

Wrestling

Wrestling may seem a very strange thing to include as something we do before the Blessed Sacrament. In fact, the idea of wrestling with God goes right back into the Hebrew scriptures with Jacob spending a whole night wrestling physically with a being he later recognises as an angel of the Lord.

People like Abraham, Moses and the prophets seem also to have spent hours in prayer wrestling with God. Abraham negotiated with God to ensure the salvation of a town. Moses really did not want to have to go to Pharaoh and told God so. Most of the prophets struggled with their growing awareness of what God was asking of them.

Very few of us have such major roles to play — but most of us will have times when we struggle with our faith — even with God. We may be facing a decision and trying hard to discern what God wants for us. This is especially difficult if we sense that what God is asking is not what we ourselves want. We may be facing great pain or problems in our lives and wondering just where our loving God is when things seem at their worst.

There can be a temptation to think that we cannot be honest with God about all this — that somehow we should bypass our real feelings and come to acceptance of 'God's will'. This can happen and is beautiful when it does. But, if we are really wrestling with something, we find ourselves in very good company and God does not think less of us for being honest and 'real' when we come into his presence.

Jesus and Wrestling

There is no reference at all to Jesus physically wrestling with anyone but there are mentions of times when he was frustrated and angry with his disciples and wrestling spiritually and emotionally with them.

There is also a very clear example of Jesus wrestling with God. It is the night before he dies and his human fear and dread is growing by the second as he realises what he is about to face. Jesus does not try to pretend that he does not feel those things. In fact, he begs God to 'take the cup away from him!' — asking God to find another way to save humanity. He has asked friends to pray with him but they just sleep through most of it. One translation says that they slept 'because of grief' — as if Jesus' anguish was just too much for them to face with him. Eventually, Jesus works through his fear and desperation and comes to acceptance — entrusting himself into the hands of the Father. He does not suddenly become happy — but finds peace and serenity, not by avoiding the pain but by accepting his need to wrestle with God, to name the fear and to struggle through to a way of overcoming it.

Acknowledgements

Time before the Blessed Sacrament is a series of leaflets produced by the Spirituality Committee in preparation for *Adoremus*. It is intended for individual reflection as part of a time of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament or Exposition. It could also be used with small groups.

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Agony in the Garden by William Dyce. British Museum.

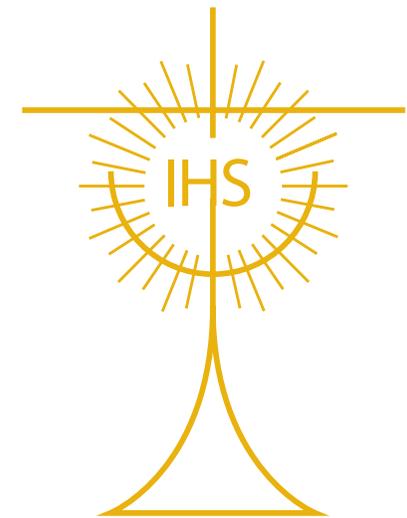
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Time before the Blessed Sacrament

Wrestling

Not my will
but yours be done.

Luke 22:42

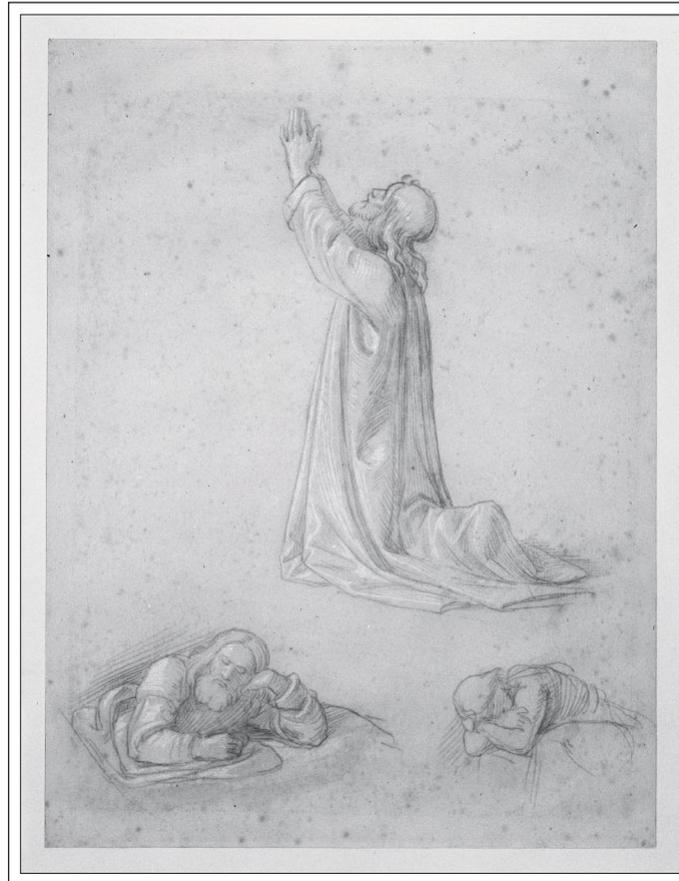


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Looking at Scripture

Jesus went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the me of trial.' Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the me of trial.'

Luke 22: 39-46



Reflection

What am I wrestling with at the moment?

How do my feelings echo those of Jesus?

Who are the angels who come and support me in my difficulties—in my 'wrestling'?

Who can I think of who also wrestled with God — from scriptures or the lives of saints? How does their example help me?

What do I need from Jesus in this time of prayer to help me carry on the struggle?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
I honour your time of struggle
and wrestling with God —
the Father you trusted completely.

I come into your presence
with my own struggles
(*name them here*).

I long for their resolution
but ask for the courage to be honest with
God — and the resilience to continue the
wrestling when the temptation might be to
walk away and give up.

Help me to draw on the examples of those
who also wrestled with God
and who came to find that his will for them
surpassed anything they could ever have
imagined, and that all they needed to fulfil
it was given in full measure.