



Waiting *in Hope*

Hope & Healing, Justice & Peace for Advent

POPE FRANCIS, ST. MOTHER TERESA
& FR. HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

AN ADVENT INVITATION

Advent invites us to prepare ourselves for Christ's coming into our world anew so that we and our world may be touched once again by God's mercy and love and be changed. One way to use our Advent season profitably might be to consider how we can take small steps to change ourselves and our world by focusing on the words of Pope Francis to the U.S. Congress back in 2015:

*"All of us are quite aware of, and deeply worried by, the disturbing social and political situation of the world today. Our world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred and brutal atrocities, committed even in the name of God and of religion. Our response must be one of **hope and healing, of justice and peace**. Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good."*

So during the four weeks of Advent, let us use this booklet to focus on each of the Pope's four suggested themes—hope and healing, justice and peace—using not only the words of Pope Francis, but also those of two of the most insightful spiritual writers of the twentieth century: St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Fr. Henri J. M. Nouwen.

We hope that by using their reflections, together with a related biblical quotation and a suggestion for your personal prayer or reflection for each day, your Advent season will be a rich spiritual experience of preparing to meet Jesus again in your heart, in others around you and in the daily events of your life.

—Steve Mueller, Editor

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LISTENING TO GOD IN SILENCE

*For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation. —Psalm 62:1*

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 the 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. Contemplatives have sought God in the silence and solitude of the desert, forest 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 God's voice. But when you have listened to God's voice in the stillness of your heart, then your heart is filled with God. Then you can hear God everywhere: in the closing of a door, in the person who needs you, in the birds that sing, in the flowers, the animals—that silence which is wonder and praise.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

What do I most need to do this Advent to create more silence of the heart?

MONDAY, WEEK 1

MESSENGERS OF GOD'S COMFORT

“Comfort, O comfort my people,” says your God. —Isaiah 40:1

Advent reawakens in us the memory of Christ’s historical coming and the expectation of his return. Isaiah addresses people who have passed through a dark period and been subjected to a very difficult trial. But now the time of comfort has come. Sorrow and fear can be replaced with joy, for the Lord himself will guide his people on the way to liberation and salvation.

How will God do all this? With the solicitude and tenderness of a shepherd who takes care of his flock. He will in fact provide unity and security and feed his flock, gather the lost sheep into his sure fold, reserving special attention to the most fragile and weak. This is God’s attitude toward us, his creatures. For this reason, Isaiah invites those who hear him—including us, today—to spread this message of hope: that the Lord consoles us. And to make room for the comfort which comes from the Lord.

We cannot be messengers of God’s comfort if we do not first feel the joy of being comforted and loved by God. Let us therefore allow Isaiah’s call to resound in our heart in this Advent season. Today there is need for people to be witnesses to the mercy and tenderness of God, who spurs the resigned, enlivens the disheartened, ignites the fire of hope. God ignites the fire of hope! We don’t. So many situations require our comforting witness to be joyful, comforting people.

—Pope Francis

To whom and how might I be a messenger of comfort today?

TUESDAY, WEEK 1

LIVING IN HOPE

Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you
—Psalm 33:2

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon, and Anna were not filled with wishes. They were filled with hope. Their hope was something very different. Their hope was trusting that fulfillment would come, but fulfillment according to God's promises and not just according to their wishes. Hope is always open-ended.

I have found it very important to try to let go of my wishes and instead live in hope. I am finding that when I choose to let go of my sometimes petty and superficial wishes and trust that my life is precious and meaningful in God's eyes something really new, something beyond my own expectations begins to happen for me. To wait with openness and trust is an enormously radical attitude toward life. It is choosing to hope that something is happening for us that is far beyond our own imaginings. It is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life. It is living with the conviction that God molds us in love, holds us in tenderness, and moves us away from the sources of our fear. Our spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, expecting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination or prediction. This, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.



—Henri J. M. Nouwen

*What might most help me this Advent to await Jesus' coming
with more openness and trust?*

WEDNESDAY, WEEK 1

JESUS TEACHES US HOW TO LOVE

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. —John 3:16

Love Jesus generously, trustfully, without looking back and without fear. Give yourself fully to Jesus—he will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in his love than in your weakness. Believe in him—trust in him with blind and absolute confidence because he is Jesus. Believe that Jesus alone is life—and that sanctity is nothing but Jesus intimately living in you. Then his hand will be free with you.



In each of our lives Jesus comes as the bread of life—to be eaten, to be consumed by us. This is how he loves us. Then Jesus comes in our human life as the hungry one, the other, hoping to be fed with the bread of our life, our hearts by loving, and our hands by serving. In loving and serving, we prove that we

have been created in the likeness of God, for God is love and when we love we are like God.

Today let us recall God's love for you and for me. God's love is so tender, so great, so real, so living that Jesus came just to teach us that—how to love. Works of love, and declaring love, is the way to peace. And where does this love begin? Right in our hearts. We have been created in order to love and to be loved.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

*How have I most experienced Jesus intimately living
in me and in others?*

THURSDAY, WEEK 1

JESUS' PRESENCE BRINGS US HOPE

You who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy.
—Sirach 2:9

Jesus awakened great hopes, especially in the hearts of the simple, the humble, the poor, the forgotten, those who do not matter in the eyes of the world. He understands human sufferings, he has shown the face of God's mercy, and he has bent down to heal body and soul. This is his heart which looks to all of us, to our sicknesses, to our sins.

Let us welcome Jesus and express our joy at accompanying him, at knowing him to be close, present in us and among us as a friend, a brother, and also as a king. Jesus is God, but he lowered himself to walk with us as our friend and brother and illuminate our way.

Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but from having encountered a person: Jesus, in our midst. It is born from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments, even when our life's journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable.

Let us follow Jesus! We accompany, we follow Jesus, but above all we know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders. This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world. Please do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! Do not let hope be stolen! The hope that Jesus gives us.

—Pope Francis

How has Jesus presence in me and my life given me more hope?

FRIDAY, WEEK 1

GOD IS PREPARING US FOR NEW LIFE

My Father is the vinegrower. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. —John 15:1-2

Gratitude is not a simple emotion or an obvious attitude. Living gratefully requires practice. It takes sustained effort to reclaim my whole past as the concrete way God has led me to this moment. For in doing so I must face not only today's hurts, but the past's experiences of rejection or abandonment or failure or fear.

While Jesus told his followers that they were intimately related to him as branches are to a vine, they still needed to be pruned to bear more fruit. Pruning means cutting, reshaping, removing what diminishes vitality. When we look at a pruned vineyard, we can hardly believe it will bear fruit. But when harvest comes, we realize that the pruning allowed the vines to concentrate their energy and produce more grapes.

Grateful people learn to celebrate even amid life's hard and harrowing memories because they know that pruning is no mere punishment, but preparation. When our gratitude for the past is only partial, our hope for the future can likewise never be full. But our submitting to God's pruning work will not ultimately leave us sad, but hopeful for what can happen in us and through us. Harvest time will bring its own blessings. I am gradually learning that the call to gratitude asks us to say, "Everything is grace."

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

How has God been pruning me to prepare me for more involvement in his kingdom work?

SATURDAY, WEEK 1

BECOMING MORE THOUGHTFUL OF OTHERS

*The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.
How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! —James 3:5*

Thoughtfulness is the beginning of great sanctity. If you learn this art of being thoughtful, you will become more and more Christ-like, for his heart was meek and he always thought of the needs of others.

And our lives, to be beautiful, must be full of thought for others. Jesus went about doing good. Our Lady did nothing else in Cana but think of the needs of the others and made their needs known to Jesus. The thoughtfulness of Jesus and Mary and Joseph was so great that it made Nazareth the abode of God most high. If we also have that kind of thoughtfulness for each other, our homes would really become the abode of God most high.



The quickest and surest way to do this is to use our words for the good of others. Violence of the tongue is very real—sharper than any knife, wounding and creating bitterness that only God’s grace can heal. If you think well of others, you will also speak well of others and to others. From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. If your heart is full of love, you will speak love.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

*How might I become more conscious of the power of my words
on others for good or ill?*

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

GOD WANTS TO HEAL US

*As you go, proclaim the good news,
“The kingdom of heaven has come near.” —Matthew 10:7*

Jesus does not want to act alone, he came to bring the love of God into the world and he wants to spread it in the style of communion and brotherhood. That is why he immediately forms a community of disciples, which is a missionary community. He trains them straight away for the mission to go forth.



But pay attention: their purpose is not to socialize and spend time together but to proclaim God’s Kingdom, and this is urgent! And it is still urgent today! There is no time to be lost in gossip, no need to wait for everyone’s consensus but to go out and proclaim. To all people you bring

the peace of Christ, and if they do not welcome it, you go ahead just the same. To the sick you bring healing, because God wants to heal us of every evil. Do not live for yourselves, but live to go forth and do good! Everyone must be a missionary, everyone can hear that call of Jesus and go forth and proclaim the Kingdom!

Don’t be afraid of joy! That joy which the Lord gives us when we allow him to enter our life. Let us allow him to enter our lives and invite us to go out to the margins of life and proclaim the Gospel. Don’t be afraid of joy. Have joy and courage!

—Pope Francis

What might I do to spread the joy of Christ’s healing power today?

MONDAY, WEEK 2

THE MINISTRY OF BEING WITH OTHERS

*When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them. —Psalm 91:15*

Jesus never did much ministry but spoke what his heart was full of. And anybody who touched him was healed. He didn't sit people down and diagnose them, or say to them, "I can help you, but I can't help you." People touched him and were healed.

The whole incarnation, God-with-us, Emmanuel, is first of all being with people. Caring means "to cry out with." Compassion literally means "to be with those who suffer." We are to be precisely where people are vulnerable, not to fix it or to change it.

Compassion is the priesthood of Jesus. Since nothing human was alien to him, he was the compassionate high priest. Jesus is first of all God-with-us. For thirty years he was just living in a small village, living the same life that we live. It was only for three years that he was preaching. So even when you look at it in a spiritual way, Jesus' ministry wasn't just the three years he was preaching.

The mystery is that he shared our lives. God is a God-with-us. Ministry is being with the sick, the dying, being with people wherever they are, whatever their problems. We dare to be with them in their weakness and trust that if we are entering into people's vulnerable places, we will experience immense joy. That is the mystery of ministry. You can't solve the world's problems, but you can be with people.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

Who might most need me to just be with them today?

TUESDAY, WEEK 2

CURING THE SICKNESS OF BEING UNLOVED

*I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. —Jeremiah 31:3*

Whoever the poorest of the poor are, they are Christ for us—Christ under the guise of human suffering. When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed. We have refused to be instruments of love in the hands of God to give the poor a piece of bread, to offer them a dress with which to ward off the cold. It has happened because we did not recognize Christ when, once more, he appeared under the guise of pain, identified with a man numb from the cold, dying of hunger, when he came in a lonely human being, in a lost child in search of a home.

All sicknesses have cures. The only one that cannot be cured is the sickness of feeling unloved. I invite all those who appreciate our work to look around them and be willing to love those who have no love and to offer them their services. Are we not, by definition, messengers of love?

God has created us so we do small things with great love. I believe that great love, that comes, or should come from our heart, should start at home: with my family, my neighbors across the street, those right next door. And this love should then reach everyone.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

To whom and how might I be a messenger of love today?

WEDNESDAY, WEEK 2

THE MYSTERY OF MARY: TRANSFORMED BY LOVE

*Then Jesus said to the disciple whom he loved,
“Here is your mother.” —John 19:27*

Luke’s Gospel presents us with Mary, a girl from Nazareth, a small village in Galilee, in the outskirts of the Roman Empire and on the outskirts of Israel as well. Yet the Lord’s gaze rested on her, on this little girl from that distant village, on the one he had chosen to be the mother of his Son. In view of this motherhood, Mary was preserved from original sin, from that fracture in communion with God, with others and with creation, which deeply wounds every human being.

The mystery of this girl from Nazareth, who is in the heart of God, is not estranged from us. She is not there and we over here. No, we are connected. Indeed, God rests his loving gaze on every man and every woman! By name and surname. God’s gaze of love is on every one of us.

By contemplating our beautiful immaculate mother, let us also recognize our truest destiny, our deepest vocation: to be loved, to be transformed by love, to be transformed by the beauty of God. Let us look to her, our mother, and allow her to look upon us, for she is our mother and she loves us so much. Let us allow ourselves to be watched over by her so that we may learn how to be more humble and also more courageous in following the Word of God. Let us learn to welcome the tender embrace of her son Jesus, an embrace that gives us life, hope and peace.



—Pope Francis

*How might I be more like Mary and let myself be transformed
by the love of others for me and mine for them?*

THURSDAY, WEEK 2

SAYING “YES” TO GOD

*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word. —Luke 1:38*

Often during my meditation I think about a thousand things except God and God’s presence in my life. To my own surprise my meditation on the Annunciation brings me real peace and joy. I try to



simply be with Mary and listen to her words and discover a restful peace. Instead of thinking about these words and trying to understand them, I just listen to them being spoken for me.

At the Annunciation 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 responds with a complete surrender and thus becomes not only the mother of Jesus but also the mother of all who believe in him.

I keep listening to these words where Mary says “Yes” to God’s love 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

What most hinders me from letting God’s Holy Spirit guide my life?

FRIDAY, WEEK 2

NOTHING IS TOO SMALL FOR GOD

*Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones
in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you,
none of these will lose their reward. —Matthew 10:42*

There are in the world those who struggle for justice and for human rights and who try to change structures. We are not inattentive to this but our daily contact is with people who do not even have a piece of bread to eat. Our mission is to look at the problem more individually and not collectively. We care for a person and not a multitude. We seek the person with whom Jesus Christ identified himself when he said, “I was hungry, I was sick.”

When someone told me that the Sisters had not started any big work, that they were quietly doing small things, I said that even if they helped only one person, that was enough. You can do what I can't do. I can do what you can't do. Together we can do something beautiful for God.

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 because God is almighty, and therefore each one of our actions done with and for and through Jesus Christ is a great success.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

*How might I be more ready to notice
and help those who come into my life?*

SATURDAY, WEEK 2

JESUS' WORDS OF HOPE

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest. —Matthew 11:28*

When Jesus says this, he has before him the people he meets every day on the streets of Galilee: very many simple people, the poor, the sick, sinners, those who are marginalized. These people always followed him to hear his word—a word that gave hope! Jesus' words always give hope!—and even just to touch a hem of his garment. Jesus himself sought out these tired, worn out crowds like sheep without a shepherd, to proclaim God's Kingdom and heal many of them in body and spirit. Now he calls them all to himself and promises them relief and rest.

Jesus' invitation reaches to our day, and extends to the many brothers and sisters oppressed by life's precarious conditions and difficult situations. There are so many weary people, worn out under the unbearable weight of neglect and indifference. Human indifference causes the needy so much pain! And worse, the indifference of Christians!

On the fringes of society so many men and women are tried by indigence, but also by dissatisfaction with life and by frustration. So many are forced to emigrate from their homeland, risking their lives. Many more, every day, carry the weight of an economic system that exploits human beings, imposing on them an unbearable "yoke," which the few privileged do not want to bear. His invitation is for everyone, but especially for those who suffer the most.

—Pope Francis

*How might I offer a word or gesture of hope to those around me
who are suffering?*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

SHARING OUR JOY

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
The Lord is near. —Philippians 4:4-5*

Today is “Gaudete” Sunday, the Sunday to rejoice. 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.

The period before Christmas has that remarkable quality of joy that seems to touch not only Christians but all who live in our society. But Advent is not only a period of joy. It is also a time when those who are lonely feel lonelier than during other periods of the year. During this time many people try to commit suicide or are hospitalized with severe depression. Those who have hope feel much joy and desire to give. Those who have no hope feel more depressed than ever and are often thrown back on their lonely selves in despair.

Surrounded by a loving, supportive community, Advent and Christmas seem pure joy. But let us not forget our lonely moments because it does not take much to make that loneliness reappear. If we are able to remember loneliness during joy, we might be able in the future to remember joy during loneliness and so be stronger to face it and help others face it.



—Henri J. M. Nouwen

*How might I be more attentive to those who are lonely and sad
and offer a bit of Christ's joy to them?*

MONDAY, WEEK 3

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR GOD

*What do you have that you did not receive?
And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?
—1 Corinthians 4:7*

As I read the Gospel, I cannot but smile at those who tell us that we are spoiling the poor in offering them our free service. No one has given us more than God, who has given us everything freely. And it is not so bad to have at least one religious order that spoils the poor, when everybody else spoils the rich.

I am deeply impressed that before explaining God's word, before presenting to the crowds the beatitudes, Jesus had compassion and gave them food. Only then did he begin to teach. What Our Lady does is similar; at the moment Jesus entered her life, Mary hurried to go and serve Elizabeth. And what did she do? She became the hand-maiden of the Lord.

We too—you and I—have to begin by giving Jesus to others. People nowadays suffer much, but above all they are hungry for God. I see a great poverty in the fact that in Western countries a child may have to die because we fear to feed one more mouth, we fear to educate one more child. The fear of having to feed an elderly person in the family means that this person is sent away.

One day, however, we will have to meet the Lord of the universe. What will we tell him about that child, about that old father or mother? They are his creatures, children of God. What will our answer be?

—*St. Mother Teresa*

*How might I share my self and what I have with those
who are most in need?*

TUESDAY, WEEK 3

BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

*For the LORD loves justice;
he will not forsake his faithful ones. —Psalm 37:8*

No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society. An authentic faith—which is never comfortable or completely personal—always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.

We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. If indeed the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics, the Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.

All Christians are called to show concern for the building of a better world. This is essential, for the Church's social thought is primarily positive: it offers proposals, it works for change and in this sense it constantly points to the hope born of the loving heart of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it unites its own commitment to that made in the social field by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, whether at the level of doctrinal reflection or at the practical level.

—Pope Francis

What small steps might I take to make my world a little better today?

WEDNESDAY, WEEK 3

THE QUESTION WE ARE LEAST PREPARED FOR

*Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these,
you did not do it to me. —Matthew 25:45*

Christ's coming again is his coming in judgment. The question that he will ask will be the question that we always tend to remain deaf to. Our lives seem to anticipate questions that never will be asked. "How much did you earn during your lifetime?" "How many friends did you make?" "How much progress did you make on your career?" Were any of these to be the questions Christ will ask when he comes again in glory, many of us could approach the judgment day with great confidence.

But nobody is going to hear any of these questions. The question we all are going to face is the question we are least prepared for. "What have you done for the least of mine?" It is the question of the just judge who in that question reveals that making peace and working for justice can never be separated.

As long as there are people who are less than we, in whatever way or form, the question of the last judgment will be with us. As long as there are strangers, hungry, naked and sick people; prisoners, refugees and slaves; people who are handicapped physically, mentally or emotionally; people without work, a home or a piece of land; there will be that haunting question from the throne of judgment: "What have you done for the least of mine?" The question makes the coming of Christ an ever present event.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

What might I do today to help those around me with what they need most?

THURSDAY, WEEK 3

OUR VOCATION OF LOVING AND BEING LOVED

*O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand. —Isaiah 64:8*

You and I have been created for greater things. We have not been created to just pass through this life without aim. And that greater aim is to love and be loved. Once in a while we should ask ourselves several questions in order to guide our actions like: Do I know the poor? Do I know, in the first place, the poor in my family, those who are closest to me—people who are poor, but not because they lack bread?

There are other types of poverty just as painful because they are more intrinsic. Perhaps what my husband or wife lacks, what my children lack, what my parents lack, is not clothes or food. Perhaps they lack love, because I do not give it to them. We all have much to give, to share, to contribute wherever we find ourselves to be living. Holiness starts in the home, by loving God and those around us for God's sake.

Wherever God has put you, that is your vocation. God could put me here. God could put me there. God can use me. God can not use me. It doesn't matter because I belong so totally to God that God can do just what God wants to do with me. It is not what we do but how much love we put into it.



—*St. Mother Teresa*

What most stops me from letting God use me to help those who are in need?

FRIDAY, WEEK 3

BEYOND JUSTICE TO MERCY AND LOVE

*You are righteous, O Lord, and all your deeds are just;
all your ways are mercy and truth; you judge the world. —Tobit 3:2*

Justice and mercy are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love. Justice is a fundamental concept for civil society, which is meant to be governed by the rule of law. It is also understood as that which is rightly due to



each individual. Mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God's way of reaching out to the sinner, offering him a new chance to look at himself, convert and believe.

If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone will result in its destruction. This is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. Yet this does not mean that justice should be devalued or rendered superfluous. On the contrary: anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price.

God does not deny justice but rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice. God's justice is his mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through it God offers us the certitude of love and new life.

—Pope Francis

*How has God most been prompting me to greater love
and new life this Advent?*

SATURDAY, WEEK 3

FINDING GOD IN MYSELF AND IN OTHERS

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, . . . built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. —Ephesians 2:19, 22

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 see only demons within ourselves, we can see only demons in others, but when we see God within ourselves, we can see God also in others. When we pray, we will increasingly experience ourselves as part of a human family infinitely bound by God who created us to share, all of us, in the divine light. 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.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

*What most helps me realize and remember that each person
is also a child of God?*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

WORKS OF LOVE ARE WORKS OF PEACE

*Prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves;
set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ
will bring you when he is revealed. —1 Peter 1:13*

Don't worry about why problems exist in the world—just respond to people's needs. We can do something beautiful for God by reaching out to the poor. I see no lack of hesitation 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.

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). If an ill person wants medicine, then give him medicine. If he needs comfort, then comfort him.

Works of love are always works of peace. Whenever you share love with others, you'll notice the peace that comes to you and to them. When there is peace, there is God—that is how God touches our lives and shows his love for us by pouring peace and joy into our hearts. Let peace fill our hearts, our world our universe, peace, peace, peace.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

*How has God been moving me this Advent from prayer
to action and loving service?*

MONDAY, WEEK 4

ALL THINGS ARE ONE IN CHRIST

Christ is our peace. —Ephesians 2:14

Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners. They lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, resolve it and make it a link in the chain of a new process.

Christ has made all things one in himself: heaven and earth, God and humanity, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society. The sign of this unity and reconciliation of all things in him is peace. The Gospel message always begins with a greeting of peace, and peace at all times crowns and confirms the relations between the disciples.



Peace is possible because the Lord has overcome the world and its constant conflict “by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). But this reconciliation of differences must first be within ourselves, in our own lives, ever threatened as they are by fragmentation and breakdown. If hearts are shattered in thousands of pieces, it is not easy to create authentic peace in society.

—Pope Francis

*What conflicts in my life must I face more openly
so as to resolve them and bring peace?*

TUESDAY, WEEK 4

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRINCE OF PEACE

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God. —Matthew 5:9*

Do not give up working for peace. Always remember that the peace for which you work is not of this world. Do not let yourself be distracted by the great noises of war, the dramatic descriptions of misery and the sensational expressions of human cruelty. The newspapers, movies and war novels may make you numb, but they do not create in you a true desire for peace but only feelings of shame, guilt, and powerlessness—the worst motives for peace work.

Keep your eyes on the prince of peace, who doesn't cling to his divine power, who refuses to turn stones into bread, jump from great heights, and rule with great power. See the one who touches the lame, the crippled, and the blind; who speaks words of forgiveness and encouragement; who dies alone, rejected, and despised. Keep your eyes on him who becomes poor with the poor, weak with the weak, and who is rejected with the rejected. That one, Jesus, is the source of all peace.

Where is his peace to be found? The answer is surprising but clear. In weakness—where our hearts feel most broken, most insecure, most in agony, most afraid. Why there? Because in our weakness our familiar ways of controlling and manipulating our world are being stripped away and we are forced to let go from doing much, thinking much, and relying on our self-sufficiency. Where we are most vulnerable, the peace that is not of this world is mysteriously hidden.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

How might my weakness combined with Jesus' strength bring more peace to my family, friends and neighbors?

WEDNESDAY, WEEK 4

MESSENGERS OF PEACE

*Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen,
cannot love God whom they have not seen. —1 John 4:20*

The gift of peace reminds us that we have been created to live that peace, and Jesus became human to bring that good news to the poor. He was the first messenger of peace. He died on the cross to show that greater love. He died for you and for me and for that leper and for that man dying of hunger and that naked person lying in the street not only of Calcutta, but of Africa, and New York, and London, and Oslo—and insisted that we love one another as he loves each one of us.

How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live. And so it is very important for us to realize that love, to be true, has to hurt. It hurt Jesus to love us, it hurt him. We have been created in his image. We have been created to love and be loved.



He makes himself the hungry one—the naked one—the homeless one—the sick one—the one in prison—the lonely one—the unwanted one—and he says: You did it to me. Hungry for our love, and this is the hunger of our poor people. This is the hunger that you and I must find, and it may be right in our own home.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

What might I most do to become a greater messenger of peace today?

THURSDAY, WEEK 4

JESUS IS OUR PEACE

*Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?
No, I tell you, but rather division! —Luke 12:51*

Faith is not a decorative or ornamental element. Living faith does not mean decorating life with a little religion, as if it were a cake and we were decorating it with cream. Faith means choosing God as the criterion and basis of life, and God is not empty, God is not neutral. God is always positive. God is love, and love is positive!



After Jesus has come into the world it is impossible to act as if we do not know God, or as if God were something that is abstract, empty, a purely nominal reference. No, God has a real face, God has a name: God is mercy,

God is faithfulness, God is life which is given to us all. Jesus is our peace, he is our reconciliation! But this peace is not the peace of the tomb, it is not neutrality, Jesus does not bring neutrality. This peace is not a compromise at all costs.

Following Jesus entails giving up evil and selfishness and choosing good, truth and justice, even when this demands sacrifice and the renunciation of our own interests. And this indeed divides. As we know, it even cuts the closest ties. However, be careful: it is not Jesus who creates division! Jesus establishes the criterion: whether to live for ourselves or to live for God and for others; to be served or to serve; to obey one's own ego or to obey God.

—Pope Francis

*What most hinders me from choosing good, truth and justice
in my everyday life?*

FRIDAY, WEEK 4

PREPARING TO RECEIVE CHRIST

*A child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. —Isaiah 9:6*

The days a before Christmas must be days of deep prayer to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. We must be really ready to receive him. Christ wants to be born in us, but we must be open, willing, receptive and truly welcoming.

Songs, music, good feelings, beautiful liturgies, nice presents, big dinners and many sweet words do not make Christmas. Christmas is saying “yes” to something beyond all emotions and feelings. Christmas is saying “yes” to a hope based on God’s initiative, which has nothing to do with what I think or feel. Christmas is believing that the salvation of the world is God’s work and not mine. Things will never look just right or feel just right. If they did, someone would be lying. But it is into this broken world that a child is born who is called Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, Savior.

Thank you Lord, that you came, independent of my feelings and thoughts. Your heart is greater than mine. Maybe a “dry” Christmas, a Christmas without much to feel or think, will bring me closer to the true mystery of God-with-us. What it asks is pure, naked faith.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

*What might I do to be more prepared to receive Christ
and be changed by him?*

SATURDAY, WEEK 4

SURRENDERING OURSELVES TO GOD

*Christ Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness. —Philippians 2:7*

Total surrender consists in giving ourselves completely to God, because God has given himself to us. If God owes nothing to us and is ready to impart to us no less than himself, shall we answer with just a fraction of ourselves?

To possess God we must allow God to possess our souls. How poor we would be if God had not given us the power of giving ourselves to him. How rich we are now. How easy it is to conquer God. We give ourselves to him, then God is ours, and there can be nothing more ours than God.

To surrender means to offer God my free will, my reason, my own life in pure faith. My soul may be in darkness. Trial is the surest way of my blind surrender. Surrender is also true love. The more we surrender, the more we love God and others. If we really love others, we must be ready to take their place, to take their sins upon us and expiate them.

There is no limit to God's love. It is without measure and its depth cannot be sounded. 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 hands of Christ to touch those bodies wounded by pain and suffering.

—*St. Mother Teresa*

*How might I thank God for the gift of Jesus and offer myself
as a gift in return?*

OUR DAILY ADVENT PRAYER

Let us open our hearts to receive
the grace of this Advent season,
which is Christ himself,
whom God our Father has revealed
to the entire world.
Where God is born, hope is born.
Where God is born, peace is born.
And where peace is born,
there is no longer room for hatred and for war.
God alone can save us and free us
from the many forms of evil
and selfishness in our midst.
Let us welcome into our lives God's mercy,
which Jesus Christ has bestowed on us,
so that we in turn can show mercy
to our brothers and sisters.
In this way, we will make peace grow!

—*Pope Francis*

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Henri J. M. Nouwen: *Finding My Way Home: Pathways to Life and the Spirit* (Crossroad, 1994); *Jesus a Gospel* (Orbis, 2013); *The Genesee Diary* (Doubleday, 1976); *The Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey* (Doubleday, 1988); *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life* (Crossroad, 1999); *Turn My Mourning into Dancing* (World Publishing Group, 2001).

EMBRACING THE CHILD WHO CHANGES EVERYTHING

*To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is the Messiah, the Lord. —Luke 2:11*

Today, the Son of God is born, and everything changes. The Savior of the world comes to partake of our human nature; no longer are we alone and forsaken. The Virgin offers us her Son as the beginning of a new life.

If we take him in our arms and let ourselves be embraced by him, he will bring us unending peace of heart. This Child teaches us what is truly essential in our lives. He was born into the poverty of this world; there was no room in the inn for him and his family. He found shelter in a stable and was laid in a manger for animals. And yet, from this nothingness, the light of God's glory shines forth. From now on, the way of authentic liberation and perennial redemption is open to every man and woman who is simple of heart.

In a society so often intoxicated by consumerism and hedonism, wealth and extravagance, appearances and narcissism, this Child calls us to act in a way that is simple, balanced, consistent, capable of seeing and doing what is essential. We need to cultivate a strong sense of justice, to discern and to do God's will. Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns ruthless, our style of life should instead be devout, filled with empathy, compassion and mercy, drawn daily from the wellspring of prayer.

—Pope Francis

*How might I continue the grace of this Advent season by changing
my life and making the world a better place each day?*