

Advent 2023, Week 2 Reflection

YOUR GIFTS – AN IMPORTANT PART OF GOD’S STORY

Welcome to the Second Week of the Advent audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. If you haven’t listened to last week’s reflection about “Staying Awake and Slowing Down” during Advent, not to worry! You can always revisit past audio clips at your convenience. For now, we invite you to pause, breathe deeply, and notice the Spirit of life around you, wherever you are. If it will help you to light a candle, brew a cup of tea, move to a more comfortable spot, or close your eyes, do it! Simply be here, now, as much as you are able to, feeling yourself held by the chair, the ground, and by God as we explore this week’s theme: “Your Gifts - An Important Part of God’s Story.” This week’s reflection was written by Louise Tessier, an alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Philadelphia...

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Earlier this year, I finished listening to the Bible in a Year Podcast. (If you haven’t listened, I’d highly recommend it!) One of my biggest takeaways is that the whole Bible is connected. When read chronologically, it’s amazing how God’s story unfolds and how the Old and New Testaments are so intertwined. The Bible is not just individual, unrelated books; they’re all chapters in one story that required people to say “yes” to God’s call.

The first reading this week comes from the prophet Isaiah. He lived about 700 years before Jesus was born, showing how far ahead of time God was preparing his people. The book of the Prophet Isaiah is made up of the “Book of Woe” and the “Book of Consolation.” Chapter 40 is the beginning of the Book of Consolation, which was written to console people who were exiled in Babylon. God loved his people so much, he gave Isaiah words of comfort to share. When God’s people were hopeless, homesick, and sad, God was telling them to hang in there and that they’re not alone. Because Isaiah was willing to share God’s Word, people knew there was good news coming. This is the same message God has for us this Advent season.

The Gospel reading from Mark quotes one of Isaiah’s prophecies from the first reading, and quickly tells us that John the Baptist is the one who “prepare[s] the way of the Lord.” The TV series, [The Chosen](#), suggests that many of Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries had memorized scriptures. Many people would have known our first reading from Isaiah by heart. They would know that the Lord was coming. They would know that someone would be preparing the path for him. They would be waiting for these people. How amazing would it have been for them to start recognizing that these prophecies were being fulfilled? Jesus is coming, John is preparing the way, and Isaiah told them this would happen hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth.



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Isaiah was given a gift of prophecy - he was called to speak God's word to his people. Isaiah certainly had free will and could have said "no" to this call. But look at what his "yes" did. It gave comfort and hope to God's people for hundreds of years. Similarly, John the Baptist was given a mission that he said "yes" to, which involved baptizing, preaching, and preparing people for the coming of Jesus. Look at what his "yes" did. He confirmed that the Messiah would be here soon! During this Christmas season, we also reflect on *Mary's* great "yes" that brought Jesus into the world. She didn't have to say "yes," either, did she? But she did, and it changed everything.

Just as God worked through the prophet Isaiah to ready his people hundreds of years ahead of time and sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus, we can look at our own lives to see how God prepares us and always makes a way. When I look at my life, I can see the ways God was preparing me to be a math educator in an elementary school today. For years, I avoided education. I entered college as an elementary education major, but immediately switched out because I was scared to commit to that path. Over the next decade, God prepared me through different roles: instructing adult GED classes, substituting at a middle/high school, and teaching math for 3 years in a middle school. Along the way, I learned what my gifts were (and weren't!), so I was able to say "yes" to God's next step in my life – being an elementary school math educator. My "yes" has brought me so much joy, as I'm able to use my gifts, see students' math growth, and bring change to our school structures for the good of my students. When we say "yes" to God, we are able to use our gifts to allow God's story to continue to unfold.

As we journey through this Advent season, may our hearts be open to God's unique call for each of our lives. It can be frightening and sometimes uncomfortable to recognize and use our gifts to say "yes." But God tells us over and over again in the Bible, "Do not be afraid." Your life can impact others in ways you may never understand. May we have the courage to use our gifts and say "yes" to God, who spent hundreds of years preparing us and comforting us as we waited for his son.

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Thank you for joining us for this week's reflection, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. Join us next week, when we contemplate "Joy, Sorrow, and Patience in the Waiting."

Reflection questions:

- *In the rush of the holiday season, it's easy to worry about what gifts you're getting loved ones. What gifts has God given to you to share with the world? Are you using them? Are you saying "yes" to God?*
- *I'm sure people of Jesus's time were constantly wondering when the prophecies would be fulfilled; they needed to trust that God was going to keep his promises. Do you trust God? What makes trusting God challenging in your life? When God answers your prayers and shows up in unexpected ways, do you recognize him? Do you see how He has prepared you for the life you're leading?*

Opening & Closing Prayers

Blessed Are You Who Bear Light by Jan Richardson

Blessed are you who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify to its endurance
amid the unendurable,
who bear witness to its persistence
when everything seems in shadow and grief

Blessed are you in whom the light lives,
In whom the brightness blazes -
your heart a chapel, an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen the fire that shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope,
in love that illumines
every broken thing it finds.

- *Excerpted from Circle of Grace by Jan Richardson*

“Into the Quiet God Calls You” by Liam Lawton, album Castle of the Soul

Into the quiet God calls you,
Calls you each by name
Into the quiet God calls you.
Enter God’s dwelling,
God’s Love foretelling,
On this day of days.