12th June 2026

Bower

"So sweet is zealous contemplation."

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*

A recent visit to Linlithgow Palace outside Edinburgh proved to be as fascinating as ever. Although I'm not good with heights, I was determined to explore part of the Palace I hadn't seen before, by climbing to the top of one of the Palace turrets, to "Queen Margaret's Bower".

In 1503, the Palace was given to Margaret Tudor, the bride of King James IV of Scotland. It became the new queen's favourite home in Scotland, her place of pleasure and security, as much a home as any queen might wish. James and Margaret's son, the future King James V, was born in Linlithgow Palace in 1512. But in the following year, tragedy struck, when King James IV was killed at the Battle of Flodden. Legend has it that Queen Margaret retreated to her Bower, at the top of the Palace, to await news of the King's fate in the battle, and, in time, to grieve for his death.

At the top of a palace turret, Queen Margaret's Bower is small and remote, and as I sat in it for a while on my own, I could see why it could be a place of retreat, solitude, private tears, reflection and prayer. Queen Margaret's Bower would offer a fearful and grieving queen a place of contemplation and, hopefully, restoration and renewal.

In my second parish, my church had two small side-chapels. One of them, what was known as The Prayer Chapel, became *my* bower, my place of retreat and reflection, prayer and peace, sanctity and security, contemplation and consolation, in thankfulness and sorrow. Like Queen Margaret 500 years ago, I needed my bower, and I used it often.

I wonder where your bower might be. Is it a place – specific to you, to which you can retreat, knowing what it will provide for you? Is it a system – an attitude of mind, which you can slip into for prayer and contemplation, wherever you might find yourself? Is it a pattern – a set of prayerful exercises which you can use, which, in their familiarity, provide you with the space and reflection you need? Whatever or wherever it is, I hope you have a bower that works for you. For you never know when you might need to climb the turret of your thoughts and spend time in "zealous contemplation", working through what's important in your life.

A prayer for today

Loving God, in my bower of thoughtfulness and prayer, grant me your peace. Amen

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