

DIY Advent 2020 Retreat Prayer Guides

After introductory meeting:

⁸The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. ¹⁰So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." ¹¹The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹²But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. ¹³As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." ¹⁴So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. ¹⁸Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." ¹⁹Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow.
(Gen 21:8-20)

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:7-11)

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7)

- Try to picture social circumstances behind each of these three biblical narratives. (Ask yourself what it must be like to live in a land not your own or occupied by hostile forces). Who was suffering and why?
- How do these circumstances relate to ours today, Advent 2020?
- What is God's response to these ancient sufferings?
- How is God responding today, Advent 2020?
- How do Hagar, Moses and Mary respond to God's response? How will you respond in Advent 2020?

“True, a worldwide tragedy like the Covid-19 pandemic momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together. As I said in those days, “the storm has exposed our vulnerability and uncovered those false and superfluous certainties around which we constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities... Amid this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about appearances, has fallen away, revealing once more the ineluctable and blessed awareness that we are part of one another, that we are brothers and sisters of one another”.

33. The world was relentlessly moving towards an economy that, thanks to technological progress, sought to reduce “human costs”; there were those who would have had us believe that freedom of the market was sufficient to keep everything secure. Yet the brutal and unforeseen blow of this uncontrolled pandemic forced us to recover our concern for human beings, for everyone, rather than for the benefit of a few. Today we can recognize that “we fed ourselves on dreams of splendour and grandeur, and ended up consuming distraction, insularity and solitude. We gorged ourselves on networking, and lost the taste of fraternity. We looked for quick and safe results, only to find ourselves overwhelmed by impatience and anxiety. Prisoners of a virtual reality, we lost the taste and flavour of the truly real”. The pain, uncertainty and fear, and the realization of our own limitations, brought on by the pandemic have only made it all the more urgent that we rethink our styles of life, our relationships, the organization of our societies and, above all, the meaning of our existence.

34. If everything is connected, it is hard to imagine that this global disaster is unrelated to our way of approaching reality, our claim to be absolute masters of our own lives and of all that exists. I do not want to speak of divine retribution, nor would it be sufficient to say that the harm we do to nature is itself the punishment for our offences. The world is itself crying out in rebellion. We are reminded of the well-known verse of the poet Virgil that evokes the “tears of things”, the misfortunes of life and history.

36. Unless we recover the shared passion to create a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time, our energy and our resources, the global illusion that misled us will collapse and leave many in the grip of anguish and emptiness. Nor should we naively refuse to recognize that “obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction”. The notion of “every man for himself” will rapidly degenerate into a free-for-all that would prove worse than any pandemic.” (Pope Francis’ latest encyclical, Fratelli tutti, Oct. 2020.)

- How is Covid-19 an Advent 2020 gift for you, for the world?
- Advent has always been the celebration of the coming of new life into a beaten world. What form is this new life taking for you in Advent 2020?
- How will you/how do we avoid slipping into a “death wish back to normal?”
- What has Covid taught you about your values and where you put your attention and energies?

Death Wish Back to Normal

Greg Kennedy SJ

Death wish back to normal
bustles through empty streets
in every isolated mind
longing for the old, obstructive crowds
to slow it down.

Back to normal
and to the flesh pots of Egypt
plus all the ecocidal fixings
that made for sumptuous meals
under the bullwhip shadows
of oppression.

Who besides rocks and rattlesnakes
really likes deserts?
Even cowboys just use them
as backdrops for violence.
But once a people walked one
into freedom.

And every step was heavy
resistance against the death wish
back to normal that tilted
Earth in the direction of Egypt
so that every isolated mind
would simply slide that way
by force of selective memory.

And Papa God put out his hands,
one of which closed around
a yellow daffodil. "Pick one", he said,
"The living or the dead?"

And the people hemmed and hawed
and scratched their heads,
knowing full well where the flower hid.
Finally the game grew tired;
they chose life and God smiled.
And the rest of the story
goes on in real time being told.

After video #2 *****

Mary's Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55)

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

- Read Mary’s Magnificat a few times.
- What kind of world do her words sketch? Jot down the spiritual, political, economic and ecological implications of her words.
- Looking at the sketch, are you attracted to kind of world it shows? What emotions does it evoke in you?
- When Mary says yes to Gabriel, thereby committing herself to collaborate with God’s redemptive plan, to what is she agreeing? How much of the world pictured in the Magnificat accompanies her great “fiat”: let it be so done!
- To what extent are you willing to collaborate in creating such a world? In what ways are you already collaborating?
- What do these reflections have to do with you personally this Advent 2020?

After video #3

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in[o] hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes[p] for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:18-25)

“The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle, but each one of them performed this common work in accordance with his own personal property. Consequently, “when we contemplate with wonder the universe in all its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity”. (Pope Francis, *Laudato si* #238)

- How do you relate your own spiritual freedom to the liberation of all of creation?
- When do you feel most free and why?
- When do you feel the most hope and why?
- When do you feel the most creative and why?
- Are there any parallels in your answers to the last three questions?
- If God, the Trinitarian Creator, is behind all creation, how do you understand your own creativity?
- After a weekend of Advent reflection, in what ways would you now say that Advent 2020 is calling forth your creativity, freedom and hope?