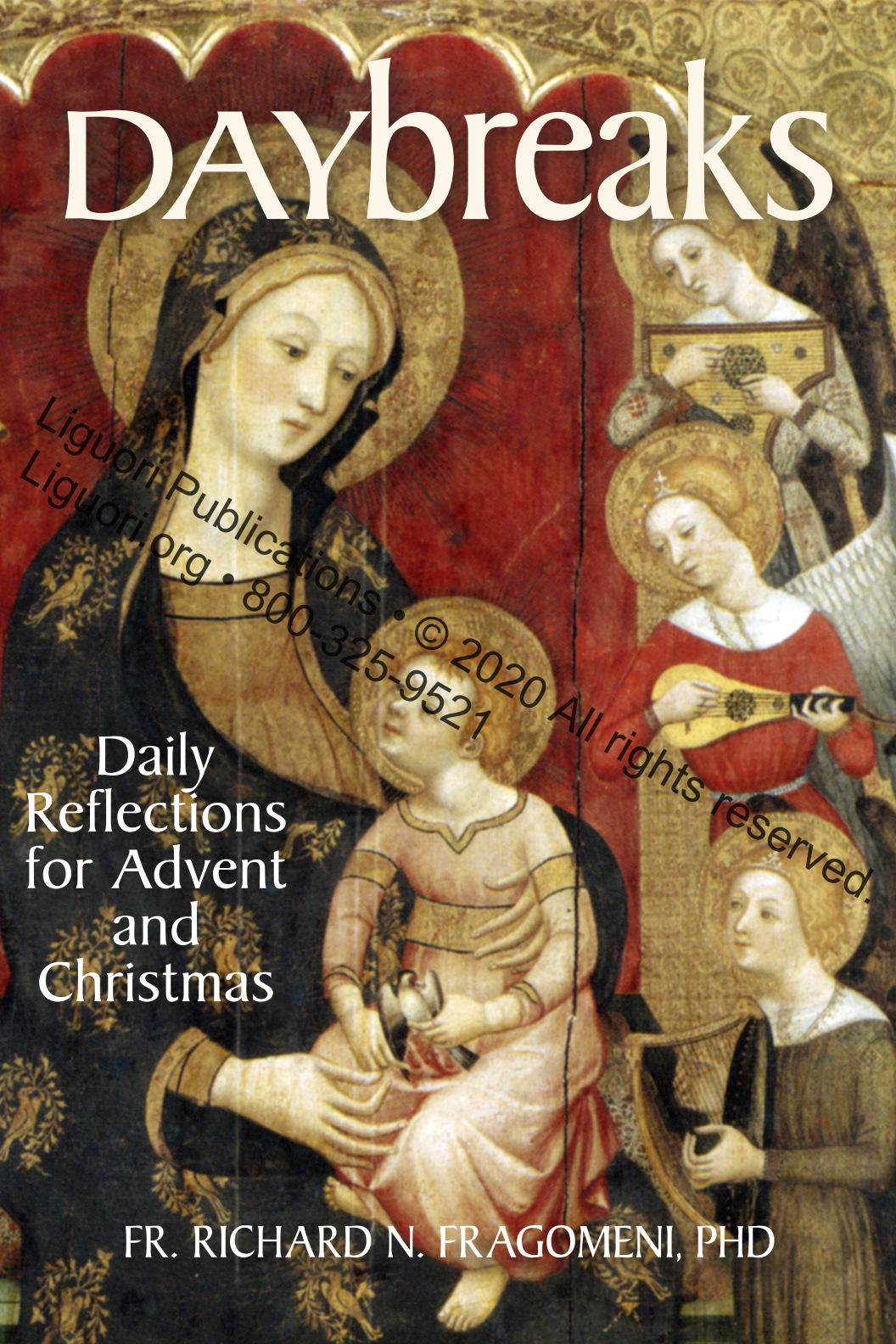


DAYbreaks

The background of the entire page is a medieval manuscript illumination. It depicts the Virgin Mary seated on the left, wearing a dark blue mantle over a red gown, holding the Christ Child on her lap. The Christ Child is wearing a pink and red robe and holding a small object. To the right, three angels are shown: one at the top playing a lute, one in the middle playing a stringed instrument, and one at the bottom playing a harp. The background is a deep red with gold leaf patterns.

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Daily
Reflections
for Advent
and
Christmas

FR. RICHARD N. FRAGOMENI, PHD

Introduction



Even during the most difficult of times there are moments filled with unique rituals of care and creativity. They bring out hope that the best in humanity, beyond narrow boundaries and egocentric concerns, will blossom and bloom like Isaiah's deserts and mountaintops. This reality gives testimony to both the shadow and the shine of the human community. They offer an icon of what could be our nefarious demons or our herald angels.

As Charles Dickens writes in his 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*:
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

"Quarantine," now a common word, comes from *quarantena*, meaning "forty days." It was used in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Venetian language and designated an isolation period that passengers on incoming ships were required to follow during the bubonic plague known as Black Death. These days we can see a period of isolation as a sacred time to meditate on what is going on inside of what is going on: the promise of Emmanuel—"God with us"—is an invitation for transformation.

The Advent and Christmas season indicates the dawn of a new era and where darkness is the birthplace of light. It calls us to awaken from our slumber, to deeply embrace the incarnate mystery of God among us, and inhabit a time of interiority known as *Kairos* time. Kairos does not represent the chronological counting of days until Christmas. Rather, it is a time when we are summoned into a new appreciation of the divine

indwelling that lights the stars of night and beckons us to cry, “*Veni, Veni, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.*” We anticipate the hope of the ages as we look east for the coming of our Savior. Behold, the time of your deliverance is at hand.

The meditations that follow are inspired by classical hymn texts of Advent and Christmas. My intent in quoting them is to instill a requisite for pause in this sacred time of waiting. Let us learn that patience and faith are siblings; hope and joy are twins. And let us hear the poetry of this season with fresh hearts as we ponder with Mary the words of the angel: nothing is impossible with God.

FR. RICHARD N. FRAGOMENI, PHD

Daybreaks

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FIRST *Sunday* OF ADVENT

O Come, Divine Messiah

O come, Divine Messiah!

*The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.*

Refrain:

*Dear Savior, haste;
Come, come to earth,
Dispel the night and show your face,
And bid us hail the dawn of grace.*



We begin our Advent journey with an eighteenth-century French carol, “Venez, Divin Messie” (“O come, Divine Messiah”). Simon-Joseph Pellegrin—a French poet and playwright—wrote the text and set these words to a sixteenth-century French melody. Sr. Mary of St. Philip, a member of the English community of the Sisters of Notre Dame, translated the piece from French to English in 1877.

During this opening week of this holy season, let us meditate on the first verse and refrain of “Venez, Divin Messie.” The festive nature of this folk tune gives this hymn an important place in the celebration of Advent. You may be wondering why I am using hymn texts as the lead-in material of *Daybreaks* instead of Scripture.

I have always been enchanted by poetry and wanted to write a series of meditations based on Advent and Christmas hymn text. I am grateful for this opportunity. I see poetry as an invitation into an inner world that rarely can be entered with prose, especially the prose we encounter these days. Walter Brueggemann makes a similar claim in his book on preaching, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation*. He implores preachers to become poets and laments that we live in a flattened-



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prose world. Tweets and text messages, emojis, sound bites, and slang fill our ears. Flattened prose reinforces a flattened world where speech and communication become banalities and lack the freshness and depth of the inner world of our humanity and our souls. This dullness also tends to enter our churches and spill over into homilies, prayers, and devotions. Biblical texts can become so familiar to us that they morph into platitudes that fail to pierce our hearts with passion. Brueggemann insists that preaching is an art form. It is a poetry that unleashes the Scripture to sing its music and give us a glimpse of the beauty of God's reign.

I believe the poetry of our singing proclaims Scripture, making it alive in the harmonies of the assembly of praise. Weathered by time, this classic repertoire of our liturgy is scriptural, albeit not literally, but faithfully. May you allow these poetic verses to soar with anticipated grace into your hearts and lead you into the infinitely comprehensible mystery of the Incarnate Word, written by the Divine Poet.

Monday



O come,
Divine Messiah

*O come, Divine Messiah;
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.*

The words that begin our Advent hymn are also the words that conclude the New Testament: *Veni, Domine Jesu*: Come, Lord Jesus. This cry of longing for Christ echoes Christ's very cry of longing for us.

O come

Come, follow me.

Come, and stay with me.

Come, unto me.

Come and rest.

Come to the waters.

Come to the feast.

Come, take up your cross.

Come, be my disciples.

Come, walk on the water.

Come, touch my wounded side.

Come, do not be afraid.

Behold, I am coming very soon.

What an interesting twist—one that has been noted by spiritual writers throughout the centuries. It is not we who are the primary pursuers in the sacred drama of life. Rather, it is God who summons us. Our crying out, “O Come, Divine Messiah,” is a faint echo compared to the huge boom of God’s voice calling all of creation into being.

Our cry, “*Venez, O Come, Veni,*” comes from deep within. The call of God is imprinted there. Our cries relay a longing for God, filled with the anxiety of waiting to be received. We cry out, “O Come,” so we might become aware of the mystical good news that what we long for is already here, crying out for us. God’s cry and our cry are one in the longing for holiness and wholeness, for goodness, truth, and beauty. The longing of divinity for us is indistinguishable from the longing of humanity for God. It is all a gift.

As Advent begins, what is God longing for in you?