

ADVENT REFLECTIONS & BLESSINGS RESOURCES

FOR THE DIOCESE OF OSSORY



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SUGGESTION FOR ADVENT DAILY PRAYER

WEEK ONE

This week why not start or end your day with one of the following prayer phrases taken from the Scripture readings of the First Sunday of Advent!

- “To you O Lord I lift up my soul”
- “Lord, make me know your ways. Lord, teach me your paths”
- “God’s ways are faithfulness and love”
- “The Lord-our-integrity”
- “Come Lord Jesus”

WEEK TWO

This week why not start or end your day with one of the following prayer phrases taken from the Scripture readings of the Second Sunday of Advent!

- “Put on the beauty of the glory of God for ever, wrap the cloak of integrity around you.”
- “Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight a path. And all will see the salvation of God.”
- “God will guide us in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and integrity for escort.”
- “What marvels the Lord has worked for us! Indeed we are glad.”
- “Come Lord Jesus”

WEEK THREE

This week why not start or end your day with one of the following prayer phrases taken from the Scripture readings of the Third Sunday of Advent!

- “Truly, God is my salvation, I trust, I shall not fear.”
- “May that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, guard our hearts and our thoughts, in Christ Jesus.”
- “The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me; he has sent me to bring the good news to the poor.”
- “Come Lord Jesus”

WEEK FOUR

This week why not start or end your day with one of the following prayer phrases taken from the O Antiphons of 17th-24th December!

- “Wisdom of the Most high, come and teach us the way of truth”
- “Ruler of the House of Israel, come and save us with outstretched arm”
- “Root of Jesse, come to save us, and delay no more”
- “Emmanuel our king and lawgiver, come and save us”
- “Key of David, come to liberate from prison the captive who lives in darkness”
- “King of the people’s and corner-stone of the Church, come and save us”
- “Morning star, sun of justice, come and enlighten those who live in darkness”

REFLECTIONS

*She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger
because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke2:7*

No room for you in the city, Jesus, So many doors were tried and
closed to you, So many places did not warm you with welcome.

There is still a coming
There is still a Bethlehem, it is the city of my heart
With no room to give you welcome.

It is the manger of my inner self,
where your request is made,
Searching for an entrance, To my poor and empty dwelling.

Advent is a time for waiting,
I will wait faithfully,
For slow recognition of the closed doors in my Bethlehem.

Advent is a time of yearning,
I will keep on longing for you, I will try to do so patiently.

Advent is a time of hoping,
I will seek the strong stirring sureness
That it is possible to open doors.

Advent is a time of coming,
I will pray with all the Church:
Come, come, come, Lord Jesus,
Welcome into my home of love.

And Lord, when it is time to say:
This is the Christmas Day
I pray that you will warmly be welcome.
In the Bethlehem of my heart,
Giving birth in my newly opened places.

"Fresh Dread" by Joyce Ruyy O.S.N. Ave Maria Press.p156

I AM LIVING AMONG YOU - A STORY BY LEO TOLSTOY

The famous Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, tells a story about a poor cobbler, Martin Avdyeeich. Just a few years after his marriage Martin's young wife died and later his small son. Their deaths left the cobbler broken-hearted and empty. Life had no meaning for him. He called into question all that he had known about God, all that he believed about Christ. Where, he asked, was God in this suffering? Was there no consolation for him, no hope? Gradually Martin sought peace and comfort in the Scripture. How God's people suffered! Yet he saw that there was meaning and purpose in life. God is always near at hand; Christ does care.

One night Martin's eyes grew heavy and his head drooped over the fading print of his Bible. Laying his head down on the open book, he fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke the next morning his heart was filled with expectation and a strange joy. Could it be, or was he only dreaming, that this very day Jesus would visit him? The experience was more than a fanciful dream to Martin. He was certain Christ did speak to him during the night. This day he would have the Lord Jesus with him.

All day long Martin sat at the shop window distracted. He could not work. He searched every face that passed by along the busy street outside. He knew those faces: the old, the young, the tradesmen with whom he had done business, the soldiers, the servants of the well-to-do. Then there were the others, those who just walked the street day after day.

The Russian winter is bitterly cold and from fall to spring the ground is covered with snow. As Martin sat looking out his window, he noticed an old soldier. Having shovelled snow for hours, the man was at the point of exhaustion, weary armed and pierced with the cold. Martin took the soldier in, gave him some hot tea and then talked to him. The man was lonely and unhappy. Martin consoled him. Later, while walking in the snow-packed street, Martin was startled by what he saw. There out in the open near his shop sat a starving woman and her nearly-frozen child. Martin ran to help them. During the afternoon the cobbler noticed that a young boy was in trouble. He had stolen an apple and an old woman was dragging him off to be arrested. Martin intervened on the boy's behalf and the woman forgave the youth. It was a busy day, a disappointing day. That evening Martin sat down and stared emptily into space. He had been so certain that this was the day he would have a visit from Christ and the day was nearly over. He sighed and taking up the book began to read in the gospels. It was still and quiet in

the shop. The light was low. Martin felt strangely warm. Suddenly he leaned forward attentively. Had he heard a voice whispering “Martin, Martin don’t you know me?” The old soldier was standing before him! Then the woman with the child in her arms! The boy who had stolen the apple and the woman who had wanted him arrested suddenly they too seemed to appear. The moment lingered, then Martin’s eyes went down to the pages of the Gospel. He began to read from where he had left off the previous night. “I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me into your home” Martin’s heart leaped for joy as he came to the bottom of the page ‘In as much as you did this to one of these, you did it to me.’ (Mt. 25:40)

THE WEIGHT OF A SNOWFLAKE

Not too long ago in a place not too far away, a field mouse asked a wise old owl what is the weight of a snowflake. “Why nothing more than nothing,” answered the owl.

The mouse went on to tell the owl about the time he was resting on a branch in a fir tree, counting each snowflake until the number was exactly 3 million, 471 thousand, 952. Then with the settling of the very next flake-crack. The branch suddenly snapped, tumbling mouse and snow to the ground. “Humph, Such was the weight of nothing,” said the mouse.

So the next time you think your contributions, your acts of charity, your works for justice, your gifts of love, and your talents are nothing, or that they are small in comparison to those of others, remember that when one is added to another, and then to another and so forth, great things can happen from nothing. In the same way, what seems to be ordinary can be transformed into something extraordinary with just a little extra nothing.

Your mission is to create great things once again out of nothingness, to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

LET ME NOT KEEP CHRISTMAS

“Let me not wrap, stack, box, bag, tie, tag, bundle, seal, keep Christmas. Christmas kept is liable to mold.

Let me give Christmas away, unwrapped, by exuberant armfuls. Let me share, dance, live Christmas unpretentiously, merrily, responsibly with overflowing hands, tireless steps and sparkling eyes. Christmas given away will stay fresh-even until it comes again.”

Linda Felver, A Book of Christmas, Nashville: Upper Rooms, 1988, p.48

A CHRISTMAS VERSION

1 CORINTHIANS 13

If I decorate my house perfectly with plaid bows, strands of twinkling lights and shiny balls, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another decorator.

If I slave away in the kitchen, baking dozens of Christmas cookies, preparing gourmet meals and arranging a beautifully adomed table at mealtime, but do not show love to my family, I'm just another cook.

If I work at a soup kitchen, carol in the nursing home and give all that I have to charity, but do not show love to my family, it profits me nothing.

If I trim the spruce with shimmering angels and crocheted snowflakes, attend a myriad of holiday parties and sing in the choir's cantata but do not focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops the cooking to bug a child. Love sets aside the decorating to kiss the husband. Love is kind, Though harried and tired. Love doesn't envy another's home that has coordinated Christmas china and table linens.

Love doesn't yell at the kids to get out of the way, but is thankful they are there to be in the way. Love doesn't give only to those who are able to give in return but rejoices in giving to those who can't.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. Video games will break, pearl necklaces will be lost, golf clubs will rust, but giving the gift of love will endure.

CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

Nobody expected him just like that: a baby, a manger, a young man, a young woman. Nobody expected that his first visitors would be shepherds, Little thought of in the eyes of the great. Yes, he has come, but not as we expected.

The kings of the time had sons and daughters, but who remembers them now? Who would know now of Herod, except that He had spoken of him? Who would have thought that more people in today's world know of Nazareth. A poverty-stricken, sleepy townland, than know of Antioch or Alexandria, the places big in the minds and on the tongues of the time, But not big in the heart of God?

Our notion of fame and success are turned upside down. Long after Herod's castles have turned to ruin, the cave of Bethlehem stands strong and holy, A place of hope for generations yet unborn Because on that starry night the Son of God was born there. Only the heart that wants to love and love forever can recognise the reality of God in the darkness of the cave. Only such hearts can see greatness and dignity in the shepherd. Only such hearts can see in this child the glory and life of God.

We didn't expect that later he would walk our bloodstained earth and share the sweat of our toil and agony and sadness, as he still walks this day. Nor that he would laugh with the happy just because they were happy. Nor that he would be nailed to a wooden cross so that the life of man would mingle with the blood of man's death And the love of God displayed in Jesus, would conquer.

Nor did we expect that he would say things like, 'He who sees you sees me' or 'What you do for the least of my people you do for me.' It's strange and unexpected that God would reach out to touch mankind Through the hands of an infant in a poor farmyard. And it's strange, though beautiful, that our song, 'Glory to God and peace on earth', is a call to be his peace, justice and his music on earth.

Can we honestly sing 'Come, all ye faithful' when what God means is 'Come to my Bethlehem, and my Bethlehem is no longer a hillside cave but it is where you create friendship, justice and love among each other and bring Christ my son to birth'.

LESSONS FROM THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY BY RAYMOND TOPLEY

Originally published in the Irish Catholic, Advent 2008

'The Little Drummer Boy' is one of the most popular carols of the Christmas season. Its message, telling the story of an imaginary encounter with the new-born Jesus, is familiar to all. In this regard, it has much to teach the Christian disciple of any age. Particularly appealing are the touching and inspiring lines, "I played my drum for him," and "I played my best for him."

The song is simplicity itself and this is very much part of its universal appeal. Against the backdrop of the gentle yet catchy tune, the words recount the meeting between a boy drummer and a boy king. But the apparent simplicity reveals a profound message. The drummer boy not only plays his drum for Jesus, he also plays his best for him. The commitment is one hundred per cent. There is no holding back and in this total giving he becomes a model for all Christian disciples in their relationship with the Lord. The song, therefore, is essentially Christological. It imagines an encounter with Christ and points to the ideal response namely, service of the Lord to the best of one's ability.

What lessons, therefore, has the little drummer boy for us as parishioners, for instance?

Firstly, Christian ministry is rooted in an encounter with the Lord. Each annual celebration of Christmas presents an opportunity for deepening that experience. Secondly, it is important to identify one's particular talent with a view to placing it at the service of God and God's people. For this boy it was drumming. However, each one has something special to offer as noted in the jingle, "God has a job for you to do, as hand fits glove and foot fits shoe" or as expressed more soberly by Cardinal Newman when he declared, "God has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another" (Mediations and Devotions). But while each one responds in a particular way to the call of God there remains one thing that is common to all, and that is the fulfilling of one's role to the very best of one's ability.

For the Christian believer to be able to say at the end of life, “I played my drum for him” and “I played my best for him” is truly to have answered the call of Christian ministry and discipleship. Besides that, it also inherits the affirmation of Christ expressed succinctly in the closing words of the song, “Then he smiled at me.” If this ‘eschatological smile’ of Christ were sub-titled it might read, “Well done, good and faithful servant, come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world” (Mt 25:24). This carol, therefore, is not just about a simple visit to a crib. It has more to it than that. It is eschatological in that it fits in with the end of life, with the Christian believer’s final encounter with the Lord and the notion of Christ as King.

Inheriting such a royal divine ‘smile’ for a job well done or a life well spent is the eternal lot of both adults and children, who ‘drum’ for the Lord to the best of their ability following the spiritual rhythm of the little drummer boy.



CHRISTMAS LITANY

Let Us Pray:

Saviour of the World, born in simplicity and joy; cradled in a welcoming manger and nursed by Mary and Joseph, we rejoice with you in your simplicity as we come before you in prayer this Christmas, praying;

Joy of God	be the source of our joy
Happiness of God	be unity in our families
Grace of God	be compassion to us sinners
Calm of God	be our tranquillity in our times of trouble
Care of God	be comfort in those who are mentally ill
Hope of God	be optimism to the down-hearted
Manger of God	be our Eucharist as we journey through uncertain times
Way of God	be a sure path for those seeking employment
Light of God	be hope to those who have lost their financial security
Image of God	be reflected in our words and in our actions
Hospitality of God	be our welcome to the rejected and the homeless
Harmony of God	be our reconciliation and peace
Integrity of God	be the conscience of each of us and of our leaders
Justice of God	be our truth and that of our policy makers
Silence of God	be the tongue of our voiceless and bullied
Word of God	be Good News to all seekers
Thanksgiving of God	be our blessing as we journey in renewed faith and trust
Salvation of God	be our Host at the Paschal Banquet

CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS

A CHRISTMAS BLESSING

God give you blessings at Christmas time;
Stars for your darkness,
Sun for your day,
Light on the path as you search for the Way
And a mountain to climb.

God grant you courage this coming year,
Fruit for your striving,
Friends if you roam,
Joy in your labour,
Love in your home,
And a summit to clear.

ABLESSING OF THE CRIB IN THE PARISH CHURCH OR IN THE HOME

This blessing can be prayed when the crib is being put in place in the home. When the final figures are ready to be put into the crib. The family might gather around it and recite the following blessing

All make the sign of the cross
God of every nation and people,
from the very beginning of creation you have
made manifest your love:
When our need for a Saviour was great you
sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary.
To our lives he brings joy and peace,
justice, mercy, and love.
Lord, Bless all who look upon this manger,
May it remind us of the humble birth of
Jesus, and raise up our thoughts to him,
Who is God-with-us and Saviour of all, and
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen

FAMILY TABLE PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

Loving God,
 on this Christmas day we give thanks that
 Jesus, your Son, has come into our world
 Bringing us gifts of peace and joy.
 Bless us as we sit down together at this table
 for our Christmas meal.
 Bless the food we share and help us to
 remember those who are hungry.
 Be with our neighbours and our friends,
 those who are lonely, sick or away from
 home.
 We pray that our departed loved ones
 may now sit at your table in heaven.
 May the joy of this feast give us strength
 and light, now and in the days ahead.
 We ask this prayer through Christ, Our Lord,
 Amen

A BLESSING OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

(in the Home or the Parish)

This blessing can be prayed on the day that the family or the community puts up the Christmas tree. Once the lights are ready to be switched on, the prayer can begin.

Lord our God,
 We praise you for the light of creation:
 The sun, the moon, and the stars of the night.
 We praise you for the light of Israel:
 The Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures.
 We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son:
 he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace,
 Who fills us with the wonder of your love.
 Lord God,
 Let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree.
 May the light and cheer it gives us be a sign
 of the joy that fills our hearts.
 May all who delight in this tree come to the
 knowledge and joy of salvation.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.
 Amen