

DAYbreaks

Daily
Reflections for
Advent and
Christmas

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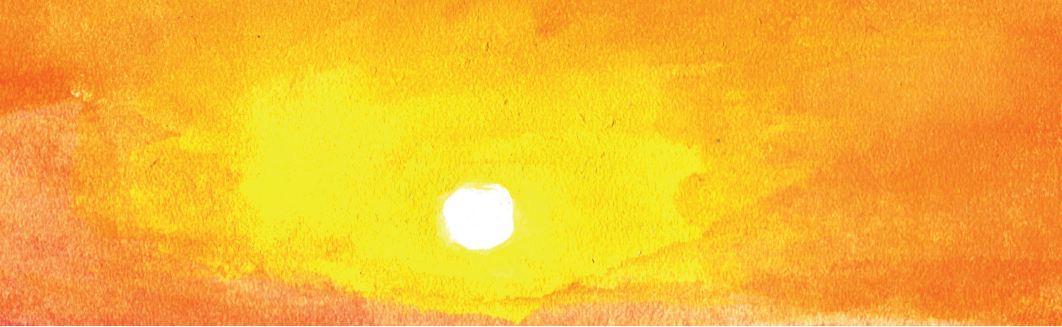
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PRAYER

I am going to strive to be productive for as long as I can.

I am going to make every day and every activity as precious and enjoyable as possible.

I am going to strive to be as gracious, warm, and charitable as possible.

I am going to strive to be healthy as long as I can.

I am going to strive to accept others for a deeper way than I have up to now.

I am going to strive to live a more fully "reconciled" life.
No room for past hurts anymore.

I am going to strive to keep my sense of humor intact.

I am going to strive to be as courageous and brave as I can.

I am going to strive, always, to never look on what I am losing but rather to look at how wonderful and full my life has been and is.

And I am going to, daily, lay all of this at God's feet through prayer. Amen.

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SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Staying Awake and Waiting Patiently

Second Sunday of Advent

And do this because you know the time; it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

ROMANS 13:11

Staying Awake

In his autobiography, *Report to Greco*, Greek philosopher and writer Nikos Kazantzakis recounts a conversation he once had with an old monk. Kazantzakis, a young man at the time, was visiting a monastery and was very taken by a famed ascetic who lived there, Fr. Makarios, and asked him for some spiritual advice. The old monk said simply: “Wake up, my child. Wake up before death wakes you up.”

Jesus is always telling us to wake up, to stay awake, to be vigilant. What does he mean by that? How are we asleep?

All of us know how difficult it is for us to be inside the present moment, to not be asleep to the real riches inside our own lives. The distractions and worries of daily life tend to so consume us that we habitually take for granted what’s most precious to us: our health, the miracle of our senses, the love and friendships that surround us, and the gift of life itself. We go through our daily lives not only with a lack of reflectiveness and gratitude but often with a habitual touch of resentment as well, a chronic, gray depression. We are very much asleep, both to God and to our own lives.

How do we wake up? Today there’s a rich literature that offers us all kinds of advice on how to get into the present moment so we can be awake to the deep riches inside our own lives. While much of this literature is good, little of it is very effective. It invites us to live each day of our lives as if it were our last day, but we simply can’t do that. It’s impossible to sustain that kind of intentionality and awareness over a long time. An awareness of our mortality does wake us up—a stroke, a heart attack, or cancer—but that heightened awareness is easier to

sustain for a short season of our lives than it is for twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years. Nobody can sustain that kind of awareness all the time. Or can we?

Spiritual wisdom offers a nuanced answer: We can and we can't! On the one hand, the distractions, cares, and pressures of everyday life will invariably have their way with us and we will, in effect, fall asleep to what's deeper and more important inside of life. But it's for this reason that every major spiritual tradition has daily rituals designed precisely to wake us from spiritual sleep, akin to an alarm clock waking us from physical sleep.

None of us lives each day as if it were his or her last. Our heartaches, headaches, distractions, and busyness invariably lull us to sleep. That's forgivable; it's what it means to be human. So it's important that we make sure we have regular spiritual rituals, prayer, and Eucharist to jolt us back awake—so that it doesn't take a heart attack, a stroke, cancer—or death—to wake us up.





Friday

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

The Arrival of the Kingdom

Most of us are well-intentioned, but we push the things we need to change in our lives off into the future: *Yes, I need to do this, but I'm not ready yet. I want more time. Sometime in the future I'll do this.*

When Jesus says he has come to bring us new life, he is not talking simply about our future lives in heaven. He is also talking about our lives here, now. The new life is already here, he assures us.

Jesus preached this very clearly, and the problem was not that his hearers didn't understand him. They understood. But, almost universally, they resisted that message. Having God become concrete in their lives was far too threatening.

We're like the guests in the Gospel parable who are invited to a wedding banquet. We all want to go to the feast. We intend to go to the feast. But first we need to attend to our marriages, our businesses, our ambitions. We can get serious later.

You may be familiar with the infamous prayer of St. Augustine. If not, I suggest you look it up. After converting to Christianity at age twenty-five, he struggled for another nine years to bring his sexuality into harmony with his faith. Sometime during those nine years, he asked God to "grant me chastity...but not yet." To his credit, unlike many people, at least he eventually stopped pushing things into the indefinite future.

Heaven is here.

Is having God as a force in our lives too threatening?



Saturday

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

God's Quiet Presence

The poet Rumi submits that we live with a deep secret that sometimes we know, and then not. That concept can be helpful in understanding our faith. One reason we struggle with faith is that God's presence inside us and in our world is rarely dramatic, overwhelming, sensational, something impossible to ignore. God doesn't work like that. Rather, God's presence—much to our frustration and loss of patience sometimes—is something that lies quiet and seemingly helpless inside us. It rarely makes a huge splash.

Because we are not sufficiently aware of this, we tend to misread the dynamics of faith and find ourselves habitually trying to ground our faith in precisely something that is loud and dramatic. We are thus looking for something beyond the gifts God gives us.

But we can learn from the very way God was born into our world that faith needs to ground itself on something that is quiet and undramatic. Jesus, as we know, was born into our world with no fanfare and no power, a baby helpless in the straw, another child among millions. The God that Jesus incarnates is neither dramatic nor splashy.

This is important for understanding faith. God lies inside us as an invitation that fully respects our freedom, never overpowering us. God also never goes away. God-as-invitation lies there precisely like a baby in the straw, gently beckoning us but helpless. God can't make us pick up and accept his invitation.

God lies like a baby in the straw, gently beckoning us but helpless.

Drawing on Scripture, literature, and personal experience, Fr. Ron Rolheiser shows God's love in such abundance that our souls yearn for that love. God lies inside us as an invitation that fully respects our freedom, never overpowering us, never leaving us. God-as-invitation, precisely like a baby lying in the straw, gently beckons us, but he's helpless. God can't make us pick up and accept his invitation.

For each day of Advent and through the octave of Christmas, *Daybreaks* invites you to pray and wait for the coming of the Messiah, the word made flesh.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

JOHN 3:16



RON ROLHEISER, OMI, is an internationally renowned spiritual author, speaker, and community builder. He

has a master's degree in theology from the University of San Francisco, and a PhD and an SThD from the University of Louvain, Belgium. Fr. Ron is a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio.

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