



## Advent 2021, Week 2 Reflection

# Peace in Suffering

Welcome to the Second Week of the Advent audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections and Charis Ministries. If you haven't listened to last week's reflection about "unveiling hope" 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 today, feeling yourself held by the chair, the ground, and by God as we explore this week's theme: "Peace in Suffering..."



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I must admit that in 2021 I am guilty of donning the robe of mourning and misery that Baruch writes of in this week's first reading. I often turn on the radio during my morning commute and am confronted with bleak news. Climate change threatens endangered animal species, not to mention the homes of our fellow humans living in coastal areas. Racism continues to plague our country and contributes to increasing rates of poverty and health inequity. Political polarization threatens cooperation in our government. And violence tears at the fabric of already struggling communities.

As I hear about these many forms of suffering in our world, it can be difficult to access peace, the traditional theme of Advent's second week. In this week's readings, as is often the case in Scripture, those who suffer are rewarded: "Although they go forth weeping... They shall come back rejoicing" (Psalms 126:6.). But it is increasingly difficult to think of the suffering in our world today in such simplistic terms. I wonder: is the purpose of increasingly common natural disasters to bring us closer to salvation? As we make our way through year two of a devastating pandemic, can we justify sickness and death by claiming that it has all brought us closer to God? Can we look at poor and marginalized populations, who we know are more vulnerable to natural disasters, pandemics, and community violence, and think: great will be their reward in heaven? While it is tempting to wrap up suffering in nice, neat packages, we risk reducing the pain of others to a one dimensional platitude. How can we challenge ourselves to come to a different conclusion? Something that cannot be tied up with a bow, but that reflects the messiness and complexity of this current time?



I walk through this darkness and despair. I reject the easy explanations that tend to pacify me into complacency. And this Advent, I try to arrive at new conclusions. Of course, after describing such suffering, this week's readings call us not only to peace, but to joy as well. And what a challenge that is: to shed the robe of mourning and misery, and by some spiritual transformation, arrive at joy. When considering how that is possible, I look to Mary as an example. Surely she felt overwhelmed by the task of serving as mother to a Divine Child, but still she managed to say yes. And this leads me to ask: what can we say yes to? As we survey the suffering around us, can we find an invitation to some courageous act? In the company of mercy and justice, can I summon the motivation to make some small contribution towards a better world? Can I open myself to sharing some of this pain, knowing that through vulnerability I can form authentic connections? Can I muster the energy to challenge myself to reject fear and choose love?

If, amidst the pain surrounding us, we can recognize an invitation and emulate Mary's yes, we too can contribute to preparing a way for the Lord. It may be messy, and the path may be winding, but by navigating through mourning and misery towards peace and joy, we can prepare for Christmas.

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*This week's reflection on "Peace in Suffering" was written by Aimee Della Porta, a 2017 alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Philadelphia. We at Ignatian Young Adult Ministries want to thank you for sharing your Advent journey with us. Join us next week when we ponder "Gratitude and Joy."*

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## **Reflection questions:**

- Spend time with the sixth line of Psalm 126: "Although they go forth weeping... They shall come back rejoicing." What is God inviting you to mourn these days? Where is God leading you into joy?
- What easy explanations-- about the meaning of Scripture or Christian teachings, or about sources and situations of suffering and injustice-- tend to pacify you into despair and complacency? How might you, like the author of this week's reflection, arrive at new conclusions?
- How do you feel called to prepare a way for the Lord this season? What one, small, concrete act might help you begin?