



Advent 2023, Week 4 Reflection

DISCOMFORT, CURIOSITY, AND RESPONDING TO GOD

Welcome to the Fourth (and final) Week of the Advent audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. As we conclude our series and make final preparations for Christmas, recall the beginning of your Advent journey. Where were you four weeks ago? What were you feeling, discerning, anticipating? How have things shifted since then? Imagine there is an Advent wreath around your heart. Take a moment to light each candle as we turn our attention, one last time, to this week's theme: "Discomfort, Curiosity, and Responding to God." This reflection was written by Katie Laskey, an alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Washington, DC...

...

This weekend, we get to pray with the great story of the Annunciation, where the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and tells her that she will bear the Son of God into the world. Often I have heard people reflect on Mary's great 'yes', but recently, Catholic speaker Mike Patin highlighted another aspect of the story while I attended a summer retreat for campus and youth ministers at Notre Dame. When Gabriel first speaks to her, Mary is "greatly troubled at what was said." Greatly troubled! Perplexed! Confused and even disturbed. This is her initial reaction to God's call. This is perhaps the most relatable and comforting part of the story - Mary doesn't say yes immediately with no thoughtfulness or reservation. She is rightfully shaken by this astounding news.

While my next step in an uncomfortable situation might be avoidance, Mary does something different. She asks a question - How can this be? She is truly curious about this message and what it could mean. Her question shows a desire to understand God's will. And finally, we get around to the 'yes.' The words Gabriel uses would have clued Mary into the Jewish teachings on the Messiah that she learned from Scripture as a child. Mary was able to say yes because she allowed herself to be uncomfortable, got curious about God's will, and made herself available to cooperate with God's grace.



¹ ["The Annunciation", bas relief \(about 1320-1330\) by Lorenzo Maitani \(Siena, before 1275-Orvieto 1330\) and disciples - Cathedral of Orvieto" by Carlo Raso](#)

In the summer of 2022, I had no idea what I was going to do next. I had just left my teaching job, yet another casualty of teacher burnout during the pandemic. I was uncomfortable and

discouraged. I naively thought I would be teaching in a classroom for the rest of my life, but the situation became untenable for my mental and physical health. I sensed God's invitation to rest in the uncertainty, to take time for myself to heal, and to open myself to new possibilities that had not yet been revealed.

After a few weeks of rejuvenation, I got curious. What could I do next? How might my skills as a teacher translate to other fields? Could I find work that allowed me to still spend time with students? Eventually, I saw a job posting in my city: Coordinator of Youth Ministry. "Huh," I thought. "I always loved youth group. That could be cool." To be clear, I am not a theology major and had never planned to pursue parish ministry. But my interest was piqued, and I submitted my application. Through the interview process, I came to learn more about the Ignatian identity of the parish, their hope for youth, and their desire for someone to build a new vision of what youth ministry could be at the parish.

A week or two after the final interview, I received the offer to work there as a full-time youth minister. I took some time to think it over, pray about it, and discuss it with trusted family and friends. Ultimately, I was able to say 'yes.'

This all came together in less than a month, honestly a much quicker timeline than most job-seekers experience. Sometimes each phase of discernment and transformation - discomfort, curiosity, response - can last months or years. Regardless of the timeline, the model set by Mary is essential to growing closer to God. By letting go of control and offering my discomfort and questions up to God, I was opened to a new path that I may have ignored before.

We are not sinless like Mary, but we can follow her lead. We can sit with uncomfortable truths and emotions. We can ask curious questions to deepen our understanding. And we can find space to say 'yes' to God's invitation in our lives. As we prepare to welcome Jesus into the world and into our hearts, let us pray for the courage to be uncomfortable, to get curious, and to ultimately respond wholeheartedly to our loving Creator.

...

With full hearts, we thank you for journeying through Advent with us. We hope this audio retreat served as a catalyst for your own prayer, reflection, and discussion. From all of us at Jesuit Connections and the Office of Ignatian Spirituality, we wish you and yours a merry and meaningful Christian season. May God help you "Stay Awake and Slow Down." May God illuminate your gifts and help you celebrate them as essential to God's story. May God bring you joy and patience in this waiting season. May God grant you the grace, curiosity, and courage to hear and respond to God's invitations in your life. And may God help you to be bearers of peace, justice, and mercy for all in the year to come!

Reflection questions:

- When have you been disturbed or challenged by God's Word?
 - How are you making yourself available to God in your daily life?
-



Opening & Closing Prayers

“Gabriel’s Annunciation” by Jan Richardson

For a moment
I hesitated
on the threshold.
For the space
of a breath
I paused,
unwilling to disturb
her last ordinary moment,
knowing that the next step
would cleave her life:
that this day
would slice her story
in two,
dividing all the days before
from all the ones
to come.

The artists would later
depict the scene:
Mary dazzled
by the archangel,
her head bowed
in humble assent,
awed by the messenger
who condescended
to leave paradise
to bestow such an honor
upon a woman, and mortal.

Yet I tell you
it was I who was dazzled,
I who found myself agape
when I came upon her—
reading, at the loom, in the kitchen,
I cannot now recall;
only that the woman before me—
blessed and full of grace
long before I called her so—
shimmered with how completely
she inhabited herself,
inhabited the space around her,

inhabited the moment
that hung between us.

I wanted to save her
from what I had been sent
to say.

Yet when the time came,
when I had stammered
the invitation
(history would not record
the sweat on my brow,
the pounding of my heart;
would not note
that I said
Do not be afraid
to myself as much as
to her)
it was she
who saved me—
her first deliverance—
her *Let it be*
not just declaration
to the Divine
but a word of solace,
of soothing,
of benediction

for the angel
in the doorway
who would hesitate
one last time—
just for the space
of a breath
torn from his chest—
before wrenching himself away
from her radiant consent,
her beautiful and
awful yes.



“Draw Me Into Your Friendship” adapted from the prayer by Fr. Joseph Tetlow, SJ

Lord Jesus, from the start
you invite ordinary people to come to you.
When they come, you welcome them
and call them to walk with you,
to labor and rejoice with you.
You are the most beautiful among all human beings,
and I hardly believe you want me for your friend.
Lord, by the power of your love
draw me ever more deeply
into your friendship
and lead me along the way you took:
the way that leads to truth and life.