

## On Any Quiet Night

The bedroom lights go out. Darkness envelops the room like a great warm quilt. Another day in the lives of my children is being laid to rest. It's sometimes like murder to get them this close to slumber. We might have sweet-talked them into bed, but more likely they were threatened. Their clothes probably lie on the floor in a heap. With any luck, we've remembered to brush their teeth. Yet, here in the dark, none of this matters. All that still stands between now and that nightly launch to the land of dreams is a ritual I've come to cherish: bedtime prayers.

Their mother and I sit on the edge of their beds. Their fidgety bodies slow to stillness. Then and there we do what families have done in one way or another since the dawn of religious consciousness. We pray.

Our prayers do not run a linear course. We converse as we pray and pray as we converse until it is no longer possible to tell the difference. As God listens in, we fill in the gaps of each other's day. Our children wow us with news on the school front—things like the difference between a fruit and a vegetable, or the capitol of Idaho, or the girl who tipped her food tray into the cafeteria monitor's lap. We pray for a good night's rest, but break the flow to remind someone to pack a lunch for the field trip or to ride the late bus home. We pause in mid-sentence to feel a loose tooth or examine a mosquito bite. We suspend a prayer for someone near death in favor of a lengthy debate about heaven.

Yes, our words get around to God, but God is more than the words we speak. God is the inspiration, not only for our words, but for ourselves, the one *in whom we live and move and have our being*. And because we believe God is loving and generous, our

prayers freely express not only our praise but also the truth of our tangled lives, opened wide like the pages of an unfinished novel. Our prayers are *made flesh*, like the one in whose name we pray them.

Not all our prayers work this way. On some tired nights we barely go through the motions. At times our efforts slip into the pat and predictable or even teeter on the edge of sanctimony. Occasionally we don't pray at all. But on most any quiet night, we can be found together in the dark, gently coaxing one another from the shallows out to the deep of our lives, where God hears our chatter as well as our cries and, in the quiet and the clamor, speaks.