



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

ADAPTED FROM HENRI NOUWEN'S
"IN JOYFUL HOPE: MEDITATIONS FOR ADVENT"



EIKON CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

From James E. Adams, editor

Few Christian writers have articulated the spiritual longings of their contemporaries better than Henri J.M. Nouwen (1932-1996). In more than 40 books during the last three decades, Nouwen always seemed to anticipate the spiritual concerns of readers. Perhaps because he was in touch with himself as a pilgrim in the faith, he could share what he was experiencing in his own spiritual journey. Nouwen drew readers into his spiritual ups and downs, triumphs and defeats, joys and sorrows—not to draw attention to himself but to point both himself and his readers toward the redeeming light of Christ.

What better Advent guide than Nouwen, then, for today's spiritual pilgrim? In Advent we recall—"in joyful hope" as an Advent prayer says—the first coming of Christ in the Incarnation. And we look forward to his Second Coming. But there is also a more personal Advent coming—the presence of Christ in our hearts in the here-and-now of grace-filled moments. It is that presence about which Nouwen wrote so eloquently.

Each reflection herein is from a book by Nouwen. The Scripture verse preceding and the prayer, suggested action or examination of conscience following the text have been added by the editor. Scripture texts are from the New American Bible.

DAY I

DECEMBER 3, 2023

During Advent We Wait With 'A Promise In Our Hearts'

*Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.
For you I wait all the long day, because of your goodness, Lord.
~ Psalm 25:5 ~*

Waiting is essential to the spiritual life. But waiting as a disciple of Jesus is not an empty waiting. It is a waiting with a promise in our hearts that makes already present what we are waiting for. We wait during Advent for the birth of Jesus. We wait after Easter for the coming of the Spirit, and after the Ascension of Jesus we wait for his coming again in glory. We are always waiting, but it is a waiting in the conviction that we have already seen God's footsteps.

Waiting for God is an active, alert-yes, joyful-waiting. As we wait we remember him for whom we are waiting, and as we remember him we create a community ready to welcome him when he comes.

“
*Lord, by your grace may I learn the art of waiting for you and your gifts
with an eager and joyful heart.*
”

DAY II

DECEMBER 4, 2023

Waiting Patiently Means 'Living The Present Moment'

*Good is the Lord to one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him;
it is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.
~ Lamentations 3:25-26 ~*

How do we wait for God? We wait with patience. But patience does not mean passivity. Waiting patiently is not like waiting for the bus to come, the rain to stop, or the sun to rise. It is an active waiting in which we live the present moment to the full in order to find there the signs of the One we are waiting for.

The word patience comes from the Latin verb *patior*, which means “to suffer.” Waiting patiently is suffering through the present moment, tasting to the full, and letting the seeds that are sown in the ground on which we stand grow into strong plants. Waiting patiently always means paying attention to what is coming.

“ *Do I fail to appreciate the blessings I have because I am too anxious about the future? What are some practical steps I can take this Advent to help me become more patient, to live more fully the grace of each moment?* ”

DAY III

DECEMBER 5, 2023

Have We Lost Our Identity As Children Of God?

*"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
for although you have hidden these things from the wise
and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike."
~ Luke 10:21 ~*

How much I want to say to you, as Jesus said, "Become like children" (Matthew 18:3). Many of us have become so serious and intense, so filled with preoccupations about the future of the world and the Church, so burdened by our own loneliness and isolation, that our hearts are veiled by a dark sadness, preventing us from exuding the peace and the joy of God's children. You know as well as I that when our words are full of warnings, our eyes full of fears, our bodies full of unfilled needs and our actions full of distrust, we cannot expect ever to create around us a community that shines as a light in the darkness...Yes, indeed, many of us have lost touch with our identity as children of God.

“
*Lord, help us this Advent to lay aside my burdensome preoccupations
and to open my heart in childlike prayer to your Holy Spirit.*
”

'I Am Called To Live At The Place Of Innocence'

*The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack...
Even when I walk through a dark valley, I fear no harm
for you are at my side; your rod and staff give me courage.
~ Psalm 23:1, 4 ~*

I see a lot of suffering in people's faces, but I see also a simple human goodness underlying all the disillusionments of an ever changing life. I keep thinking of innocence, and I sense that beyond all my own darkness there is innocence too...I carry God's innocence in me. Before I am sinful, I am innocent; before I participate in the evil of the world, I am touched with goodness. I realize...that I have to claim that innocence in me. It belongs to my deepest self. It is given to me by God my Creator; it is reclaimed for me by Jesus my Redeemer...

I know that I am called to live at the place of innocence: the place where Jesus chose to live. There he made his home and asks me to make mine. In that place I am loved and well held. There I do not have to be afraid. And from there I can forgive and heal and make things new...I can simply be where I am, listening, seeing, touching in the very moment, always sure that I am not alone but with him who called me to live as God's child.

“

*Lord, help us this Advent to see and appreciate the goodness
and innocence in others - and in myself as well.*

”

Society Doesn't Help Us Break Through To God

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."

~ Matthew 7:24 ~

We modern Westerners are so busy with ourselves, so preoccupied with the question of whether we do justice to our own selves, that the experience of the "transcendent" becomes practically impossible. In the way of thinking which involves talking, discussing, analyzing, and criticizing, in which one opinion asks the other for attention, in which belief is replaced more and more by an endless list of conceptions, opinions, visions, and ideas which whirl around as paper boats on the sea—in this way of thinking there is scarcely room for the Spirit who speaks whenever we are silent and who comes in whenever we have emptied ourselves. Instead of making ourselves susceptible to the experience of the transcendent God we, busy about many things, begin to seek after the small, flighty sensations brought about by artificial stimulation of the senses.

“*Lord, I confess that much of my daily life is absorbed either in self centered concerns or in flighty sensations. Help me this Advent to open my heart so that I may know, love and serve you better.*”

DAY VI

DECEMBER 8, 2023

We Must Keep Tuned Into What Leads Us Closer To God

Wait for the Lord, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the Lord!

~ Psalm 27:14 ~

If we do not wait patiently in expectation for God's coming in glory, we start wandering around, going from one little sensation to another. Our lives get stuffed with newspaper items, television stories, and gossip. Then our minds lose the discipline of discerning between what leads us closer to God and what doesn't, and our hearts lose their spiritual sensitivity.

Without waiting for the second coming of Christ, we will stagnate and become tempted to indulge in whatever gives us a moment of pleasure...but when we have the Lord to look forward to, we can already experience him in the waiting.

“ *Do I try to live with an 'Advent awareness' that God is always ready to come to me with his saving power? What am I doing in my daily life to increase that awareness? What things must I cut out because they are moving me away from God?* ”

Spiritual Maturity Means Daring To Ask For Help

*The Lord will be gracious to you when you cry out; as soon as he hears
he will answer you. He will give you the bread you need and the water
for which you thirst.
~ Isaiah 30:19-20 ~*

I feel within me a strong desire to live my life on my own. In fact, my society praises the self-made people who are in control of their destinies, set their own goals, fulfill their own aspirations, and build their own kingdoms. It is very hard for me to truly believe that spiritual maturity is a willingness to let others guide me and lead me even where I would rather not go” (John 21:18). And still, every time I am willing to break out of my false needs for self-sufficiency and dare to ask for help, a new community emerges—a fellowship of the weak-strong in the trust that together we can be a people of hope in a broken world...

To receive help, support, guidance, affections, and care may well be a greater call than that of giving all these things because in receiving | reveal the gift to the givers and a new life together can begin.

“Am I trying to be too self-sufficient? Have I even made an idol out of gaining control?
Am I refusing to ask for help when I really need it? What can I do within my family
or parish to increase healthy giving and receiving?”

Don't Let Your Mind Become 'The Garbage Can Of The World'

This is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

~ Philipians 1:9-10 ~

Through spiritual reading we have some say over what enters into our minds. Each day our society bombards us with a myriad of images and sounds... each image or word demanding our attention in all sorts of sizes and colors and with all sorts of gestures and noises. The words yell and scream at us: “Eat me, drink me, buy me, hire me, look at me, talk with me, sleep with me!” Whether we ask for it or not is not the question; we simply cannot go far without being engulfed by words and images forcibly intruding themselves into our minds.

But do we really want our mind to become the garbage can of the world? Do we want our mind to be filled with things that confuse us, excite us, depress us, arouse us, repulse us, or attract us whether we think it is good for us or not? Do we want to let others decide what enters into our mind and determines our thoughts and feelings?

Clearly, we do not, but it requires real discipline to let God and not the world be the Lord of our mind.

“ *O Lord, help me this Advent to reduce my daily input of distractions, and to see and appreciate the realities of faith, to treasure the things that really matter.* ”

Look For Ways To Turn 'Fatalism Into Faith'

Strengthen the hands that are feeble.

*Make firm the knees that are weak. Say to those whose hearts
are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God.*

~ Isaiah 35:3-4 ~

We are always tempted with fatalism...the attitude that makes us live as passive victims of exterior circumstances beyond our control. The opposite of fatalism is faith. Faith is the deep trust that God's love is stronger than all the anonymous powers of the world and can transform us from victims of darkness into servants of life.

After Jesus drove out the demon from a lunatic boy, his disciples asked: "Why were we unable to cast it out?" Jesus answered: "Because you have little faith. I tell you solemnly, if your faith were the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it would move; nothing would be impossible for you" (Mt 17:19-20).

It is important to identify the many ways in which we think, speak, or act with fatalism, and, step by step, to convert them into moments of faith. This movement from fatalism to faith is the movement that will remove the cold darkness from our hearts and transform us into people whose trust in the power of love can, indeed, make mountains move.

“ *O Lord, when I am tempted to give up as a victim of fate that is beyond
my control, strengthen my faith, and help me to open myself
to the liberating power of your grace* ”

All Prayer Isn't

'Satisfying Feelings Or Enlightening Insights'

*My soul shall savor the rich banquet of praise...when I think of you
upon my bed, through the night watches I will recall that
you indeed are my help.
~ Psalm 63:6-8 ~*

Without prayer we become deaf to the voice of divine love and become confused by the many competing voices asking for our attention. How difficult that is! When we sit down for half an hour-without talking to someone, listening to music, watching television, or reading a book-and try to become very still, we often find ourselves so overwhelmed by our noisy inner voices that we can hardly wait to get busy and distracted again. Our inner life often looks like a banana tree full of jumping monkeys! But when we decide not to run away and stay focused, the monkeys may gradually go away because of lack of attention, and the soft gentle voice calling us the beloved (son or daughter of God) may gradually make itself heard. Much of Jesus' prayer took place during the night. "Night" means more than the absence of sun. It also means the absence of satisfying feelings or enlightening insights. That's why it is so hard to be faithful. But God is greater than our hearts and minds, and keeps calling us the beloved...at a level far beyond all feelings and thoughts.

“

Help me, Lord, to listen daily in prayer to your voice that is always reminding me that I am your adopted child, your beloved offspring.

”

Have You Lost Your Dreams?

*They that hope in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar
as with eagles' wings; they will run and not grow weary,
walk and not grow faint.
~ Isaiah 40:31 ~*

Nobody can escape the agonizing losses that are part of our everyday existence—the loss of our dreams. We had thought so long of ourselves as successful, liked, and deeply loved. We had hoped for a life of generosity, service, and self-sacrifice. We had planned to become forgiving, caring, and always gentle people. We had a vision of ourselves as reconcilers and peacemakers. But somehow—we aren't even sure of what happened—we lost our dreams. We became worrying, anxious people clinging to the few things we had collected and exchanging with one another news of the political, social, and ecclesiastical scandals of our day. It is this loss of spirit that is often hardest to acknowledge and the most difficult to confess.

“ *Do I still have concrete spiritual goals? What am I doing to reach them?
Do I need the help of a friend or associate to reflect on how I can restore
my loss of spirit?* ”

This Is The Truth I Must Claim: That I Am God's Beloved

*"Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken,
my love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken,"
says the Lord.
~ Isaiah 54:10 ~*

Aren't you, like me, hoping that some person, thing or event will come along to give you that final feeling of inner well-being you desire? Don't you often hope: "May this book, idea, course, trip, job, country or relationship fulfill my deepest desire." But as long as you are waiting for that mysterious moment you will go on running helter-skelter, always anxious and restless, always lustful and angry, never fully satisfied. You know that this is the compulsiveness that keeps us going and busy, but at the same time makes us wonder whether we are getting anywhere in the long run. This is the way to spiritual exhaustion and burn out. This is the way to spiritual death.

Well, you and I don't have to kill ourselves. We are the Beloved. We are intimately loved long before our parents, teachers, spouses, children and friends loved or wounded us. That's the truth of our lives. That's the truth I want you to claim for yourself. That's the truth spoken by the voice that says, "You are my Beloved."

“ *How do I seek my feelings of inner well-being? Through social conformity?
Through success at my job? Through success at sports or fitness?
Through money and material security? Through a favorable reputation?* ”

The Word of God Holds The Power To Heal Us

"I, the Lord, your God, teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go. If you would harken to my commandments, your prosperity would be like a river."

~ Isaiah 48:17-18 ~

At every Eucharist, the word that is read and spoken wants to lead us into God's presence and transform our hearts and minds. Often we think about the word as an exhortation to go out and change our lives. But the full power of the word lies, not in how we apply it to our lives after we have heard it, but in its transforming power that does its divine work as we listen. The Word of God is not a word to apply in our daily lives at some later date; it is a word to heal us through, and in, our listening here and now.

At first this might sound quite new for a person living in a society in which the main value of the word is its applicability. But most of us know already, generally unconsciously, of the healing and destroying power of the spoken word. When someone says to me, "I love you," or "I hate you," I am not just receiving some useful information. These words do something in me. They make my blood move, my heart beat, my breathing speed up. They make me feel and think differently. They lift me up to a new way of being and give me another knowledge of myself. These words have the power to heal or to destroy me.

“ *Am I trying to live a life of “harkening” to God’s commands? Am I hearing God’s word and allowing it to change me? Am I careful with the words I use, aware of how words can heal or harm others?* ”

In Prayer We Admit That We Need God's Help

*Stir up your power, come to save us. O Lord of hosts, restore us;
let your face shine upon us that we may be saved.*

~ Psalm 80:3-4 ~

Prayer requires that we stand in God's presence with open hands, naked and vulnerable, proclaiming to ourselves and to others that without God we can do nothing. This is difficult in a climate where the predominant counsel is "Do your best and God will do the rest." When life is divided into "our best" and "God's rest," we have turned prayer into a last resort to be used only when all our own resources are depleted. Then even the Lord has become the victim of our impatience. Discipleship does not mean to use God when we can no longer function ourselves. On the contrary, it means to recognize that we can do nothing at all, but that God can do everything through us. As disciples, we find not some but all of our strength, hope, courage, and confidence in God. Therefore, prayer must be our first concern.

“

How often do I turn to God as a last resort when all else fails?

Do I ever turn to God as my first resort?

Is prayer one of the top priorities of my life?

”

God Is A Lover Who Wants To Be Loved

*The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love; he will sing joyfully because of you, as one sings at festivals.
~ Zephaniah 3:17 ~*

Life is a God-given opportunity to become who we are, to affirm our own true spiritual nature, claim our truth, appropriate and integrate the reality of our being, but most of all, to say “Yes” to the One who calls us the Beloved.

The unfathomable mystery of God is that God is a Lover who wants to be loved. The one who created us is waiting for our response to the love that gave us our being. God not only says “You are my beloved.” God also asks: “Do you love me?” and offers us countless chances to say “Yes.” That is the spiritual life: the chance to say “Yes” to our inner truth. The spiritual life, thus understood, radically changes everything...At every point in the journey there is the choice to say “Yes” and the choice to say “No.”

“

Am I drifting in my spiritual life? What do I need to do this Advent to revive my commitment to say “Yes” to God daily?

”

'The Painful Truth Of Our Own Brokenness'

When the just cry out, the Lord hears and rescues them from all distress.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted.

~ Psalm 34:18-19 ~

What do we do with the losses that are an inevitable part of our lives? Are we hiding them? Are we going to live as if they weren't real? Are we going to keep them away from others? Are we going to convince ourselves or others that our losses are little compared to our gains? Are we going to blame someone? We do all of these things most of the time, but there is another possibility: the possibility of mourning. Yes, we must mourn our losses. We cannot talk or act them away, but we can shed tears over them and allow ourselves to grieve deeply. To grieve is to allow our losses to tear apart feelings of security and safety and lead us to the painful truth of our own brokenness. Our grief makes us experience the abyss of our own life...

As we feel the pain of our own losses, our grieving hearts open our inner eye to the world in which losses are suffered far beyond our own little world of family, friends, and colleagues. It is the world of prisoners, refugees, AIDS patients, starving children, and the countless human beings living in constant fear. Then the pain of our crying hearts connects us with the moaning and groaning of a suffering humanity. Then our mourning becomes larger than ourselves.

“ *What losses in my life am I failing to deal with adequately? Do I need to do more grieving? Or am I stuck in the grieving process and failing to move on? Am I “brokenhearted about the right things”?* ”

DAY XVII

DECEMBER 19, 2023

The Gospel Isn't A Call To Be 'Ordinary And Proper'

But you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

~ 1 Peter 2:9 ~

The Gospels confront us with a persistent voice inviting us to move from where it is comfortable, from where we want to stay, from where we feel at home...We must realize the extent to which we are preoccupied with adapting ourselves to the prevalent norms and values of our milieu. We want to be ordinary and proper people who live ordinary and proper lives. There is an enormous pressure on us to do what is ordinary and proper even the attempt to excel is ordinary and proper-and thus find the satisfaction of general acceptance. This is quite understandable since the ordinary and proper behavior that gives shape under control and that everything extraordinary and improper can be kept outside the walls of our self-created fortress.

“ *Jesus, forgive me for the times I try to get by with cheap and comfortable discipleship. I resolve this Advent to meditate anew on the high standards the Gospel calls me to in every phase of my life.* ”

'A Happy Life Is A Life For Others'

"Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in turn be measured out to you."

~ Luke 6:38 ~

Have you ever noticed the joy of a mother when she sees her baby smile? The baby's smile is a gift to the mother who is grateful to see her baby so happy! What a wonderful mystery this is! Our greatest fulfillment lies in giving ourselves to others. Although it often seems that people give only to receive, I believe that, beyond all our desires to be appreciated, rewarded and acknowledged, there lies a simple and pure desire to give. I remember how I once spent long hours looking in Dutch stores for a birthday gift for my father or mother, simply enjoying being able to give. Our humanity comes to its fullest bloom in giving. We become beautiful people when we give whatever we can give: a smile, a handshake, a kiss, an embrace, a word of love, a present, a part of our life...all of our life...

It is sad to see that, in our highly competitive and greedy world, we have lost touch with the joy of giving. We often live as if our happiness depended on having. But I don't know anyone who is really happy because of what he or she has. True joy, happiness and inner peace come from the giving of ourselves to others. A happy life is a life for others.

“ *Is there genuine joy of giving in the way I handle Christmas shopping and gift-giving? What do I need to do to make my Christmas-giving a source of joy for myself and others?* ”

How Am I Growing In The Spirit?

*“Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”
~ Luke 6:38 ~*

How does the Spirit of God manifest itself through us? Often we think that to witness means to speak up in defense of God. This idea can make us very self-conscious. We wonder where and how we can make God the topic of our conversations and how to convince our families, friends, neighbors, and colleagues of God’s presence in their lives. But this explicit missionary endeavor often comes from an insecure heart and, therefore, easily creates divisions.

The way God’s Spirit manifests itself most convincingly is through its fruits: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galations 5:22). These fruits speak for themselves. It is, therefore, always better to raise the question “How can I grow in the Spirit?” than the question “How can I make others believe in the Spirit?”

“ *What am I doing daily to foster my growth in the Spirit?
Do I need the discipline of some church group that meets regularly
to help get me back on track?* ”

Without God's Word We Become 'Little People'

*I will speak of the mighty works of the Lord; O God, I will tell
of your singular justice. God, you have taught me from my youth;
to this day I proclaim your wondrous deeds.*

~ Psalm 71:16-17 ~

The Eucharist calls us to...a life in which we are continually aware of our role in the sacred story of God's redemptive presence through all generations. The great temptation of our lives is to deny our role as chosen people and so allow ourselves to be trapped in the worries of our daily lives. Without the word that keeps lifting us up as God's chosen people, we remain, or become, small people, stuck in the complaints that emerge from our daily struggle to survive...

Without the word our life has little meaning, little vitality, and little energy. Without the word we remain little people with little concerns who live little lives and die little deaths. Without the word we still may be a news item in the local or even a national newspaper for a day or two, but there will be no generations to call us blessed. Without the word our isolated pains and sorrows may extinguish the Spirit within and make us victims of bitterness and resentment.

“*Lord, you have called me to be an active member of your Church and to play a role in salvation history, however small. Help me to move out of my narrow concerns and do my full share within the ranks of your chosen people.*”

‘Think Of Yourself As A Little Seed Planted In Rich Soil’

Mary said: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

~ Luke 1:38 ~

You have to say yes fully to your powerlessness in order to let God heal you. But your willingness to experience your powerlessness already includes the beginning of surrender to God’s action in you. Your willingness to let go of your desire to control your life reveals a certain trust. The more you relinquish your stubborn need to maintain power, the more you will get in touch with the One who has the power to heal and guide you. And the more you get in touch with that divine power, the easier it will be to confess to yourself and to others your basic powerlessness...

A seed only flourishes by staying in the ground in which it is sown. When you keep digging the seed up to check whether it is growing, it will never bear fruit. Think of yourself as a little seed planted in rich soil. All you have to do is stay there and trust that the soil contains everything you need to grow. This growth takes place even when you do not feel it.

“

*Lord Jesus, I know that I try to control too much of my life.
Help me to repent, and to learn to look to you for the nourishment
that I need to grow.*

”

Faith Is Trusting Fully That God Loves Me

*"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you
by the Lord would be fulfilled."*

~ Luke 1:45 ~

The word "faith" is often understood as accepting something you can't understand. People often say: "Such and such can't be explained, you simply have to believe it." However, when Jesus talks about faith, he means first of all to trust unreservedly that you are loved, so that you can abandon every false way of obtaining love...

The mystery of God's love is not that he takes our pains away, but that he first wants to share them with us. Out of this divine solidarity comes new life. Jesus' being moved in the center of his being by human pain is indeed a movement toward new life. God is our God, the God of the living. In his divine womb life is always born again...The truly good news is that God is not a distant God, a God to be feared and avoided, a God of revenge, but a God who is moved by our pains and participates in the fullness of the human struggle.

“

*O Lord, I praise you and I thank you for the awesome gift of divine life
and divine love that you have shared with me and with all Christians.*

”

God Isn't Concerned About Gaining Popularity

"The Lord...dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty."

~ Luke 1:51-53 ~

In our publicity-seeking world, a lot of discussions about God assume that even God has to justify himself. People often say: "If that God of yours really exists, then why doesn't he make his omnipotence more visible in this chaotic world of ours?" God is called to account, as it were, and mockingly invited to prove, just for once, that he really does exist. Again, you often hear someone say: "I've no need whatsoever for God. I can perfectly well look after myself. As a matter of fact, I've yet to receive any help from God!" The bitterness and sarcasm evident in remarks of this sort show what's expected: that God should at least be concerned about his own popularity. People often talk as though God has as great a need for recognition as we do.

Now look at Jesus, who came to reveal God to us, and you see that popularity in any form is the very thing he avoids. He is constantly pointing out that God reveals himself in secrecy. It sounds very paradoxical, but accepting and entering into that paradox sets you on the road of the spiritual life.

“What kind of God do I seek? Do I want God to rule with flashy worldly power and authority? Or am I trying to learn to be content with the humility of God, the hidden way that God saves us?”

'My Heart Is Restless Until I Rest In You, My Beloved Creation'

*"Thus says the Lord who made you, your help, who formed you
from the womb; fear not, O Jacob, my servant,
the darling whom I have chosen."
~ Isaiah 44:2 ~*

The whole long history of God's relationship with us human beings is a history of ever-deepening communion. It is not simply a history of unities, separations, and restored unities, but a history in which God searches for ever-new ways to commune intimately with those created in God's own image.

Augustine said: "My soul is restless until it rests in you, O God," but when I examine the tortuous story of our own salvation, I see not only that we are yearning to belong to God, but that God is yearning to belong to us. It seems as if God is crying out to us: "My heart is restless until I may rest in you, my beloved creation." From Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah, from David and Bathsheba to Jesus and ever since, God cries out to be received by his own.

“

*Lord, help me to listen to you daily and to respond joyfully
and wholeheartedly to your calling.*

”

God Doesn't Seek — Or Need— Publicity

"Thus says the Lord: Should you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day on which I led the Israelites out of Egypt to the present...The Lord also reveals that he will establish a house for you."

~ 2 Samuel 7:5-6, 11 ~

There was nothing spectacular about Jesus' life. Far from it! Even when you look at Jesus' miracles, you find that he did not heal or revive people in order to get publicity. He frequently forbade them even to talk about it. His resurrection too was a hidden event...

Now that Christianity has become one of the major world religions and millions of people utter the name of Jesus every day, it's hard for us to believe that Jesus revealed God in hiddenness. But neither Jesus' life nor his death nor his resurrection were intended to astound us with the great power of God. God became a lowly, hidden, almost invisible God ...

That's a mystery which is difficult to grasp in an age that attaches so much value to publicity. We tend to think that the more people know and talk about something, the more important it must be. That's understandable, considering the fact that great notoriety often means big money, and big money often means a large degree of power, and power easily creates the illusion of importance.

“ *As we prepare to welcome you who grew silently and hidden in Mary's womb, help us, Lord, to honor and to love you in the mystery of your divine hiddenness.* ”

God Wants To Be Identified Through Servanthood

*Then I said, "As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God."
~ Psalm 40:8-9 ~*

God's becoming a servant is not an exception to his being God. His self-emptying and humiliation are not a step away from his true nature. His becoming as we are and dying on a cross is not a temporary interruption of his divine existence. Rather, in the emptied and humbled Christ we encounter God, we see who God really is, we come to know his true divinity.

In his servanthood God does not disfigure himself, he does not take on something alien to himself, he does not act against or in spite of his divine self. On the contrary, it is in his servanthood that God chooses to reveal himself as God to us. The downward pull as we see this in Jesus Christ is not a movement away from God, but a movement toward him as he really is: a God for us who came not to rule but to serve. God does not want to be known except through servanthood and, therefore, servanthood is God's self-revelation.

“ *O Servant God, how often I resist even the hint that I need to serve others! Help me to be open to your grace that will move me to serve others freely.* ”

A Radically ‘Displaced God’

“Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness.”

~ Psalm 40:8-9 ~

The Lord, whose compassion we want to manifest in time and place, is indeed the displaced Lord. Paul describes Jesus as the one who voluntarily displaced himself: “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as we are.” A greater displacement can not be conceived. The mystery of the incarnation is that God assumed the condition of a suffering human being. Thus God became a displaced God to whom nothing human was alien, a God who could fully experience the brokenness of our human condition...Jesus Christ is the displaced Lord in whom God’s compassion becomes flesh. In him we see a life of displacement lived to the fullest. It is in following our displaced Lord that the Christian community is formed.

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O Lord, send your Holy Spirit to us so that we may feel the call to be humble and to empty our hearts of arrogance and prejudice.

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