

Advent 2020: Week 3

Rejoicing with the Consoler

Arise, my love, my beautiful one,
and come away.
O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
in the crannies of the cliff,
let me see your face,
let me hear your voice,
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.

(Song of Solomon 2.13f)



From Luigi Gioia's talk:

Through Scripture God looks for us, waits for us, comes to visit us behind our closed doors to wrestle with our doubts about him; is not put off if we do not recognize him; he is not resentful if we have betrayed or ignored him. Tirelessly, tenderly, patiently, he leads us to love him and trust in him...

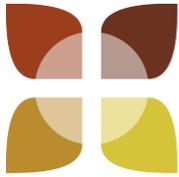
When I joined the monastery aged 18, I was quite taken aback when an old and normally wise monk one day during confession told me that I should cover the images of saints and of our lady in my monastic cell when I was taking off my clothes before going to bed in the evening. Nakedness was supposed to be offensive to the saints. It certainly isn't for God, at least if we believe the Letter to the Hebrews where it says that "being naked and exposed to God's eyes" is the sign that we are welcoming God's Word as it should be (Heb 4.12).

So, today, through his Word, the Lord keeps asking us: *Where are you?*

Nakedness comes in many forms. All have in common that we feel vulnerable, guilty, ashamed. This might be understandable in our relations with each other, but not with God.

He died naked, so he gets it.

No reason for us to hide from him anymore, whether because of our guilt, our loneliness, our fears or, as for Jesus, of our failure. Even in the areas of our life where



we hide from ourselves, we can now let God in and allow him do the job of reassuring us and of winning our trust.

Patiently, the Lord stands at the door and knocks. What we consider to be the absence of the Lord only is a form of respect for us, his concern not to impose himself, his patient waiting at our door. To the Lord who asks us: '*Where are you?*', we have an example in the way Mary did not hide from him, overcame her fear and freely replied

Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy Word.

Where are you?

This advice is very necessary, not only for all those who advance so prosperously but also for all others who seek their Beloved, I want to speak of it.

In the first place it should be known that if anyone is seeking God,

the Beloved is seeking that person much more.

John of the Cross: *Living Flame of Love* 3.27-28

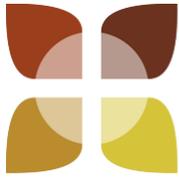
Prayer is the creation of a meeting place where God can find us.

Begin by becoming aware of this meeting place, this 'here' and 'now' moment by moving from the busy flow of your thoughts into your senses.

- Listen to the sounds of this place, giving all your attention to your hearing...louder sounds and quieter...from close by and from distant places...with different tones and textures.
- Look at what is around you – the shapes and the colours, the light and the shadow...take your time...this is a deep breath between all that activity... and God is in this deep breath.
- As you stay in this meeting place you may become aware of your physical self...the weight of your feet on the floor, the relaxation of your fingers as you let them uncurl, the slow rhythm of your breathing. Take time to be with yourself in this way, for God meets you here.
- Your feeling self may also greet you: – the lightness or heaviness, tiredness or energy, gratitude or sorrow. Receive your feeling self gently – as a guest in this place. A name for how you feel in this moment may come to you. Acknowledge its presence with you but also let it go – allow it to rest.

In this meeting place your thoughts will come and go. They might want to hustle you out of this moment, telling you there's somewhere more important you need to be. Yet, even hurry and worry deserve to rest for a while.

There is nowhere more important for this moment than here and now – where God is.



Nakedness

Our good Lord revealed it that is very greatly pleasing to him that a simple soul should come naked, open and familiarly. For this is the loving yearning of the soul through the touch of the Holy Spirit...

Julian of Norwich: Showings, Long Text 5



As you come before God, what 'clothes' might you need to remove?

- The self you present to others to meet their expectations, or to avoid their disapproval?
- The need to show that you are self-sufficient?
- The cloak of busyness in which you lose yourself?
- The need to show you are anything other than how you are and who you are at this moment?

As you own these clothes, let them slip away.

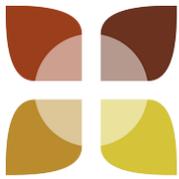
Here I am...let it be with me according to your word.

Mary said 'yes' to a reality beyond her understanding and a future beyond her capacity to see.

What 'yes' to God is now invited of you?

- The 'yes' to allowing God to lead you within circumstances you cannot control
- The 'yes' to allowing God to accept you as you are, without need of pretence?
- The 'yes' to allowing God to draw from within you the 'more' of who you are, as yet hidden from your sight?
- The 'yes' of availability to God to work through you, for the healing and wholeness of others?

Be attentive in discerning God's invitation to you at this time in your life. Stay with the question. The beginnings of clarity will come if, like Mary, you are willing to receive the word and then respond to it.



Getting into the story

Advent unfolds the stories of ordinary people in the Gospels who placed their trust in God amidst uncertainty.

Whose story most draws you:

- Mary's?
- Joseph's?
- Elizabeth's?
- John the Baptist's?

Read the story of your chosen person. Imagine yourself into their story. How does this person's experience speak to you own?

Some Bible passages for prayer and reflection:

Philippians 4.4-9 / Luke 1.26-38 / Luke 1.39-58 / Isaiah 42.5-9 / Jeremiah 31.1-9