

*Hope sees the invisible,
feels the intangible, and achieves the impossible.*

Helen Keller



PRAY AND REFLECT: ADVENT



WEEK ONE
HOPE



*Our task is to seek and find Christ in our world as it is
and not as it might be.*

*All will be done according to his will.
Our Advent is the celebration of this hope.*

Thomas Merton

INTRODUCTION

In the first book of Kings God speaks to the prophet Elijah but His voice is not to be found in the power of the hurricane, in the roar of the earthquake or in the heat of the fire. Instead, God reveals Himself in the gentle whisper of the breeze. It is here, in the quiet, that God speaks to Elijah in a small, still voice. Elijah meets God in the silence and this is where we too can encounter Him in moments of quiet contemplation.

Anne O'Connor

WAITING AND WATCHING

Advent is about two comings. It's about waiting and watching for the coming of the Christ child – new life, new birth, new hope coming into our world and into our lives. It is the fulfilment of God's promises. But it's also about waiting and watching for the end times when the fullness of God's kingdom will be revealed. Both these advents signify the coming together of humanity and divinity.

Advent is a time when the Church stands up in the face of the busyness of life and asks us to slow down, be still, and be quiet. We are to keep awake, looking and listening for the God who is always coming to us. We are called to prepare the way of the Lord. We watch and reflect on who we are. We live with expectancy and anticipation of God's presence in our lives. We wait for the angelic messenger that promises us that the womb of our humanity will bear a child named Jesus. Advent reminds us that waiting and watching are holy work.

So how do we do this? Silence is the key. Silence is a way of waiting, a way of watching, and a way of listening to what is going on within and around us. We come to self-knowledge through stillness and silence, through attentiveness and watchfulness.

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pause for silent prayer and reflection

SILENCE

The gentle murmur of the wind in the trees. The faint rustling in the undergrowth. The creaking of a branch. Birdsong. I am silent and listen. Sometimes there is nothing to hear. No sound. 'No sound' is not nothing, although 'no sound' is not anything either. Silence is there as soon as you remember silence. And silence is there as soon as you listen for silence.

Heather Kiernan

ADVENT: A CELEBRATION OF HOPE

Our task is to seek and find Christ in our world as it is and not as it might be.

The fact that the world is other than it might be does not alter the truth that Christ is present in it and that his plan is neither frustrated nor changed: Indeed, all will be done according to his will.

Our Advent is the celebration of this hope.

Thomas Merton *Advent: Hope or Delusion?*

PRAYER FOR OUR PARISH *(we say together)*

Dear Father, pour out your Holy Spirit on our parish that we may grow ever closer to you, showing your loving kindness to others.

May our parish be a place of welcome for all, offering companionship to the lonely, shelter to the stranger and comfort to the broken. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Saviour. Amen.

Anne O'Connor

PRAYER: AN ADVENT PEOPLE *(we say together)*

God of light,
shine forth, show us how to bring hope to others.

God of mercy,
help us to comfort your people and share in their joy.

God of hope,
make us an Advent people,
preparing the way for life in all its fullness.
Amen.

Catherine Gorman CAFOD

HOPE GOES WITH US, STEP BY STEP

Hope does not depend on our mood, our disposition, our desire.

Hope does not wait until we are ready for it,
until we have prepared ourselves for its arrival.

It does not hold itself apart from us
until we have worked through the worst of our sorrow,
our anger, our fear.

This is precisely where hope seeks us out,
standing with us in the midst of what most weighs us down.

Hope has work for us to do.
It asks us to resist going numb
when the world within us or beyond us is falling apart.

In the height of despair, in the deepest darkness,
hope calls us to open our hearts, our eyes, our hands,
that we might engage the world when it breaks our hearts.

Hope goes with us, step by step, offering to us the manna it holds.

Hope takes us past our fear.
Hope blesses those to come.

Jan Richardson *Women's Christmas Retreat 2017*
www.janrichardson.com

pause for silent prayer and reflection

THE ECLIPSE

I stood out in the open cold
to see the essence of the eclipse
which was its perfect darkness.
I stood in the cold on the porch
and could not think of anything so perfect
as man's hope of light in the face of darkness.

Richard Eberhart

pause for silent prayer and reflection

IT IS ENOUGH TO LISTEN TO THE SILENCE

It is enough
to listen to the silence.
Silence comes to fetch us
where we have just been
with our thoughts and feelings.

It is enough
to listen to the silence.
Silence brings us
to where we are now,
right here,
into this room,
to this place,
this day.

It is enough
to listen to the silence.
Silence embraces
what wants to
become.
Whatever this day brings us,
is held,
and always has been,
in this silence
now.

It is enough
to listen to the silence.

Silvia Ostertag from *Living Silence*

pause for silent prayer and reflection

MUSIC: Hope Simeon Wood

SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

In our busy, stressful world, we have to seek out silence and stillness consciously. God speaks in all sorts of ways – through scripture, through nature, through other people. However, unless we slow down and listen, we miss his promptings and his voice. Only then can we truly appreciate the value of the journey, as well as the destination; the value of slowing down, looking and listening; learning from the rhythms of nature; from the formation of community along the way, and from times of stillness and rest.

So often we rush through life at breakneck speed, never pausing to reflect and be still. It is only when we slow down and look that we really see. By slowing down, and being more present to each moment, all sorts of lessons are learned.

For some people, this might involve the healing of painful memories. For others, it could be time to discern the next stage in life. For many, it is a chance to really get away and listen to God. For me, it is an invitation to a whole way of being – one that recognises that God is not 'out there' to be sought, but already 'in here' to be found.

Annie O'Connor *The Camino: Finding Stillness and Presence*

pause for silent prayer and reflection

THE HOPE OF ADVENT

The hope of Advent asks us to stay with what is most present to us at this time: to enter this world in its heartrending brokenness and its astonishing beauty, that we might welcome the love that keeps finding its way into the world, and into us, again and again.

Hope asks us to open our eyes, our hearts, our hands, to recognize it when it shows up and to respond to what it offers.

Hope knows its own way. It is a mystery, but it has a path, an invitation, a labyrinth for us to walk. As with a labyrinth, the way of hope does not allow us to see far ahead. But this way invites us to keep walking, to dream of how the path will unfold, and to trust that what we need will come to us.

Jan Richardson *Women's Christmas Retreat 2017*

www.janrichardson.com

pause for silent prayer and reflection

MUSIC: *Christ has no body now but yours* The Porter's Gate
(soloist Josh Garrels)

A READING FROM THE FIRST LETTER OF ST PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

May the Lord be generous in increasing your love and make you love one another and the whole human race as much as we love you. And may he so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when the Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his saints. Finally, brothers, we urge you and appeal to you in the Lord Jesus to make more and more progress in the kind of life that you are meant to live: the life that God wants, as you learnt from us, and as you are already living it. You have not forgotten the instructions on the authority of the Lord Jesus.

pause for silent prayer and reflection

PSALM 24 (*we say together*)

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

Lord, make me know your ways,

Lord, teach me your paths.

Make me walk in your truth and teach me:

For you are my God, my Saviour.

The Lord is good and upright,
He shows the path to those who stray,
He guides the humble in the right path;
He teaches his way to the poor.

His ways are faithfulness and love
for those who keep his covenant and will.
The Lord's friendship is for those who revere
To them he reveals his covenant.

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

pause for silent prayer and reflection

THE IN-BETWEEN TIMES

Advent is about the in-between times and Advent is where God will meet us. We have on one hand, a world in disarray and it doesn't seem like there is much hope.

On the other hand, we have a vision of something better. That's the struggle of Advent. A new born baby in a stable announcing: '*Peace on earth*' or a man on a cross crying: '*Forgive them, Father*'.

It is a bridge. The Jesus who does not solve all the problems or remove all the pain and suffering, but who says that fear can be met with faith and that history and hope do rhyme.

Author unknown

pause for silent prayer and reflection

MEETING GOD IN OUR HEARTS

God comes, and his ways are near to us.

God saves in history.

Each person's life, each one's history

is the meeting place God comes to.

How satisfying to know one need not go to the desert to meet him,
need not go to some particular spot in the world.
God is in your own heart.

Saint Oscar Romero December 1978

MUSIC: *Grace and Peace* Fernando Ortega