Church actually teaches about dreams



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Little Treasures



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Before You Begin



This is not a book that will teach you how to interpret dreams. It is not a dictionary of snakes and staircases. It is a small Catholic answer to a serious question: what does the Church actually teach about dreams?

The answer has two sides, and both matter. God can use a dream. Scripture itself would make any other claim impossible. But a Christian must not build a life on dreams. God is free to speak. We are not free to turn His freedom into a method.

Read it if a dream has frightened you. Read it if you have been told that Catholics must either dismiss the night entirely or treat it as an oracle. Neither is the faith. Then sleep, if you can. The morning already has enough of God in it.

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Chapter 1

Why We Wake and Wonder



A dream happens to almost everyone and can be explained by almost no one. You lie down as yourself. For a few hours the mind keeps working without your permission. You wake with a feeling larger than the pictures.

People have always wanted those hours to mean something. Ancient kings kept interpreters. Now the same hunger moves into apps, dream dictionaries and late conversations that begin, I think it means. The hunger is not foolish. We look for signs. The question is whether every stirring of the imagination is a sign, and whether we have any right to demand one.

Catholic faith begins in a quieter place. God can speak. He is not required to. He has already spoken in His Son. He speaks still in Scripture, in the sacraments, in the ordinary duties of a Christian day. A dream, if it is ever from Him, will not be a second Bible. It will be, at most, a mercy given to a particular person in a particular night. It will have to stand in the light of what He has already made public.

That is why this book will not teach you how to decode the night. It will try to do something kinder. It will show you the difference between receiving a gift and inventing a method.

Reflection

Sometimes we want God to tell us something extraordinary because the ordinary answer is already inconvenient. We already know we should forgive. We already know we should pray. We already know we should go to Mass. We already know whom we have promised to love.

A dream can feel like a way around that. If God would only send a picture, perhaps we would not have to do the thing we already understand. That is not always the motive. But it is a motive worth noticing.

Public revelation is God being clear. He has already said what we need for salvation. He has given the Church what is needed for salvation in Christ. We do not wait for another Gospel. Private experiences may sometimes help a person live that Gospel more fully. They do not complete Christ. They do not correct Him.

Perhaps the problem is not that God is silent. Perhaps we do not like what He has already said.

A Short Prayer

Lord, teach us to want the word You have already given, and to stop asking the night for a second one. Amen.

Chapter 2

The Dreams Scripture Will Own



The Bible is not embarrassed by sleep. It is only careful. Jacob is running from his brother and spends a night in the open with a stone for a pillow. He dreams of a ladder between earth and heaven. When he wakes he is afraid in the good sense. Surely the Lord is in this place, he says, and I did not know it. He sets up the stone as a marker. Then he goes on.

Joseph in Egypt is given dreams and later the grace to interpret them. The point is not that he became interesting at night. The point is that he became useful in the day. Pharaoh's dreams lead to storehouses. People eat.

Solomon at Gibeon is offered, in a dream, whatever he will ask. He asks for a listening heart. When he wakes he governs. Daniel reads dreams that kings cannot. Joel says old men shall dream dreams, and Peter repeats the line at Pentecost. Scripture will own these nights because they send someone back into a public work of God.

Scripture is also suspicious. Deuteronomy warns against those who claim hidden knowledge. Jeremiah speaks against prophets who tell dreams that God did not send. Sirach, which belongs to the Catholic canon, is blunt: dreams have deceived many, and those who put their hope in them have been disappointed. Many Catholics have never heard that sentence. It is in the Bible.

Reflection

Notice what the biblical dreamers do next. Jacob gets up. Joseph stores grain. Solomon judges. The Magi go home another way. The question Scripture keeps asking is not, What did you dream? It is, What did you do when you woke up?

That is a very Catholic question. Faith is not something that happens only in the mind at night. It has to be able to live in the day.

Sirach is useful here because it belongs to our Bible and because it refuses to be impressed. A dream can come from many places. Anxiety. Hope. A heavy supper. A real word from God. The book will not let us skip the first three in our rush toward the fourth.

If a night sends you back into prayer, duty and love, it has already done the work Scripture recognises. If it only makes you want another night like it, be careful.

A Short Prayer

God of Jacob and Joseph, send us back into the day You have already given.

Amen.

Chapter 3

The Carpenter Who Got Up



The most important dreamer in the New Testament is not a mystic in a desert. He is a tradesman in a small town in Galilee, betrothed to a girl named Mary, and facing a scandal he does not understand. Matthew tells us that Joseph resolved to send her away quietly. That is already a just man's sentence. Then, in a dream, an angel of the Lord appears. Do not fear to take Mary as your wife. The child is from the Holy Spirit. You shall call His name Jesus.

Matthew is a careful writer. He does not give us Joseph's feelings at any length. He gives us Joseph's mornings. He woke and did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. Later the Magi are warned in a dream not to return to Herod. Joseph is told in the night to take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Later he is told that Herod is dead. Later he is warned again and settles in Nazareth. Four dreams, four acts of obedience. The Gospel never shows Joseph asking for a fifth.

Joseph's dreams are not entertainment. They protect a Child, a mother and a promise. They agree with what God is already doing. They do not flatter Joseph. They cost him sleep, reputation and a country. And when the danger has passed, the dreams stop. A man who had been given angels in the night goes back to wood and silence in Nazareth. That is not a comedown. It is the point. The dream was for the mission, not for the dreamer.

If you want a Catholic picture of a holy dream, start here. A just man is already trying to do the right thing. God uses sleep to move him one step further. In the morning he gets up.

Reflection

St Joseph receives extraordinary guidance and then lives an ordinary life. God speaks. Joseph gets up. Then Joseph works. No book of symbols. No spiritual celebrity. No demand for another vision.

Four dreams. Four obediences. No request for a fifth. That is the Catholic pattern. The holiness is not that he became fascinated with dreams. The holiness is that when God spoke, Joseph obeyed.

We like the night because it can feel special. Joseph's nights were not special in that sense. They were costly. They sent him into exile and into work. If a dream only makes us feel chosen, it does not look like his.

The safest way to honour St Joseph is not to wait for an angel. It is to get up and do the next right thing that is already in front of you.

A Short Prayer

St Joseph, who woke and obeyed, teach us to love the morning more than the vision. Amen.

Chapter 4

What the Law Forbids



The Church does not say that God never uses a dream. She does say that we may not treat the night as a machine for secret knowledge. The Catechism is plain about divination, magic and attempts to unveil the future. These are not harmless hobbies. They try to seize what belongs to God.

Deuteronomy forbids the searching out of hidden things by forbidden means. Curiosity is not the problem. The problem is wanting to know what God has not chosen to give. Prayer says, Lord, guide me. Divination says, Tell me what is going to happen so that I can possess the information.

A dream dictionary belongs, spiritually, with that second sentence. So does any habit of asking the night for answers God has not chosen to give in the day. Trying to get messages from the dead is in the same family. The Church forbids it. Love for the dead is not forbidden. Prayer for them is commanded. Using them as messengers is not.

The difference is trust. One hands the future back to God. The other tries to own it in advance. Catholics may ask for light. They may not demand a forecast.

Reflection

Prayer and divination can look similar from a distance. Both want to know. Both use words about God. You can see the difference in what the hands are doing.

Prayer opens the hands. It asks for guidance and then accepts that God may answer through Scripture, through counsel, through a slow change of heart, through nothing dramatic at all. Divination closes the hands around information. It wants the future as a possession.

That is why the Church is severe here without being frightened. She is protecting freedom. A person who must know tomorrow cannot love today. A person who must decode every night cannot rest.

If you need to know the future in order to obey, you are no longer obeying. You are bargaining.

A Short Prayer

Lord of the living and the dead, teach us to ask for guidance without trying to own tomorrow. Amen.

Chapter 5

How Thomas Sorted the Night



St Thomas Aquinas did not write a dream manual. He did something more useful. He remembered that a human being is body and soul, and that sleep is a bodily thing. In the Summa he treats dreams among the questions of prophecy, divination and the causes of our thoughts. He will not let us jump straight to angels.

A dream may come from the body: illness, food, tiredness, the day's leftover images. It may come from the mind's own work when the senses are quiet. St Augustine, writing on Genesis, had already said much the same. Many pictures in sleep are gathered from memory. They are not automatically a word from heaven. It may, rarely, be used by God, or by what is not God. Thomas is not trying to make the night exciting. He is trying to keep Christians from calling every picture a revelation.

This is not an insult to faith. Catholicism believes God created the body too. A natural explanation does not push God out. Grace does not destroy nature. It assumes nature is real.

Thomas would rather a Christian become holy through the sacraments than become interesting by the night. That sentence is not in the Summa in those words. The instinct is his. Holiness has a public road: faith, the commandments, the Mass, confession, the works of mercy. The night is not the main classroom.

Reflection

Not everything that feels spiritual is spiritual. Sometimes a dream means you were tired. Sometimes it means you were anxious. Sometimes it means you ate too late, or you miss somebody, or your body is unwell.

Saying that is not unbelief. God made the body. He made tiredness and digestion as well as angels. If we skip the body in our rush toward a message, we are not being more supernatural. We are being less Catholic.

Grace builds on nature. That old sentence means something practical here. Before you call a night a vision, ask whether the day was ordinary. Sleep. Grief. Fever. A film. A quarrel. These are allowed to exist.

If after that you still wonder, you have lost nothing by being honest. God is not threatened by a glass of water and a good night's rest.

A Short Prayer

Creator of body and soul, keep us from calling every picture a revelation.

Amen.

Chapter 6

The Mystics Who Would Not Cling



The saints who actually had extraordinary experiences are often the ones who tell us not to chase them. St Teresa of Avila knew visions and locutions. She also knew how easily the soul can start wanting the experience more than God. She told her sisters to measure a favour by the humility and obedience it left behind, not by how vivid it was. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers record something similar. Brothers once came to Abba Antony because they were having visions that often turned out true. On the way their donkey died. Before they could ask him anything, Antony told them the donkey had died. The demons showed me, he said. Then they understood that a true picture is not yet a holy one.

St John of the Cross is even more severe. The night, for him, is often God's way of weaning a soul from sweets. Attachments to visions, voices and inner pictures can become a quieter idol. He would rather a person walk by faith in the dark than collect spiritual events like treasures.

St Ignatius taught a similar caution in another language. Consolation and desolation come and go. A feeling in the night is not yet a decision. Wait. Look at the fruit. Do not change a vocation on a mood.

Why would people who had seen so much warn us not to hunt for more? Because the experience can become more important than God. A person can begin by wanting God and finish by wanting experiences of God. Those are not the same thing.

Reflection

This is one of the hardest Catholic lessons. The saints are not trying to sell us extraordinary nights. They are witnesses that God is enough when the extraordinary stops.

Wanting God and wanting experiences of God can feel identical at first. They are not. One will still pray when the pictures fade. The other will go looking for another experience.

Teresa and John are not killjoys. They are protecting love. If I need a vision in order to keep faith, I do not yet have faith. I have an appetite. The safest extraordinary grace is the one that makes you more ordinary: more patient, more honest, more willing to do the next hidden duty.

A Short Prayer

Lord, wean us from wanting experiences of You more than we want You.

Amen.

Chapter 7

A Particular Night Is Not a Method



Don Bosco dreamed. St Monica was consoled about Augustine. St Perpetua, in prison, was given visions before her martyrdom. These nights belonged to those lives. They were not issued as a system for the rest of the Church.

Teresa of Avila, in her own Life, says she never undertook a work merely because it came in prayer. When her confessors told her to do the opposite, she did it. That is a hard sentence if you think a vision settles everything. The Catechism is careful about private revelation. It can help people live the Gospel more fully in a particular time. It does not complete public revelation. No one is obliged to treat another person's dream as a command.

This is a kindness. If Don Bosco's dreams were a method, then every parish youth worker would have to wait for the same nights. They do not. They have the Gospel, the sacraments and the young people actually in front of them.

The saints are to be imitated in faith, hope, charity, obedience, prayer and sacrifice. Not necessarily in their extraordinary experiences. A particular night is a gift. It is not a technique.

Reflection

God's gift to another person is not automatically God's method for me. That sentence can save a lot of spiritual unhappiness.

We read a life of a saint and quietly add their visions to our shopping list. Then we feel unloved because our own nights are only sleep. The Church never asked us to have their nights. She asked us to have their love.

Monica's consolation belonged to years of tears for a son. Perpetua's visions belonged to a prison. Don Bosco's dreams belonged to a vocation among poor boys. Remove the life and the night becomes a curiosity. Imitate the charity. Leave the special effects where God put them.

A Short Prayer

God of the saints, teach us to copy their love and to stop borrowing their nights. Amen.

Chapter 8

When a Dream Disturbs You



A nightmare can feel spiritually powerful and still be only a nightmare. Fear is not revelation. At night the mind is loud and not very clear.

A dream about someone who has died does not automatically mean that person is contacting you. The Church does not treat sleep as a way of receiving messages from the dead. If remembering them moves you to pray, or to have Mass offered, do that. The good action does not require you to prove the dream was supernatural.

After a frightening dream, the first Catholic things are small. Get up if you need to. Drink some water. Say a Hail Mary. Look at a crucifix. If the fear remains and starts to rule the day, speak to a priest. If the nights keep coming and your health is involved, speak to a doctor as well. A priest and a doctor are not rivals. God made both kinds of help.

Do not immediately search for a supernatural interpretation. Do not give the devil more attention than Christ. Catholic teaching knows that evil is real. It does not invite you to decorate every bad night with that name.

Reflection

Fear is not a message just because it is strong. Intensity is not the same as truth.

If you wake from a dream of the dead, the Catholic response can be very simple. Pray for them. Entrust them to God. Then stop interrogating the pictures. The prayer is Catholic even if the dream was entirely natural.

Psychological or medical help is not a failure of faith. Recurring nightmares, trauma, medication, stress and illness are real. Seeking help is a way of taking the body seriously. That is not unbelief. It is humility. Christ is more interesting than the dark. Keep Him in the larger place.

A Short Prayer

Mary, who kept the night watches, stay with those who wake afraid, and teach them to rest again. Amen.

Chapter 9

Discernment After Dawn



Suppose, after all the cautions, you still wonder. The dream was clear. It did not flatter you. It asked something that looks like the Gospel. What then? The Church does not leave you without a road. She only refuses to let the road be a private one.

Wait. A genuine mercy of God can survive a week of silence. A compulsion cannot. If the image demands an immediate, secret, dramatic act, treat it as a suspect. Place the content beside public revelation. Nothing that contradicts the Creed, the commandments or the unity of the Church can be from the Holy Spirit.

Tell someone who is not impressed by you: a confessor, a director, a wise older Catholic who will not gasp. Secrecy is a bad sign. So is a hunger to be believed. Look at the fruits over time. Does the memory make you more patient and more willing to be small? Or restless and special?

Do not make a large life-decision on a dream alone. Vocations, marriages, moves and money need the ordinary means: prayer, counsel, the sacraments, and time. Joseph himself was already a just man before the angel spoke. The dream did not create his character. It used it.

Reflection

Anything supposedly from God must be willing to stand in the light. God does not need secrecy to protect the truth.

A claimed private message does not outrank Scripture, the Church, the sacraments, the commandments, your real duties or sound reason. That is not bureaucracy. It is how the Body of Christ stays one Body.

If you desperately need your dream to be believed, that itself deserves attention. Joseph did not need an audience. He needed a road out of Bethlehem.

Humility is part of discernment. The surest holy night sends you back into the day you already had, only a little more willing to be faithful.

A Short Prayer

Holy Spirit, give us companions in the daylight, and save us from a guidance that cannot bear to be tested. Amen.

Chapter 10

Living Without a Spellbook



The Catholic life does not require a theory of dreams. It requires a way of spending the day and a way of giving the night back. The Church already has both. She puts words into our mouths at evening: Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. She gives us a last glance at a crucifix, an examination of conscience short enough for a tired person, and permission to sleep as a creature, not as a guard.

If you want a practice, let it be that small. End the day with an act of contrition or a Hail Mary. Do not go hunting through the day's images for a code. If something in prayer or duty is unfinished, write one line and leave it for the morning.

In the morning the sure speech of God will be where it was yesterday. A page of the Gospel. The Mass if you can get there. The face of the person you have already promised to love. A need that does not require a dream to make it visible. These are not lesser messages. They are the ordinary ones, which is why they are safe.

The Christian goal is not to become somebody who dreams well. It is to become somebody who can wake up, work, pray, love, fulfil his duties and go back to sleep without demanding a message from the dark.

Reflection

Perhaps one of the greatest acts of faith is going to sleep without demanding an answer.

We pray, Into Your hands. Then we actually have to place ourselves there. I do not need to watch over the world. God remains awake. I do not need tomorrow's answer tonight. I can sleep.

That is not spiritual laziness. It can be faith. A creature is allowed to stop. The night already belongs to God. We do not have to make it mysterious in order to make it holy.

If He uses a dream, He will know how to find you. You do not have to leave the light on as a test.

A Short Prayer

Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit. Give us nights quiet enough for trust, and mornings willing enough for work. Amen.

A Last Word



The night already belongs to God. We do not have to make it interesting in order to make it holy.

God may sometimes use a dream. But He has already given us His Son, His Word, His Church, His sacraments, prayer, our duties, and the people we have been asked to love.

St Joseph, guardian of the Holy Family, pray for us.

Sources and Further Reading



Scripture: Genesis 28; Genesis 37; Genesis 40–41; 1 Kings 3; Daniel 2 and 4; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17; Matthew 1:18–25; Matthew 2; Deuteronomy 13 and 18; Jeremiah 23; Sirach 34:1–8; Matthew 7:15–20.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 65–67 (Christ the final Word; private revelation); 2110–2117 (divination, magic, consulting the dead); 2115–2116 in particular on unveiling the future.

St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, questions on prophecy, divination and superstition, especially qq. 172–95 as they touch causes of knowledge beyond ordinary reason. Thomas is used here for his caution, not as the author of a modern dream system.

St Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle and the Life*, on not clinging to visions. St John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, on detachment from extraordinary communications. St Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, rules for discernment of spirits.

The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity. Augustine, *Confessions* IX, on Monica; *De Genesi ad litteram* XII, on dreams arising from memory and the body. Sayings of the Desert Fathers (*Apophthegmata Patrum*), Antony 12, the brothers and the donkey. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, on obeying confessors even when a vision seemed to say otherwise. Standard lives of St John Bosco, used only to note that his dreams belonged to his vocation and are not a method for others.

Private revelations do not complete or correct the Gospel. No Catholic is required to build a spiritual life around somebody else's dream.

Before the light goes out



Some of the work behind a Little Treasure happens when nobody sees it. Reading. Checking. Removing an attractive story that cannot be verified. Rewriting a paragraph until a difficult Catholic teaching becomes simple. Perhaps that belongs in a book about the night. Not everything useful happens where people can watch.

I keep these booklets free to read. The pages you have just finished are already yours. A short book can take a long time to become short. Sometimes the shortest sentence took the longest time, because before I can make a teaching simple I have to understand it properly.

If this Little Treasure steadied you, and if you would like another one to reach the morning, a gift through the Silent Homilies website would be received with real gratitude. It is not payment for this book. It helps make the next one possible. Your support gives me something practical: time and resources to continue.

If you cannot give financially, nothing changes. Read. Share the booklet. Give it to someone who has been frightened by a dream, or confused about what the Church actually teaches. That too helps the work continue.

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