

Advent Reflections 2019

December 1, 2019

“And that knowing the season; that is now the hour for us to rise from sleep. For, now, our salvation is nearer.”- Romans 13:11.

REFLECTION

December 1, 2019 is the official beginning of the new calendar year in the life of the Church. Usually with the beginning of a new year, we often challenge ourselves to make New Year’s Resolutions. This new year is different from previous years because this new year of 2020 marks the beginning of the third decade in this century and millennium. Should we have a new vision for our lives and our world as 2020 approaches? According to Romans 13:11, our answer should be, “Yes.”

Furthermore, every New Year in Church tradition is followed by the Penitential Season of Advent, which literally means “to come” as it applies to “new beginnings.” Therefore, we should consider a new vision for our lives and world during the 2020 Advent Season. In fact, this passage from Romans that is contained in our Scriptures for this Sunday supports this important aspect of our Advent journey.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Prayerfully apply this passage from Romans, and answer the following questions at the end of your prayer period today or sometime during Advent:

1. How have I been sleeping?
2. How will I use this Advent Season to awaken from my slumber?
3. What are three goals, I can set for myself in 2020?
4. What are three action steps, I can do, to help me achieve these three goals in 2020 to improve not only myself but also to be of better service in this world?

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December 2, 2019

“Listen to my words: When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams.”

(Numbers 12:6.)

REFLECTION

In my lifetime I have had the honor of hearing prophets publicly, speak clear visions to the people. From President John F. Kennedy challenging our nation, “And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., on the Washington DC mall, “I still have a dream, a dream deeply rooted in the American dream—one day this nation will rise up and live up to its creed, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal...” I have a dream..”

I am convinced God has spoken to the people through prophets in the past and God speaks to us today. We are called to faithful attention to the cares and concerns of this world. We are called to speak truth to power, assist the downtrodden, and give voice to the vision of God’s call to us, a call to equality and the empowerment of all of God’s children. My prayer today is to hear the clear vision of prophets and to prayerfully embrace their call to action.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- When you dream take time to write down what you heard and saw, when you’re awake.
- Recall a prophet who spoke to your soul. If they are alive call them and thank them.

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December 3, 2019

“For you have hidden these things from the wise and learned you have revealed them to the childlike.” Luke 10, 21-23

REFLECTION

As you ponder this scripture verse you are called to become aware of the many ways you learn from those who are childlike, unencumbered by the ways of the super smart and wise of the world.

Look into the eyes of a baby and see innocence, joy, openness and trust. Jesus, chose to become like us as a child. Before getting caught up preparing for Christmas, find space in your day and in your heart for Jesus. The spirit of the Lord rest upon you to see Jesus in the minutes of your life and not be afraid. “Behold the Lord shall come with power and he will enlighten the eyes of his servants.” Observe a child as they look at the clouds in the sky or at a blade of grass and ask their many questions. Why is the sky blue? Where do the clouds go at night? Why is the rain wet?

They wonder at the smallest little things. In the quiet solitude of your heart listen to the words of Jesus speaking to you and asking you to be his message in this world of so much confusion and disarray. Can you accept His challenge this Advent season to listen with childlike simplicity and spread the message of love and peace?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see... And to hear what you hear...” Open my eyes Lord this Advent season that I will take to time to see like a child, the beauty in your people all around me.
- Open the ears of my heart to hear your voice each day. And to respond to you with an open heart, as Jesus listened to his Father.

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December 4, 2019

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse...The wolf shall live with the lamb and a little child shall lead them...”

(See Isaiah 11:1-10 for entire passage.)

REFLECTION

Several years ago, a tree in my front yard needed to be removed because its root system was getting too big and could encroach on the structure of our house. So we had the tree removed thinking that was that. But to this day, we still have to clip shoots that emerge from the roots that are still alive underground and seeking light. It just keeps sending them out in spite of our efforts to thwart it.

So it is with Isaiah’s vision – his vision of the world that is led by this “shoot”. Out of something seemingly finished, or worn out, or useless, comes life and hope that persistently seeks the light. Isaiah’s promise seems to be one we can hold on to now as we, through our Christian eyes, see this vision as looking forward to the hope that Christ brings. The weak will be made strong and the powerful will be made weak. This force for hope helps sustain us in the here and now as well as for eternity as we envision, with Isaiah, a peaceable kingdom. It may work quietly and out of sight, like my tree roots underground, but it grows just the same.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Reflect on where are the “stumps” are in your life and where do you feel cut off or hopeless? What new growth or hope might God be nurturing in you?

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December 5, 2019

“May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6:10

REFLECTION

“Viboon Leesuan is a Thai Christian artist and teacher. He has been a guiding force in the development of abstract art using color and texture. When invited to portray the coming of God’s kingdom for a conference, he felt it could only be depicted in an abstract form letting the colors speak for themselves.” *The Bible Thru Asian Eyes, p. 124*

Snorkeling in south Thailand, I found the sea painted with color. Schools of yellow, blue, red and black fish swam right to me and around me. What looked like a gap between purple rocks would suddenly snap shut like the jaws of a monster. Water of light teal, islands of forest green and brown, sand of ivory and cream, skies of royal blue, corals of the rainbow, God’s mysterious and magnificent colors are everywhere to be seen. The colors are vibrant and beautiful witnessing to the story of life there, not just at the ocean’s edge, but in the creatures of the land, the plants and trees, flowers, and the people of many varieties. All of life visibly interconnected with the eternal power of the Divine. Even decay, pollution, and death had a color and a part to play.

The colors spoke of love and respect, of courage and strength, of hope and healing. The colors spoke of injuries, relationships and promise. God speaks to us closer to home, in the colors everywhere.

The first and greatest painter made heaven and earth splashed with every shade of every color, including the earthy greys, browns and black. The Garden of Eden was a blended portrait that has spoken to us through the ages. The God of Creation gives us the world and in it tells the story of amazing love for us, God’s children.



PRAYER PRACTICE

What colors and textures emerge in your vision for 2020? How do they speak to you?

- What is the color of hope and healing for our broken lives?
- What is the color of peace and love in our fractured church?
- How does mercy paint itself in the natural world that God created?

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December 6, 2019 – First Friday of Advent

“Out of the gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see.”

Isaiah 29:18

REFLECTION

I have always loved Advent. As a child I jostled to help light the candles around an Advent wreath; on Dec. 6 (today!) we awoke to find that St. Nicholas had filled the shoes we'd left by the door with little candies and trinkets; and...CHRISTMAS WAS COMING! Later, I treasured sharing these traditions with my own children.

These last few years, I have had a deepening anticipation - even yearning- for not only Christmas, but Advent: that time to savor WAITING. I may not have been exactly blind, but today my vision has improved somewhat, and I'm learning to focus. The Kingdom of God here on earth is now. During Advent I'm waiting, as today's Psalm says, "to dwell in the house of the Lord, that I may gaze on [God's] loveliness." (Ps. 27:4).

Yes, it's about NOW. And what's that house of God like? I'm pretty sure that at least part of it has to do with hope. "O God, sometimes physical, spiritual, and world problems seem insurmountable. I just can't do any more. But here is this little purple candle flickering bravely in front of me, and I can see clearly that YOU can. Your kingdom shines through these days of deepening darkness and despair in our sad and unjust world. Come into this world, Jesus. I can't fix it. You can. I give my life, my world to you."

"What did you say, Jesus?"

"Wait for the Lord with courage. Be stouthearted." Ps. 27:14

PRAYER PRACTICE

Reflect on your own perceptions of Advent and Christmas as you've grown in faith and hope.

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December 7, 2019

...your eyes will see your Teacher.
...your ears will hear a voice behind you saying,
“This is the way – walk in it.”
Isaiah 30:20-21

REFLECTION

The windows on the building where I work are a pale amber stained glass that allow only a general sense of what's going on outside. I can usually see just enough to know if it is day or night, overcast or sunny. But, occasionally I am surprised to see crisp snowflakes gliding by or hear a clatter and see the sharp outline of raindrops splashing against the panes.

St. Paul said, now we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see God face to face. My vision of God has been clouded over the years by sadness, guilt, shame, fear, ignorance, even busyness. But a few times, I have gotten glimpses of such clarity that I recognized my Teacher, and I heard the Teacher's voice plainly speaking, “This is the way – walk in it.”

PRAYER PRACTICE

Do a brief examen, reviewing the last 24 hours and asking yourself:

- Where did I see God?
- Where do I wish I could have seen God?
- What blocked my vision?

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December 8, 2019

“...the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” Matthew 3:1-12

REFLECTION

After reading this scripture, two thoughts jumped out to me...repentance and expectation. We frequently look at reconciliation as receiving of a sacrament that holds both the love of God and love of oneself. But what are our expectations? It involves thoughts of expectations of oneself, or others around us, but in the deepest sense: what are the deepest expectations of our eternal reward and life with God?

I spent several days with this question coming to me at different times of the day; during my work, as I was reading and resting, before meditation and sleep, even driving my car. And then suddenly, the words of a beautiful song came on the radio...” I Can Only Imagine...”, by Mercy Me and I could not stop smiling. YES, these are the words of my heart:

*I can only imagine, what it would be like, when I walk by your side.
I can only imagine, what my eyes would see, when your face is before me
Surrounded by your glory, what my heart will feel.
Will I stand in your presence, to my knees will I fall?
Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all?
I can only imagine, when ALL I will do is forever, forever worship you.
I can only imagine...when I walk by your side.*

Can you only imagine, the words of this beautiful song be the words of your heart?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Find a quiet place to read or listen to the lyrics of the song “I Can Only Imagine”
- Allow your prayer time to include your own expectations of “what it’s going to be like”.

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December 9, 2019

“Sing to the Lord a new song for He has done marvelous deeds.”

~Psalms 98:1

REFLECTION

As we start this second week of Advent and continue to celebrate the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we are reminded of all the marvelous deeds God has placed before us. While we all have been given this wonderful gift of Jesus Christ, each of us has also been given our own personal gifts – the unique and marvelous deeds that God has placed within us. Gifts that He intends us to use, through our thoughts and actions, to help and support others. What might your unique and marvelous deeds be? How can you use them today, and every day to help build up His Kingdom on earth?

PRAYER PRACTICE

St. Ignatius gave us the Examen Prayer. A prayer where we think back over our day and see where God has been in our life that day. Then, to look to tomorrow, where do we know we will need God's help.

- Become aware of God's presence. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.
- Review the day with gratitude. Walk through it in God's presence. What did you receive from people/events? What did you give back?
- Pay attention to your emotions. What is God saying through your feelings? Make note of these.
- Choose one feature of the day and pray over it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is important.
- Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Seek God's guidance.

As we use this prayer practice, we also need to be open to ALL things that happen tomorrow and realize that God is with us, every moment of every day,,, calling on Him as we live out each day.

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December 10, 2019

A voice cries out:

In the desert prepare the way of the LORD!

(Isaiah 40:3)

REFLECTION

In today's readings, we are invited to find our way to the LORD. We hear the parable of the man with 100 sheep and one sheep goes astray. The man goes out of his way to find the lost sheep and rejoices when he lays his eyes upon it. Losing something important to us like keys or a cell phone can put us in a tail spin. Yet, our God has a way containing our focus and attention so that we can find what is lost. It is a matter of slowing ourselves down and removing the clutter so that we can pave the wasteland of our lives into a highway to God. We are invited to envision our God as a tender guardian caring about us; believing in us even though we can easily stray away from our life's direction. God sets a loving gaze upon us and does not inject blame or shame. God awaits our homecoming.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Reflect on your image of a tender guardian. What sights, sounds, smells and touches come to mind? Using a piece of paper and crayons, create shapes and colors representing your image of God.

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December 11, 2019

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.”
(Matthew 5: 14 NIV)

REFLECTION

At this time of the year I look forward to going to Central Park in Ashland, the small town in Kentucky where I live. The local community has been hosting The Winter Wonderland of Lights Festival for over thirty years. At the park there is a light display second to none and enjoyed by many. We have a nativity scene, a menorah, a world globe, skating elves, dinosaurs, a rocking horse, paddle boats, poinsettia candles, stars, and much more. This community effort is supported by volunteers who sit in a warehouse stringing lights and checking over 700,000 bulbs. Wow! And there are so many more people who set up the displays, make sure the electrical outlets are safe, and donate time and money to make this a success.

When I drive around the park to enjoy the lights I am reminded that I am a part of a community who together enrich each other's lives.

Christmas is an experience of much more than the multicolored lights shining in the darkness. It is the time to remember the birth of baby Jesus over two thousand years ago that began a community of light throughout the world. It is a time of hope.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Spend time today remembering you are the light of the world and find ways to give the priceless gifts of community to all whom you encounter by listening, by praying, by inclusion, by sharing.

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December 12, 2019, Our Lady of Guadalupe

“Maria, O most merciful Mother, Gentle virgin,
with the name Guadalupe. On a mountain, we find roses in winter,
All the world, has been touched by your love,”

REFLECTION

Our Lady of Guadalupe...a beautiful reminder of God's love for ALL people! The last line of the above refrain is particularly applicable to this day and time when immigration and acceptance of those different from ourselves is in question. When Mary the mother of Jesus, the Lady referred to in this song, appeared to Juan Diego, she presented herself as a Mexican woman, one with the people who were suffering under the Spaniard rule, she wanted to give God's message of love and acceptance.

A Franciscan reflection on this day stated: “In these days when we hear so much about God's preferential option for the poor, Our Lady of Guadalupe cries out to us that God's love for and identification with the poor is an age-old truth that stems from the Gospel itself.”

Perhaps, what Mary was trying to teach the Church authorities at that time was to see God's face in the Native Americans. In our time and in our own place, can we see the face of God in those around us who are different from us?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- As we pray with Our Lady of all nations, what is our welcoming 2020 Vision for all those seeking a better life?
- As we listen to the news today, may we pray that Mary's love and acceptance in our lives may be different from that of Diego's time in history.
- With the love of Jesus in our hearts, prayerfully listen to “Open My Eyes, Lord” by Jesse Manibusan on YouTube Music...<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eo6gZAUuQ3E>

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December 13, 2019

“I, the Lord, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go.” Is. 48:17-19

REFLECTION

Sometimes my work involves “proof reading”. I often ask “for another set of eyes” to look upon the news article, brochure or advertisement I am creating. I always appreciate the fact that others can more easily spot my mistake or omission.

The same principle applies when I think about my life lived in relationship to The One who “sees” with the heart. In my daily life, I often ask Jesus to “open my eyes”, to those to whom I am called to minister but perhaps do not see. I ask Jesus to “help me see more clearly” especially when I might be quick to make a judgement or misinterpret a statement or someone’s intention.

What speaks the most to me in the scripture from Isaiah is the reminder that God will lead me on the way I should go. Advent is the perfect time to draw aside to reflect on where God is leading at this time. Advent provides a quiet and rich time to ponder one’s response to God’s leading. Many times situations in my life leave me unable to see or understand what is happening. I ask; “where are you God?” The experiences I find most challenging are precisely what God uses to call forth my trust in his lead. Even when I cannot see the path before me, I trust that God has my hand and will lead me where I should go.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Take some time to reflect on how God is leading you during this Advent season.
- Journal your experiences of being led by God. What was that like?

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December 14, 2019

“The endurance of darkness is the preparation for great light.”
(St. John of the Cross)

REFLECTION

We're less than two weeks from celebrating the birth of our Lord, the Light of the World. Are our hearts ready to receive this great light? Today is the feast of St. John of the Cross, a Carmelite, whose writings remind us that sometimes, the way Christ enters our hearts is by breaking them open.

As I contemplate on the theme Vision 2020, I wonder, “How might we be called to let Christ break open our hearts this Christmas and, in the year ahead?”

It is so easy for me to let fears and insecurities build a shell around my heart. And this self-protective barrier can make it difficult for me to see and hear clearly. I can be quick to see how others may be trying to infringe on what I think is mine rather than recognize that they, like me are dealing with fears and insecurities as well. I can have difficulty listening in a way that seeks to understand the other and instead wait impatiently for the chance to tell them what I believe.

What might our world be like if each of us allowed Christ, as he enters into our lives anew this Christmas, to break the shells of our hearts open? What might our world be like if each of us asked Christ to help us listen and see as He did?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Who in your life will feel more loved by your listening deeply to them?
- What is something you are attached to that may be keeping you from loving another?

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December 15, 2019

“What did you go out to the desert to see?

A reed swayed by the wind?

Then what did you go out to see?

Someone dressed in fine clothing?

Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces.

Then why did you go out? To see a prophet?

Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

Matthew 11:7-9

REFLECTION

Do we ever open our eyes to the daily miracles that God has made known to each of us, or do we go throughout the day oblivious of God's presence at every moment? Have you seen the homeless or disenfranchised? Have you seen someone with a disability? Have you seen an advertisement for help for those in need of their daily needs?

PRAYER PRACTICE

Seeing with our eyes and feeling with our hearts for that which we see is seeing the face of God. We don't have to wait. God is ever present. Let us open our eyes to the presence of God. Daily.

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December 16, 2019

I (Jesus) in you, and you in Me – John 10:14. John 17L 21
‘The Christian of the future will a mystic or will not exist at all’.
– Karl Rahner

REFLECTION

Advent, with its wonderful theme of 20/20 VISION- Christ is the visible image of the invisible God (Col 1: 14)- calls us to sink from the shallows , living on the surface, into the interior center of our being where the spark of God’s Being resides, untouched by darkness.

Holy Mary is our witness; Jesus is the way: He encounters the blind and deaf Pharisees. If only they would be honest with themselves, Jesus’ words and action will open them to spiritual seeing and hearing.

What Rahner means by ‘a mystic’ is one who is focused on staying in union with God through faithful and love, even when suffering is involved. He means that people will either have a dynamic, immediate and existential relationship with Christ Jesus (Jesus, if you are really alive, I need to experience you NOW = John 20: Mary Magdalene, Thomas, others) or they will be bereft of faith

The experience of God’s presence and action will affect ordinary awareness, create a new way of living and energize (Holy Spirit) every dimension of life – Or – one’s life will be lived superficially, on formulas and laws, empty, with attempts at controlling God’s relationship with us. I understand 20/20 VISION as God’s call for us to participate in the transformation of human consciousness.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Using Mary’s FIAT: Let your word, your presence, your action happen in me NOW. I beg You, Lord, to open my spiritual eyes and ears that I may love you more dearly, see and hear you more clearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day.

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December 17, 2019

“Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait upon the LORD.” Psalm 31:24

REFLECTION

As I think about the Advent season, I think about waiting. Before the incarnation of Jesus, the nation of Israel was waiting for their coming Messiah. After the incarnation, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, now the church waits for the second coming of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I am not a big fan of waiting. A recent experience taught me a valuable lesson about waiting. I was experiencing severe nerve pain in my shoulder, and after two months of physical therapy, my condition was showing some signs of improvement. Then it took a turn for the worse. I was able to get an appointment for an MRI two weeks after my pain became more intense. After an MRI, it was determined that I needed surgery to relieve the nerve pain. I waited three weeks to get an appointment with the surgeon and another two weeks for the surgery. Thankfully the surgery was successful, and the nerve pain was gone.

Over that period of seven weeks while I was waiting for relief, I cried out to God for mercy and grace to see me through the pain. At times I was angry that I had to endure it. At times I was comforted knowing that Jesus was with me in my pain. Through it all, Jesus sustained me and carried me through to the pain relief after the surgery.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Is there anything in your life right now that is making you wait?
- Are you leaning on Jesus to come along side of you during this period of waiting?

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December 18, 2019

“Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed.

For I am going to do something in your days
That you would not believe, even if you were told.”

Habakkuk 1:5

REFLECTION

As I write this reflection for today, I recall how often the Lord has spoken to me through this word. This speaks to me of what is happening in our world that can be very upsetting if we were to dwell on it. However, the Lord reassures us that he is doing something new right now, today, wherever we are. He comforts us with his amazing love and protection regardless of what is happening in our lives.

He speaks to us of his constant movement; ongoing creation within us, and tells us we should be utterly amazed with his vision for our lives. He is doing something new every day if we can only believe and cling to his promises. He is our majestic Father God and he is telling us he is in charge.

Advent is a time for watching and waiting. It is a time for reflection and making more room in our hearts for the Christ child to live and dwell within us. Let us recognize any fears that hold us back and keep us from surrendering our entire selves to the Lord. May we ask for the love and the grace to be amazed at whatever the Lord wants to do this Advent season as we pray for a deeper faith.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Am I able to trust in God’s vision for my life?
- Do I believe his promises that he is still recreating me and the world?
- Am I willing to watch and wait for his vision to become my vision for my future?

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December 19, 2019

Surprise!

REFLECTION

Have you ever noticed how much God loves surprises? Throughout the scriptures there is story after story about people receiving, not necessarily what they expected, but (in God's eyes) what they needed – needed to fulfill God's mission for them.

And what greater or more life-changing surprise could there be than an unexpected pregnancy? But even that seems to be part of God's plan. Today we are given two stories of unexpected pregnancies: the wife of Manoah is to be the mother of Samson (Judges 13:2-7, 24-25); and Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, is to be the mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25). Both had long dreamed and prayed for a child, and Elizabeth was past the age. Nonetheless, God would bring life out of barren, empty wombs. Nothing is impossible for God. And these stories point the way to another unexpected pregnancy in the lives of Mary and Joseph.

God loves surprises. God loves to bring forth life where there was only barrenness, light where there was only darkness. As we in the northern hemisphere see our days cloaked with increasing darkness; as we in our world witness endless examples of humankind's propensity for violence, stupidity and death, we might be inclined to relegate surprises to the realm of Santa Claus and children's fantasy. But read these stories again. Allow yourself to be surprised again. And then you will be open enough, ready enough, to see and receive whatever surprise God may want to give you today, and every day. And then you will also be able to surprise others with the goodness of God, made present through you.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Recall a time when God surprised you. How did you respond? How might you respond today?

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December 20, 2019

Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back.
Those who wish to sing always find a song. - Plato

REFLECTION

Every young girl cradles a song in her heart. Some are so plaintive, so heart-rending, that the hills refuse to release the echoes of their melodies. Jephthah's daughter and her friends wandered the mountains surrounding Mizpah, her keening causing the flowers of the fields to droop with grief. Days earlier, she was an innocent and trusting young girl standing at the window, candle in hand, waiting for her father to return from battle, oblivious to the foreboding shadows flickering across the room as she danced impatiently, first on one foot and then the other. She knew that war was always dangerous, but her uncles assured her that God's spirit rested with her father and his band of outlaws. Little did he know that his victory would turn his daughter's world upside down, mourning the unfulfilled promise of love and new life. For centuries afterwards, the virgin daughters of Israel would traipse the hills of Judea with raised candles, keeping the memory of a barren sister alive through song, finding in her unfinished symphony a source of hope. (Judges 11)

The angel startled the young Mary hunched over the kitchen counter kneading the day's ration of bread before the sun rose. Usually she liked the way the unsteady light of the waxy candle on the windowsill hid her flour-covered arms and dress in shadows, but this morning those same shadows masked the face of the stranger in her kitchen, and she was afraid. Even his words, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you!" failed to calm her pounding heart. After all, she was a virgin, alone and unprotected, and no one was likely to believe her story about a predawn break-in by someone claiming to be an angel, for heaven's sake! Instinctively, she folded her arms in front of her belly as if to guard her purity, but the defensive gesture only emphasized her vulnerability. As the story goes, what happened next was too preposterous, too far-fetched, too unimaginable to explain, but after a blinding light and rumors about her barren-but-now-pregnant bidy of an aunt, the angel disappeared



leaving Mary dazed and, she thinks, maybe, just maybe, with child. But how could this be? For days the girl pondered in her heart the improbable possibility that God would actually look with favor on the lowliness of a poor servant girl who grew up like every other Hebrew girl - haunted by the memory of Jephthah's daughter's lament. Her world turned upside down, Mary set out for her aunt's house under cover of night, following the well-worn footsteps of bands of barren young girls with raised candles who traipsed the hills of Judea, filling the skies with her new song full of hope, "With God, all things are possible!" (Luke 1:26-56)

PRAYER PRACTICE

Ponder in your heart the new thing God may be doing in your life as you listen to Mary's sung prayer, You Tube Canticle of Mary (18 – 96830)

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December 21, 2019

Taste and see that the Lord is good~ Psalm 34:8

REFLECTION

The first thing that came to mind when assigned the date and topic for this reflection was a line from a poem written by Clement C. Moore: “While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads”. My initial reaction was that is too silly for a devotional; but the thought did lead me to google what is a sugar plum. As I searched for the definition of sugar plums, my thoughts began to center on sweetness.

The sweetness of this advent and Christmas season that anticipates and celebrates the birth of our salvation from sin. The good news of The Life that lead us into eternal life with our creator. ~Taste and see that the Lord is good~

The sweetness of this message we share in the spirit of love and joy, in our relationship and attitude towards each other: especially the poor and marginalized. Not forgetting or ignoring the bitter-sweet moments of pain and struggle we endure within ourselves; and as we journey with others. ~Taste and see that the Lord is good~

PRAYER PRACTICE

Today I encourage you to contemplate on the sweetness of the celebration to come; our savior is born. Contemplate the good news of salvation and eternal life as you go about your daily activities. May you see this sweetness in the eyes of another, in the creation around you, and with every breath you take. May you taste the sweetness in your words. ~Taste and see that the Lord is good~

Leanna Lake

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December 22, 2019

Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man,
yet unwilling to expose her to shame,
decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when,
behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream
and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take
Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the
holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.
"When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord
had commanded him and took his wife into his home.
(Matthew 1:19-20, 24)

REFLECTION

When I read today's Gospel, I feel great admiration for Joseph and his decision to obey the angel of the Lord. He must have felt quite awkward, but nevertheless, put his ego to the side in obedience to the Lord. Joseph provides a wonderful lesson for us, especially during the hustle and bustle of the last few days of Advent just before Christmas.

PRAYER PRACTICE

As the anticipation and excitement of the Savior's birth nears its peak, we ask God for an open heart, an open mind, and to help us put our egos aside so that we may more fully embrace the miraculous joy, peace, and beauty of the birth of our Savior.

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December 23, 2019

“Let us sing a new song not with our lips but with our lives.”

- St. Augustine

REFLECTION

Nestled in a corner cove of CAMC General Hospital is West Virginia’s largest medical rehab program. It houses patients with snapped spinal columns, gunshot wounds, and irreparable brain injuries. Here, patients relearn basic skills – eating; walking; talking; and living. Success is often measured by one’s ability to raise an arm, wiggle a toe, rally a faint smile, or roll a few feet in a wheelchair.

Dr. Jenkins is one of CAMC’s rehab physicians. She enters a patient’s room with a warm smile and often a Christian song. Her hypnotic voice fills the unit’s sterile halls with psalmody and gives her patients hope. Dr. Jenkins doesn’t just sing with her lips. She sings with her heart. And she provides healing witness with her life.

This Advent Season, Jesus asks us to sing with our hearts and our lives. He asks us to give hope to the hopeless and fill the drab hallways of others with his love.

As we await the birth of our Savior, let us celebrate our hope in God by giving hope to others. Let’s live not just with our lips but with our hearts. Let’s become the incarnate love of Christ so that the end of this Advent Season will be a new song for Jesus and a new life for others.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Still your heart, quiet your mind, and listen to a Christian hymn. Savor our Savior’s love. Enter the hymn’s joy and pray – how will I sing a new song with my life?
- Remember the infirm and the afflicted and the hospitalized and the displaced. Sing a new song for them and ask yourself – how will I give hope with my life?

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December 24, 2019

“Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.” (“Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous)

REFLECTION

I’m writing this shortly after a group of us recovering alcoholics and drug addicts closed the daily morning meeting. About forty of us in the room had shared our thoughts about “Letting go and letting God.”

When we worked our way around the table to my turn, I described the God of my understanding as a “trickster” and “master of disguise and surprise” – showing up in unexpected places and forms. Trying hard to let go seems to get in the way of God’s process. My Creator prefers His schedule- usually when his saving grace is most needed.

This seems to fit well into the themes of Christmas Eve and Vision 2020. God show up as a babe in arms, surrounded by lowly animals in the most unlikely little town of Bethlehem! Who would have imagined that? And no human being could accurately predict why. Who would have thought that Jesus, Mary and Joseph could have such an impact on their times and for that matter on the entire universe – then and now?

Perhaps this is a good time to think about God in our own individuality and personal expectations of the present and future. How, when and in what forms does God show up for us on a daily basis, and why? How has God already changed you and me into better human beings? It can a quite remarkable by-product of letting go!

PRAYER PRACTICE

Gently ask to gently help you let go. Try letting go of the trying. Let God do that!

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December 25, 2019

John 1:1-18 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. ...And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us

REFLECTION

“Vision for 2020” causes me to ponder. While asking, “What do I have in place today that brings about change for tomorrow?” Helping a sister make plans for a better tomorrow by moving to North Carolina to live with her son? Sorting a house full of treasures into two stacks; “keep” or “toss” causing emotions to run high as we laugh, wiping away tears. Or accepting an invitation to join a granddaughter in her search for just the “right dress” for her future wedding? In the mix of details, I linger in the memories of the summers spent at “Granny Camp,” giving her space to be who God created her to become? Seeing the anticipation in a friend’s face as she hopes for the start of physical therapy again for the healing of a wound? What is in place is recognizing the core thread that binds us together.

John’s Gospel reading for today heralds in Christmas, proclaiming the old and the new as ONE. Our life tugs to “hold on” or “let go” are ever present. Who will we share our vision with and how? Do we listen to others vision? It’s not an individual vision but different visions coming together nurturing communion. The core thread that recognizes us as brothers and sisters near and far, full of grace and truth is my vision for 2020.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Share the gift of your vision today.
- Allow your presence to recognize your brothers and sisters.
- Time and stillness nurtures your relationship with God. Give today

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December 26, 2019 Feast of Saint Stephen

When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. Whoever endures to the end will be saved. Matthew 10:19, 22

As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Acts 7:59-60

REFLECTION

We are called to participate in Jesus’ vision of making present the Kingdom of God. Sometimes we experience hostility, mistreatment, or persecution from others as we carry out our particular mission. What can we learn from Stephen’s example that will help us to endure with love? Stephen was filled with faith and the Holy Spirit and with grace and power. He worked signs and wonders among the people. When certain Jews engaged Stephen in debate, they could not match his wisdom. Frustrated, these men instigated others to charge Stephen of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin. Stephen’s prophetic discourse angered them. He looked up intently and saw Jesus, The Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God. When he told them his vision, they stoned him. Stephen’s dying prayer modeled Jesus’ prayer from the cross: Father forgive them for they do not know what they do, and quoting Psalm 31, Father ‘into your hands I commend my spirit’ (Luke 23:34, 46). Like Stephen, we can look to Jesus. We ask for the grace to respond with love and ask God to forgive those who mistreat us. We entrust ourselves to God’s care.

PRAYER PRACTICE

- Pray the Lord’s Prayer
- Read Psalm 31. Make a Gratitude List: Write down five ways you have experienced God’s providential care in the past. For what are you grateful today?

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December 27, 2019

REFLECTION

After returning to the Church in 2008 following an absence of many years, I went to the sacrament of Reconciliation which I had stayed away from even longer. Nervous about the accumulation of my offenses, I was instead assured by the young priest, “God has been waiting for you.” I heard the gospel in six words. This prodigal daughter was welcomed back enveloped in love.

No chastisement. No shaming. Rather mercy, forgiveness, reunion.

Had God been asking, “How long, Pat, how long?”

God’s patient longing was a revelation to me. We are not the only ones who wait. Being human means a portion of our lives is spent waiting—with worry, expectation, and angst but also with excitement and hope. We wait in line to pay for groceries or tickets, to hear test scores or medical results, for planes to take off and land, to hear of a new baby’s birth or a loved one’s death, for special occasions, for healings, for true love, for endings, for beginnings. Here it is December 27 and our period of anticipating the Christ Child has been fulfilled with joy and glory.

God’s generous embrace was a fresh beginning for me. A journey out of darkness into light. My darkness had been so deep, I felt there would be no light in my life ever again. In the middle of a tunnel with no end in sight, I found it difficult to believe in what I could not see. With the help of grace, I surrendered and decided to trust God again Who was there waiting for me of course. What a lesson in presence—God’s light and love is always there. But I have to do my part and “not sit there like a bump on a log” as the nuns would say. I have to cooperate with grace, to be a co-worker in the vineyard.



My vision has expanded to know God's love and light is not only there, but here and now and always. Is there any better good news?

PRAYER PRACTICE

- In what way is God waiting for you?
- How is God calling you to expand your 2020 Vision to work alongside God in the vineyard?

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December 28, 2019

God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all. John 1:5 – 2.2
“For John, light is divine energy manifested in...communion with God.

The strongest of all weapons against darkness is our love for God.

A strong vibrant relationship with Him.”

REFLECTION

Hindsight is 20/20. But is it really? Do we ever have perfect vision? It seems that when we operate from a position of certainty, it leads to judgment that often divides people who don't quite “fit” into our cultural view. There are over 4,000 religious traditions in the world and they all claim to know their God's ways. I find that the more I grow, the less I can really claim to know. The “not knowing” keeps me open to where God is calling me in this moment. It is very humbling to live in uncertainty. Experiencing clarity comes from growing dependence on God's grace in our lives. It is about recognizing our own darkness and opening to the Light of the Spirit. Also, we must recognize the darkness in others and be able to love them where they are. This can't be realized in your head. It comes from the silence of your heart. ALL comes from God. Your next breath comes from God.

Jesus left the crowds and His disciples to be in silent communion with the Father. He continually nurtured this relationship and depended on His Father to guide Him. Daily practices such as contemplative prayer, meditation or forest bathing enable one to grow in clarity and become more sensitive to the world. In the silence, the stillness God speaks and opens us to become more of who we are created to be.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Each day begin by naming 3 things you thank God for. Sit with each one and imagine your life without these blessings. You can also do this at night before you sleep. This daily practice will open you to God's presence in your life.

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December 29, 2019 - Feast of the Holy Family

“...the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, Take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt’.....” Mt 2:13-14

REFLECTION

A vision. A dream. Joseph trusted this and other mystical visions to convey God’s will. Even as he slept, Joseph’s intimate relationship with God allowed him to see and accept God’s plan for saving their lives.

When my sons were young, I recall sitting in church with my family each year on this Holy Family Sunday, nurturing my somewhat myopic vision of our own little Holy Family. However, as they entered their teens-when tempers flared, and boundaries were challenged, my vision of who we were and how we were following God’s plan became a bit more blurry.

Fast forward to 2019- an eye exam for a newer pair of trifocals. As Heather whirred and clicked dials, she encouraged me to try HARD to see the smallest letters possible on the eye chart. Her words were a challenge to herself as well as me: “I think I can get you down to 20/20.”

I never knew how important it was to give it my all in this particular situation. Consequently, I’ve never had a pair of glasses so clear and in focus! (Well, duh, you might interject here.) My point: I pushed myself to see clearly- to have the best vision I was capable of.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Spiritually, we can push ourselves toward the vision of deepening our relationship with God – sort of, or with all our heart. Personally, being faithful to Scripture readings, centering prayer, and the Examen prayer (recalling where I’ve seen God throughout my day) are bringing my inner vision into clearer focus.

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December 30, 2019

“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord, Open the eyes of my heart, I want to see You, I want to see You.”
-Michael Smith

REFLECTION

As I drove to church this morning I was shocked by the dense fog rising from the river, descending from the mountains leaving me in a dense cloud of what appeared like smoke. There was no way to tell even the lines in the road, for the cloud cover surrounded and blinded my vision. It was comparable to an experience of desolation, fear, aloneness. Would this ever lift? As I drove further the clouds slowly disappeared, a bright sun arose, fear and darkness subsided and a sense of peace and relief embraced me. I am reminded of the stops and starts of vision and retreat, of moving ahead in the consoling presence of One who protects and guides me, who brings me from the darkness to the light. What is my vision of where God is in my life? Do I see Him as taking care, being always with me? Certainly in my mind, but when the experiences of unease, different that I expect occurs, can I keep my eyes on the vision of surrounding love and grace? I talk the talk of a vision of God's love for me, for the world, yet am I convinced that He is always, even in the unexpected and challenging moments with me? I am reminded of Johnny Nash's song "I Can See Clearly Now...the rain is gone...it's gonna be a bright, bring sunshiny day". Help me Lord to not forget your loving presence and tenderness in the clouds that at time envelop me.

PRAYER PRACTICE

Today I ask for the grace to keep my eyes on Christ intentionally, thanking for the many gifts of grace, even in those challenging moments knowing He leads, understands, and cares of me. I 'live Christ' in the good and not so good moments of my life, looking to deepen that practice as I enter 2020.

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December 31, 2019

For all that has been thanks, for what will be Yes!

-Dag Hammarskjold.

REFLECTION

I've spent many New Year's eve alone, in empty convents, many without media. Sometimes with others in prayer and deep consolation. I know the loneliness some experience on a celebratory day. David Richo has helped with his 5 A's to move toward loving presence to the NOW. 2019, with my 6th jubilee, the 20 anniversary of WVIS, graces, gifts, fill me with appreciation yet a sobering acceptance of aging and dedicated attention to the interconnectedness of everything. What events of 2019 evoke appreciation for you? What experiences call for sober acceptance and perhaps surrender? What is your vision of your place on this planet?

We live in a fragile world. I try to cultivate affection for the planet, my footprints, hopefully respectful, allowing others the same freedoms I want for myself. We are so blessed to be with each other. For whom do you feel affection, a desire or call to empathy? Commit to 'allowing' which is the opposite of controlling, demanding or manipulating. We can create a new vision. Cultivate gratitude!

PRAYER PRACTICE

Today is the last day of 2019 as each day is only once in our existence, spend this day attuned to each morsel eaten, sound heard, feeling experienced, vision seen, aroma inhaled.

New Year's Eve! Give thanks for 2019, and hug yourself in total acceptance, appreciation. You've been blessed with another year; be thankful for what has been and say YES to 2020.

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