ACE Advocates Advent Prayer Service for Catholic School Teachers, Leaders, and Staff Advent 2020

The Weary World Rejoices

Compiled by the ACE Advocates Team
Kati Macaluso (Kati.Macaluso@nd.edu)
Taylor Kelly (tkelly10@nd.edu)

Opening Song *(All): O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (verses 1-4)

Opening Prayer *(1 minute; volunteer reader):*

"God of Glory and Wisdom, the day draws near when the glory of your Son will make radiant the night of our waiting world. Do not let the obstacle of selfishness keep us from the joy that is at the end of our Advent path. May the darkness not blind us to the vision of wisdom which fills the minds of those who find him. Help us, Source of All Kindness, to clear out all those things that block our paths. Let us straighten our crooked ways, pull down our distrustful mountains, and fill up our valleys of fear. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. **Amen.**"[1]

Theme Introduction and Reflection *(5 minutes; prayer service leader):*

As educators, we are well-versed in the art of "backwards planning." We begin our work with the end in mind, always sequencing and scaffolding in anticipation of the end result or outcome we are seeking (or more precisely, supporting our students in seeking) to achieve. Advent is no different. We begin this season of preparation because we know its ending: the arrival of a Savior, who came into this world, so that we might have life and have it to the fullest. As backwards planners, we begin this time of reflection together focused on that ending, the night of our dear Savior's birth, choosing as our theme, a line from the popular Christmas hymn, *O Holy Night.*

It's probably safe to assume, though, that not a single one of us is quite there yet. We might be feeling the darkness of night, but the "holy" part?--not quite. The only thing brightly shining in our worlds seems, of late, to be the blue light emanating from our computer screens as we post another video to Google classroom. It's difficult to hear the angel's voices above the din of social media and rioting. In fact, it's difficult to hear human voices behind masks and lines of separation. What we wouldn't give to pull our desks together in small group configurations again, to be able to sing in music class, to bring all of our students into a single physical space again.

Indeed, much like the early verses of *O Holy Night* report, ours is a "weary world." We are exhausted-- by the pivoting from one mode of instruction to the next, by not knowing whether there will be enough faculty and staff in the building tomorrow to cover our bases, by the philosophical differences in opinion about this pandemic, by the centuries of racial injustice in our country, by political bickering and gridlock. The list goes on and on. If we listen to the words of *O Holy Night*, though, there is a thrill of hope that buoys us up from our state of physical, mental, and even spiritual exhaustion: Even a weary world rejoices.

We rejoice not only because God sent His only Son into the world. We rejoice because God sent his Son into a *weary* world, a dark world, a broken world. As Isaiah says, and St. Paul later echoes, while we are still in darkness, just then--on the darkest, longest night of the year, while we are asleep in the exhaustion of sin--God looks down on us, sees us as we are, and chooses to love us beyond our wildest imagination by sending his Son into the world, that we might experience the fullness of life. By human standards, God's actions make little sense. Why, as an all-knowing, all-powerful being, enter into a weary world? Why not just wipe the world out and begin again? Furthermore, why enter into a weary world knowing that you'll be asked to die an awful death of crucifixion for that world too?

Only standards of divine love can make sense of God's actions. The angel reported that the Christ-child would be named Emmanuel, which means God is with us. In other words, God comes to us as a human person, but his choosing to dwell with us, a weary, broken, at times downright disappointing people, is a choice measurable only by standards of divine love.

If we think for a moment about our mission as Catholic educators, we can probably all agree that it is a mission animated by human persons striving to live up to standards of divine love. If we reflect for a moment on what distinguishes our school community as a *Catholic* school, it is the fact that every encounter that occurs in the context of our community is poised to be an encounter that announces to the world, 'God is *with us*.'

"Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'til He appeared and the soul felt its worth," wrote Cappeau in *O Holy Night*. As we draw closer to Christmas and to the close of a particularly exhausting, weariness-inducing semester, let us reflect on where—in our encounters with one another, our students and our families-- Christ has appeared, or has begged to be made more apparent. Where and when have we allowed the souls entrusted to our care to feel their God-given worth? How, even in darkness, have we encouraged those around us to watch for the light? How, through our words and actions, have we announced to a weary world that "yonder breaks a new and glorious morn"?

Song and Art Meditation *(10 minutes; After reading the previous reflection and thereby establishing the theme, the prayer service leader will invite participants to listen to the hymn* O, Holy Night, *and to reflect on Steinbrück's artistic rendition of the Nativity, which we recommend that participants view on individual handouts located in the appendix or on a large screen via this link):*

We now invite you to listen to the song that inspired our theme of *The Weary World Rejoice* while meditating on a depiction of the nativity scene and an accompanying reflection. Please listen and reflect while the song is playing and then to respond to the questions provided, either in your thoughts or in writing.

Song: *O Holy Night*

Art (also available in the appendix or at this link):

Eduard Karl Steinbrück (German, 1803-1882), Adoration of the Magi, 1838, oil on canvas. Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame: Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Hamilton Sr. Purchase Fund, 1978.017.

Reflection on Steinbrück's painting (by Bridget Hoyt; also available in the appendix):

Adoration of the Magi combines two Gospel accounts with the Magi and Herod's soldiers on the right and the shepherds visiting on the left. The central manger scene is geometrically structured. Christ and Mary form a triangle; they are nested in another triangle, pointing up to the angels, inscribed in the square of the manger. In other words, Christ is bringing order when we might feel unmoored these days.

The group on the left coming to Christ includes a blind man. He "sees" Christ without being able to physically see. He might experience healing, and that healing can represent the physical healing so many need right now amidst the pandemic and spiritual healing. Additionally, in light of our current context, Herod's army may represent the many serious conflicts in the world.

Questions for Individual Reflection (also available in the appendix):

1. What is something that stood out to you in the lyrics of *O Holy Night* or from the depiction of or reflection on Steinbrück's *Adoration of the Magi*?
2. What parts of your own life need healing? How can you seek out Christ this Advent season to receive that healing?
3. How is Christ already bringing order to your life? How can you further trust Christ to bring peace to our troubled world?
4. How are you being called to rejoice in this moment of weariness in our world?

Small Group Discussion *(10 minutes; Participants discuss their thoughts in response to the questions listed above, which are also available in the appendix)*

Large Group Sharing *(5 minutes; Prayer service leader invites thoughts or responses for sharing within the context of the whole group)*

Scripture Reading (*5 minutes; volunteer reader; also available in the appendix):*

"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'

"When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them." (Luke 2:1-20)

Individual Reflection *(10 minutes; Prayer service leader invites participants to reflect individually, in thoughts or in writing, on the following questions in response to Luke's account of the Nativity, which are also available in the appendix):*

Questions (also available in the appendix):

1. What is something that stood out to you from this telling of the birth of Jesus?
2. Currently, with whom do you most identify in the story of the birth of Jesus - The Holy Family, the angels, the shepherds, the magi, etc.? Why?
3. Where is weariness present in this story? How does this relate to the weariness you are experiencing personally and/or professionally?
4. Where is rejoicing present in this story? How does this relate to the rejoicing you are being called to personally and/or professionally?

Large Group Sharing *(5 minutes; Prayer service leader invites participants to share thoughts from their individual reflection with the larger group)*

Closing Prayer *(1 minute; volunteer reader):*

"God of all our joy, you are always faithful to your promises and always close to your people. The earth rejoices in the hope of the Savior's coming and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time. Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness of blindness that hinders us from recognizing Jesus, and from feeling the joy and hope which his presence will bestow, for he is Lord forever and ever. **Amen.**"[2]

Closing Song: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (verses 5-7)

[1] Dillon, J., & Dillon, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Lead Kindly Light: The Notre Dame Book of Prayers.* Campus Ministry, University of Notre Dame. p. 164.
[2] Dillon, J., & Dillon, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Lead Kindly Light: The Notre Dame Book of Prayers.* Campus Ministry, University of Notre Dame. p. 166.

Additional Advent Resources:

Songs and Playlists:

- "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"
- "Mary, Did You Know?"
- Advent with Sacred Ordinary Days (Spotify playlist)
- Waiting on a King: Advent Music (Spotify playlist)

Reflections:

- ACE Advent Reflections (2012-2019)
- FaithND Reflection from Fr. Lou DelFra, CSC - December 24, 2013
- FaithND Reflection from Meghan Kirzeder (ACE 10) - December 2, 2014
- FaithND Reflection from Kristin Sheehan (PLACT, IEI) - December 3, 2014
- FaithND Reflection from Mary Pullano (ACE 20) - December 16, 2014
- FaithND Reflection from Kaileen (Bonina) Sanner (ACE 8) - December 22, 2014
- FaithND Reflection from Michael Zelenka (ACE 8, RLP 6) - November 30, 2015
- FaithND Reflection from Maura Shea (ACE 18) - December 4, 2016
- FaithND Reflection from Charleen Doan (ACE 12) - December 6, 2016
- FaithND Reflection from Katie Olson (RLP 10) - December 8, 2016
- FaithND Reflection from Amy Wyskochil (ACE 10) - December 10, 2018
- FaithND Reflection from Maria Murphy (ACE 22) - December 23, 2018
- Chapels of ND: A Daily Advent Journey (Carole Sandner/Visitation Halls)
- Spiritual Resources for Advent