

Waiting

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Is 9:2). Every time I hear these words proclaimed at the beginning of the first reading during the Christmas Midnight Mass my heart leaps for joy. Yes, we were in darkness but you have come to us; you have come to us! But even when we don't want to be a prophet of woes and doom, we realize that there is still a lot of darkness in our world that needs to be overcome. And even in my heart, are there not some lands of shadows where light needs to dawn? What about yours?

At the monastery we witness everyday the victory of light over darkness while we pray the psalms together and do our *lectio divina*. Mother nature reminds us with her quiet words of beauty that there is always hope, that we can trust. Only those who hope and trust know how to wait, wait for the dawn, wait for the victory.

I am afraid that we are not good at waiting anymore. We want instant results and immediate gratifications. Our hopes tend to be too thin and they easily crumble when the desirable outcome seems to delay.

Advent is the time of active waiting, the time of desire, the time of promise. How many people miss these precious weeks not knowing how to wait, how this of waiting expands the heart with desire to welcome a much greater reality than what we could plan or expect. But when we fail to train our hearts and souls with the longing that stretches us, we don't truly recognize the fulfillment when it finally comes, and our joy is wasted as fast as the bubbles in a champagne bottle.

What has this to do with the discernment of one's vocation? Good discernment always requires some time of waiting at the different stages of the process. This is not just letting time pass by, waiting for an angel to tell me what to do or to overcome the difficulties on the way while I do little about it.

Have you ever sat in a quiet place and found your pulse, your heart beat? Try it. It is a simple way of realizing that life is beating within you. Yes, this is physical life, biological life, but it points to a much greater reality: eternal life, divine life within you. It is so strong and mysterious that you cannot control it, it is yours and not yours at the same time.

During Advent we celebrate that God is active and fully alive as the tiny heart of Jesus that started one day to beat in Mary's womb. And because this is so, all is possible: deserts will become gardens and all will find a place they can call home, in peace and security. What deserts are in your life? Where is God calling you to make your home and to welcome others? The Spirit is already acting in you and for you. Look deeper and you will find a new spring of water gushing forth from your thirsty ground.



Advent is also a time to learn to listen. Sometimes we want to see, to have it all clear and be certain. There are times for that, like Christmas, when we just kneel and worship in amazement. But most of our lives and our discernment process are more about listening than seeing. When we truly listen, we cannot jump to the conclusion, we have to adapt ourselves to the rhythm of the person who is talking to us, one word at a time. We also need to quiet down our inner talking if we want to receive the words, thoughts, needs or feelings of another. Listening is a welcoming act, like the ground receives the rain, like Mary, our Mother, received the words of the angel and welcomed the Word of God. All too often, even when our hearts cry, "Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus," we fail to wait and listen to his response, "Surely, I am coming soon" (Rev 22: 20).

Advent is here, the time of promise, and our hearts rejoice and expand in expectation for us and for whole world. We only need to listen and set out. "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful of heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come and save you" (Is 35: 3-4).

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