

## Daily Devotional, December 10, 2020 A Time of Preparation

***“Let every heart prepare him room.” (“Joy to the World”)***

Before the days of Covid-19, when someone we treasured was coming to visit, we would feel excitement in anticipation of their visit, wouldn't we? Memories automatically come of times we've spent together, leaning into intimate conversation across the table over meals or cups of coffee, or settled into couches while talking into the wee hours of the morning, or memories of faithful companionship in sickness and loss. Waves of gratitude for those moments come rushing back and washing over us as we contemplate those precious moments.

Now the waiting begins. The open-hearted waiting that yearns for those gatherings to take place again. Caught up in these times of uncertainty with nothing more than memories can be trying—exasperating.

So how can we prepare—especially in this season of insecure, secluded activity—for the most treasured guest of all, for the Christ who is born in us. The line from “Joy to the World” gives one direction: Let every heart prepare him room. What's implied here is not just to “fix up” a room, but to prepare the full expanse of our hearts, to open a spacious place where we can hear and experience the holy in our midst. It calls for honoring a contemplative spiritual practice which includes solitude, silence, and interior prayer, free of masks and face-shields.

Henri Nouwen once said that “solitude is the furnace of transformation.” Without solitude, we continue to be chilled & imprisoned by the irrational, false sense of self, rather than allowing the transformation to take place that evolves into the new creations we become in Christ.

When Arsenius, the Roman educator who gave up his prominence and wealth for the solitude of the desert, prayed to be led to salvation, he heard a voice saying, “Be silent.” In a world where we are bombarded by empty words, it can be unsettling at first to let loose of our dependence on this input, but, ultimately, it clears the way for the voice of Peace, Love, and acceptance. Additionally, as Henri Nouwen states, silence “guards the fire within us” and teaches us to return to the world speaking with a new kind of power.

One kind of prayer that helps us to prepare Him room is what Thomas Merton describes as a “prayer of silence, simplicity, contemplative and meditative unity, a deep personal integration in an attentive, watchful listening of the heart.”

This spiritual teaching allows us to slow down enough to ponder what is really important and to settle into who deep down we are called to be—the image of Christ to be offered in our own service to the world.

***Prayer: God of Advent, prepare us for the silence and stillness of this season. Make our hearts your Bethlehem, the place where Jesus is born and resides every day of our lives. As we prepare room, may heaven and nature sing your praises and bring us the joy of your love and salvation this season. In the name of the one who is born into our hearts each day. Amen.***