



School Sisters of Notre Dame

Advent Retreat: An Invitation to Intimacy with God

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Advent and Christmas are soon upon us. As the commercial, capitalistic world so readily remind us and profits from the season, Christmas is framed with food and fellowship, friends and shopping, and songs and lights. These are good, but will never be enough.

Why not? Because we humans are hardwired in our DNA to connect with our Divine Designer; we are designed to connect with our Creator God. However successful we are at keeping ourselves busy eleven months of the year, and more so during December, within our busy schedules our mind bounces back to some basic, sometimes troubling questions to ponder: “How did we get here?” “Why are we here?” “Are we alone?” “What is next for me?” Whatever language we use to image or address The Source of all that exists, God, for the Christian, the Church cycle of Advent invites us to spend multiple weeks in preparation for one of the important events in salvation history - Christmas.

More importantly, the season includes the mystery of Jesus sent as Emmanuel, God with us, as Ambassador to help us not only to muddle through life’s ambiguities, but to convince us that we are here because we are loved. Jesus, was sent to convince us; Jesus with clay, human feet like ours, wanted to be with us, to convince us that we are lovable.

Kindly, the “political party” of The Godhead chose not a power person. To avoid scaring us out of our skin, The Godhead sent Jesus, someone unassuming. Jesus looked much like us; he spoke in a language that was understood by people of his time. Those who walked in his footsteps, in his geographic area were engaged by him. He invited them in real time to “Come and see.” In spite of their love of fishing, with its fresh salty air and the lure of the risk factors, it was difficult for them to decline His offer.

The timing of slowing down for minutes each day may be flawed. Jesus’ time was not a perfect time to connect. A few were just getting the hang of the ropes of fishing. Heat and cold were part of the package of his time. The grit of unpaved streets was unavoidable. The sands of the seashore evidenced that his terrain had suffered an early climate change over the

previous two thousand years. In spite of the prophet's promises of milk and honey during the time of Moses, following Jesus would not guarantee that there would always be enough food to go around for everyone. At least one of the seas in his area was Dead such that nothing living could swim in it, much less bathe in it. His clientele, unschooled fisherman, were questionably on his educational level. The population of Jesus' time was mostly disgruntled about their current political leadership; they did not like the Romans and their greedy tax collector agents. They could have said, "Forget it. No one has time for you." But they didn't.

Aware that Jesus' time was not the only time that tried men and women's souls, the Vocation Team of the School Sisters of Notre Dame extends an invitation to you to explore the Advent texts with us, to ponder the mysteries of the Scriptures, to sit in contemplative silence and to dialogue with us during these weeks of Advent, allowing God to enter your life more deeply.

We have included reflections for all 4 Sundays of Advent to use as you will even though this year the 4th week of Advent is only 1 day. There are also resources describing various ways of entering into prayer.

This online retreat is planned with an interactive dimension of meeting weekly by phone, skype or in-person with a sister spiritual companion to allow for the processing and deepening of your personal reflection and prayer. If you have found your way to these materials without having previously signed up for the retreat and would like to be paired with a sister for spiritual companionship, please contact Sister Stephanie at sspandl@ssnd.org.

May this time of Advent be blessed for you!

Sister Carolyn Sur and the North American Vocation Team