

Hopeful Longing: A Spirituality for Advent

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One November a friend called, saying, “I have cancer and it’s inoperable. I only have a few weeks.” I could hardly respond. She broke the silence with words that brought a deeper understanding of Advent. “I’ve always loved the Advent readings, especially the prophets,” she said. “They’re my prayer of longing and hope as I wait.”

The word *Advent* means “coming” or “arrival.”

The First Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year and the season when we both prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth and anticipate the second coming. The Church has intended this time as a period to consider how our lives are preparing the world for the second coming.

The Advent/Christmas season celebrates a truth about God. We believe that through the revelation of God in the human and divine infant, all of creation is reconciled to God. The words of the Advent hymn “O come, O come Emmanuel” speak our story. We long for ransom from the shackles that bind us to certain ways of living. We long to be saved as a community and a nation from oppression and the lure of cultural seductions that place us in exile from God’s love and friendship. We long to know that “The Lord, your God is in your midst, a mighty savior; He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love” (Zephaniah 15b).

We can miss Advent’s power. We can become distracted from the essence of the meaning of the season: “Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path” (Luke 3:4b–5a). Spend time reflecting on the Sunday readings. Absorb the hope in the first reading for each of the Sundays. That is what my dying friend did. If you think you do not have time, remember that we *make* time. Use these weeks for an examination of conscience and the celebration of the sacrament of Penance.

As you make preparations for Christmas, heed the response John gave the crowd after they heard his call for repentance. “Let the man with two coats give to him who has none. The man who has food should do the same . . . Do not bully anyone. Denounce no one falsely. Be content with your pay” (Luke 3:11, 14).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What meaning does the phrase “coming of the Lord” hold for you this Advent?
- What changes would you make if you were told you only had a few weeks to live?
- How will you make time to celebrate Advent?

ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Participate in a faith sharing group in your parish.
- Set aside time to read the Sunday readings and ask, “What are these readings saying to me about my longings and hopes for a Savior for myself, for the world?”
- Put aside ten percent of your Christmas spending for the needy. *R*

SCRIPTURE CORNER

Psalm 9—10; Psalm 33; Psalm 40

Think about how these psalms are messages of hope.

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