

Waiting in God's Time



Weekly Reflections for Advent

CYCLE B

Fr. Trey Nelson

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Living with Certain Faith in an Uncertain Time

As I sit here writing this, the date is Sunday, September 13, 2020. I reside in the State of Louisiana. As a State and as a local church, we have been into this pandemic experience now for roughly 6 months. We entered into what is called phase three this past Friday. Early on, we were issued a stay-at-home ordinance which lasted about 6 to 8 weeks. As a priest, I then went from living alone to living *and* working alone. Other than our Director of Administration and Bookkeeper coming in on Mondays to process finances, it was just me and my dog, Roux. At first, it didn't seem so bad. After 2 weeks, however, it began to hurt. The spiritual and emotional longing to be with other people morphed into an occasional physical longing as well. Simply put, it hurt. It hurt not to be able to drive around and move about freely. It hurt to not take an occasional walk through the mall. While I was not one to go out to eat often, it hurt also to not be able to do that. Most of all, it hurt not being able to greet members of our church family on the front steps before and after Mass, not to mention being with them for Mass itself. From the global level, all the way down to the local level here in our city, we have watched, read, heard, and talked about the disease, racial tensions and violence, the environment and climate, and, of course, the coming election, which will probably have come and gone by the time this book is printed. I have found myself struggling at times and not always able to describe that struggle with words. This morning, however, I was blessed with a means of focus. It came to me during my morning prayer time, Sunday of the Twenty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time. The Second Letter of Paul to Timothy reminded us this morning, that, "...if we hold out with Him, we will reign with him." (from 2 Tim. 2:13).

To use those words from Saint Paul, how have you been "holding out" during this time? If you're like me, you have moments when you simply do not feel like holding out, digging in, masking up, or taking one more deep breath. This is the first time in my entire life when I've found myself facing an experience for which there seems to be no end in sight. Even when I went in for cancer surgery back in 2004, I had some sense of

“how long.” I remember the appointment with my surgeon, during which he described what the surgery would be like and the risks involved. At one point during our visit, I decided to ask him about an end-point.

“So, doctor, this is obviously something that can’t be rushed, but do you have any sense of how long I will be in the hospital?”

“About 2 weeks,” he said. “Maybe a little longer, but definitely no less than 2 weeks.”

My point is, that, even in the face of the most difficult experience of my life, I had at least some sense of how long it would last. When I was discharged, my total in-hospital time had been 14 days, 7 of which were spent in an isolated unit in intensive care, and 7 of which were spent in a “regular” room on the cardiac floor. The last 2 or 3 days before I finally went home seemed to last longer than the entire experience itself. Looking back, I can definitely say that my whole notion of “waiting” had been challenged. It has not been the same since. To put it simply, I was beginning to see the difference between *worldly waiting* and *spiritual or biblical waiting*. To *wait* as we wait in daily life, for daily things to happen, does not bring us comfort. Waiting on God’s time, waiting from a biblical posture is the only way to achieve peace. Perhaps it is an opportunity, then, that the season of Advent this year and the universal challenges that we have all been experiencing occur close to one another.

The Season of Advent is a time of preparation and waiting. We prepare for the celebration of the birth of Christ our Savior by, first, acknowledging that this is an extra-special time of year. Then, many of us, focus on our prayer life, examine our transgressions and perhaps seek forgiveness, and we tend to be more aware of and attentive to the needs of our neighbor, especially the poor. At the same time, through it all, we live-out this season against the backdrop of commercialism, holiday-time rushing around, and struggling with who, if anyone, to buy for, and what, if anything to buy. That’s how it is. Every single year. Normally, that is. This year will be different. Our lives have been, off and on for the past

several months, basically shut down. People have lost their jobs, and many, due to storms, wildfires, and other natural disasters have lost or come close to losing everything they owned. I saw a post on Facebook a couple of months ago. It showed an old Nintendo game cartridge. In so many words, the caption suggested that if the year 2020 was like an old game cartridge from the eighties, then someone needed to take it out and blow on it, because it's not working! Because of my age, I could definitely relate to that image.

Advent is always a time when we can hit the reset button on our spiritual lives, if we want to. But here's the bottom-line for Advent 2020: it's challenging enough as it is each year. This year it's going to be harder. However, I still firmly believe that this time has been and can continue to be a time for us to refocus on the things that really matter, beginning with our relationship with God, our family, our health, and our dependence on worldly things, and come out on the other side of it healthier and happier than we were before. Here's the thing, though. We do not know what "the other side" will look like, nor do we know when it will come. We only know that it will.

This little book isn't really a book at all. It's simply meant to be a prayer aid for what you could call a pandemic-Advent. What will Christmas Mass look like? Will we still have to limit seating and wear masks? I have no idea. Will people even want to come to church at Christmastime? I'm sure they will. But will it feel the same? I don't really know. I would, however, like to think that it will

feel even better, just being able to be together. If you aren't doing so already, take some time each day to stop and breathe a little more slowly. If these pages can help you, then I'm glad for that. Here's something that may at first sound like an ironic thought. While this is the time of year when we approach Christmas, let me make an Easter statement. There is a resurrection side to every challenge. Again, we may not know what it will look like or when it will come. We just know that it will. And, while our *earthly style of waiting* leads us to wait for a time *in the future* when something will occur, an Advent style of waiting tells us that the blessing, the grace is occurring right now. We simply have to stop, breathe, and invite God to reveal it to us. Happy Advent. Happy waiting.

Fr. Trey Nelson
September 21, 2020

SETTING THE TONE FOR YOUR PRAYER:

Recently I was having a conversation with one of the young men in our parish Confirmation class. He asked me about prayer. He simply asked me “how I do it.” While I did not want to tell him how to pray, because there are, obviously, many different ways to do so, I did share with him what I have come to experience as some of the basic necessities for the best prayer experience possible. I recommend that we consider the following as we prepare to pray:

Time, Place, and Disconnection- these are crucial elements to prayer. The time of day, where we pray, and our willingness to disconnect from everything else for a few moments can make or break the prayer experience. If we approach prayer in the same way that many of us approach a yellow caution light, then we are going to be disappointed. We cannot pray “on the fly,” as the expression goes. I find it easier for me to pray early in the morning. Others may prefer the evening. The “where” that we pray is also important. Try to find a “prayer place” in your home or outside, or in a church, chapel, or some other suitable place. Consider going to that place every time you pray. Wherever it is, it needs to be a place where there will be few to little interruptions. Lastly, prayer is meant to be what a friend of mine calls “the great disconnect.” In order to connect with God in prayer we must disconnect from the rest of the world, at least for a few moments. So, here’s the deal. I’ll bottom-line it for you. Whatever room or other place that you choose for your prayer, either turn your phone off, don’t bring it with you, or place it into a mode that will keep you from being interrupted. I cannot put it any simpler than that. The world is not going to end if we are off the cellular grid for 20 to 30 minutes. Again, praying and checking text messages or other posts at the same time is a lot like cruising through a caution light. There are too many risks involved. Consider for a moment what I like to call the “i.n.g.’s of prayer.” Prayer is refreshing, lifegiving, rejuvenating, healing, and comforting. BUT before it can be any of that, prayer MUST Be **stopping**.

A Prayer Candle- you may not be able to do this, but lighting a candle at the beginning of your prayer time is always helpful. It makes the statement that this time is sacred. The space is transformed as soon as the candle is lit. If you want, you could even purchase a special candle, just for your prayer time. However, always remember to extinguish it when you're done.

Center Yourself, Relax- now comes the challenging part. You have to figure out how to slow things down. There is no easy way to do it, but some practices do help. Assume a comfortable but prayerful and reverent posture. Close your eyes and deliberately focus on your breathing. Consciously choose to take your time. Breathe in and out slowly for a minute or two. It's going to seem like an eternity, but trust me, it will be worth it. If you want, you can formulate your own prayer-mantra. For example, take the words, "*be with me now, O Lord. Give me your peace.*" Breathe in and pray the first half. Breathe out and pray the second half, over and over again. Then, when you feel your mind and body slowing down enough and ready to enter into the structure of this prayer, open your eyes and do so.

Outline of this Prayer Experience- I have designed this Advent prayer book to follow a simple, repetitive routine:

1. Begin with the ***Sign of the Cross***
2. Pray the ***Opening Prayer*** for the day, very slowly, maybe twice
3. Slowly read ***the scriptures of the day***, contained in this book
4. Read the ***reflection and summary of the scriptures***
5. Slowly read and consider the ***Daily Reflections on Waiting***, found at the end of this book
6. Consider making ***a journal entry*** in the space provide

7. Offer the ***Lord's Prayer***, but pray it slowly.
8. Pray the ***Concluding Prayer*** for the day
9. If using a candle, ***extinguish it now***
10. Try not to rush to "the next thing." Take a moment to enjoy and be thankful for the experience.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

WEEKLY REFLECTIONS ON WAITING: As you enter into the season of Advent, you may wish to consider some of the things for which you are waiting. You may find it helpful to reflect on the weekly scriptures within the context of the following questions:

This week, are you waiting for, hoping for an answer from God?

Are you waiting for a certain situation in your life—or in the world—to “play out,” come to a conclusion?

Are you waiting to find out whether or not you made a correct decision about something?

Are you waiting for a particular suffering to end?

Are you waiting for some type of affirmation from a certain person or group?

Are you waiting for the courage to do something that needs to be done?

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Scripture- Matthew 13:33-37

Begin with the Sign of the Cross

Center Yourself and Relax

Prayer for the Day- Oh God, Father and Creator of us all, as I begin this Advent time, help me to slow down a little more than normal. Help me to be at peace with saying “no” to the noise in my life for just a few moments each day, that I may hear you, sense your presence in my life and feel you more intently. Come, Lord Jesus. Recreate within me a new heart, a heart of trust, confidence, and peace. Amen.

Scripture (Matthew 13:33-37)- Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

Reflection- I find this passage challenging for me at 2 levels. First, it brings me face to face with the reality that each of us has only so much time in this life, on this earth. Hopefully, as we grow older, we take this for granted less and less. To assume that we have so many days, to assume that there will always be another tomorrow, and to assume that we will always have a second chance to get things right is a detrimental risk to take. We risk taking God’s love for granted, His forgiveness too. We risk putting off to the last minute those things that we know we need to be about now. And before you know it, several years will have passed, without us having grown as much as we could have. This passage also challenges me with regard to the relationships in my life. Each and every day, God offers us

opportunities to bring His love to others. For me, “being watchful and alert” means being as aware as I possibly can of those in my life who are hurting, lonely, and in need of a certain comfort that I can provide. May neither busyness nor selfishness keep us from this task.

For Prayerful Journaling- You may wish to pray with the following questions and maybe jot down a few thoughts as well. The journaling exercise could also help with preparation for spiritual direction, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or any other mentor-type conversation:

1. Who or what are you taking for granted? Today, right now. At this point in your life, is there someone or some other area of your life to which you want to be more attentive?
2. Is there something that you keep putting off? Areas to consider: physical health, prayer life, worship life (“going to church”), forgiving someone, or asking forgiveness?
3. At this point in your life, what does “being watchful...being alert” mean to you?
4. Name 1 action step that you could take in response to the above questions. Keep it simple. Don’t take on too much. Take little steps, but take them.

The Lord’s Prayer

Concluding Prayer- Thank you, Lord, for this time with you. Attune my mind and heart to the quiet whisper of your Spirit. Bless me with your protection. Guide me by your Word. Strengthen me with your courage, that I may walk faithfully with you each day. Amen.

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Scripture- Mark 1:1-8

Begin with the Sign of the Cross

Center Yourself and Relax

Prayer for the Day- You desire, O Lord, to come more deeply into my life. Help me to honestly see those things in my life that come between you and me. Give healing to any bitterness, regret, guilt, or pain that may be present in me at this time. As Your Holy Spirit was upon John the Baptist long ago to empower him in his ministry, may that same Spirit be upon me now, and all those I know and love. Cleanse me, O God. Move me. Comfort me. Amen.

Scripture (Mark 1:1-8)- As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: *Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."* John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection- Some probably considered John to be a wild man. To many, he looked and acted the part. For several, however, he was a wake-up call. His preaching was a bold proclamation of the unconditional love that God had for everyone and an invitation to change their ways, as necessary. As we see in the final words of this week's passage, John was also a model of humility before God, saying,

“I am not worthy...” The words of this Gospel reading that strike me most deeply each year are, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.” Right away, they lead me to think of the clutter in my life, the things that block my path to a better relationship with Christ. Sometimes the clutter comes in the form of sin, other times it’s in our busyness and preoccupation with trivial things. Either way, Advent is always an opportunity for us to clean things up, if you will, in our spiritual lives, to make it easier for God to break through and for us to hear what we need to hear.

For Prayerful Journaling- You may wish to pray with the following questions and maybe jot down a few thoughts as well. The journaling exercise could also help with preparation for spiritual direction, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or any other mentor-type conversation:

1. For the average person, how would you define “clutter?” In other words, what are some of the elements in everyday life that could come between us and good health: spiritual, physical, and relational?
2. Now, more directly, describe your own personal clutter. Here are some elements to consider: social media, work, over-dependence on food or alcohol, pornography, inappropriate and unhealthy relationships (including sexual acting-out), lack of organization or little to no sense of direction?
3. At this point in your life, what could the words, “make straight a path for the Lord into your life” mean for you?

4. Name 1 action step that you could take in response to the above questions. Keep it simple. Don't take on too much. Take little steps, but take them. (Regarding #2, above, you may wish to begin by scheduling a conversation with a priest, deacon, or religious brother or sister whom you trust, or an initial session with a counselor of some sort. You could begin with a trusted family member or friend, but if you sense a need for something professional, don't be afraid to take that step.)

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer- Thank you, Lord, for this time with you. Attune my mind and heart to the quiet whisper of your Spirit. Bless me with your protection. Guide me by your Word. Strengthen me with your courage, that I may walk faithfully with you each day. Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (Known as “Gaudete Sunday”)

Scripture- John 1:6-8;9-28

(An Excerpt from the Entire Passage)

Begin with the Sign of the Cross

Center Yourself and Relax

Prayer for the Day- Jesus Christ, you who are to come into the world, come even more deeply into my life. Dispel the darkness of selfishness and sin that sometime surround and entangle me. Help me to trust that, standing in your light, I do not face judgment or retribution, but only love and empowerment. At my baptism, I was challenged to, “walk as a child of the light.” Help me to do this more faithfully. Amen.

Scripture (John 1:6-8;9-28)- A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him,

“Who are you?”

He admitted and did not deny it, but admitted,

“I am not the Christ.”

So, they asked him,

“What are you then? Are you Elijah?”

And he said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.”

So, they said to him,

“Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?

What do you have to say for yourself?”

He said: “I am *the voice of one crying out in the desert,*

‘make straight the way of the Lord,’” as Isaiah the prophet said.”

Reflection- I'm not sure where I first heard it—or from whom—but there is an expression that has always challenged me, especially when at Mass with God's faithful: "we are called to be transparent to the mystery of Christ." What this means for me is, that, wherever I find myself, in whatever role I am serving, I am called to let it not be about me. All that I say and do should serve to, as authentically as possible, point others to Christ. It's never about me. It's always about him. This is what I hear in John's words today. From the very beginning of his ministry, he was about Jesus. Even when tested by some of the Jewish elders and the pharisees, John continually deflected the attention away from himself and onto Christ. It's a very subtle trap that we can fall into at times, not even realizing that we are doing it; namely, shining the light on ourselves. Surely, we will at times struggle in our human relationships. We will struggle with our own overconfidence and, at times, arrogance and that of others. Still, we, like John, are called to be an authentic, humble light that points others to the one *True Light*, Jesus Christ, born of Mary.

"Gaudete Sunday"- Today is known as "Gaudete Sunday," which, simply defined, means, "rejoice." The color for the first, second, and fourth weeks of Advent is violet, purple. For this day, however, the color is brighter. The color is rose. This is a season of anxious preparation and waiting. While it's not meant to be somber, it is a time when we are urged to take a serious look into ourselves. This particular Sunday, the color, along with the prayers of the Mass, serve as a reminder of the joy that we await.

For Prayerful Journaling- You may wish to pray with the following questions and maybe jot down a few thoughts as well. The journaling exercise could also help with preparation for spiritual direction, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or any other mentor-type conversation:

1. Who, more than anyone in your life, reminds you of Jesus? Have you told them this? Maybe you can do so. A simple thank-you card or note means more than we could ever know.

Sure, you could send a text or an email, but why not do it the old-fashioned way?

2. How would you describe your basic conversational style? In other words, do you find yourself really trying to listen to the other person and “hear what they’re saying,” or do you find that you respond with what’s going on in *your* life? Are you judgmental and/or rigid in your conversation, or are you compassionate and accepting? Simply put, as John deflected the attention off of himself, how can you be a better, more compassionate listener to others, especially if they’re hurting?

3. To what “light” does your life give testimony? There are false lights, false promises of happiness, and areas of life that are trivial and, in some cases, hurtful, if given too much emphasis. There is only one who can be called “The Light.” When people see you, who or what do they see?

4. Name 1 action step that you could take in response to the above questions. Keep it simple. Don’t take on too much. Take little steps, but take them.

The Lord’s Prayer

Concluding Prayer- Thank you, Lord, for this time with you. Attune my mind and heart to the quiet whisper of your Spirit. Bless me with your protection. Guide me by your Word. Strengthen me with your courage, that I may walk faithfully with you each day. Amen.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Scripture- Luke 1:26-38

Begin with the Sign of the Cross

Center Yourself and Relax

Prayer for the Day- O Lord my God, give me this day the strength that comes from you alone. I do not always understand your will for me or for others, but I know that I do desire it. Make me more trusting in your plan, whatever it may be. Help me to be more open to my calling, my vocation and to pursue it more earnestly. May the courage of Mary, your mother, be mine, this day and always. Amen.

Scripture (Luke 1:26-38)-The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection- I remember as a child going to Mass week after week at our home parish of Our Lady of Mercy here in Baton Rouge. There was a large, 8-foot diameter Advent wreath hanging on the wall of the sanctuary. Each week, when the next candle was lit, I knew—we all knew—that we were that much closer to Christmas! The little child in me probably saw it as a count-down clock to the big day. Even then, however, what moved me even more were the words of the scriptures and the songs, especially today’s Gospel. Nothing says Christmas more than Mary and her “yes” to God. Wow. There is no way that I or any of us could ever imagine what she must have really felt that day. What we do know is her response. Somehow, some way, she was able to stand before this unexpected moment and allow faith to overcome fear, trust to overcome doubt, and love to overcome selfishness. Father Ron Rolheiser, omi, has always told us that, from day one, Mary pondered these things and was open to whatever would come, not knowing where it would lead. So many times in our lives, we do not say, “your will be done.” We, instead, say, “my will be done.” For me personally, I may not even be aware that I’m saying it, but, to be completely honest, it does happen. As we approach, then, the big day, we recall that this season has been and still is a chance for us to realign our will with God’s.

For Prayerful Journaling- You may wish to pray with the following questions and maybe jot down a few thoughts as well. The journaling exercise could also help with preparation for spiritual direction, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or any other mentor-type conversation:

1. How are you feeling? Right now? Are you feeling excitement? Sadness? How has your Advent been thus far? Are you worried about finances, shopping, decorating? Be as honest as you can with your feelings. Know that every feeling, in and of itself, is a gift from God. The Lord accepts you and blesses you, wherever you are. Just be attentive to what these feelings could lead you to do.

2. Do you feel any tension in your life between God's will and your own will? If so, how would you describe it? What area of life does it involve?

3. Mary trusted that God would provide. How hard is it for you to let go in the face of worry, anxiety, or fear?

4. Name 1 action step that you could take in response to the above questions. Keep it simple. Don't take on too much. Take little steps, but take them.

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer- Thank you, Lord, for this time with you. Attune my mind and heart to the quiet whisper of your Spirit. Bless me with your protection. Guide me by your Word. Strengthen me with your courage, that I may walk faithfully with you each day. Amen.

THE SOLEMNITY OF CHRISTMAS

Scripture- Matthew 1:18-25

Begin with the Sign of the Cross

Center Yourself and Relax

Prayer for the Day- Oh God of all creation, Your goodness and love are without end. No one can measure the depth of your love for us. As we now come to the moment of the birth of your infinite love into the world, may that love be reborn in our hearts—each of us—and into our homes, friendships, and lives. May the light of this holy moment shed light upon the darkness of all those who suffer loneliness, oppression, and alienation in any way. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your compassion, wisdom, and mercy. As these gifts have been given to me by your birth, may I extend them to others all year long. Amen.

Scripture (Matthew 1:18-25)- This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel*, which means “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

Reflection- Over the next few weeks we will celebrate the gifts of family, the coming new year and Mary's role in our lives, the visits to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph by shepherds and magi, and then the baptism of Jesus himself. These Sunday celebrations—and the days in-between each—constitute the bulk of the Christmas season in our church year. Today, however, or tonight, is Christmas! For many, this moment brings with it a lot of excitement. For some, perhaps it brings sadness. For most of us, no doubt, there is a fondness of memory, as we all look back on the past and ponder how things use to be. We put so much emphasis on preparing and getting ready for Christmas, that, for some it's a let-down when it finally arrives, almost anti-climactic. We run around, make lists, cook, bake, spend money, and wrap. If I were to give one bit of advice to all of us, it would simply be this: enjoy the moment. Breathe easy. The greatest gift any of us could ever receive is the gift of being with the people we love, and the greatest gift we could ever give them is our time—or at least a little of it. My 3 favorite things about the Christmas season are the music, the food, and being with family. What are yours? I know it may sound cliché, but Christmas is more than just a day. It's a season. Enjoy it. Merry Christmas.

For Prayerful Journaling- You may wish to pray with the following questions and maybe jot down a few thoughts as well. The journaling exercise could also help with preparation for spiritual direction, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or any other mentor-type conversation:

1. Do you have a favorite Christmas song? A favorite Christmas movie or show? What about a Christmas tradition that you and your family celebrated when you were a child? Take a few moments and share these things around the table.
2. If you were to define your personal appreciation for Christmas in 1 sentence, how would you describe it?

3. Do you know someone who is spending a first Christmas without a loved one? Would it be appropriate for you to maybe reach out to them in some way and let them know that you are thinking about them?

4. What practical step could you perhaps take to truly celebrate Christmas beyond Christmas Eve and Christmas Day? More consistent daily prayer? Less emphasis on finances and material things? Better, regular communication with someone dear to you?

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer- Thank you, Lord, for this time with you. Attune my mind and heart to the quiet whisper of your Spirit. Bless me with your protection. Guide me by your Word. Strengthen me with your courage, that I may walk faithfully with you each day. Amen.

A Few Concluding Thoughts...

I hope these pages have been somewhat helpful to you during this holy time. Remember, when it comes to “waiting in God’s time” or waiting in the biblical sense, the good things are already happening—right there in the midst of the waiting. It’s not so much about whether we get what we’re hoping for or not, as it is about what we become in the process.

Fr. Trey Nelson
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