



God with Us

AN ADVENT JOURNEY WITH
THOMAS MERTON, ST. MOTHER TERESA
& HENRI NOUWEN

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Merton once described Advent as the “sacrament of the presence of God in this world, the Mystery of Christ at work in history.” As we celebrate Advent with the outward symbols of anticipation and joy and the rituals of Christmas preparation, we also embark on an inner journey to the center of our faith, to a meeting with Christ who is mysteriously present within us and around us in our world.

To accompany us on this faith journey, we invite three experienced guides who, like the magi of old, sought Christ in their lives and offered him their unique gifts. These distinguished guides, Cistercian (Trappist) monk **Thomas Merton** (1915-1968), Missionaries of Charity founder **St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta** (1910-1997) and priest-psychologist **Henri J.M. Nouwen** (1932-1996) are three of the most insightful and helpful spiritual guides of the twentieth century.

Through the example of

their lives and their many writings on the spiritual life, they are well-suited to lead us on our Advent journey into God’s presence in order to renew our relationship and deepen our experience of the living Christ dwelling in us and working in our world now.

But as Thomas Merton also reminds us, the mystery of Christ already present and working in our midst for our salvation “can only be known by those who enter into it, who find their place in the Mystical Christ, and therefore find the mystery of Christ realized and fulfilled in themselves.”

So now through their expert guidance let us enter into this Advent mystery through our silence, solitude, prayer and conversion, ever eager to discover that although we seek God as if God were absent, the surprising reality is that God is already in us, around us and always with us.

—Steve Mueller
Editor

First Sunday of Advent

JESUS WAITS IN SILENCE

*“Be still and know that I am God...
The LORD of hosts is with us.” (Psalm 46:10, 11)*

Jesus is always waiting for us in silence. In this silence he listens to us and speaks to our souls. And there, we hear his voice. Interior silence is very difficult, but we must make the effort to pray. In this silence we find a new energy and a real unity. God’s energy becomes ours, allowing us to perform things well. There is unity of our thoughts with his thoughts, of our prayers with his prayers, of our actions with his actions, of our life with his life.



Are we convinced of Christ’s love for us and of our love for

him? This conviction is like the sun’s rays, which cause the sap of life to flow and make the flowers of holiness blossom. This conviction is the rock on which holiness is built by serving Christ’s poor and lavishing on them what we would love to do for him in person.

If we follow this way, our faith will grow, our conviction will grow, and the striving for holiness will become our daily task. God loves those to whom he can give the most, those who expect the most from him, who are most open to him, those who have most need of him and count on him for everything.

—St. Mother Teresa
The Love of Christ

Jesus, help me to grow closer to you this Advent.

Monday, Week 1

A GRACE-FILLED TIME

“Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)

The expectation of Advent is anchored in the event of God’s incarnation. The more I come in touch with what happened in the past, the more I come in touch with what is to come. The Advent liturgy builds up the excitement and anticipatory joy about the coming of the LORD. But is this not a preparation that can only lead to an anticlimax? I don’t think so.

Advent does not lead to nervous tension stemming from expectation of something spectacular about to happen. Rather, it leads to a growing inner stillness and joy allowing me to realize that the One for whom I am waiting has already

arrived and speaks to me in the silence of my heart.

Just as a mother feels the child grow in her and is not surprised on the day of the birth but joyfully receives the one she learned to know during her waiting, so Jesus can be born in my life slowly and steadily and be received as the one I learned to know while waiting.

Calmness, repose, even-mindedness, restful joy, gentleness: these are the feelings that describe best my present life. I feel very much at ease and still, and neither noise nor words nor actions seem to disturb this stillness. It is a grace-filled time and God is close.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
The Genesee Diary

Jesus, help me trust in the slow and steady growth of your life within me.

Tuesday, Week 1

CHRIST IS ALREADY WITH US

“Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Advent reminds us that the “last things” are already present and realized in a hidden manner. God’s kingdom is already “in our midst.” But, the mystery can only be known by those who enter into it, who find their place in the Mystical Christ, and therefore find the mystery of Christ realized and fulfilled in themselves.

It is important to remember the deep seriousness of Advent, when the celebrations of our marketing culture so easily harmonize with our tendency to regard Christmas as a return to our own innocence and infancy. But the Church, in preparing us for the birth of Christ has more in mind than seasonal cheer. The Advent mystery focuses the light of faith upon the

very meaning of human life, of history, of the world and of our own being. In Advent we celebrate the coming and indeed the presence of Christ in our world.

We learn to recognize the present Advent that is taking place at every moment in our own earthly life as wayfarers. We awaken to the fact that every moment is a moment of judgment, that Christ is passing by and that we are judged by our awareness of his passing. If we join him and travel with him to the Kingdom, the judgment becomes for us salvation. But if we neglect him and let him go by, our neglect is our condemnation!

—Thomas Merton
Seasons of Celebration

Jesus, help me discover anew your presence in me and in my life.

Wednesday, Week 1

IN THE SILENCE, GOD SPEAKS

“For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from God.”

(Psalm 62:5)

To make possible true inner silence, practice:

Silence of the eyes, by seeking always the beauty and goodness of God everywhere, and closing them to the faults of others and to all that is sinful and disturbing to the soul.

Silence of the ears, by listening always to God’s voice and to the cry of the poor and the needy, and closing them to all other voices that come from fallen human nature, such as gossip, tale bearing, and uncharitable words.

Silence of the tongue, by praising God and speaking the life-giving Word of God that is the truth, that enlightens and inspires, brings peace, hope, and joy; and by refraining from self-defense and every word

that causes darkness, turmoil, pain, and death.

Silence of the mind, by opening it to the truth and knowledge of God in prayer and contemplation, like Mary who pondered the marvels of the LORD in her heart, and by closing it to all untruths, distractions, destructive thoughts, rash judgments, false suspicions of others, vengeful thoughts, and desires.

Silence of the heart, by loving God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength; loving one another as God loves; and avoiding all selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and greed. For in the silence and purity of the heart God speaks.

—St. Mother Teresa
In the Heart of the World

Jesus, help me seek silence to listen for your voice.

Thursday, Week 1

WAITING WITH OPEN-ENDED HOPE

“In accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.” (2 Peter 3:13)

Waiting, as we see it in the people on the first pages of Luke’s Gospel, is waiting with a sense of promise. Those who were waiting had each received a promise that gave them courage and allowed them to wait. They received something that was at work in them, a seed that had started to grow.

This is very important for us because we too can wait only if what we are waiting for has already begun for us. Waiting is never a movement from nothing to something. It is always a movement from something to something more. Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon, and Anna were living with a promise. It was a promise that

nurtured them, fed them, and enabled them to stay where they were. By their waiting, the promise could gradually unfold and realize itself within them and through them. They were present to the moment. That is why they could hear the angel. They were alert, attentive to the voice that spoke to them and said, “Don’t be afraid. Something is happening to you. Pay attention.” They were filled with hope. Their hope was something very different. Their hope was trusting that fulfillment would come, but fulfillment according to the promises of God and not just according to their wishes. Hope is always open-ended.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
Finding My Way Home

Jesus, help me not to fear and to trust in your promise to be with us.

Friday, Week 1

LED BY GOD INTO DARKNESS

“God reveals deep and hidden things; God knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him.” (Daniel 2:22)

Every moment and every event of every person's life on earth plants something in his soul. If you have to live in a city and work among machines and ride in the subways and eat in a place where the radio makes you deaf with spurious news, and where the food destroys your life and the sentiments of those around you poison your heart with boredom, do not be impatient, but accept it as the love of God and as a seed of solitude planted in your soul.

If you are appalled by those things, you will keep your appetite for the healing silence of recollection. Meanwhile, keep your sense of compassion for the people who have forgotten

the very concept of solitude. You, at least, know that it exists, and that it is the source of peace and joy. You can still hope for such joy. They do not even hope for it anymore.

When you are led by God into the darkness where contemplation is found, you are not able to rest in the false sweetness of your own will. The fake interior satisfaction of self-complacency and absolute confidence in your own judgment will never be able to deceive you entirely: it will make you slightly sick, and you will be forced by a vague sense of interior nausea to gash yourself open and let the poison out.

—Thomas Merton
New Seeds of Contemplation

Jesus, help me dare to follow you into the darkness.

Saturday, Week 1

TO BE ALONE WITH GOD

*“You have seen, O LORD; do not be silent!
O LORD, do not be far from me!” (Psalm 35:22)*

Prayer is a two-way process: speaking and listening. God speaks to us: we listen. We speak to God: God listens. God speaks in the silence of our heart, and we listen. And then we speak to God from the fullness of our heart, and God listens. Our words are useless unless they come from the bottom of our heart.

If we really want to pray, we must first learn to listen: for in the silence of the heart God speaks. Silence of the heart, not only of the mouth, is necessary. Our prayer life suffers so much because our hearts are not silent. The contemplatives and ascetics of all ages and religions have sought God in the silence and solitude of the desert, for-

est and mountain. We too are called to withdraw at certain intervals into deeper silence and aloneness with God, together as a community as well as personally.

To be alone with God, not with our books, thoughts, and memories but completely stripped of everything, to dwell lovingly in God’s presence—silent, empty, expectant, and motionless. Listen in silence, because if your heart is full of other things you cannot hear the voice of God. But when you have listened to the voice of God in the stillness of your heart, then you can hear God everywhere.

—St. Mother Teresa
Everything Starts from Prayer

Jesus, help me listen to you in the silence of my heart.

TIME FOR CHANGE

*“Build up, build up, prepare the way,
remove every obstruction from my people’s way.” (Isaiah 57:14)*



Living a spiritual life requires a change of heart, a conversion. Such a conversion may be marked by a sudden inner change, or it can take place through a long, quiet process of transformation. But it always involves an inner experience of oneness. We realize that we are in the center, and that from there all that is and all that takes place can be seen and understood as part of the mystery of God’s life with us.

Our conflicts and pains, our tasks and promises, our families and friends, our activities and projects, our hopes and aspirations, no longer appear to us as a fatiguing variety of things which we can barely

keep together, but rather as affirmations and revelations of the new life of the Spirit in us. “All these other things,” which so occupied and preoccupied us, now come as gifts or challenges that strengthen and deepen the new life which we have discovered.

This does not mean that the spiritual life makes things easier or takes our struggles and pains away. The lives of Jesus’ disciples clearly show that suffering does not diminish because of conversion. Sometimes it even becomes more intense. But our attention is no longer directed to the “more or less.” What matters is to listen attentively to the Spirit and to go obediently where we are being led, whether to a joyful or a painful place.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
Making All Things New

Jesus, give me courage to trust where you are now leading me.

Monday, Week 2

LOVE IS PROVED IN DEEDS

*“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the
LORD Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*
(Colossians 3:17)

Love does not live on words, nor can it be explained by words—especially that love which serves God, which comes from God and which finds God and touches God. We must reach the heart, and to reach the heart as we must, love is proved in deeds.

Perhaps it is only a smile, a little visit, or simply the fact of building a fire for someone, writing a letter for a blind person, bringing a few lumps of coal, finding a pair of shoes, reading for someone. This is only a little bit, yes, a very tiny bit, but it will be our love of

God in action.

Never think that a small action done to your neighbor is not worth much. It is not how much we do that is pleasing to God, but how much love we put into the doing. That is what the good God looks for—because God is love and God made us in the divine image to love and to be loved. The poor are hungry for God; they want to hear about our LORD. They do not worry so much about material things; they want to hear that they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

—St. Mother Teresa
Love: A Fruit Always in Season

Jesus, help me show my love in small acts for others.

Tuesday, Week 2

OPENING OUR EYES TO ETERNITY

*“Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;
give me life in your ways.” (Psalm 119:37)*

All good meditative prayer is a conversion of our entire self to God. One cannot, then, enter into meditation, in this sense, without a kind of inner upheaval. By upheaval I do not mean a disturbance, but a breaking out of routine, a liberation of the heart from the cares and preoccupations of one’s daily business.

The reason why so few people apply themselves seriously to mental prayer is precisely that this inner upheaval is necessary, and they are usually incapable of the effort required to make it. It may be that they lack generosity, and it may also be that they lack direction and

experience, and go about it the wrong way.

But as soon as a person is fully disposed to be alone with God, he is alone with God no matter where he may be—in the country, the monastery, the woods, or the city. And at the same instant the infinite liberty of God flashes in the depths of that person’s soul, and he is illumined. At that moment, he sees that though he seems to be in the middle of his journey, he has already arrived at the end. For the life of grace on earth is the beginning of the life of glory. Although he is a traveler in time, he has opened his eyes—for a moment—in eternity.

—Thomas Merton
Thoughts in Solitude

Jesus, help me apply myself to my prayer to be with you.

Wednesday, Week 2

SAYING “YES” TO GOD

Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the LORD; let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

My prayer life has been quite difficult lately. During my morning meditation I think about a thousand things except God and God’s presence in my life. I am worrying, brooding, and agonizing, but not really praying.

To my own surprise the only prayer that offers me some peace and consolation is the prayer to Mary. As I tried to simply be with Mary and listen to her words, I discovered a restful peace. Instead of thinking about these words and trying to understand them, I just listened to them being spoken for me.

Mary is so open, so free, so trusting. She is completely willing to hear words that go far beyond her own comprehension. She knows that the words spoken to her by the angel come

from God. She seeks clarification, but she does not question their authority. She senses that the message of Gabriel will radically interrupt her life, and she is afraid, but she does not withdraw. She responded with a complete surrender and thus became not only the mother of Jesus but also the mother of all who believe in him.

I keep listening to these words as words that summarize the deepest possible response to God’s loving action within us. God wants to let the Holy Spirit guide our lives, but are we prepared to let it happen? Just being with Mary and the angel and hearing their words—words which changed the course of history—bring me peace and rest.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
The Road to Daybreak

Jesus, “yes, yes,” come and be born in me today.

Thursday, Week 2

NOTHING IS SMALL FOR GOD

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid.” (Matthew 10:29-31)

Give yourself fully to God, who will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in God’s love than in your weakness. If we really fully belong to God, then we must be at his disposal and trust in him. We must never be preoccupied with the future. There is no reason to be so. God is there.

We impatiently await God’s paradise, but we have in our hands the power to be in paradise right here and now. Being happy with God means this: to love as he loves, to help as he helps, to give as he gives, to serve as he serves. Never think that a small action done

to your neighbor is not worth much. It is not how much we do that is pleasing to God, but how much love we put into the doing.

Let no one glory in their success but refer all to God in deepest thankfulness; on the other hand, no failure should dishearten them as long as they have done their best. God sees only our love. God will not ask how many books we have read, how many miracles we have worked, but whether we have done our best for the love of him. Have we played well? Slept well? Eaten well? Nothing is small for God.

—St. Mother Teresa
Everything Starts from Prayer

Jesus, I give myself to you and want to serve you.

Friday, Week 2

LISTEN TO JESUS IN YOUR HEART

“If God calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” (1 Samuel 3:9)

Praying is first and foremost listening to Jesus who dwells in the very depths of your heart. He doesn't shout. He doesn't thrust himself upon you. His voice is an unassuming voice, very nearly a whisper, the voice of a gentle love. Whatever you do with your life, go on listening to the voice of Jesus in your heart. This listening must be an active and very attentive listening, for in our restless and noisy world God's loving voice is easily drowned out. You need to set aside some time every day for this active listening to God if only for ten minutes. Ten minutes each day for Jesus alone can bring about a radical change in your life.

You'll find that it isn't easy to be still for ten minutes at a

time. You'll discover straightaway that many other voices, voices that are very noisy and distracting, voices which do not come from God, demand your attention. But if you stick to your daily prayer time, then slowly but surely you'll come to hear the gentle voice of love and will long more and more to listen to it.

Listening will help you to get to know Jesus in a very intimate way, make you aware of the unique manner in which he is calling you, and give you the courage to follow him even to places where you'd rather not go. Living with Jesus is a great adventure. It's the adventure of love.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
Letters to Marc about Jesus

Jesus, help me to listen for your quiet voice within me.

Saturday, Week 2

MARY: WINDOW TO GOD'S MYSTERY

"In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:4-5)

The genuine significance of Catholic devotion to Mary is to be seen in the light of the Incarnation itself. The Church believes that the one who was closest to him in this great mystery was the one who participated most perfectly in the gift.

Mary, who was empty of all egotism, free from all sin, was as pure as the glass of a very clean window that has no other function than to admit the light of the sun. If we rejoice in that light, we implicitly praise the cleanness of the window. And, of course, it might be argued that in such a case we might well forget the window altogether. This is true. And yet the Son of God, in emptying

himself of his majestic power, having become a child, abandoning himself in complete dependence to the loving care of a human mother, in a certain sense draws our attention once again to her.

The Light has wished to remind us of the window, because he is grateful to her and because he has an infinitely tender and personal love for her. If he asks us to share this love, it is certainly a great grace and a privilege, and one of the most important aspects of this privilege is that it enables us, to some extent, to appreciate the mystery of God's great love and respect for his creatures.

—Thomas Merton
New Seeds of Contemplation

Jesus, help me become a clear window so others might see you through me.

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS!

“Rejoice in the LORD always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The LORD is near.” (Philippians 4:7)



Today is “Gaudete” Sunday, the Sunday to rejoice. This feast day gives Advent its true character. It is indeed primarily a season of joy. It is not, like Lent, primarily a time of penance.

There is too much anticipation for that. All-overriding is the experience of joy.

We are joyful already now because we know that the LORD will come. Our expectation leads to joy and our joy to a desire to give to others. Real joy always wants to share. It belongs to the nature of joy to

communicate itself to others and to invite others to take part in the gifts we have received.

Advent is indeed a time of joyful waiting and joyful giving. How much this mood is also part of our whole society. The period before Christmas has that remarkable quality of joy that seems to touch not only Christians but all who live in our society. When you, as a Westerner, live in another society, such as the Japanese society, where Advent and Christmas do not exist as universal events, you realize the lack of this joyful anticipation most painfully.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
The Genesee Diary

Jesus, help me rejoice knowing that you are always coming more fully into our world.

Monday, Week 3

GROWING IN JOY

“Rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:13)

Joy is not simply a matter of temperament. In the service of God and others, it is always hard to be joyful—all the more reason why we should try to acquire it and make it grow in our hearts.

Joy is prayer; joy is strength; joy is love; joy is a net of love by which we catch others. God loves a cheerful giver. She gives most who gives with joy. If in your work you have difficulties and you accept them with joy, with a big smile—in this, like in any other thing—people will see your good works and glorify the Father. The best way to show your gratitude is to accept

everything with joy. A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart burning with love.

We need to find God, who cannot be found in noise and restlessness. In the silence of the heart, God speaks to us. We need silence to be alone with God, to speak to him, to listen to him, to ponder his words deep in our hearts. We need to be alone with God in silence to be renewed and to be transformed. Silence gives us a new outlook on life. In it we are filled with the grace of God, which makes us do all things with joy.

—St. Mother Teresa
Total Surrender

Jesus, help me increase my joy by imitating your loving service of others.

Tuesday, Week 3

A BLAZE OF RECOGNITION

“The angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.”

(Exodus 3:2)

The protection of darkness and silence is extremely necessary for the soul that begins to burn with the touches of God’s spirit. Under the pressure of a very great love, or in the darkness of a conflict that exacts a heroic renunciation of our whole self, or in the ecstasy of a sudden joy that does not belong to this earth, the soul will be raised out of itself. It will come face to face with Christ.

In an experience that might be likened to a flash of dark lightning, a thunderclap over the surface of the abyss, “its

eyes will be opened and it will know him and he will vanish from its sight.” This momentary blaze of recognition is not produced by a created species or image in the soul.

It is the flash of a flame that is touched off by an immediate contact of the substance of the soul with God himself. In one terrific second that belongs not to time but to eternity, the whole soul is transfixed and illumined by the tremendous darkness which is the light of God.

—Thomas Merton
Bread in the Wilderness

Jesus, help me be ready always to discover you in my life.

Wednesday, Week 3

EYES OF DEEP FAITH TO SEE CHRIST

“LORD, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” (Matthew 25:44)

The first step toward holiness is the will to become holy. Through a firm and upright will we love God, we choose God, we hasten to God, we reach him, we have him. Often, under the pretext of humility, of trust, of abandonment, we can forget to use the strength of our will. Everything depends on these words, “I will” or “I will not.” And into the expression “I will” I must put all my energy. One cannot expect to become a saint without paying the price, and the price is much renunciation, must temptation, much struggle and persecution, and all sorts of sacrifices. One cannot love God except at the cost of oneself. The love of

Christ should be a living bond between all of us.

We need the eyes of deep faith to see Christ in the broken body and dirty clothes under which the most beautiful One among the sons of men hides. We shall need the hand of Christ to touch those bodies wounded by pain and suffering. How pure our hands must be if we have to touch Christ’s Body as the priest touches him in the appearances of bread at the altar. With what love and devotion and faith he lifts the sacred host! These same feelings we too must have when we lift the body of the sick and poor.

—St. Mother Teresa
The Love of Christ

Jesus, help me discover your hidden presence in those around me.

Thursday, Week 3

FACING OUR INNER, SILENT SELF

“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”

(Psalm 42:11)

There is a silent self within us whose presence is disturbing precisely because it is so silent: it can't be spoken but has to remain silent. To articulate it, to verbalize it, is to tamper with it, and in some ways to destroy it.

Our culture helps us evade any need to face this inner, silent self. We live in a state of constant semi-attention to the sound of voices, music, traffic, or the generalized noise of what goes on around us all the time. This keeps us immersed in a flood of racket and words, a diffuse medium in which our consciousness is half diluted: we are not quite “thinking,” not entirely responding, but we are more or less there. We are not fully present and not entirely

absent; not fully withdrawn, yet not completely available. We just float along in the general “noise,” the commotion and jamming which drown out the deep, secret, and insistent demands of the inner self.

With this inner self we have to come to terms in silence. That is the reason for choosing silence. In silence we face and admit the gap between the depths of our being, which we consistently ignore, and the surface which is untrue to our own reality. We recognize the need to be at home with ourselves so that we may go out to meet others, not just with a mask of affability, but with real commitment and authentic love.

—Thomas Merton
Love and Living

Jesus, help me discover my inner self where you now dwell.

Friday, Week 3

NOTICING GOD'S PRESENCE IN OTHERS

"If we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has given us of his Spirit." (1 John 4:12-13)

One of the discoveries we make in prayer is that the closer we come to God, the closer we come to all our brothers and sisters in the human family. God is not a private God. The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is also the God who dwells in the inner sanctuary of each human being. As we recognize God's presence in our own hearts, we can also recognize that presence in the hearts of others, because the God who has chosen us as a dwelling-place gives us the eyes to see the God who dwells in others.

When we pray, we will increasingly experience ourselves as part of a human family infinitely bound by God who created us all to share in the

divine light. Without this acknowledgment of human solidarity, what we do for one another does not flow from who we truly are. We are brothers and sisters, not competitors or rivals. We are children of one God, not partisans of different gods.

To pray, that is, to listen to the voice of the One who calls us the "beloved," is to learn that that voice excludes no one. Where I dwell, God dwells with me and where God dwells with me I find all my sisters and brothers. And so intimacy with God and solidarity with all people are two aspects of dwelling in the present moment that can never be separated.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
Here and Now

Jesus, help me recognize your indwelling in each person I meet.

Saturday, Week 3

LIVING THE LOVE OF GOD

“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”
(Matthew 19:21)

There are many kinds of poverty. Even in countries where the economic situation seems to be a good one, there are expressions of poverty hidden in a deep place, such as the tremendous loneliness of people who have been abandoned and who are suffering. As far as I am concerned, the greatest suffering is to feel alone, unwanted, unloved. The greatest suffering is also having no one, forgetting what an intimate, truly human relationship is, not knowing what it means to be loved, not having a family or friends.

We have the specific task of giving material and spiritual

help to the poorest of the poor, not only the ones in the slums but those who live in any corner of the world as well. To do this, we make ourselves live the love of God in prayer and in our work, through a life characterized by the simplicity and humility of the Gospel. We do this by loving Jesus in the bread of the Eucharist, and loving and serving him hidden under the painful guise of the poorest of the poor, whether their poverty is a material poverty or a spiritual one. We do this by recognizing in them (and giving back to them) the image and likeness of God.

—St. Mother Teresa
In My Own Words

Jesus, help me be alert to those around me who need my help today.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

GOD SEEKS TO DWELL IN US

“I pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.” (Ephesians 3:17)



We do not dare to believe or trust the incredible truth that God could live in us, and live there out of choice, out of preference. The message of hope the contemplative offers you is not that you need to find your way through the jungle of language and problems that today surround God; but that whether you understand or not, God loves you, is present to you, lives in you, dwells in you, calls you, saves you, and offers you an understanding and light which are like noth-

ing you ever found in books or heard in sermons.

The contemplative can only reassure you that if you dare to penetrate your own silence and dare to advance without fear into the solitude of your own heart, and risk sharing that solitude with the lonely other who seeks God through you and with you, then you will truly recover the capacity to understand what is beyond words and beyond explanations because it is too close to be explained: it is the intimate union in the depths of your own heart, of God's Spirit and your own secret inmost self, so that you and God are in all truth One Spirit.

—Thomas Merton
The Monastic Journey

Jesus, help me clear a place within me for you to dwell.

Monday, Christmas Week

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S LOVE

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

(John 20:29)

O LORD, I have not seen you and yet I truly see you every time I look at the broken bodies of my fellow human beings. I have not heard you, and yet I truly hear you every time I hear the cries uttered by men, women and children in pain. I have not touched you, and yet I truly touch you every time I touch all those who come to me in their loneliness. In the midst of all the human brokenness and human pain, I see, hear and touch the heart of humanity, your humanity, the humanity of all the people embraced by your love.

Thank you, Jesus, for your heart. Thank you for showing me your heart. Thank you for

letting me see while not seeing, hear while not hearing, touch while not touching. Thank you for letting me believe more every day, hope more every day and love more every day.

My heart is little, fearful and very timid. It will always be so. But you say, “Come to my heart. My heart is gentle and humble and very broken like yours. Do not be afraid. Come and let your heart find rest in mine and trust that all will be well.” I want to come, Jesus, and be with you. Here I am, LORD, take my heart and let it become a heart filled with your love.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
Heart Speaks to Heart

Jesus, help me give up my hesitations and fears and follow you.

Tuesday, Christmas Week

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR GOD

“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.” (1 John 3:17-18)

Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving your time. Sometimes this may mean doing something physical (such as we do in our homes for the sick and dying) or sometimes it may mean offering spiritual support for the shut-ins (those isolated and lonely in their own homes).

Our work is constant. The problems of the poor continue, so our work continues. We can do something beautiful for God by reaching out to the poor. I see no lack of hesi-

tation in helping others. I see only people filled with God’s love, wanting to do works of love. This is the future—this is God’s wish for us—to serve through love in action, and to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to act when called.

It is not how much you do but how much love you put into the doing and sharing with others that is important. Try not to judge people. If you judge others then you are not giving love. Instead try to help them by seeing their needs and acting to meet them. Don’t judge people. It isn’t what anyone may or may not have done, but what you have done that matters in God’s eyes.

—St. Mother Teresa
A Simple Path

Jesus, help me put my prayer into action and service of others.

NO PLACE FOR HIM HERE

“She gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”
(Luke 2:7)

Collective life is often organized on the basis of cunning, doubt, and guilt. True solidarity is destroyed by the political art of pitting one person against another and by the commercial art of estimating all persons at a price. On these illusory measurements people build a world of arbitrary values without life and meaning, full of sterile agitation. To set one person against another, one life against another, one work against another, and to express the measurement in terms of cost or of economic privilege and moral honor is to infect everybody with the deepest doubt.

Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is

absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, who are tortured, bombed and exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in the world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst.

—Thomas Merton
Raids on the Unspeakable

Jesus, help me make room for you in my self and my life.

Thursday, Christmas Week

GOD'S WAY OF WEAKNESS

“For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25)

The way of God is the way of weakness. The great news of the Gospel is precisely that God became small and vulnerable, and hence bore fruit among us. The most fruitful life ever lived is the life of Jesus, who did not cling to his divine power but became as we are.

Jesus brought us new life in ultimate vulnerability. He came to us as a small child, dependent on the care and protection of others. He lived for us as a poor preacher, without any political, economic, or military power. He died for us nailed on a cross as a useless criminal. In this extreme vulnerability our salvation was won. The fruit of

this poor and failing existence is eternal life for all who believe in him.

It is very hard for us to grasp even a little bit of the mystery of God’s vulnerability. Yet, when we have eyes to see and ears to hear we can see it in many ways and in many places. We can see it when a child is born, the fruit of the love of two people who came together without defenses and embraced each other in weakness. We can see it in the graceful smiles of poor people and in the warm affection of the handicapped. We can see it every time people ask forgiveness and are reconciled.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen
Lifesigns

*Jesus, help me accept my vulnerability and weakness
and let you give me strength.*

HE EMPTIED HIMSELF

“Though he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

Why must we give ourselves fully to God? Because God has given himself to us. If God, who owes nothing to us, is ready to impart to us no less than that, shall we answer with just a fraction of ourselves?

Christ being rich emptied himself. This is where contradiction lies. If I want to be poor like Christ—who became poor even though he was rich—I must do the same. Nowadays people want to be poor and live with the poor, but they want to be free to dispose of things as they wish. To have this freedom is to be rich. They want both and they cannot have both. This is another kind of con-

tradiction. Our poverty is our freedom. This is our poverty—the giving up of our freedom to dispose of things, to choose, to possess. The moment I use and dispose of things as mine, that moment I cease to be poor.

We must strive to acquire the true spirit of poverty which manifests itself in a love for the practice of the virtue of poverty in imitation of Christ—in imitation of him who chose it as the compassion of his life on earth when he came to live among us. Christ did not have to lead a life of poverty. Thus he taught us how important it is for our sanctification.

—St. Mother Teresa
Total Surrender

Jesus, help me empty myself in service to those who are in need.

Saturday, Christmas Week

CHRIST LIGHTS OUR DARKNESS

“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79)

Christ, light of light, is born today, and since he is born to us, he is born in us as light, and therefore we who believe are born today to new light. That is to say, our souls are born to new life and new grace by receiving him who is the truth. For Christ, invisible in his own nature, has become visible in our nature. What else can this mean, except that first he has become visible as human; and secondly, he has become visible in his Church?

He wills to be visible in us, to live in us, work in us, and save us through his secret action in our own hearts and

the hearts of our brothers and sisters. So we must receive the light of the newborn Savior by faith, in order to manifest it by our witness in common praise and by the works of our charity towards one another.

We are born in Christ today. Can it be surprising that we feel in our hearts the exultation of the divine light which streams into our spirit from the presence of the newborn Savior and transforms us from glory to glory in his image? This is the mystery of light which shines upon us today.

—Thomas Merton
Seasons of Celebration

Jesus, help me live in your light and let it guide me.

A Prayer for Our Advent Journey

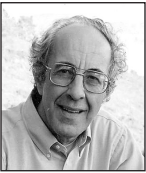
O God of love, you gave us life
and sent us your only Son
to be with us at all times and in all places,
so that we never have to feel lost in our struggles
but always can trust that he walks with us.

Help us know that Christmas
is the renewed invitation
not to be afraid and to let you—
whose love is greater than our own hearts
and minds can comprehend—
be our companion.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
¡Gracias!

Acknowledgements

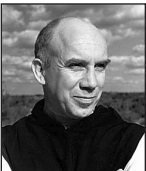
Excerpts are taken and adapted from the following publications:



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Thomas Merton: *Bread in the Wilderness* (New Directions Publishing, 1997); *Love and Living* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979); *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions Publishing, 2007); *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New Directions Publishing, 1966); *Seasons of Celebration* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965); *The Monastic Journey* (Cistercian Publications, 1977); *Thoughts in Solitude* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958).

Christmas Day

JESUS, GOD-WITH-US

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, God is with us.” (Matthew 1:23-24)

God has become human so as to be able, in all completeness, to live with us, suffer with us and die with us. We have found in Jesus a fellow human being who is so completely one with us that not a single weakness, pain or temptation has remained foreign to him. Precisely because Jesus is God and without any sin, he is able to experience our sinful, broken human condition so thoroughly that we may say he knows us better than we know ourselves and loves us more than we love ourselves.

No one else, however well disposed, is ever in a position to be with us so completely that we feel ourselves to be understood and loved without

limit. We humans remain too self-centered to be able to forget ourselves fully for the other person's sake. But Jesus does give himself fully, he holds nothing back for himself, he wants to be with us in so total a fashion that we can never again feel alone. Jesus is the compassionate God who comes so close to us in our weakness that we can turn to him without fear.

When you stand before God, vulnerable as you are, and let him see all there is of you, you will begin gradually to experience for yourself what it means that God has sent Jesus to be, in all things, God-with-you.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen
Letters to Marc about Jesus

Jesus, help me hold nothing back in my love for you and for others.