



Sunset or nightfall has always been a special time for prayer in Christianity and indeed in all the world religions. This prayer balances the prayer of morning. We are invited to slow down, to rest, to become still and at the same time, attentive to God.

Whenever you have the opportunity - probably in your holiday time - sit or stand in silence, facing the setting sun. This is particularly beautiful when it is watched slowly sinking into the western sea. If you like, use a line of Scripture to help you meditate, for example Psalm 113.3 or Ephesians 4.26: "From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the name of the Lord be praised!"; and "the sun must not be allowed to go down, while you are still angry".

If the weather is cold or wet and you are unable to see the sun - then, as it begins to get dark, sit near the window of your bedroom, with the curtains open. You might like to set up a crucifix or an ikon with a candle, night-lights, incense, etc. As you begin, you will scarcely notice the light of the candle - your attention will be drawn by the day-light coming in from outside. Take a little time to make sure that you are in a comfortable, steady position. Look ahead of you and take note of what you can see in the light of day: the furnishings of your room, the window frame and everything that you can see outside trees, walls, poles, buildings, etc. Do not strain to see. Just relax and allow objects to impinge on your consciousness.

Next, slowly close your eyes and listen to the sounds of evening. Pay particular attention to the sounds of nature, but include also man-made sounds such as traffic, stereos and, of course, the human voice. From this point on open or close your eyes at will. Become aware of the pulsating stream of life behind all that you can see and hear. With the passing of time, keep in touch with any changes that are taking place - the sky turning a deeper blue, birds becoming silent, house and street lights coming on, and so forth. Notice how your candle light now appears brighter and your religious image becomes more "alive".

Become conscious of what is happening within you - the breath, heart-beat and your whole body slowing down and becoming more relaxed. Deliberately allow yourself to go with the movement of nature - from the exertion and speed of day to the rest and stillness of night. The words of Psalm 104.23 beautifully capture the mood of this time of day: "People go out to do their work and keep working until evening"; "The sun knows the time to set. You make the darkness, and it is night" (verses 19-20).