

Advent Prayer
Dominican Sisters of Houston & Dominican Family
December 14, 2019

Reflection: Isaiah 35:1-6A, 10

Advent this year came with a familiar comfort to it: the invitation to enter the darkness, to be wrapped in a heavy blanket and hunker down. The arrival of Advent, for some reason this year, more than others, for me, matched the dreary nature of our world.

This year's period of waiting and darkness seemed perfectly timed as I read about a [teenager dying of the flu in a detention center](#). And why is he in a detention center in the first place? So much darkness.

Last week, I was privileged to be in attendance at a gathering of people of color who work in independent schools. As I will never fully understand what it means to move through the world without the privilege I'm afforded because of the color of my skin, it was just a glimpse into the sad, frustrating reality of racial injustice still so prevalent in our world. So much darkness.

This past week, in my Theology III class, we were talking about the Eucharist—what a gift, what nourishment, and what an opportunity to be transformed to be Christ in the world... but mainstream media doesn't talk about that. Rather, they focus on priests denying communion: first, to a [political figure for his platform](#), and just two weeks ago, to a [Michigan judge in a same-sex marriage](#). So much darkness.

So, this Advent, for me, has been marked by an internal dissonance: finally, permission to dwell in the reality of darkness in our world... but there is simultaneously a pull to be in the spirit of the season! Let's just celebrate Christmas already! Why must we sit in all of this darkness?!

In preparation for this morning, Sr. Donna suggested that I look at this weekend's readings. So, I opened [the readings for the third Sunday of Advent](#) and they sort of gave me a visceral reaction: really!? What do you mean the desert and the parched land will exult?! Who is going to rejoice in joyful song!? What are we celebrating!? I'm not ready yet. Can we slow the celebration?! I need to be here for just a moment longer.

Maybe you've felt this internal dissonance: the already and not yet all at the same time. Last Monday was Christmas pajama day at school... but we still have five days of classes and assessments AND THEN midterms. We can't pretend we're on vacation yet. I need these days to finish my preparation.

So, in my own small act of... protest? I gave myself permission to soak up this Advent darkness, intentionally attending Advent prayer each morning at school. (Thanks, Dominican Sisters, for the reflection books!)

But, this is the wisdom of our Church and of the liturgical seasons, in the brilliance of our creative God who knows just what humanity needs... like a steady beat of a drum, this past week's readings urged me toward this third Sunday of Advent:

[Monday's](#) greeting from the angel to the blessed mother, "hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (*Luke 1:26-38; Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception*).

[Tuesday's](#) "comfort, give comfort to my people" (*Isaiah 40:1-11; Tuesday of the Second week of Advent*).

[Wednesday's](#) "come to me, all who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest" (*Matthew 11:28-30; Wednesday of the Second Week of Advent*).

[Thursday's](#) "see, I am coming to dwell among you, says the Lord" (*Zechariah 2:14-17; Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*).

And sitting in the dimly lit chapel listening in the stillness of each morning with my colleagues, these phrases gently invited me into this third week of Advent. There is no rush, just a steady insistence that something IS coming. We cannot rush through this period of waiting. We cannot pretend there is no darkness. We cannot turn away from the hardship and struggle in our world, we cannot ignore the work to be done.

But neither can we get lost in the darkness or forget about the light that is to come: As Isaiah says, "Strengthen the hands that are feeble, / make firm the knees that are weak / say to those whose hearts are frightened: / be strong, fear not!"

This has to be a whole-community effort. And, I believe that it is in our communal efforts that we "will see the glory of the Lord / the splendor of our God." As we await Christ's coming as a babe at Christmas, AND while we await the second coming, you and I have an opportunity to build the kingdom here and now.

When I wanted to dwell in the darkness, just being in the presence of my colleagues and students gathered daily for Advent prayer urged me to "be strong, [to] fear not!"

As I was reflecting on racial tensions in our country, a friend of mine finishing her PhD on transformative social change in education posted a new paper with interactive resources to create access and equity for students of color. The conversation this paper spurred between educators across the country is palpable... then the eyes of the blind will be opened.

On Monday, in the center of Rome, [a church opened to welcome Rome's poorest](#) and most marginalized. The church will be open 24/7 and will be fully staffed to support the needs of the poorest people in Rome. It is being called "the Pope's dream come true." The tongue of those who have been muted by society will sing.

On Wednesday, Greta Thurnberg was named [Time's Person of the Year](#) for her work on climate change. And, let's be clear—this climate crisis is for sure going to take the whole world to turn

around, if the desert and the parched land are ever going to exult... but there is rejoicing in joyful song that this crisis is taking center stage in our world.

And, just like this past week's readings were a drum-beat toward this Third Sunday of Advent, a week of joyful anticipation, so, too, our justice work—all of our work in making our world a better place—are a steady urging toward the kingdom of heaven. "Be strong, Fear not! / Here is your God."

How will you and I choose to create a space for God in our world? How will we choose to open our eyes that have been blind or clear our ears that have been deaf? How will we choose to bloom, or rejoice in joyful song? How are you being called to strengthen the hands that are feeble or make firm the knees that are weak in our society? Because it is in these spaces where we "will see the glory of the Lord / the splendor of our God."

May we set our sights now on creating a world where Christ might dwell among us, as a humble babe, laying in a manger—our God who became human—what a gift. And yes, there are preparations to be made. Let us not rush, but let us be intentional. It is in our intentional actions that we "will see the glory of the Lord / the splendor of our God." And it is in our intentionality that we will create a space for God to dwell in our midst.

And, it is with intentionality that we can listen confidently to the promise of the prophet Isaiah. Yes. We "will see the glory of the Lord / the splendor of our God."

Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

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