

## Prayer of the Month • August 2010

O God, you put into my heart this great desire to devote myself to the sick and sorrowful; I offer it to you. Do with it what is best for your service. You know that through all these twenty horrible years I have been supported by the belief that I was working with you who were bringing every one of us, even our poor nurses, to perfection. O Lord, even now, I am trying to snatch the management of your world from your hands. Too little have I looked for something higher and better than my own work—the work of supreme Wisdom, which uses us, whether we know it or not.

Florence Nightingale, 1820–1910

In this prayer of exploration and offering, Florence Nightingale shares her feelings and desires about what to do with her life. Her main desire is to serve God. There is a danger of trying to take over and doing God's work for him. She seeks the balance of working and of entrusting what she does to God, and recognises that she will not always know how she is being used by God. There is both ambition and realism in this prayer, framed by humility.

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was born into a well-off family on 12 May 1820, and named after the place of her birth, Florence. Her parents were on their honeymoon, quite a length honeymoon, during which both she and her elder sister were born. On 7 February 1837, not long before her seventeenth birthday, Florence experienced what she described as a strong sense of calling. "God spoke to me", she wrote, "and called me to His service." It was the type of experience that was to recur throughout her life. She announced in 1845 that she wanted to go into nursing, to the intense distress of her parents, and also in opposition to a what society expected of a woman in society. She educated herself in the art and science of nursing and became a campaigner for improvement in medical care in hospitals. In 1853 she became superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in Upper Harley Street, London, but her most well-known contribution to nursing came from 1854 in the Crimean War. This is where she acquired the name 'The Lady with the Lamp'. Although her work generally prevented her from attending church, she read the religious works of classical authors like Augustine of Hippo and Bede, as well as sermons by figures from her own age, such as Benjamin Jowett and Thomas Arnold. During later life when was bedridden for some years, but continued to campaign for improvements in hospital planning. Her religious faith was important to her throughout her life, and it seems that as an adult she said prayers daily with her own household. In her personal prayers she particularly remembered the seventh day of the month as the anniversary of her 'call to service'. Her religious ideas are expressed in *Suggestions for Thought (to Searchers after Religious Truth)*. She died peacefully in her sleep on 13 August 1910, at the age of 90, and is buried at St. Margaret Church in East Wellow, Hampshire.

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