

Introduction

The Church ends her liturgical year with the celebration of Christ the King, and the following Sunday, we find ourselves officially beginning anew with the season of Advent. Every ending is the chance for a new beginning, and it is my hope that this book can help you do just that—that is, to start anew and to resolve to do better, to turn away from the same vices that have perhaps been dragging you down for years, and to keep your mind's eye fixed on Jesus Christ, who alone can offer you the lasting peace and joy that your heart was made for.

The season of Advent is a time of preparation and therefore a time to examine your Conscience, to take advantage of the healing that comes with a good Confession, and to reclaim your mind and heart for Christ Jesus. It is a season to focus on the coming of Emmanuel, “God with us,” not only at ancient Bethlehem but also in you today, and importantly at the end of time, when he will come in glory. Move forward in hope and joyful anticipation this Advent by actively seeking Jesus through a life of genuine devotion and consistent prayer. Weed out those things that block your relationship with him and keep you complacent, those habits that keep you from being the person you want to be, because God wants you to flourish. With a renewed heart and mind, you can then reflect on your life with clarity of vision and be healed of regret. You can look forward with authentic hope, rid of all fear and anxiety. Advent is a time for letting go of the past and leaning in to the Holy Spirit to begin to ask, “What does *God* want for my life?”

As Christians, we recognize that it is not primarily us who seek God “out there” but rather God who has been seeking us from the beginning, from deep within our hearts. Relationship with the Lord is more of an opening up and a receptivity to his arrival than a going out to him. The Lord proves his love in seeking

us to the point of sharing in our humanity by the mystery of his Incarnation. He arrives in our midst every day in the context of the holy Mass and by the mystery of the Eucharist. And he will come again at the end of time when he will claim all of creation for the Father. Christ came at Christmas, he comes now, and he will come again. And the dwelling place he prefers is your very heart.

The psalms constitute a central part of the Church's prayer life and express everything from a joyful song to a sorrowful lament. In the liturgy, we turn to the psalms to guide the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, and they anchor our prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. Anytime they are read or recited, the Holy Spirit invites us into the love of God and into prayerful contemplation by which we come face-to-face with God, who is Love itself.

Each day, we will spend time together with a verse or two from the psalm for that day's Mass. I will share a brief reflection, followed by a minute (or however long you choose) of silent resting in the Lord. I will provide a simple spiritual exercise for the day and then invite you to close by praying again the psalm verses that opened the devotion. At the back of the book are printed the full psalm texts for the Sundays and major feasts from Masses for the season. Pray with them as you wish or as the Lord calls you to do.

The pages of this book are nothing compared to the capacity of your own heart. I pray that each day is a starting point for deeper prayer, a building of anticipation, and a greater love for silence and contemplation. In that silence, our Savior waits to be born in your heart anew. May he come to you again and again in the psalms as you learn to joyfully wait for him.

Sunday, November 30

First Week of Advent

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus.**

I will say, "Peace be within you!"
For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good. (Ps 122:8–9)

The word *advent* comes from the Latin *adventus*, which means "arrival." No matter what our lives look like, most of us seem to always be waiting for the arrival of someone or something. Whether it is as ordinary as waiting in the car line to pick up our kids or as profound as waiting to discover our vocation in life, we are always waiting and watching for an arrival. This fundamental aspect of our lives springs from hearts that God has made for the infinite. Our hearts simply cannot come to rest in the passing things of this life.

The Church, in acknowledging this, sets aside these days of Advent, which beckon us to reflect on and pray for that for which we most deeply long: the peace of Christ, a peace beyond all telling. This holy season prepares us to welcome Christ, not just in the profound and beautiful memory of his holy birth long ago at Bethlehem but also in our hearts and homes and in all those we know as neighbors.

Rest for a bit in silence with the Lord.

Think of someone you will likely encounter today. How will you show them peace?

I will say, "Peace be within you!"
For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus. Amen.**

Monday, December 1

First Week of Advent

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus.**

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!” (Ps 122:1)

In the second chapter of Ephesians, St. Paul tells those to whom he writes at Ephesus that they are “fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God.” We understand this to be true of us as well: *We belong to the household of God, the Church.* How often do we truly rejoice in this amazing truth?

The Church, like Christ, is both human and divine. With the Holy Spirit as her center, the Church is called to stand as a source of unity and consolation in a world tragically divided. In her deepest nature, the Church is not primarily administrator or judge, but mother. As such, she offers a safe haven. She beckons us to come and find comfort in her arms as we lay our heads in her lap. Mother Church washes us clean in the waters of Baptism and feeds us with bread of the finest wheat. She listens to us and offers us healing as she reminds us that we are her beloved children. She will inspire and encourage us to take our places among the holy ones, becoming the saints we are called to become by offering our gifts for the salvation of the world.

Rest for a bit in silence with the Lord.

Write down a list of all the ways in which you have known the Church as a loving mother. Rejoice and give praise for these precious gifts.

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus. Amen.**

Tuesday, December 2

First Week of Advent

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus.**

In his days may righteousness flourish,
and peace abound, till the moon be no more! (Ps 72:7)

We tend to think of laws as something outside of ourselves that restrict our freedom or take something from us. We make our highest value the ability to make unrestricted choices or to do whatever we please. We reduce truth to something every person is free to decide for themselves. However, classically understood, truth goes beyond our opinions and exists as a reality that we come to discover. Only when we come to discover the truth are we set free from mistakes that blind us.

Just laws are signposts that steer us toward discovery and bring clarity of sight. The truly just people are thus those who allow God's law to mold and conform their hearts to the One who stands as their origin. The just spontaneously give to God what is his due and to others what is theirs. Jesus, as fully God and fully human, is the truly just one who reveals to us the full potential of our humanity. It is Christ, the Law made flesh, that reveals what it is to be fully alive and live as truly free.

Rest for a bit in silence with the Lord.

In what specific ways are you allowing God's law to mold you this Advent? Ask the Lord for the courage to accept his law.

In his days may righteousness flourish,
and peace abound, till the moon be no more!

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus. Amen.**

Wednesday, December 3

First Week of Advent

† Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul. (Ps 23:1–3)

Likely the most familiar and beloved of all the psalms, Psalm 23 has the incredible ability to touch our deepest hearts and remind us of our true identity in Christ. You and I and all people were created to journey in lush or *verdant* pastures along the soothing waters of a restful stream. We were created for a peace that comes only from the Lord, who is our shepherd, always giving us shelter and a place to rest.

We are meant to deeply understand and accept ourselves as sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. And from this child-like freedom comes the capacity to respond from the heart to the beauty and goodness all around us. “It is for freedom that you were set free,” St. Paul reminds us in Galatians. How little do we see people taste such freedom! And yet, this is the proper state of each and every human being—to look at life with the eyes of a child, convinced, as it were, that all this abundant goodness of the earth and the bounty of God’s love was created for you and for me.

Rest for a bit in silence with the Lord.

Set aside today the things that keep you from walking with the Lord in joy and freedom.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.

† Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Thursday, December 4

First Week of Advent

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus.**

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in man.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes. (Ps 118:8–9)

From the time we are born until old age, you and I need someone. No matter how we might try, we cannot overcome being dependent. Any semblance of self-sufficiency we think we have is an illusion. As St. Paul asks in 1 Corinthians, “What have you that you did not receive?” (4:7). Even our accomplishments are possible only because we were first given life, our gifts, and the cooperation of others. And no matter what we do, nothing of this world is guaranteed to last—not material wealth, jobs, or even our health.

So how are we to respond to this existential crisis?

The secret lies in the very fabric of our being. We are created for relationship, and only in the context of mutual self-gift can we truly discover who we are. Do not be afraid of your dependency; even Jesus depended on other human beings and wholeheartedly entrusted himself to the Father. Depending on—trusting in—the Lord is the only way our hearts will ever find true rest.

Rest for a bit in silence with the Lord.

Today, try abandoning any resentment you may have about having to depend on others into the hands of the Lord.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in man.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to put confidence in princes.

† **Fill me with Advent peace, Lord Jesus. Amen.**