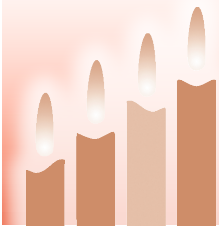


ADVENT AWAKENINGS
YEAR A

TRUST THE LORD

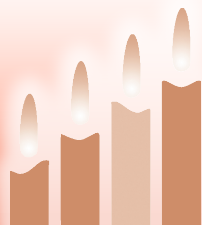




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INTRODUCTION



Advent Awakenings is a resource for small Christian communities to use in their group meetings and with their families in order to enrich the experience of anticipating the coming of Jesus—an experience that is often muddled by holiday preparations that have little or nothing to do with the origin and meaning of the season. *Advent Awakenings* is based on the three-year cycle of the Sunday Lectionary. Each book contains four sessions corresponding to the four Sundays of Advent and presents themes drawn from the Sunday gospel readings.

Year A: Trust the Lord urges participants to have confidence that God’s challenging call, as proclaimed by John the Baptist, is the true way to prepare for union with Christ.

Year B: Take the Time encourages participants to prepare for Jesus’ coming by setting aside everyday busyness and becoming more deeply aware of God’s call.

Year C: Say Yes to God prompts participants to accept the invitation of Jesus to prepare for his coming by reflecting more deeply each week on how they can open themselves to his presence in their lives.

These reflections are intended to help Christian communities to move beyond the rhetorical call each year to “keep Christ in Christmas”—a call that has more to do with the hectic weeks leading up to Christmas than with the holy day itself. These faith-sharing sessions aim to focus reflection and prayer on the original dynamic of this season—the *anticipation* of the coming of the Savior Christ, in his human nativity, in his real presence in our everyday lives, and in his glorious appearance at the end of time. In addition to the group sessions, *Advent Awakenings* includes an appendix with devotional activities that families can use at home so that each adult and child can fully play a part in connecting the symbols of the season—the Advent candles, the crèche, the tree—with our everyday world.

As we *wait* for Jesus, we renew our commitment to him to both hear his word and practice it our lives—in love and in justice.



BE PREPARED!

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Suggested Environment

A Bible and an Advent wreath with four candles are placed on a small table. The Bible is open to the scripture reading for this session. You might also wish to display a clock to reflect the fact that Advent calls our attention to the future. You might wish to decorate the table with violet, which is the liturgical color for the season of Advent.

Advent Awakenings 1

The leader invites one member to light the first candle of the Advent wreath while another member reads aloud the aim of the session:

That amid the stresses and distractions of everyday life, we may always do what will prepare us to meet our God.

Invitation to Pray

Leader: Let's take a few quiet moments to become conscious of the presence of God.

The group spends time in silence as each member pays attention to his or her breathing and quietly prays for stillness.

Leader: Let us pray.

All: Lord Jesus, Advent invites us
to a time of new beginning.
Help us to make a fresh start—
to rid our lives
of distractions or preoccupations
that keep us from preparing ourselves
to welcome you at your
second coming.

**This we ask in your name,
 who live and reign with the Father
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, forever and ever.
 Amen.**



Song suggestion: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Gospel Reading for the First Sunday of Advent

The leader invites a member of the group to proclaim the Gospel:

Matthew 24:37-44

Reflecting and Sharing on Scripture

Take a moment to reflect on what word, phrase, or image from the scripture passage touches your heart or speaks to your life.

The leader invites those who so wish to repeat and share on a key word or phrase in the Scripture that touched them.

Are we ready?

In Charles Dickens’ iconic story, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge’s nightmare ends when he sees a neglected grave marker with his name on it and pleads with the silent phantom that has led him there: “I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. . . . Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!”

Scrooge’s ordeal begins with a visit from the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who asks this rhetorical question: “Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me?” Scrooge doesn’t understand the question at first, but in the end he is redeemed because the three spirits of Christmas that haunt him during the long night show him what his life has consisted of, prompting him to question himself about how he was preparing for eternity.

Although Dickens’ story is often trivialized in the re-telling, it has a profound message. Before the night of his conversion, Scrooge didn’t take responsibility for the misery he inflicted on other people by the rigid way he

conducted his money-lending business. He didn't think there was anything wrong with his self-absorbed, insular life. On the contrary, he thought it was logical: "It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's." When his heart has been opened, however, Scrooge sees the truth about how we conduct our everyday lives, our business — the truth that Marley had learned too late: "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

Invitation to Share

- What steps do you take to evaluate the priorities of your daily life?

Reflection

Be prepared. Millions of boys can give you the source of that expression—two words full of meaning, the motto of the Boy Scouts. Older, wiser scout masters used to invoke the motto at the start of each scout meeting with the force and gravity of war veterans, speaking in a voice of impending doom, perhaps even prophecy. It wasn't unusual for boys in their pressed uniforms to glance around, nervously asking themselves, "Prepared for what?"

Robert Baden-Powell, the British founder of the Boy Scouts, once explained what he meant by such a motto. "Prepared for what?" he said. "Why, for any old thing": being stranded in the woods with no matches; noticing someone in danger of drowning in the deep end of a pool. The explicit lesson was that if we took time to prepare for most eventualities, then the future wouldn't be nearly so haphazard, nor be a cause for dread. Baden-Powell believed this preparation rounded young boys, gave their characters a sense of completion. Of course, few boys ever encountered frozen tundra or bears or the aftermath of nuclear war, but that was not the point. Stay alert. Try not to slip. Always be prepared—for any old thing.

Advent is about the future, too. The word means coming, appearance, arrival. In these early days of Advent the focus is on the second coming of Christ, so we are invited to begin with eyes on the future, straining to focus on what might be coming and hoping to make sense of it. The reading from Matthew's Gospel is not about the birth of a poor little child; rather, it is about the end of the world. The mature Jesus is speaking as a prophet himself—foretelling an unexpected return with astounding consequences,

implores his audience to be prepared for what's coming. The imagery is stark, even startling: Two men are working in a field. Two women are preparing food. Suddenly, in each place, only one is left. Such abruptness is meant to startle us. We can be separated from the familiar in the twinkling of an eye, particularly if we fail to take care with our own lives. Our daily actions, those simple pleasures—eating, drinking, marrying, as in “the days of Noah”—that make up our everyday lives should never be thought of as comfortably complete.

Of course, human longing tells us there is always more to life, more to come. Flux is a state of living. But in such a state, how do we prepare for a future? What is trustworthy? On what do we rely? The same story about the “end times” appears in the Gospel of Luke—before the parable of the persistent widow we heard a few weeks ago. The lesson is the same in both Gospels: be prepared.

The liturgical year has changed, but the lesson has not changed. Jesus tells us over and over to be prepared for the end of this age. In Matthew's Gospel, these two stories are part of a whole set of passages in which Jesus warns all who claim to be his followers that craving such things as respect, admiration, and prestige is hopelessly selfish and short-sighted.

The stark stories we read in Matthew's Gospel tell us that we the Church, the followers of Christ, should be a community that is preparing for our ultimate encounter with God. Our hopes and goals in this life should be changed if they are not helping us prepare for the Lord. We want happiness, security, and the comforts of love; we want jobs that allow us to maintain our humanity and sense of purpose. Each of us wants an identity, to stand out as an individual. We hope to be spared failure or unhappiness. Yet this is not the same as “preparation.” What is each one of us called to do to “be prepared”?

Invitation to Share

- Jesus' prophecy in today's gospel reading reminds us that we don't have forever to prepare to meet the Lord — that none of the people or possessions that make us feel secure are permanent, that life can end suddenly for any one. What feelings does this prophecy inspire in you?
- What do you think preparation and watchfulness consist of? What are we being asked to focus on?

- How could you balance love of your own life—the “eating, drinking, and marrying” of the days of Noah—with a command to be watchful? How do you do it?

Invitation to Act

Jesus emphasized the connection between faith and action, between what we believe and what we do. In that spirit, decide on an individual or group action that flows from what you have shared in this session. If you decide to act on your own, share your decision with the group. If you decide on a group action, determine among you which individual members will take responsibility for various aspects of the action.

You are likely to benefit most from taking an action that arises from your own response to the session. However, you can consider one of the following suggestions or use these ideas to help develop one of your own:

- Choose a book on the spiritual topic of your choice. Set aside a realistic amount of time in your busy life and begin to read the book. Implement a small change in your life based on insights gained from your reading. Share with your group the changes you make.
- Spend some time reflecting on the important things in your life that you may have let “slide.” Choose to focus on one and begin to take some action on it this week.
- Take steps to learn about the work done by Catholic Charities in your diocese or by a more local charity such as a food bank. Choose a way that you can assist in one aspect of that work, either with financial help, donations of tangible goods, or your own time and talent.
- Gather your family and friends to begin this holy season by blessing the Advent wreath in your home using the ritual included in the appendix of this book.

Invitation to Pray

The group leader invites the participants to pray together:

Leader: Lord Jesus, our world is truly in need of your presence.

The leader invites participants to offer spontaneous petitions, responding to each with the refrain, “Come, Lord Jesus, come.”

Leader: As we go our separate ways, let us hold all of these needs tenderly in our hearts as we await the hope that is you.

All: **Amen.**

Looking Ahead

Prepare for your next gathering by prayerfully reviewing the scripture passage and reflection for the next session as identified by your small-community leader.

'Totally Yours' —'Totus Tuus'

"Watch, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Mt 24: 42) — these words remind me of the last call that will come at whatever time the Lord desires. I want to follow Him and I want all that is part of my earthly life to prepare me for this moment. I do not know when it will come but I place this moment, like all other things, in the hands of the Mother of my Master: Totus Tuus.

*Spiritual Testament, Pope John Paul II
March 6, 1979*

FAITH-SHARING RESOURCES FROM RENEW INTERNATIONAL



PRAYERTIME Cycle A, B, C: Faith-Sharing Reflections on the Sunday Gospels



This faith-sharing resource responds to the U.S. Bishops' suggestion that "every parish meeting can begin with the reading of the upcoming Sunday's Gospel, followed by a time of reflection and faith sharing."

With each Sunday's Gospel as a focus, *PRAYERTIME* proposes meaningful reflections, focused faith-sharing questions, related questions for consideration,

and prayers as a source of spiritual nourishment and inspiration.

Use *PRAYERTIME* any time of year, whenever the small community needs. It is also ideal for beginning meetings of the pastoral council, staff, and other parish groups. The themes can also be read personally as a way to prepare for Sunday Mass.

This invaluable resource is also available in Spanish: *OREMOS Ciclo A, B, C Reflexiones sobre los Evangelios Dominicales para Compartir la Fe*

Lenten Longings, Year A, B, C

Make a six-week retreat by exploring the Sunday readings of Lent. Based on the three-year cycle of the *Lectionary*, each book contains six sessions corresponding to the six weeks of Lent and presents themes drawn from the year's Lenten readings. Simple language and everyday metaphors steep you in the season's promptings to surrender self, work for justice, and deepen prayer life.

Lenten Longings is well suited for seasonal groups, small Christian communities, and individual reflection.



ALSO AN

BOOK

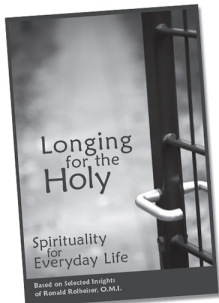


An 18-song CD is also available and contains the songs suggested for use during the prayerful reflections of each faith-sharing session for years A, B, and C.

LONGING FOR THE HOLY: Spirituality for Everyday Life

Based on selected insights of Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

Experience how the gentle spiritual guidance and practical wisdom of best-selling Catholic author Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI can enliven everyday life.



Suitable for small community faith sharing or individual reflection, Longing for the Holy covers different dimensions of contemporary spiritual life for those who want to enrich their sense of the presence of God and develop a deeper spirituality.

The Participant's Book contains twelve sessions with prayers, reflections, sharing questions, and stories from saints and contemporary people of faith.

This resource is also available as a four CD-set audio edition, which has both narrated text and songs for all twelve sessions.



The songs suggested for the moments of prayer in the faith-sharing sessions are offered on the 13-song music CD.

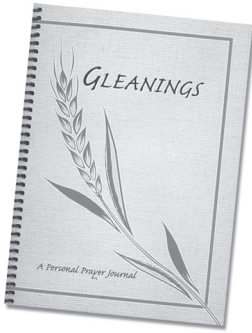
The kit includes the essential ingredients to bring this engaging spiritual experience to your parish or small Christian community.



For more information, please visit www.renewintl.org/longing



GLEANINGS: A Personal Prayer Journal



An excellent companion for your personal faith journey, *Gleanings* will help you tap into the richness of God's wisdom within you. The handsomely decorated pages with spiritual quotations or musings inspire prayerful reflection on your relationship with God. The size and format are conducive to many different methods of journaling: writing, poetry, or even sketching.

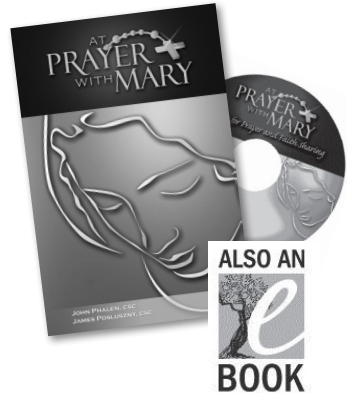
At Prayer with Mary

At Prayer with Mary offers seven sessions on the life and mystery of Mary that will deepen your appreciation of and devotion to our Blessed Mother Mary and enrich your prayer experiences.

Over the centuries, Mary's example has inspired Christians to imitate her by saying "yes" to God's call in their own lives. Her faithfulness, as it is portrayed in the Gospel narratives, is a model of the prayerful kind of life Jesus calls us to. Scripture, Catholic teaching, personal testimonies, and Marian prayer—including the rosary—provide a renewed appreciation of Mary's place in today's world, where she, as always, points the way to Christ.

The 14-song CD is also available and contains the songs suggested for use during the moments of prayer.

For more information, please visit www.renewintl.org/mary.





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