

His words penetrate deep inside you. You feel a sense of peace and calm, a feeling that he knows all about you and sits there without judgment. "All you need to do is open your eyes. I am here. I am everywhere. Just look."

It is then you know. It is then you understand. You look down at your coffee unable to speak but feeling more alive than you have in years. When you look up, he is gone. You look around the café, but you don't see him. You look out the window, and there he is, smiling at you. He points to his heart and says, "Just look. I am here."

And then he disappears into the crowd.

PRAYER

Hold your light out to the world
and let people of all nations feel the warmth of God's love
as they encounter the Word made Flesh through Christ our Lord.
Follow, where the Spirit of Hope leads us
Listen, as the Child of Peace cries for us
Rejoice, as the Love of God embraces us
and let us go with Hope, Peace and Love in our hearts
and the blessing of Creator, Child and Spirit forever within us.

Richard Becher



CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, as we prepare for your coming at Bethlehem
we watch with patience.
As the Word became flesh and lived and moved among us,
so we search for you,
that in finding you we may respond with hearts and minds
to that Love, born of Mary;
to the Word made flesh, dwelling in us,
so that we may dwell in Him.

Timothy Radcliffe OP from *The Little Book of Advent*



LET US PRAY ADVENT

WEEK 4: LOVE

INTRODUCTION

The theme of our final session is Love and for the final time we offer you an oasis of peace to pray, to imagine, to rest, and to dream as we open our hearts to welcome Christ into the world and accept the love He offers.

We want this week to really dwell on the intensity of the unconditional love that God has for each one of us, and our response to that. We invite you in this session and the final days before Christmas to allow God to speak to you in whatever way He wants to.

Let us begin by listening to a few readings from the Scriptures and from Pope Francis that remind us of that infinite love.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, that whoever believes in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life.

1 John 4:7, 8, 15, 16

My dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.....When someone acknowledges that Jesus is the son of God, God remains in him and he in God. We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in him.

Pope Francis

A God who draws near out of love walks with His people, and this walk comes to an unimaginable point. We could never have imagined that the same Lord would become one of us and walk with us, be present with us, present in His Church, present in the Eucharist, present in His Word, present in the poor, He is present, walking with us. And this is closeness: the shepherd close to his flock, close to his sheep, whom he knows, one by one.

THE WOMB OF SILENCE

Not in the whirlwind, not in the lightning,
not in the strife of tongues is God to be found,
but in the still small voice speaking in the womb of silence.

Therefore be silent.
Let the past be silent.
Let there be no vain regrets,
no brooding on past failures, no bitterness,
no judgement of oneself or of others.

Let all be silent.
Be still and know. Be still and look.

Let the eyes of the mind be closed
that you may hear what otherwise you would not hear,
that you may know what otherwise you would not know.

Abandon yourself to God in longing love,
simply, holding on to nothing but God.
So you may enter the silence of eternity
and know the union of yourself with God.

And if in the silence God does not answer, God is still there.
God's silence is the silence of love.
Wait then in patience and in submission.
It is good to wait in silence for God's coming.

Author unknown

As we prepare to open our hearts anew to Christ this Christmas, let us hold a deep sense of the infinite and unconditional love that God is offering to each of us and everyone else in the human family everyone. May we also come to understand better that accepting the love of God calls us to see his face in everyone we meet and to love them as God loves them.

A HEART OPEN TO GOD

Loving is always risky, because we cannot enter into it without being changed. Altered. Transformed. In the face of this, we might well ask, Do I really want this? Do we really desire to be so undone? Loving is never just about opening our heart. It is about being willing to have our heart become larger as we make room for people and stories and experiences we never imagined holding.

It is about being willing to have our heart become deeper as we move beyond the surface layers of our assumptions, prejudices, and habits in order to truly see and receive what – and who – is before us. It is about being willing to have our heart continually shattered and remade as we take in not only the brokenness of the world but also the beauty of it, the astounding wonder that will not allow us to remain the same.

Jan Richardson from *Sanctuary of Women*,
A Women's Christmas Retreat 2019 www.janrichardson.com

IMAGINATIVE CONTEMPLATION

It's early evening. You are walking in a large city, perhaps it's Manchester. It's a few weeks before Christmas, and the streets are filled with people shopping. The pavements are so crowded that it's hard to walk without bumping into someone. Your life has been so busy lately that you haven't had time to think about Christmas or shopping or anything related to the season. As you walk, you wonder why you even decided to come to town tonight. You knew it would be crowded. You knew it would be difficult just crossing the street, but something drew you here, something that you felt deep inside.

You decide to sit in a café for a few minutes to let your mind settle. You take your coffee, but even this place is so full there aren't any seats available. You notice someone sitting at a table alone. "Do you mind if I sit here?" you ask him.

He looks up. You've seen his face before, but you can't remember where. "Not at all," he says with a smile.

You take off your coat and sit down. The man continues to look at you. At first it makes you feel uncomfortable but as you look into his deep brown eyes, you see an unusual depth and brightness there. Then he asks, "What are you looking for tonight?"

The question strikes you as odd, but there is something about his face and voice that make you want to open up and speak freely. "I'm not shopping, that's for sure," you say laughing. "Why do you ask?"

He smiles and says, "I think you know me."

You look at him and again that feeling that you do know him comes over you. "Your face seems familiar. Perhaps we've met before. Are you from around here?"

His eyes seem to look deep inside of you. His smile is warm and inviting. "I am the one you've been searching for. I am he."