

### **Third Reflection - Nothing is impossible with God**

How can this be? Said Mary ...

How can God use me? How can this be? I who am broken and small and imperfect, I who have questions and no easy answers, I who am afraid, and unsure. How can this be?

To bring God to birth in my life and world - to be a servant .... How can this be?

While I ask these questions, do I also hear "Do not be afraid ... for you have found favour with God ... for nothing is impossible with God.

How can this be? This is a profound Advent question. I, who am broken and fragile and beautiful and beloved by God - we, who are broken and fragile and beautiful and beloved by God: how can I just as I am without one plea .... how can we, just as we are without one plea. We are the ones who today must bear Christ to the world. The Mighty One who worked wondrous deeds in Mary is with us in this work no matter our limitations. Nothing is impossible with God.

The scripture readings in Advent - the anticipation of the Prince of Peace - pour out the disappointment and pain tearing at the heart of God who desires peace with justice for all. Our relatedness is torn apart, and we see bitterness, despair and resentment. Our actions in pursuing peace with justice often seem like a focus on unlawful acts, punishment, revenge. God's way as shown in scripture seeks to unite people through understanding and healing. Jesus calls us to reconciled relationships with God and with one another. Jesus embodied the path to the healthy unity of life God desires for creation. All things are interrelated. We are God's home, each one of us - this is a single most important truth about us: inclusiveness not rejection is God's theme song for us and God's desire for our hearts in our relationships with each other. There is no other criteria for a mutuality of love between the peoples of the earth other than this: we are one-ed in God by our shared humanity. We pray to be at one - to make all nations one in a mutuality of love and respect - in our families, our communities, our churches, our world. All our roots are inter-tangled.

It makes an incredible difference in history that Mary said yes. It makes an incredible difference in this world that we say yes, today, and make the story keep coming true in our time.

Just as we are without one plea .... we come O Lord, we come.

The way of peace is costly. Dag Hammarskjold spoke to this same longing theme of Advent when he said, "No peace which is not peace for all - no rest until all has been fulfilled.: it is a call to all that is aching and unfinished in the world. It is a call of tenacious hope that reminds us that peace has been given for all, a rest offered already because in Jesus Christ all has been fulfilled. God steps into our messes, and embraces us - God steps into the fray of human life and embraces us. Cite the Prodigal Son ... and the spendthrift lover God ...

Our heart's desires, our heart's dearest hope for release from the cycles of life and death, from separations and misunderstandings, from wars and violence are wrapped up in the same cloth that

swaddles the newborn infant of Bethlehem. He is our hope, the hope that confounds all humanly plausible reasons for hope, the hope that gathers up and fulfills all our wordless hopes and dreams.

Catherine of Sienna wrote: "Hope reaches out to God with great joy." It is the longing that is part of the Advent season - the desire to reach out in hope with great joy to God who is reaching out to us from the other side of our brightest imaginings!

Bearing Christ into the contradictions of life is no easy task. To walk the path of servant hood into the contradictions of life is a path of humility and service, mindful that God's love is greater than anything which opposes us. We live against the horizon of hope, while standing in solidarity with those whose lives are scarred by doubt, fear and sorrow. Authentic peace, the peace which God longs to give - through us - brings joy, but it also obliges us to pour ourselves out for others, so that all might share in that peace. Our peace is based on the love of God. When we live from the knowledge that God is at home with us, we are standing on the foundation of peace.

From the wilderness comes a voice crying out "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Luke 3:4) on the road ahead someone is coming toward us, someone for whom we must prepare by undertaking massive reconstruction. Valleys of loss and despair are to be filled with new hope. Mountains of self-assigned virtue are to be replaced by humility. Crooked minds are to be straightened through forgiveness, broken bodies to be healed through compassion, and misshapen ideologies graded by truth.

How can this be? How can this be? Even before we have begun this great work of reconstruction the Beloved is among us, knowing full well the meagre measure of our capacities. Here is one that will never let us go, who loves us unconditionally. Who freely labours with us and for us along the wilderness road so that, eventually, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God: (Luke 3:6)

Bearing Christ into the contradictions of life is no easy task. It is the hard work of removing the land mines in our hearts which prevent us from bringing the Prince of Peace into the world: the land mines of prejudice, hatred, greed, deception; our fears and our anxieties. Letting God's unconditional love make its home in us is to understand peace as a free gift from God and an experience of liberation. It is through the love that we have for and show for each other that the Prince of Peace can act in this world.

And this can only be if we understand ourselves to be first and foremost people of prayer. Not called to be people who say prayers, but called to be people of prayer - persons whose ongoing deep desire is to be at home with God. People who want God's mighty power of love to transform our lives and the life of the whole world. People who stand still and allow deep rooting to take place. We share the cries and tensions of the world. We often feel our powerlessness. We hear the longing for God's peace, for the freedom of the children of God.

Advent calls us to a new creation made visible in human relationships shaped by constancy, truth, gentleness, mutual affection and esteem. Advent calls us to stand still before this gift and allow these qualities to take root and grow strong.

Can we be at peace - can we be in peace as long as one of the least suffers injustice, hunger,

nakedness, in short anything less than the dignity that is theirs as a child of God? Authentic 'shalom-peace' is where integrity and wholeness are found, where good is sought and where justice is established.

This is a challenge and a pledge: a challenge because it obliges us to learn how to pour out ourselves thereby creating space for the other. The gift is a pledge of God's presence with us always - an unconditional love that will never let us go.

Nothing is impossible for God. Indeed, it is God's invitation to us to participate with God in mending the brokenness of creation and healing the rift between ourselves, and ourselves and creation, and ourselves and God. What can one person do? But look around this room - and our 'oneness' is multiplied many times. Nothing is impossible with God.

What can one person do? One person can do as much or as little as they choose. We all have gifts we can use for the service of others in the name of our God.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the Spirit we were all baptised into one body." (1 Cor 12: 12-13) "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding: (Romans 14:19) What does it mean to be the body of Christ? What is it we need to build up our common life?

When one part of the body suffers, the whole of the body is affected. We are a broken body - a broken church, a broken community, a broken world: we can begin to visualize the body of Christ as his broken body hanging on the cross. This body needs healing, and part of the healing is to rediscover how to work together in building God's kingdom on earth.

There is a great spiritual hunger in the world today. What are we doing to feed that hunger? Faith communities can offer a sense of possibility, because of the values they teach and to which they aspire - gentleness, kindness, purity, generosity, and hope. Our faith communities are inseparable unions of the divine and the dusty! But don't forget ... I have a dream ...

What we hunger for - and this is especially focused at Advent - is for the church to be more of a living sacrament in the world, and more of a beacon of social and moral value for each other and for the world in which we live.

As we stand before our angels who are asking us "will you bring God to birth here?" And as we try to say "yes, I am a servant of the Lord" ... we begin on a journey where we know we must care for each other, care for our world, and acknowledge our interdependence. We need each other, more than we can ask or imagine.

Advent is a time to sing a new song to God, as there are plenty of marvellous deed waiting to be done. It is time for us to be the change we want to see. Together we can create a more peaceful and just world, in which the hungry are feed and the environment respected.. How will we answer God's question: "Will you give birth to the Saviour of the world, the Prince of Peace"? How can this be? It can come to pass - "In Jesus God has said Yes and Amen to it all, and that Yes and

Amen is the firm ground on which we stand." Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

## Reflection Questions

How can God use me? How can this be? I who am broken and small and imperfect, I who have questions and no easy answers, I who am afraid, and unsure. How can this be? While I ask these questions, do I also hear "Do not be afraid ... for you have found favour with God ... for nothing is impossible with God.

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How will we answer God's question: "Will you give birth to the Saviour of the world, the Prince of Peace"? It can come to pass -

What are some practical ways that I can make a difference? In my own family? In my own faith community? In my neighbourhood or local community? In the world?