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Meditations: Sunday of the Fourth Week of Advent (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the 4th Sunday of Advent. The topics are: Mary opened herself to God's action; God approaches humanity in an unimaginable way; a response to our longing for salvation.

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- Mary opened herself to God's action

- God approaches humanity in an unimaginable way
 - A response to our longing for salvation
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MARY HEARD the angel's words with a sense of wonder: *You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus (Lk 1:31)*. Then, instead of freezing in fear before the divine plan that would reshape her present and future, she proclaimed with serene conviction: *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word (Lk 1:38)*. It fills us with admiration that such simple words became the gateway for God to enter our world—and the gateway by which we enter this Christmas week. “Behold, here I am’ is the key phrase for life. It marks the passage from a horizontal life, centred on oneself and one’s own

needs, to a vertical life, ascending toward God. 'Here I am' is being available to the Lord; it is the cure for selfishness, the antidote to a dissatisfied life, which is always lacking something."^[1] —

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel (Mic 5:2). A humble woman becomes the Mother of God; a small, insignificant village becomes the cradle of the Messiah. This is how God acts. Similarly, in our own lives, even small, faith-filled responses can transform the ordinary into great divine works. In the simplest moments of our daily lives, we too can say yes to God: in an unexpected encounter with a friend, in the sometimes monotonous hours of work, or in the warmth of a family evening.

In these final days of Advent, we may have been busy with the finishing touches on our Nativity scenes: moving a fallen sheep to face the Child or replacing the dry moss around the stable. These small gestures reflect our faith, as we strive to respond to God's constant and gentle invitations. Come, Lord, do not delay! We need you and lovingly prepare for your coming.

RESTORE US, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved (Ps 80:3). These words of deep longing express one of the psalmist's greatest desires: to behold the face of God. Yet, the people of Israel knew this desire was beyond reach; they believed that anyone who saw God's face would die, unable to withstand such majesty. This is why it astonishes us — and we must never grow

accustomed to it — that the Almighty chose to reveal his face in the tender figure of a child. In this season, we are drawn to Bethlehem with two complementary attitudes: reverence for the mystery, and warmth in welcoming it into our homes.

Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine (Ps 80:14), the psalmist continues. God has been far more generous than humanity's heart could ever dream. He did not only look upon us lovingly or visit for a brief time; He became one of us. He became so entwined with his vineyard that He told us, *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him bears much fruit (Jn 15:5).* Our entire existence can draw sustenance from the life Christ offers through the sacraments, prayer, and his constant presence. He chose to live a human life so that

our humanity might take on a divine dimension.

“Jesus was born in a cave in Bethlehem because, Sacred Scripture tells us, ‘there was no room for them in the inn.’ I am not departing from theological truth when I say that Jesus is still looking for shelter in your heart.”^[2] — Each day brings a new opportunity to follow St. Josemaría’s advice, opening our hearts to Jesus. Faith is not merely a set of doctrines or abstract rules to follow. Believing in God means first welcoming his Son into our lives and sharing every aspect of life with Him, making our soul a new Bethlehem. If, through Mary’s care, Joseph’s love, and the warmth of a few sheep, He could find comfort in a humble stable, will He not also find joy in our hearts when we offer Him the joys and struggles of our days?

HEAVENS, SEND your dew from above; clouds, rain down the Just One; let the earth open, bringing forth the Savior (Is 45:8). The entrance antiphon for this fourth Sunday of Advent conveys our deep longing for a God who saves. Often, our prayer becomes an outcry for Him from the depths of our hearts. Whether confronting our limitations or rejoicing in life's small blessings, we yearn for everything to be filled with his love. Life with Him is radically different from a self-contained existence.

The second reading of today's Mass reveals the purpose of Christ's Incarnation: *Behold, I have come... to do your will, O God (Heb 10:7).* The Son became man to save us, a salvation rooted in the Father's immense love for us: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*

(Jn 3:16). Gazing upon the Child in Bethlehem, how can we doubt God's care and affection? In every event of our lives, we can be certain that God is speaking to us and offering us salvation.

We can only imagine how difficult it was for Mary to watch her beloved Son be born into the poverty of a stable. Yet, even in such a seemingly bleak event, she saw the light of God shine. "What is truly great often goes unnoticed and peaceful silence proves more fruitful than the frenetic restlessness characteristic of our cities."^[3] Let us ask her to share her sensitivity and faith-filled heart so that we, too, may perceive God in every detail of our lives. Just as St. John the Baptist leaped for joy in his mother's womb when Mary drew near, so too may we be filled with joy as we celebrate Christ's birth.

^[1] Pope Francis, Angelus, 8-XII-2018.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 274.

^[3] Pope Benedict XVI, Address, 8-XII-2012.

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