

Welcome to this Home Retreat during Advent.

During this season we become conscious of three things – three times.

- (1) *Two thousand years ago* when, as a little child in a stable in Bethlehem, God became a human being, sharing our life with us as one of us, to walk among us and reach out to us;
- (2) *The end of time* when Christ will be all in all and all creation will discover its true nature and will become all it was created to be, as will we, *and*
- (3) *this time in-between* which is a very special time when he comes to us *now*, when that final completion starts to happen here and now, when we discover that “the kingdom of God is already among us and within us”.

During this time of Advent - let the Lord be at work, expect him to be at work. Thomas Merton once said: “The biggest human temptation is to settle for too little.” The invitation of this season is to live life with expectancy, openness, alertness, with eyes wide open

St. Paul tells us with shocking abruptness: “You know, **the time has come** - you must wake up **now**.” Because what you are looking for is happening **right now** in front of you.

The prophet Zephaniah 3 promises us that he will renew us by his love:

“throw away the cloak of despondency,
take off your dress of sorrow and distress...
Rejoice, exult with all your heart.
The Lord is in your midst.
He will exult with joy over you,
he will renew you by his love.”

St. Paul promises us: “God has called you. He will not fail you.”

The mark of his coming, his presence, when we experience it – is joy. It is the song of Mary, “I exult for joy, my soul rejoices in my God.”

And John the Baptist cries out to us: “There stands among you, unknown to you, the one who is coming. Prepare a way for him.”

The prophet Malachi promises us: “The sun of righteousness will rise upon us with healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2).

Moses at one stage on his journey is told to be ready, that the Lord will pass by him. Be ready, because, it says: “who knows what blessing he will leave as he passes.” (Exodus 33)

This is the time we celebrate – this *now* of God, what can happen *now* in our lives, the blessing he will leave in this season this year.

We are by definition expectant people – life calls to us, our real life calls to us, our hearts reach out, hunger for something more, are restless, drawn by a fullness that is sensed and missed/longed for, a call to come home. We are children of God and all creation is waiting for us to awaken, to have the veil that covers us fall away, so that we can see ourselves for who we really are and can discover the glorious freedom which is ours as children of God.

Listen (first word of the Rule) – how do you experience that call now, deep within? Listen to your heart, to what calls you. He is coming, he is already within calling you. Can you sense what he is saying?

An invitation to rediscover a simplicity, an innocence, a wholeness. He is coming, he comes each day in your life. And he is already within you.

In the letter to the Ephesians it says: “Before the world was created he chose us, he destined us in love to be his children and to live through love in his presence.” (Eph 1:4). Since the foundation of the world, and to go back even further, before the big bang, before time began – we were chosen, loved into life.

In the book of Revelation (2:17) it says that when in the next life we meet the Lord we will be given a white stone, which will have written on it a new name (a name no-one else will know but you). It will be the word God spoke to create you – (God says and it comes to be) – this word is completely unique, it has only ever been spoken once in all of existence (because God has an infinite vocabulary), it was spoken with infinite wisdom, infinite potential, spoken with a love so immense we will never even begin to comprehend it. He spoke that word and we began to be. And it is still only the beginning. There is so much for us to discover about ourselves. When we come face to face with the Lord and are told that name we will realise the amazing fullness of who we are, who we were created to be, and it will be wonderful. We will discover the glorious freedom of the children of God.

In the meantime Advent is a time to **listen** ... to the echo of that name within us, reverberating deep inside us, in our heart. A time of remembering “who we are”. To remember your sovereignty, your wonder, your rightness, to rediscover and awe-filled gratitude, simplicity and trust. “I have called you by name.”

Psalm 139

¹O LORD, you search me and you know me.
²You yourself know my resting and my rising;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
³You mark when I walk or lie down;
you know all my ways through and through.

¹³For it was you who formed my inmost being,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴I thank you who wonderfully made me;
how wonderful are your works,
which my soul knows well!

It is important in this season to remember something more innocent, more aware of the wonder of life, the wonder of our own self. It's important not to lose this sense of original goodness, this freedom, this treasuring of our own life, our own self, our own creation. Not to let it get drowned out or trampled down.

He is there. He loves you. Trust him.

He is already in your life, there is already so much there. Wake up, listen, look around, he is waiting. When you do turn to him, Isaiah promises us:

“He who is *your teacher* will hide no longer, and you will see your teacher with your own eyes. Whether you turn to right or left, your ears will hear these words behind you, *‘This is the way, follow it.’*”
(Isaiah 30:20-21)

The first invitation of Advent is to live life with *expectancy*. To be *alert*, to be *awake*, we know not the day nor the hour it will come, the way we will encounter him, the seed in our path which will be the seed that brings the most precious gift into our lives, that grows into the biggest tree, or remains small but immensely significant. It could happen anywhere, any time, in the blink of an eye, in an encounter with a stranger or friend, in a moment spent in quiet when we turn aside to really appreciate life and open ourselves to life.

“Only that day dawns to which we awake.” (Thoreau)

It's about waking up to what is already there waiting for us to see it, appreciate it, encounter it.

The poet Rumi puts it very simply: “There are so many gifts of your birth day that remain unopened.” An invitation to be simple again, to trust, to expect, to hope.

Were you to listen to your own heart, leaving aside the doubts, the complications, what would you hear, what would it tell you, where would it lead you?

Gradually when we do begin to listen, to open ourselves in trust and simplicity to life and to Christ, things gradually begin to change, we begin to see things a bit differently, ideas and insights start to come to us, we get a sense of peace or of strength, we start to react differently, we become somehow freer, and we may find something gradually growing within us - a sense of joy.

It is this next step now that we take on our journey that makes all the difference. And Christ is waiting for us to discover it, waiting to reveal it to us.

“Behold I stand at the door and knock,” says Christ. He waits for us to open the door to him. The most fundamental and life changing invitation is to let him in, to choose not be alone, to walk with another. To step out, embrace a different possibility, believe, take him seriously. To be a branch of the vine that opens itself to the life that wants to flow through it, the one who created you and will show you your true name, which is wonderful.

(Matthew the Poor)

*‘Faith in Christ is not a theory. It is a power that changes lives...
We do not pull Christ towards us from heaven by prayer.
Rather we discover him within us ourselves.
In prayer we discover that he stands at the door of our hearts.
He is always knocking until we open our door to him.
If we respond, he will enter our lives...to raise us from the dead
and to bring us out from the world of darkness’.*

- How will you say yes?
- What will you nourish?
- How will you let him in?
- Where is there stagnant water within you trapped, blocked, life not believed in, water waiting to well up to eternal life?

I, the Lord, your God,
I am holding you by the right hand;
I tell you, ‘Do not be afraid,
I will help you.’
I will make rivers well up on barren heights,
and fountains in the midst of valleys;
turn the wilderness into a lake,
and dry ground into waterspring.
(Isaiah 41:13-20)

trust him!