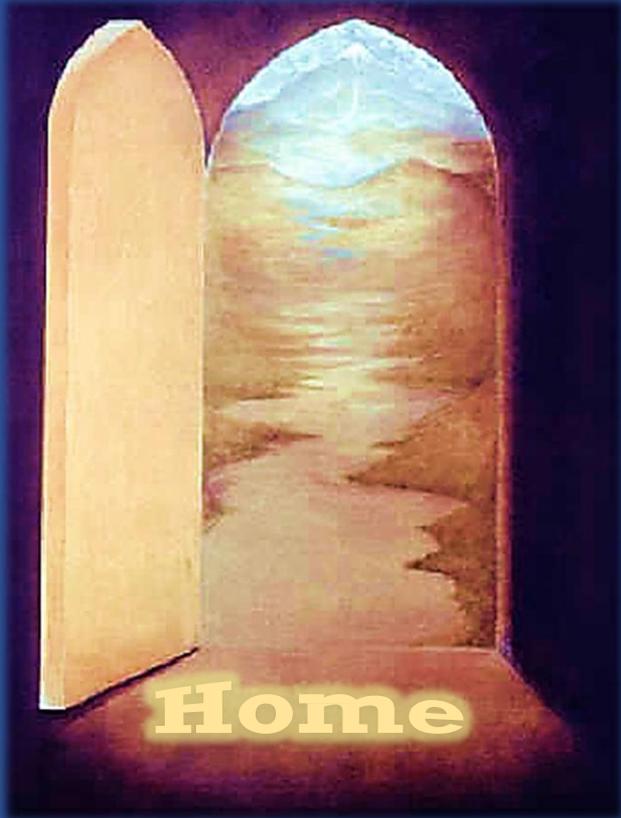


Advent Reflections



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FOREWORD

HOME is an experience that we all share. A person's experiences of **HOME** may be concrete, expandable, relational, and, thus, inviting many additional experiences of returning, leaving, missing, desiring, building, restoring, or cleaning as only some of the images the word **HOME** may evoke.

“How do we come home spiritually and dwell there?” is the main question Gunilla Norris poses in her book **BEING HOME**.

Gunilla Norris' book **BEING HOME** formed the basis from which Cindy Neely and Father Bill Petro developed the topic of **HOME** as this year's WVIS Theme for the Advent Daily Reflections.

The 24 authors, whose reflections are included in this year's work, pondered, prayed and developed these reflections to demonstrate the many possibilities that the word **HOME** not only elicited in them, but these reflections are also designed as a springboard to challenge all **PRAY-ERS**, to raise their awareness of the complexities of the meaning of the word **HOME** in our troubled world.

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First Sunday of Advent



First Sunday of Advent
“MAKE YOUR HOME IN ME”
John 15:4

REFLECTION:

Jesus tells us to ‘Make your home in me’. As we begin this Advent season, waiting quietly for the celebration of the Incarnation, we may begin thinking of the homeless who by choice or circumstance have no structure to call ‘home’; the immigrants wanting to make their homes in America: those in consecrated, vowed life who forfeit the stability of a home; or those friends and family who own beautiful homes and welcome us as well as so many others with such graciousness. All of us are called to ‘make our home in Jesus’. May each of us know, in that contemplative sense, the meaning of “Make your home in me, as we do in You.”

Our prayer should be that the God of our understanding teaches us, inspires us, creates us anew and welcomes us HOME to the inner dwelling of our heart.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Pray over your house keys.
- What doors do these keys open?
- Bless each key with the intention of **BEING A HOME** for each person you meet as you move through each of the doors that each of those keys unlock.

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Monday – First Week of Advent

Gospel: Matthew 8:5-11 "...and Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him. And the centurion making answer, said: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou should enter under my roof: but only say the word, and my servant (soul) shall be healed."

REFLECTION:

In this scripture, we recognize our very response to Jesus, as we prepare to receive Holy Eucharist at His invitation: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world, Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb" It is important to realize that it is with the same faith and love that we approach the altar and asking for healing not for our servant, but our very soul, our inmost being. We are acknowledging that we are about to receive Him under the "roof" of our mouths and thus to welcome Him into our physical abode: into our bodies, the dwelling of our souls.

PRAAYER PRACTICE:

As we become aware of our request for Jesus to heal the soul that He has entrusted to us, we are challenged to prepare our "home" in such a way that we are worthy of such a visit. As we prepare to receive Him, we pray that like the centurion, we recognize that Jesus is Lord, and so all that it will take is His mighty word and our souls, dwelling within our bodies, will in fact be healed of all unworthiness so that He can, and indeed, *will enter...* "But, *only say the word...*"

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“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord...” –Psalm 84:1-2a

REFLECTION:

An important aspect of child development, is the establishment of a “secure base” for a young child. The secure base is the child’s caregiver, usually a parent, that the child refers to when separated, even by a few feet. As the child ventures out into the world, whether it is across the living room or across the playground, the child looks back to check that Mom or Dad is still there and available. This is crucial to a child’s burgeoning sense of trust in the world as a safe place.

As adults we do not need our parents in the same way, but we need to feel secure and safe, just the same. As we mature, we form our faith and come to see the God within us as what we look to for a sense of home for us. While we may not exactly “faint” for it as the psalmist says, there is certainly a longing that keeps us connected to our spiritual home. Even as we leave our houses, we can carry it with us, a sense of Emmanuel, or “God with us”, as we go out and return.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Pray a prayer adapted from Psalm 121:8 *Lord, keep my going out and my coming in from this time on and forevermore. Amen.*
- Choose a symbol of God to carry with you, in your purse or pocket, to represent “God with you”. Touch it each day as you leave your house.

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“I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life”

Psalm 23

REFLECTION:

As one walks the streets of New York and sees the Homeless in their make shift houses of cardboard or sleeping in doorways, one has to wonder, is this a home? Not a dwelling as we might imagine, but a place in time, home. It puts things in perspective that home is where we dwell with God, not a physical place. God dwells in us and about us and around us. Where God is, home is, for God is our home.

PRAAYER PRACTICE:

As we move about today let us keep in mind what our home is and where our home is and how we can make our home not a physical dwelling, but a place, a space which we occupy with God and in God and through God. This is our home.

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Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them
will be like a wise person who builds a house on rock.

Matthew 7:24

REFLECTION:

Today's Gospel reading invites us to become wise builders through the process of active listening. The life of St. Nicholas illustrates the trust he had for God. He listened deeply and understood the needs of the poor and responded accordingly. Fear of running out of resources did not deter him from giving generously. His parents died when he was young and left a large inheritance. He shared the wealth with others in need. St. Nicholas did not hold back on his response to others. He did not discriminate others who were diverse from his own upbringing. He embraced others as part of his own community/home and his hospitality was radical. St. Nicholas carried within him a heart called home.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Spend time listening to God's word. What words and images come to mind?
- Create a new way of building community. Relationship and trust is the foundation.
- Observe the landscape and adjust to the needs of the time.
- Be Present to others.

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I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD
in the land of the living.
Psalm 27:13

REFLECTION:

For some of us, life at home tastes more bitter than sweet. Instead of soaring freely, we may be buffeted by currents of anger, addiction, mental or physical illness, and abuse. I spent much of my life wistful for a place I had never been. But my longing to be loved and valued set me on a journey that I only much later realized was toward my truest self and toward God.

Over the past 40 years God has loved me through my husband, my children, and good friends. But it was not until very recently that I was able to accept God's love directly and feel at home in myself. Secure in my center, in God, I can love more generously and forgive more easily. And when the storms come, I have hope that I will ride them out from that place of safety.

PRAAYER PRACTICE:

God's presence is transformative and healing. In your prayer and action today, invite God's generosity and forgiveness into one relationship in your own life and one challenge facing our world. Pray that all people may know they are loved and valued.

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“In You, my Beloved, I would make my home...”
(Ps. 31 – Nan Merrill’s Psalms for Praying)

REFLECTION:

“Home is where the heart is” is the typical expression one usually hears. However, a thought that touches me is: “Where the heart is, that is home”.

Today, Catholics celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The first home of Mary was the womb of her mother, St. Ann...where we believe she was conceived without the guilt of Adam and Eve. Following her birth, Mary was called to be at home in many places...from Nazareth to Judea to visit Elizabeth, to Bethlehem to give birth, to Egypt escaping Herod, to Jerusalem where Jesus is found, to Cana for a wedding feast and finally following Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. Through all these travels, I believe “home” for her was the place wherever Jesus was...whether in her womb, growing up in Nazareth, gathering his apostles, disciples, curing healing, suffering, dying, rising, and enjoying life in heaven with him. It was/is where her loved One is.

We, too, are at home where our love is...husband, children, ministry...where God is and where our loved ones living with God’s life within them. I have been in many “homes” where my religious community has sent me and have been at home there where I have found God in my Sister companions and with the people whom I have ministered. That does not mean all has been easy. It was not always easy for Mary as she experienced the sufferings of her precious Son. One loving thought has always been there...God is/was there.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Where do you find home? When did you leave home to follow where your heart was leading you? There is a refrain of a song, sung by Elvis Presley, called “Home Is Where the Heart Is”. The refrain is:

“Home is where the heart is and my heart is anywhere you are.
Anywhere you are is home. I don’t need a mansion on a hill
that overlooks the sea. Anywhere you are with me is home.”

Pray with these thoughts today.

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Second Sunday of Advent



You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust.” Psalm 91:1-2

REFLECTION:

At every point in the narrative of Jesus’ birth, we are reminded of the vulnerability of our salvation. A young unwed mother with an unbelievable story of divine conception flees her family home seeking the comfort of answers from a trusted older relative, Elizabeth, who had unexpectedly found herself pregnant. Days before delivery, this anxious about-to-be teenage mother makes a strenuous trip on the back of a donkey to Bethlehem and gives birth in a stable after being turned away from the local inn. Sometime after the birth, a terrified mother scoops up her infant son and with her husband flees their temporary home under cover of dark after being warned in a dream of imperial danger.

Imagine the frightened Holy Couple whispering these words of the Psalmist on their harrowing journeys as they scurried to protect the beloved infant revealed to them as the long-expected Messiah. I believe these whispered words, heard above the racing heartbeat of a faithful mother, comforted the swaddled infant and sustained Him through the dangers of His own shadowy journey to the cross.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

As you listen to one of the great “old time” hymns, “O God, Our Help in Ages Past,” found on You Tube, offer prayers of safety for those who flee their homes, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty as they make harrowing journeys to freedom.

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“... so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them,
and I in them.” John 17: 26b

REFLECTION:

“Abide with me” a hymn acknowledging an imminent death, bids:

...Help of the helpless, O abide with me;
...O thou who changest not, abide with me;
...Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me;
...I triumph still, if Thou, abide with me;
...In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

“Stay with me,” a hymn inspired by the words of Jesus in Gethsemane,
bids:

Stay with me,
Remain here with me,
Watch and pray,
Watch and pray.

In these appeals, we hear one bidding the other, abide, stay, remain,
with me.

The first who bids is a follower of Jesus, the other who bids *is* Jesus.
A motion, an emotion, flows between them, invoking, evoking,
an abiding place, a watching and praying place, a place called home.

Advent is a time for abiding, for keeping watch, for praying
Advent, a home, in which to wait for and hope in,
to wonder about and receive
Immanuel, God-with-us

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Ponder Advent as a time of coming home to, of being home with, God-with-us
- Recall an experience of coming home to, of being home with, God-with-us
- Ask for an experience of coming home to, of being home with, God-with-us

Reverend Diane Shoaf
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‘Console my people, console them,’ says your God...He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them up against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes. Is 40: 1, 11 (TNJB)

REFLECTION:

“Home is where all people go” were words, I was awakened to as I was pondering the theme of HOME recently. The words in this message seemed puzzling, at first. I even asked myself the question, “What could these words mean in this season of Advent?”

Perhaps these words echo the words of Isaiah in the First Reading for today during this Second Week of Advent. The Prophet reminds us that God is always inviting us home to the creativity of our universe. We can take that to mean that God chooses Jesus to make His own humble home in our hearts where we can get to know Him most intimately. He speaks there in holy whispers. We can view the world through Jesus in the light of His presence which fills our hearts as well as minds.

Like a river, God’s grace flows constantly, from heaven to the home of our hearts. It smooths off the sharp edges over time. (Word Among Us, 9/20). God creates us to experience these foretastes of heaven as He gathers us in His arms.

We are called every day into God’s home within us. The call is even louder when we really listen. Paradoxically, we do not have to look for the meaning or even hear anything. God is always present, even when there are no words!

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Perhaps, during our prayer time today, we may wish to reflect on the following words to help us understand God’s call to HOME: “I am home in Heaven, dear ones; Oh, so happy and so bright. There is perfect joy and beauty in this everlasting light...Oh the rapture of that meeting, oh the joy to see you come!” (Author unknown)

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“Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28-29

REFLECTION:

Sometimes transcontinental moves—or other significant changes in our lives—can cause us to feel adrift; as if we are without a home—even if we have a roof over our heads. All the comfort and familiarity is gone and we may even wonder who we are as we navigate a strange, new environment. The temptation is to return to the familiar in our minds; longing for the security, stability and rhythms we knew in the not-too-distant past. Our hearts cry out with John Denver, “Take me home, country roads.” But Advent reminds us that God meets us in the midst of unsettled change and invites us to experience God’s presence *right where we are*. God is our home; our native breath. And God promises peace, even in the midst of change.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Is there a change (large or small) in your life that is causing you to feel unsettled?

- Sit quietly with that change.
- Feel its impact on your body.
- Imagine Jesus coming to you—inviting you to come to him.
- Imagine Jesus in you and with you in this difficult transition.
- Imagine the change shrinking smaller and smaller as it sits next to the enormity of God’s goodness and grace—seen in the gift of God’s son, Jesus.

Dear God—You know how difficult this change is. Show me how to find my home in you; to be settled and at peace even when the winds of change are whirling about me. I come to you. I receive your rest.

Amen—let it be so.

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“A Light in the Darkness”

Memorial of St. Lucy

REFLECTION:

I’m glad to live in the northern hemisphere, at least for one important reason: Christmas. If we celebrated the birth of Christ during the longest and brightest days of the year (as happens in the southern hemisphere) instead of the shortest and darkest days, how much impact would it have? Light a candle in a room already bathed in sunlight, and you will know the answer: perhaps not much. But light a candle in the darkness of night, and everything changes.

The ancients of the North knew what they were doing when they created various festivals lasting from mid-December until early January: feasting, visiting family, and exchanging gifts lifted spirits in those long, dark days when the sun “died” but then was “reborn.” Knowing no specific date for Jesus’ birth, Christians in the second century apparently followed that instinct when they settled on 25 December, the shortest day and longest night of the year (by their calendar’s reckoning), to celebrate the birth of the Son, “a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower” (*Jn. 1:5*).

We come from Light, and strive to return home to Light; but our life journey is marked by shadows, occasionally by storm clouds, when the Light may seem to all but disappear.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

Today marks the feast of St. Lucy, whose name comes from the Latin word for “light” and who is the patron of sight. We are now halfway through Advent; and if (when) your life’s journey is marked by shadows or shrouded in darkness and you cannot see what lies ahead, stop. Light a candle. And let the opening lines of today’s first reading speak to your heart:

I am the Lord your God who grasps your right hand; it is I who say to you,
“Fear not, I will help you” (Is. 41:13).

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Luke 1:28

²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Hail, full of grace,
the Lord is with you!”

REFLECTION:

Home, Grandmothers, Mothers, and the Blessed Virgin Mary

The opportunity to offer an Advent reflection for December 14 on the topic of home inspired me to connect with my maternal grandmother and my dear mother. We recently celebrated my mother’s one hundredth birthday, and in the preparations, marveled at many fine photos spanning the entire twentieth century. My grandmother Caroline was prominent in many of family photos including one on her birthday, December 14. Born in the latter 19th century, she experienced WWI, the Great Depression, WWII, and the first moon walk. Grandmother Caroline’s father managed a shipping dock in the port city of Hamburg, Germany. Owing to his interaction with many foreign ships, he developed many basic foreign language skills. It seems that his multicultural influence encouraged my grandmother to embrace the other with an open mind. In her home, she provided a superb example for her three children and loyal husband. She endured the loss of a young child, embraced the challenge of raising a child with severe mental challenges, and maintained a kind sense of humor, compassion, and faith throughout. In short, she anchored a loving home, and through her gifts, showed my mother the way to continue the noble mission of making a loving home. As I reflect on December 14, I feel deep gratitude to my mother and grandmother for being at the heart of a loving home. Our strong, loving, and generous matriarchs gave us gifts of sustained love, care, patience, understanding, and acceptance.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

In this season of Advent, a time of reflection and preparation, let us remember the generations of mothers who have sacrificed for us. As we look ahead toward the fourth Sunday of Advent, the Church has us focus on the Blessed Virgin Mary. In his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (The Most Holy Rosary), St. John Paul II wrote, “Among creatures, no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother.” The Blessed Virgin Mary is at the heart of our spiritual home. Let us thank all of the mothers of the world for their gifts.

Edward Kocher, Ph.D.

“All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love you,
and we will come and make our home with each of you.”

John 14:23

REFLECTION:

Elijah’s mission was to awaken God’s people to God’s presence and action in their lives through challenging words. Come home to God before it’s too late.

Jesus says that John the Baptist has accomplished this through his mission, announcing, “Behold the Lamb of God”.

Advent calls to us : ‘come home for the holidays!’ But we are home when we hear and keep the word of God alive in your consciousness and living in our actions. Like Elijah, the power of God will then flow from the center our being. God’s Word will become visible, calling others to experience the goodness of God.

What John’s father said of him at his birth, made a home in my heart: “You, O Child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High...turning the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of their children to their parents” (Luke 1:76f)

Growing from youth to adult, I first had to do my own house cleaning. With the help of my spiritual director, I wrote my I.O.U’s (I-owe-you this much anger and unforgiveness for what you did/didn’t do or say.) I burnt them, like a sacrifice, watching the fire release and lift them as black flakes into God’s mercy and forgiveness. Lest the guilt and shame lodged in my memories contaminate me again, I used Jesus prayer: “Father, into your hands I place my spirit, my memories. Fill me with your love and peace.”

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Listen for God’s word that seeks to make a home in you.
- Participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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Third Sunday of Advent



Gaudete Sunday

Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: REJOICE!

Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near.

~Phil 4:4-5

REFLECTION:

Today is the third Sunday of Advent – also known as “Gaudete Sunday” to many Christians. “Gaudete Sunday” goes way back in time to the Fifth Century when Advent was known as a time of fasting and repenting, much like Lent is today. It was a time of preparation, in anticipation of the birth of the Christ. Back then, Advent lasted five weeks, not four. And, Gaudete Sunday was the “break in the middle.”

“Gaudete Sunday” was a step away from the fasting. It focused on **REJOICING** in the good news that our Savior was born! The faithful were called upon to worship and praise God with **JOY** that “the coming of the Lord is now near and close at hand.” (James 5:8)

And so Gaudete Sunday is today! It’s a time to be joyful... Rejoice in the good news... Shout it out, “I’m coming home Lord Jesus! I’m coming home to you!”

PRAYER PRACTICE:

God loves us all very much, and wants the best for us. So, as you move through the day today, think about...

- How we might let go of all the holiday pressures of: parties, presents, and scheduled events, and draw closer to Jesus this Advent.
- How we might spend some focused time with Jesus... showing Him that we are Rejoicing that He came for each of us... and that He wants a unique relationship with each of us!

Take a minute today... and REJOICE in your coming home to Him.

Elaine Soper, PhD

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“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David,
the son of Abraham... “

MT 1: 1-17

REFLECTION:

I have been dreaming of houses again; a theme of my dream life when I am invited to open my heart to know more deeply. Home is where the heart is even in dreams.

This house dreaming does not surprise me. My mother is dying with congestive heart failure and progressive dementia. After we moved her to a small group home, I helped sift and sort to prepare her home for sale.

My primary job was to sort the seven bins of pictures she had kept. For four days, I was silently immersed in the genealogy of my family. I met my great grandparents, my grandparents, aunts and uncles. I watched my parents court, marry and begin their family with me, their first born. I watched myself and my siblings grow up again, watched my own marriage, the birth of my children and grandchildren and their growing up again. I lingered, savored, remembered, cherished, cried, laughed; filled with gratitude for where God had situated me.

We are each born into a culture and situation, a particular family, with a particular tradition, at a particular time. This dimension of our self is the ever-present, underlying setting in which the formation of our life occurs. It is God’s choice for us. Largely unconscious it can emerge as we surrender to Christ’s invitations. (Adrian van Kaam). Jesus’ genealogy prophesied who he was born to be.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- In silence, and with pictures if you have them, scan your genealogy.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what has been hidden.
- Give thanks for where God chose to situate you.

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“S/he is happiest who find peace in her/his home”.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“The authentic self is the soul made visible”.

Sarah Ban Breathnach

REFLECTION:

Home is not necessarily where one lives although where one lives is often home.

Home is not necessarily those with whom we live although those with whom we live are often our home.

Home is the space where we feel unconditionally accepted. It is where we know we belong.

Home is where we feel protected by God’s love.

Home is where we love and where we are loved. Home is where we grow and learn.

Home is not being judged by others or by ourselves.

Home is being authentic. Home is where we are our authentic self.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- What (not where) is your home?
- Who is your home?
- Are you living an authentic life?
- Do you trust God’s love enough to allow yourself to live authentically?

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“You must not let yourselves be distressed—you must hold on to your faith in God and to your faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s House. If there were not, should I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? It is true that I am going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am. You know where I am going and you know the road I am going to take.” John 14:2-4

REFLECTION:

Each of us has some individual sense of “home,” a definition that may change from time-to-time, but all Christians share the belief that there is a final and eternal home in which we have a place. We have that place not based on our own merit – it is not sometime reserved for the holiest among us. Our place is the gift of God, reflecting his intention that humankind should reside in a paradise where we walk and talk with our creator.

Jesus promises us that – just as he lived with his disciples during his earthly ministry – so we shall live with him. Our calling is both to believe his promise and to live as if we do so that others may come to know God through Jesus.

PRAAYER PRACTICE:

***Make a list of those whom you love but see no more, including family, friends, people long ago given up to death and those of more recent demise.

***Remember those people (one or two at a time, please!) as they were when you knew them. Recall why you loved them. Restore them to your consciousness through memory and enjoy their presence once again, knowing that you will do so in heaven.

***Now imagine your reunion with them in heaven. What you will say to them when you meet? It may be there will come a time to apologize for some earthly thing done or left undone, some act for which you will seek or offer forgiveness. In your prayers, ask now for that forgiveness and offer it to those whom you have offended.

***In that spirit, consider those yet alive to whom you owe an apology. Then offer it.

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“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD had anointed me; He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken hearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners. To announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God, to comfort all who mourn.”-Isaiah 61:1 and 2.

REFLECTION:

On June 20, 2018, the 155 Anniversary of West Virginia Statehood, an Interfaith Service was held. During the service, Isaiah 61 was read. Governor Justice asked everyone to begin a YEAR OF PRAYER FOR WEST VIRGINIA. At the conclusion of the service, all participants prayed the Prayer for West Virginia. Today, December 20, 2018 is midpoint of the Year of Prayer for West Virginia.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- If you have been praying for The prayer for West Virginia, we are encouraging you to continue praying for West Virginia.
- If you have not been praying for West Virginia, we encourage you to join West Virginians in praying for West Virginia.
- Reprinted below is the Prayer for West Virginia:

Dear God,

When You created the universe, You thought of West Virginia. You blessed West Virginia with an abundance of beauty, scenic wonders, and natural resources to remind the world of what “Almost Heaven” on Earth might be. You created hard-working people to be born, move, or call West Virginia “Home.” As West Virginians, we are ever-mindful of our need to seek Your guidance for our state. With unwavering confidence in Your deep, unconditional love, we turn to You and humbly ask you to:

- Guide our leaders at all levels;
- Provide us with opportunities for constant growth in West Virginia;
- Instill values in all West Virginians, based on the highest regard for the dignity, equality, and worth of all people, and
- Make us responsible caretakers for West Virginia’s environment.

Last, we courageously ask You to remove barriers that prevent us from always seeking Your constant guidance for West Virginia. Amen.

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Those who dwell in the shelter of Infinite Light, who abide in the wings of Infinite Love, will raise their voices in praise: “My refuge and my strength; in You alone will I trust.”

. – Psalm 91:1-2, Psalms for Praying by Nan C. Merrill;

REFLECTION:

We are called to live in the shelter of the Divine and at the same time acknowledge that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. We are created in the image and likeness of God. Divine love is our home, our very existence. When we allow ourselves to feel anxious and worry, we lose our connection to the Divine indwelling within us. A friend often shares “worry is against my religion!” As we await the coming of the Christ Child, remember to trust in the One who created us to live in love and peace.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

The Welcoming Practice

- Focus, feel and sink into what you are experiencing this moment in your body.
- “Welcome” what you are experiencing this moment in your body as an opportunity to consent to the Divine Indwelling.
- Let go by repeating the following sentences:
 - I let go of the desire for security, affection, control.
 - I let go of the desire to change what I am experiencing.

“My heart exults in the Lord, my Savior.”

1 Samuel 2:1

REFLECTION:

It is beginning to look a lot like Christmas in our world! In just a few short days, we will be celebrating the Nativity of the Lord. Amidst the hustle and bustle of preparing our gifts, our homes, our travel plans, and the list goes on; have we taken some prayerful and intentional time to prepare the home of our hearts to celebrate this great festival of God becoming flesh and living among us? What does the home of our heart look like these days? Are we full of the praise of Samuel, with a heart that exults in our Savior? Or, is our heart heavy with worry and fear?

Today, examine the home of your heart. Is it ready to exult in the joy of these days or is it heavy with burdens? Turn the home of your heart over to God today. Allow God to calm the places that are crooked and allow God to make them straight, so that your heart might exult with joy!

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Make a list of the places in the home of your heart where you most need God to be present.
- Pray with your list and find a few specific places where you can trust God to place love and peace in the home of your heart.

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Fourth Sunday of Advent



Monday – Fourth Week of Advent

Tuesday – Fourth Week of Advent

Wednesday – Fourth Week of Advent

Thursday – Fourth Week of Advent

Friday – Fourth Week of Advent

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers
for by this some have entertained angels...”

Hebrews 13:2

REFLECTION:

These past two years have been incredibly difficult for many people around the world due to the extreme weather, we have experienced. It has provided many of us an opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities and loves. When we hear of those who have lost homes, those who have died as a result of flooding, those who have lost every *thing*, our hearts ache.

As Christmas is upon us, look around. Think about those you have accepted into your home. Think about those you have not. Opportunities abound to minister to others. To help them feel “at home” even when they are far from their homes. Keeping ourselves focused on the foundation of our “Home in God” helps keep us in God’s plan.

Let us focus a bit on resting in the arms of God. Not our easy chair – that chair could be gone tomorrow. Let us focus on that fundamental love God has for us and how that love can get us through any storm. Coming “home” to the “One Who Loves Us”. We can stray from the foundation, our home in Christ, yet are always welcomed back.

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Sit in your favorite chair. Notice what you love about it. How can those attributes also fit being with God?
- Look around at your “stuff” what would you miss least? What would you miss most? Think about the reasons.
- What makes your house a HOME? How can you help your guests to feel more at home when they are with you?

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Christmas Eve

The Creed – A Gift that Keeps on Giving

REFLECTION:

Christmas Eve afternoon, on a day that should be a very beautiful time in the life of the Church - a time of prayer, reflection, special services, celebrating the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Instead, people are busy running from place to place, getting ready for social gatherings, cooking, cleaning for guests, buying and sharing gifts, traveling. The ‘**reason for the season**’ is forgotten or given second place.

Looking around the room, I see the Christmas Tree decorated with many brightly colored lights, decorations, which as a child I could not touch. My mind flashes back to local news stories about abuse, neglect, rejection, murder, famine, accidents, fires, floods and last, but not least, the cries of the poor. What gift could I open from under the tree that will help during these challenging issues?

My eyes wander back to the tree. Under the tree, I see a package, I had not seen before. A package, triangular shape, wrapped in purple paper – it had an aura around it. Who is this package from? Picking up and looking at this triangular package I think of the Holy Trinity – and the rich traditions of my Church. I rotate the package in my hands. I begin to take the wrappings off the box. I see images of prophets, apostles, Jesus, Our Blessed Mother. The history and traditions of my Church pass before me. I open the box, and there lies the gift I have been seeking without knowing – The Creed.

I awaken, look around, and there lying on the table beside my chair is a copy of the Nicene Creed. I pick it up and prayerfully read it, section by section-reading, rereading, reflecting, listening. I have received the gift of Christmas from God. An affirmation of my beliefs. I am “HOME.”

PRAYER PRACTICE:

- Obtain copy the Nicene Creed.
- Prayerfully pray the Nicene Creed as a package given to you from God this Christmas Eve.

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Christmas Day

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
they have to take you in.” Robert Frost

REFLECTION:

I had a most unusual meeting in a most common and unexpected place. It was an experience that made me wonder: “Did I just meet an angel in disguise?” I was on a trip, when I discovered I was out of gas and lost. As I was filling my car’s gas tank, a woman approached me holding flyers in her hand and a basket.

She was carrying a basket and asking for donations. Her name was Sinceera. Sinceera was collecting money for an organization titled: “Sister, Can You Hear Me?” This organization works to assist young teens in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Community who are victims of trafficking. This organization ministers to young LGBTQ's teens who are often treated as less than human so they get even more abused and have none or few support groups.

You might be thinking, “This is a rather strange reflection for Christmas!” Yet, my thoughts go to the Holy Child who had only a manger for His bed. The One whose Mother was told that; “There was no room in the inn!” It is the poor shepherds to whom the announcement of His birth was made! As I gaze upon the Infant in the Manger this Christmas, I gaze at Him through a different lens as a result of my being reminded of the plight of young teens who are homeless, potential victims of trafficking and have nowhere to lay their heads.

As we go forth into celebrating the season of Christmas, let us particularly pray for all those in search of a home. Even if we are not in a position to literally provide a home, how is God inviting us to support those who are? On a spiritual level, how are we a “home” for others? Let us take time to thank God for the homes which have enriched us throughout our lives!

PRAYER PRACTICE:

1. Read and Reflect on Decree 1 “Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Mission” Jesuits General Congregation Meeting Document (This document is on the internet), or
2. Reflect on the ways Christ is a model of hospitality for you. What circumstances invite and challenge your ability to be hospitable?

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another door HOME opens at**

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