

Waiting in Joyful Hope

*Daily Reflections for
Advent and Christmas
2019–2020*

Daniel G. Groody, CSC



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

Nihil Obstat: Reverend Robert Harren, J.C.L., *Censor deputatus.*

Imprimatur: † Most Reverend Donald J. Kettler, J.C.L., Bishop of Saint Cloud, February 26, 2019.

Cover design by Monica Bokinskie. Cover art courtesy of Getty Images.

Daily Scripture excerpts in this work are from the *Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition* © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Other Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Excerpts from documents of the Second Vatican Council are from *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations; The Basic Sixteen Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, OP, © 1996. Used with permission of Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

© 2019 by Daniel G. Groody

Published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

ISSN: 1550-803X

ISBN: 978-0-8146-6364-6 978-0-8146-6388-2 (ebook)

Introduction

Shortly after I graduated from college, I wanted to explore the rich and varied geographical terrain of the United States. So I asked my friend Ed Langlois if he would be interested in riding a bicycle across the country. Though neither of us had any experience for such a trip, he agreed, and we embarked on an extraordinary adventure.

We started in Portland, Maine, and rode our bikes to the other side of the country to Portland, Oregon. We started by dipping our tires in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and then spent the next seventy-five days riding our bikes across mountains, plains, and deserts to the waters of the Pacific Ocean. Though we learned much along the way, little did I realize that this outer journey on a bicycle would parallel an inner journey of the soul.

In many ways our life is a journey between two ports and two waters. We enter the port of this world through our birth and we depart it through our death. The waters of baptism initiate us into the journey of faith, and the rite of Christian burial—which recalls the waters of baptism—marks its completion. In between these two ports and these two waters, we live out the adventure of life. It is ours to discover as a spiritual journey that takes us along the road of the paschal mystery.

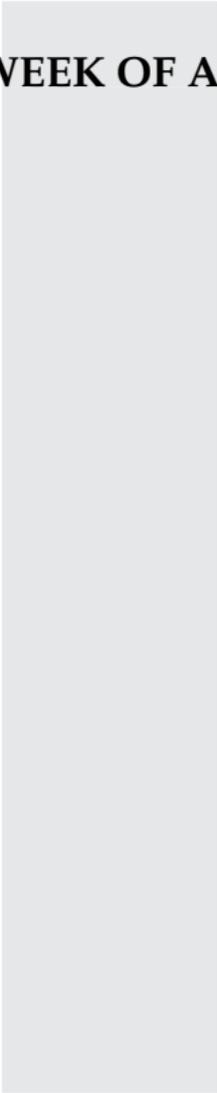
Though there were many memorable moments along the way from Portland to Portland, our trek through the desert

of Idaho speaks in a particular way to our journey through Advent. Because of the intensity of the desert heat, we had to bike at times in darkness. On one occasion I remember it was so dark that we could not see the road ahead of us or beneath us. We could no longer have faith in our senses so we had to learn a sense of faith that went beyond them. With only a sliver of the moon's light to guide us, we had to learn how to develop a "night vision" that enabled us to trust a deeper light even amid the darkness that enveloped us.

Advent is a time to cultivate night vision. It involves keeping the light of hope alive even when we journey through the darkness of the world, our politics, our Church, and even our very lives. It is also a time shift to a lower gear. Though our consuming culture constantly urges us into pedaling faster—which can keep us from tuning our hearts so that we can really listen—Advent calls us to slow down in order to make room for the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It calls us to seek directions from the angels, the Spirit, and people like John the Baptist, Isaiah, and Mary, who call us to make the appropriate course corrections through conversion that leads us in the right direction. As we do so, Advent becomes a time to tune into the signals from above, to calibrate our God Positioning System (GPS), if you will, until this road of faith, hope, and love leads us to our true home in the heart of the One who is the Alpha and Omega of our journey.

Thanksgiving, 2018

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

A vertical gray bar is positioned in the center of the page, extending from the top of the text area down towards the bottom. It is a solid, uniform gray color and serves as a decorative element.

Climbing the Mountain of Advent

Readings: Isa 2:1-5; Rom 13:11-14; Matt 24:37-44

Scripture:

“Come, let us climb the LORD’s mountain.” (Isa 2:3)

Reflection: The first time I climbed up Half Dome in Yosemite Valley, I was filled with a sense of adventure and anticipation. The first 8 miles of the hike were breathtaking, but the last 400 feet scared me to death. The slope is steep, and getting to the top meant pulling myself up cables along a bare granite face with parts that have a 50-degree pitch. With no protection on either side, the slightest slip would send me tumbling thousands of feet below.

During my initial attempt, I climbed only 100 feet before my fears overcame me, and I had to turn back. The mind and heart that brought me to this point were not enough to take me to the top. After multiple attempts, I had to slow down, reframe and repattern my mind-set in order to learn a different way. Only after I changed my approach to the journey was I able to climb higher and make it to the awe-awaiting summit.

Isaiah and the psalmist speak today of the spiritual journey as an ascent up the Lord’s mountain. Advent calls us to step away from the busyness of the world, to repattern the way we think about our lives in order to attain new heights

in our walk with the Lord. God's path is not centered on buying and busyness but on the business of the reign of God. This kingdom is not about war, violence, or hatred but a way of faith, love, hope, trust, and peacemaking.

Meditation: Vatican II reminded us that the Eucharist is “the summit” of the Christian life and “the source from which all its power flows.” As such, the Eucharist is the most important work of the church and is at the heart of our spiritual ascent with God. It is a place from which to gain a panoramic vision of life and gain new perspective on where I have been and where I am going. In this Advent season, how can I step away from the busyness of life in order to rediscover the business of my relationship with God, especially in the Eucharist?

Prayer: Lord, help me keep my thoughts on the things that are above. Even as I spend time and energy buying gifts for others during this season, help me to invest above all in the gifts of your kingdom and the treasures of your love, your grace, and your mercy.

The Heart of Worthiness

Readings: Isa 4:2-6; Matt 8:5-11

Scripture:

“Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof.”
(Matt 8:8)

Reflection: In the time of Jesus, slavery was a widely accepted practice. Some slaves toiled in the fields and mines, while others were domestic servants. In the Roman Empire they were often considered more as property than as persons. With no legal rights of their own, their lives were not only difficult and short, but to their owners they were often considered as disposable.

Today’s readings not only introduce us to the condition of a slave but to the heart of his master. While Jesus no doubt was moved by the sickness of the soldier’s servant, he must also have been moved by the humility and concern of this centurion. He was a man of rank and social importance in the Roman army, but he was not puffed up with his own self-importance. Nor did he mistreat those beneath him. The soldier not only goes out of his way to help those who work for him, but he is remarkably aware of his own unworthiness. He does not even consider himself worthy to have Jesus come to his house and enter under his own roof.

Jesus is not put off by the unworthiness of a Gentile soldier—nor our own. Rather he looks beyond our unworthiness and sees into the heart. Like the centurion soldier, Jesus not only wants to heal people of a physical illness; he wants to heal us of the blindness that keeps us from seeing our own value—and the value and dignity of each and every person.

Meditation: Though the practice of legal slavery has largely been abolished, a significant number of people today still live in physical, psychological, and emotional bondage. Many who do demeaning work often feel so degraded and socially excluded that they can feel at times as if they are nobody to anybody. God wants to free us all from the sense of unworthiness that paralyzes us—and wants us to do the same for others. How can I let God love me today, especially where I feel unworthy? And how can I value the neglected among us through a kind word, a listening ear, or a healing gesture?

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit. Enter my heart and make it your dwelling place. Move me beyond feelings of unworthiness to a place of trust in your love and mercy. Help me to reach out to those who are ignored and neglected today, and restore in us our dignity as children of God.