

Prayer of the Month • December 2011

The Apologist's Evening Prayer

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more
From all the victories that I seemed to score;
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.

Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead
of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.
Lord of the narrow gate and needle's eye,
Take from me all my trumpery lest I die.

C. S. Lewis, 1898–1963



A moment's reflection will show us that we are much more readily convinced of the things we want to believe than of those that we don't. Without even knowing it we are swayed by our preferences and prejudices, and our understanding and experience of God is clouded. In other words, we ourselves get in the way of ourselves, of reality and of God. C. S. Lewis, one of the most influential Christian apologists of the twentieth century, prays here not to get in the way, not to be carried away by his own thoughts and views, not to mistake a faint impression of God for the real thing. Lewis recognises that help comes from being able to put aside thoughts, to stop forming images, and to rest in silence – a silence that comes from God.

Clive Staples Lewis, known to his friends as Jack, was born in Belfast, Ireland, on 29 November 1898. He was initially educated at home, but in 1908 was sent to the Wynyard School in Watford, Hertfordshire, just after his mother's death from cancer, and later was sent to Malvern for the sake of his health. In 1916 he was awarded a scholarship at University College, Oxford, but his studies were suspended in 1917 when he joined the British Army and fought in the First World War. He was injured in a 'friendly fire' incident on 15 April 1918.

Although Lewis had been raised in a church-going family he had become an atheist at the age of 15. Influenced by the books of George MacDonald and by friendship with J.R.R. Tolkien and others, Lewis came reluctantly to faith, as he described it in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy: the Shape of my Early Life* (1955): "That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England." Lewis had a brilliant academic career, which began by his winning a triple first. He taught at Magdalene College, Oxford, for nearly thirty years and then was appointed the first Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. As well as academic and religious works Lewis also wrote the Narnia series of children's books and a science fiction trilogy. In later life he corresponded with and then married the American writer Joy Davidman Gresham, who subsequently died from cancer in 1960. His experience of this bereavement is expressed in *A Grief Observed* (1961), originally published under a pseudonym because of the rawness of his grief. Lewis suffered a kidney inflammation in 1961 and a heart attack in 1963. He died a week before his 65th birthday, on 22 November 1963, and is buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity Church, Headington, Oxford.

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