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The Gift of Advent: *Daily Reflections for Waiting*

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FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

SUNDAY: THE RHYTHM OF LOVE

In *The Living Flame of Love*, St. John of the Cross compares our pre-Advent selves to green logs thrown into the fire of love. Green logs don't immediately burst into flames; being young and full of moisture, they sizzle until they reach kindling temperature. Then they take on the fire around them. Similar is the rhythm of love: Only the mature can burst into flame within community.

The spirituality of Advent is about waiting without premature resolution to help facilitate the change and experience the fullness of love's rhythm. Giving birth to what's divine requires the patience of gestation. The sublime has to be waited for. In short, that's Advent.

MONDAY: THE FIRE INSIDE

We all ache for someone or something that we haven't yet known. We ache in a way that leaves us restless. God is the hand behind this "intolerable shirt of flame," as T.S. Eliot puts it. God made us to crave the infinite and be dissatisfied with everything else until that love is consummated.

Advent celebrates human longing. It asks us to enter into and deepen our longings until we undergo metamorphosis. Longing leads us to the manger of

Bethlehem and carves out a trough within our soul into which God can be born.

TUESDAY: HEALTHY CHASTITY

American educator and author Allan Bloom suggests that lack of chastity is the leading cause of unhappiness among young people. He states: "Young people have experienced everything. But they've never had anything sublime in their lives because sublimity depends upon waiting, and waiting depends upon chastity."

Today in Western culture, chastity is often denigrated. But healthy chastity is more about reverence and respect than about sex. Advent celebrates the virtues of waiting and chastity, both by pointing desire toward its adequate object and by teaching us to wait.

WEDNESDAY: LONELINESS, LONGING

In her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes: "There is a loneliness that can be rocked....Then there is a loneliness that roams."

We all experience the latter. What's to be gleaned from our wandering? We learn that we are more—more than any one moment in our life, more than the limits of our bodies or relationships. Longing lets us touch, through desire, God's deep design for us. Ultimately our longings are about consummation, harmony, and justice. Advent is about getting in touch with our longing and letting it teach us

that we are more than the limits of our present.

THURSDAY: THE ALGEBRA OF ADVENT

In the best-selling book that was turned into a popular movie, *The Bridges of Madison County*, a photographer travels to the county, where he gets lost and stops at a farmhouse to ask for directions. As chance would have it, the wife of the house is home alone. She and the photographer sense a deep connection; a love affair is triggered. Both are left sacramentally scarred. It's implied that something truly sublime has happened. Is this possible? Can anyone paint a masterpiece or compose a symphony in a couple of hours? Can sex with someone you just met be sublime?

First, to be sublime requires sublimation. Fasting is the necessary prelude to genuine feasting. Greatness of soul is contingent on carrying tension nobly. That's the algebra of Advent.

FRIDAY: THE POWER OF A CANDLE

In South Africa, prior to the abolition of apartheid, people lit candles and placed them in their windows as a sign of hope. But what is hope? Many mistake wishing for hope. Wishing is fantasy; one can wish to win a million dollars but that wish isn't connected to reality. Hope is based upon a promise: God's promise that—human sin and power notwithstanding—justice,