



PRAY, PONDER, PREACH AND PRACTICE THE WORD OF GOD

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The Great Bending Down

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We enter a new liturgical year and the great season of Advent. It is a twilight time, a time of fertile darkness, a time of waiting, of looking for something. Culturally we find ourselves in a kind of mist. We strain to make sense of what is going on. So what are we waiting for in 2020?

We want peace...we want order...we want truthfulness and honesty. We want to be saved...from ourselves. Advent is a time of hope, a time that tells us that what we want is already on the way. It's message centers on the birth of a baby, not an army, not a new foreign policy, but a baby.

The Mystery that is saving us bends down, wrapping itself in our DNA. Infinity binds itself in littleness. We ponder this, amazed. We know what's coming. There will be the growing up, the ordinary eating, sleeping, being in the family. There will be living the limits of being able to do only so much. Then there will be the bending into rejection, arrest, conviction, and execution. And because such love can't die, it takes one more step down. It finds a way to stay with us in the struggle; it becomes our food, strength for the journey, our bread.

What is this bending down of our God? Are we fools to preach a God who wants to be eaten?

Or is this the epitome of wisdom, to present a God who is bent on making us divine? So we enter into the Great Bending Down. We slowly become what we eat. And the Baby laughs.

Little mite, who charms us,
You lure us to bend our stiff necks and rigid backs
To capture us in a perennial kiss!

Special thanks to S. Ann Pratt for these reflections.

December 1 – Matthew 24:37-44 “Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day our Son of God will come.”

Today is a day of beginnings! The beginning of the new church year and the beginning of our season of anticipation, our season of waiting, or as Matthew cautions, our season of watching. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus we are also anticipating the Second Coming. How easy it is to get so immersed in our preparations for the first that we miss the glimpses of Coming that occur in our everyday lives. Tagore asks, “Have you not heard God's silent steps? God comes, comes, ever comes.” When God comes like a thief in the night, will we be found ready in the darkness, mindful of the cost, but watchful for the dawn of salvation in our midst?

December 8 – Matthew 3:1-12 “A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of our God, make straight God’s paths.”

Who are the voices of today that are crying out in the wilderness? Children separated from their parents at our borders? Today is the 610th day of the American Child Hostage Crisis. The victims of mass shootings? The number of mass shootings across the U.S. thus far in 2019 has outpaced the number of days this year. The earth itself? Huge increases in the number of fires, floods, and droughts as an impact of climate instability. John the Baptist came to the people dressed in the clothing of a prophet with a message of repentance to prepare for the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. What message do we need to hear today to ready ourselves for the coming of the Holy One of God?

December 15 – Matthew 11:2-11 “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”

John the Baptist speaks to us today from his prison cell...his question is direct but not surprising.... he has given his all and is double checking, wanting to be sure that Jesus is the real deal...because if he is not then he will just move on....at times we all find ourselves where John does, maybe not in a physical prison but a prison of our own making.... perhaps overcome by exhaustion, anxiety, or sorrow. At these times we may also ask, “Are you really the one?” In those moments we can pray for the eyes to see and the ears to hear the answer for ourselves. Perhaps the answer will come to us when we see someone’s act of justice or work of mercy. Or maybe it is someone’s act of kindness to one who is vulnerable or gesture of peace amidst racial division. When these moments open us to the Beloved, we pray that we will have open hearts ready to follow in Christ’s way.

December 22 – Matthew 1:18-24 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel.”

Today, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the last candle in our wreath, marking the final period of preparation for the celebration of the coming of Emmanuel. In some spheres, this fourth candle is known as the “Angel’s Candle.” This seems fitting since, were it not for Joseph’s encounter with an angel, he would have walked away from Mary.... quietly, respectfully, but then here comes the angel. Joseph’s faith journey is as astonishing as Mary’s.... the long ago intervention of angels in the lives of two faith-filled people has changed the course of the world for two thousand years. How might our faith journey’s impact the future if we follow in the path of this faithful and courageous couple?

December 29 – Matthew 2:13-15,19-23 “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt.”

Imagine that! A family forced to leave their homeland to go to a country unknown to them because they feared that if they did not leave their precious child would be killed by a paranoid and jealous leader! It was fortunate that the family fled because the leader did indeed send soldiers to kill every child less than two years old. So the family got away with their lives and the life of their son but little else, living, until they finally got word that it was safe to return, as refugees, unwanted and displaced in a strange land that had been the enemy of their ancestors. We know this is the story of Mary and Joseph and their first born son.... but it could so easily be a today story instead of the 2000-year-old story. The United Nations tells us that every day 37,000 people are forced to leave their homes due to conflict or persecution. Deep in our hearts, we know that we are called to welcome the stranger, but the immensity of the immigration crisis can easily be overwhelming. On this feast of the Holy Family, we have the opportunity to spend time praying about how we might better understand how our faith calls us to welcome the stranger.

