

An Advent Invitation

How are your relationships?

Your life is measured out in relationships – starting with your family, and stretching out to friends, colleagues, superiors, various functionaries, institutions, and the world itself.

As a human being, you also have another relationship: with yourself. Our humanity is bound up with our power to reflect on ourselves, to hold an interior dialogue, often to pass judgment on ourselves. This relationship, like all the others, can be deep, intense, and fruitful, or casual, shallow, neglected.

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Give Yourself Time All relationships need *time* to deepen and develop. The giving of our time is one of the major ways in which we offer ourselves to love. We would not pretend to love someone we never visited or thought about. Nor would we be honest if, when we were with the person we claim to love, we were constantly bored, idle, distracted, thinking about something else.

There is a kind of attentiveness which turns such aimlessness into acutely-focused experience. It does not require outward activity, but is an inner attitude which opens one's whole existence. Faithfully and regularly practised, it can transfigure our personality with dramatic and lifelong effect.

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Inner Space Systematically entering into the space within us reveals vast depths and recesses, whose existence and extent we probably had not previously known. To live in ignorance of this inner space is to be radically out-of-touch, only partly alive. This can be dangerous, giving us a sense of worthlessness, or even making us feel haunted; the unexplored self is always there, but as an unknown realm, which we can come to fear. Then we try to stay busy, to fill our time with noise, to avoid being alone. We experience alienation and loneliness, because we are at odds with our own life. The real healing of this loneliness is the last thing that occurs to us, because it is only possible for us if we take the journey inwards – the very thing we have begun to fear.

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An Encounter The amazing discovery that awaits me if I take up this entrance into myself is that, in the very depths of my self, I find not loneliness, but relationship.

What if I took a long and incredibly difficult path into a wilderness, only to find someone waiting for me in its very depths? What if I should discover that this stranger is intimately aware of my name, my circumstances, and the whole content of my mind and heart – my purposes, my ideals, my anxieties, my hopes, fears, and longings?

What if I should slowly understand that this stranger not only knows my whole soul, but gradually reveals that I am more closely related to him than to anyone I have previously known, even my parents: that in absolute terms *I am his*?

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You Did Not Call Me: I Called You This encounter with God is not at our disposition. God meets us on his own terms. On the other hand, we do have power to prevent it. We cannot change the fact that God is our Creator, or that he has made us in such a way that we have the power to relate to him. Our decision not to do this will always cost us a denial and create a dysfunction in us. We shall never be well without him, and we shall never be human without him, in the full sense he designed for us. But we can use our freedom to say no.

Advent means *coming*, and it is the season that leads up to the deepest moment of darkness, the Winter Solstice. It is at that moment of darkness that the Christian Church celebrates the coming of Christ.

Can we use this season, the beginning of a new Year of Grace, to set out on our pilgrimage in search of God? The Church is ready with lamps lit, filled with the spirit of vigilant waiting. The Word of God that resounds in the Church speaks about the yearning love of the God who made us for himself. The world, wounded and suffering, is stumbling in darkness, in the marches between despair and hope. It is a moment for Christians to set out on the journey of prayer.

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The Chaplaincy We would like to meet in the Chapel for prayer on the weekday mornings of Advent. We know this is the only way to ensure a regular time for prayer. We do not propose any heavily-structured liturgy, but simply silence and peace. We hope you will come along and support one another in searching for God, remembering Christ's promise, that *whoever seeks will always find*.