




Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

A close-up photograph of a lit purple candle. The flame is bright yellow and orange, and the candle is melting slightly. The background is dark blue with other out-of-focus purple candles.

Advent

REFLECTION GUIDE
ONE FAMILY OF GOD

2024

“

God not only walks with God's people, but also within them... with men and women on their journey, particularly with the least, the poor and the marginalized.

”

Pope Francis



First Sunday of Advent

But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads, because your redemption is at hand.

LUKE 21:28

Photo of Father Michael Bassano by Paul Jeffrey courtesy of the Maryknoll Magazine

The first scripture readings for the Season of Advent tell of difficult times ahead. In the gospel reading from Luke, Jesus speaks of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the violence and terror the people will face as they flee for their lives to safety. Such a bleak warning seems to be incongruous for a start to a season defined by hope for the coming of our savior. Yet despite travails ahead, we hope for a God who accompanies us along the way and makes all things new.

For nine years, I lived in a United Nations refugee camp in Malakal, South Sudan. The camp was home to over 40,000 people internally displaced by civil war since 2013. Our UN camp became a place of refuge for thousands fleeing from the violence and conflict between government and opposition military forces.

As a Maryknoll missionary, and alongside a South Sudanese diocesan priest and a Comboni religious sister, I tried to organize the Catholic community traumatized by the fighting outside the camp and bring to them some comfort. We found materials to build a simple tin-sheeted church for prayer and worship. At every Eucharistic celebration, every Sunday, we prayed for the gift of being able to live peacefully as sisters and brothers in Christ.

It was not an easy task. The challenge was to bring the three diverse ethnic groups, Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk, to live peacefully together in this camp of plastic-sheeted homes, stacked closely against each other. Despite the

violence that occurred frequently in the camp, and that continues to this day, the Catholic community became a unifying force to stop the violence through dialogue and prayer.

A woman named Margaret made history in our camp by giving birth to triplets. When her husband found out, he abandoned the family and left the camp. She asked me to give names to her children and so I called them Miriam (Mary), Esther, and Bakhita. Our Catholic community along with others in the camp, came to her aid with food, milk, and support. It was a moment that brought people together in our UN camp to be at peace and help one another.

One 12-year-old boy named Taban came to our church one Sunday and told me what he had learned from his time with us and our prayers: if peace is to come to South Sudan we must see all the ethnic groups in the camp as “one family of God.”

Such is the birth of Christ that we await in this time of Advent. It reveals the incarnate love of God that can turn us away from violence and conflict to see the dignity of all migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people around the world. It gives us courage to lift up our minds and hearts as we persevere with hope to find a better way together to live as one family of God on this beloved earth. ✠

- by Father Michael Bassano, M.M.

Questions for Reflection

Are there migrants in your community who may be facing fear and dismay?

Where others are treated as outsiders, how might you help welcome them, and build with them "one family of God?"

Readings

Jer 33:14-16 | 1 Thes 3:12-4:2 | Lk 21:25-28, 34-36

Lighting the candle

One purple candle

We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we need a Savior who will forgive our sins and restore our hearts.

Prayer

God, Almighty Father,
we are your pilgrim Church
journeying towards the Kingdom of heaven.

We live in our homeland,
but as if we were foreigners.
Every foreign place is our home,
yet every native land is foreign to us.

Though we live on earth,
our true citizenship is in heaven.
Do not let us become possessive
of the portion of the world
you have given us as a temporary home.

Help us to keep walking,
together with our migrant brothers and sisters,
toward the eternal dwelling you have prepared for us.

Open our eyes and our hearts
so that every encounter with those in need
becomes an encounter with Jesus, your Son and our
Lord.

Amen.

- Pope Francis



Sean Sprague/Maryknoll Magazine.

I had held a gathering with a group of catechists during the week. And we had been discussing the readings for the coming Sunday's liturgy as these catechists would be leading liturgies in their villages that had no priests. And the question arose: do we really believe that Jesus has died for us, we all who are sinners and that this Jesus has given his life and truly brings God's life to us? For us to share and live, this day and every day? One of the catechists said, Yes, this is my faith, that Jesus is truly son of God, the one who comes from the living God of all creation and all time. And we now, living in the gift of the Eucharist in our community gatherings and then taking that Eucharistic life out to our sisters and brothers, we are continuing to live and spread the life and saving love of the truly living God among us.

- Father Ken Thesing
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

Response

Use the four-session study guide "Papal Teaching and Migration" by USCCB Justice for Immigrants Campaign which includes prayers, Scripture readings and discussion questions for small groups to learn more about what our Church teaches about care for migrants and refugees <https://mogc.info/USCCB-PTM>



Second Sunday of Advent

*A voice of one crying out in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight God's paths...
ISAIAH 40:3*

Photo of Sacred Heart Church, El Paso, Texas, www.sacredheartelpaso.org

A voice of one crying out in the desert... What is the prophet Isaiah trying to say to his people? For those of us who have had the opportunity to meet migrants and refugees who leave their homelands in hope for a new place to live, this reading speaks volumes. It has a special resonance for those of us who have been to the U.S.-Mexico border, where hundreds of thousands of desperate people have literally “cried out in the desert,” turning to their God, their Savior.

“Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the Salvation of God!”

Consider for a moment the plight of migrants, who believe that, of every conceivable action, their best option is to make the dangerous and expensive journey, by bus, by train, or by foot, through Colombia, Central America, and Mexico, through the infamous jungle Darien Gap, across thousands of miles, to the U.S.-Mexico border.

My own work with migrants goes back to the early 2000s, in Arizona and Texas. My time on the border in Arizona was marked by the tragic reports of migrants dying in the Sonoran Desert. Hundreds of bodies were found with empty water bottles. Even brave volunteers leaving gallons of water strewn across migrant trails could not halt the deaths of desperate people – young and old, men and women, looking merely for work to send money home to their families.

Most recently, I spent the past eight years volun-

teering in shelters for migrants in El Paso, Texas, where I heard reports of the suffering and death people have endured. There on the border, we witnessed the effects of harsh immigration laws which condemn thousands who hope for a better life to hopelessness. Many of the people who came to the shelters I will never forget.

In June of 2023, in Ciudad Juarez, El Paso’s neighboring city on the Mexican side of the border, local police arrested a large group of migrants living on the streets after being refused entry to the United States. The men were placed in a detention center and were told they would be deported. The frustration of the men must have been fierce, and one man took a mattress, set it on fire, thinking the Guards would open the gate to let them out. Instead, the guards fled the scene, and 38 men died horrific deaths.

One of the few survivors was Wilson, from Guatemala. Wilson was cared for in a Juarez Hospital, but with severely damaged nerves, he couldn’t walk, talk, or move. Fortunately, Annunciation House, a network of migrant shelters rooted in Catholic Social Teachings, agreed to receive him in an El Paso shelter for long-term care.

Thus began the slow healing process for this gentle 20-year-old man. Almost a year later, I got to see my friend, Wilson, speak at a prayer service at Sacred Heart Church in El Paso, where bishops, clerics, and the faithful honored Annunciation House. Wilson was chosen to literally be “a voice crying in the wilderness,” crying for justice, mercy, and repentance. ✞

- by Sister Leila Mattingly, M.M.

Questions for Reflection

Where are migrants calling out to you from the wilderness? In the news? On the streets of your community?

Who are they and where do they come from? What do they say as they cry out?

Readings

Bar 5:1-9 | Phil 1:4-6, 8-11 | Lk 3:1-6

Lighting the candles

Two purple candles

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we need a Savior who will forgive our sins and restore our hearts.

Prayer

Creator God, your loving care is a home for all. No one is a stranger to you. With your generous blessings, watch over migrants and all who leave their homes to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, trauma, and violence. Help us to also be sources of blessings through our acceptance and valuing who they are as persons eager for wholeness of life.

Creator, you taught us to welcome all. Help us to remember that the land we call ours is a gift to be cared for and a gift to be shared with all who come. May we be open to all those searching for a safe and peaceful life.

R: Help us to pour out your love and compassion to all our brothers and sisters.

Amen.

- Maryknoll Sister Elizabeth Knoerl

Response

Join the Catholic Church in creating a culture of welcome for migrants in the U.S. through the Justice for Immigrants Campaign.

<https://justiceformigrants.org/>



Rooted in this journey of commitment to God, four Maryknoll Sisters began a new mission in Chad, Central Africa in May of 2023. After being there for almost two months, one of our Sisters passed away.

Her sudden death was a big shock for every one of us. Within a place that was new to the four of us, this mission was our greatest challenge. Living in a new place where food was different from what we were used to, most of us lost weight. Malaria and typhoid also became part of our lives. We hardly spoke the language, neither French nor Ngambay. We knew just a few people, and the temperature climbed past 100 degrees Fahrenheit, making us exhausted by the end of each day.

We know it is a hard place to be, but of one thing I am sure: it is God's will and love for us and for the people of Chad that has brought us together to this place. I know God's love and presence will be always with us. The mere fact that so many people supported us when we were going through that difficult moment is a confirmation that God has been and will continue to be with us, all the way through. This experience reflects both "Having hearts on fire and testing the goodness of our God."

- Sister Norma Pocasangre
Maryknoll Sisters



Third Sunday of Advent

God indeed is my salvation; I am confident and unafraid.
ISAIAH 12:2

Photo of memorial of Juan Lopez in Tocoa, Honduras courtesy of Guapinol Despierta

What should we do? A people “filled with expectation” pose this question to John the Baptist. How often do our own hearts burn with the same question? Look at our world! We wake up to cold, dark mornings and combat realities of forced migration, violence, and poverty. What should we do? What can we do?

In September, I visited communities in Tocoa, Honduras, to meet the people who defend the Guapinol and San Pedro rivers against mining megaprojects. Their community leader Juan Lopez had just been murdered, the fourth murder since 2023 of protesters of the mining project.

After Juan’s murder, the community leaders asked themselves: should we continue the struggle? What will happen to our families? Do we migrate? A significant root cause of migration is violence, against the poor and the earth.

What should we do? What can we do?

John the Baptist offers a moral exhortation: share with those who have none, stop taking more than is prescribed. Change your ways. Convert. But what grounds such conversion? What can ground such justice so that it remains rooted in compassion instead of resentment or bitterness?

Faced with the question whether to flee, Daniela, one of the leaders, decided to go to the mountain. She takes her children with her. I go with them.

Let’s go to the mountain. Let’s put hands into the earth. Let’s harvest tomatoes. Let’s trace constellations.

Let’s be reminded of all that we love about our home.

She rejoices in God in creation. “Shout for joy, O daughter Zion...be not discouraged! The Lord, your God, is in your midst.”

Renewed, Daniela returns to Tocoa. How can we leave this place? God is here with us now. In the middle of the struggle. She will stay. The encounter with God brings joy and hope that outlasts, overcomes, defeats destruction and despair.

Like Daniela, Saint Paul and Zephariah are no strangers to desolation. Paul writes from prison while awaiting his eventual execution, and Zephariah prophecies even as the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and exiled its remaining people. They counsel: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” God is in your midst now.

The third week of Advent calls us to hope. We might be in a dark place: mourning the loss of a loved one, far from family, discouraged by violence. But like Daniela, Paul or Zephariah, we can hope because God is in our midst now, exactly where there is suffering, to bring restoration and healing, or right relationship and restoration, “to bring glad tidings to the poor.”

The Risen Christ tells us that division and destruction do not have the final word. Communities can be healed. Rivers can be saved. Divisions between families can be repaired. Peace can prevail in our hearts.

The light will not go out. ✧

- by Sarah Bueter, Maryknoll Lay Missioner

Question for Reflection

Have you been inspired to hope and joy by someone who took the migrant's path – or perhaps by your own family's migrant journey?

How have migrants helped you to be more aware of God in our midst?



Readings

Zep 3:14-18a | Phil 4:4-7 | Lk 3:10-18

Lighting the candles

Two purples candles and one pink

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we rejoice in the coming of our savior.

Prayer

Merciful God,

Our history as human beings, and even before, has been a history of life on the move. As your sons and daughters, we continue to search for a place to sleep, food to eat, and families and communities to support us.

We are a people on a journey.

We are grateful for the earth that sustains us, but we do not always take time to thank you. Also, we lack compassion for our brothers and sisters who have been uprooted by violence, natural disasters and poverty.

Help us to remember that we are always on a journey with them and with You, to a new way of life in abundance.

Amen.

- Maryknoll Father Paul Masson

Response

Learn the facts about people on the move around the world: the record high number of displaced people; what is causing people to flee their homes; where refugees are coming from; the top hosting countries; and more at the UN High Commission for Refugees website. <https://mogc.info/UNHRC>

I work with migrants who have left their homes in Uganda, Senegal, Venezuela, Haiti and much of Central and South America. No one leaves their home, their language, food, family, culture and customs easily. The journey is hard and it's expensive. Fear of what threatens you at home or hope of a better life for you or your kids is what motivates most people.

On the way, people risk their lives with tropical weather, mud, insect and snake bites, unsafe water, not enough food, and drowning... Many vulnerable migrants also suffer violence and sexual assaults at the hands of members of organized crime groups, individuals, and even border and law enforcement authorities.

What should we do differently? Protect those coming to the U.S. to exercise their right to ask for asylum. Fight to end policies that push migrants into unsafe lands or situations and that externalize our own policies and southern borders to other nations. When we, the United States, force migrants to wait in Mexican border towns for months before they can ask for asylum, we force them into situations of vulnerability that are ripe for human trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, violence and dire living circumstances. We can do better as a nation, as people of faith, and as individuals.

- Heidi Cernaka
Maryknoll Lay Missioners



Fourth Sunday of Advent

“And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

LUKE 1:43

Photo of Bethany House for Maryknoll lay missionaries and affiliates serving migrants in El Paso, Texas courtesy of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners

Sometimes an encounter with a person fills me with wonder and gratitude and opens my heart to a long-lasting friendship. It is a spark of the divine. I have experienced this in my work with migrants and refugees often. I feel what they have told me: *Diós te puso en mi camino*. God placed you on my journey.

In my 45 years of accompanying migrants, I have been graced with many “Elizabeth and Mary” moments and built lasting friendships.

One such friend was Marta, the mother of three young boys, who was isolated in our community. I was asked to accompany a parish volunteer on a home visit as a translator. Marta needed food, which the parish provided, and I helped enroll her boys in school after confronting the superintendent for denying the right Marta’s boys had to study there. Marta and I became fast friends, and we remained friends even after she became a Jehovah’s Witness and worried that I would not be accepted into the Kingdom.

And then there was Dora. Dora had five children. We used to squeeze them all into our van and take them to Mass on Sundays, with a treat of New York bagels afterward. Dora’s oldest died of cancer a few years later, at age 17, possibly due to poisoning from the chemicals he was exposed to while helping his dad in his landscaping business.

Ceci was from El Salvador. Her traumatized kids jumped under the bed every time they heard a car backfire. On one occasion I loaned her money. She was anxious to pay me back but had trouble getting the money together. She asked if I would accept repayment in pupusas, and I agreed, grateful not to have to cook on Fridays after working all week. Our

family ate pupusas every Friday. Though our youngest complained, asking me why I couldn’t have helped an Italian woman who could repay us with pizza.

Carmen showed up at our Wisconsin free clinic, very thin, weak, sunburned, and limping. She was the last one in her group descending a rope over the border wall when someone yelled “la migra!” The coyote cut the rope and she fell, badly spraining her ankle. Everyone fled, leaving her alone in the desert and unable to walk. Three days later a Border Patrol helicopter flew over, looking for bodies. When the ground patrol found her, they were surprised she was alive. She is now with relatives, gradually recovering.

And always there is Miriam. Miriam showed up at my office on the day before Thanksgiving with her infant in a stroller. She was staying with a family that was being evicted that weekend. I called Catholic Charities, the Parish Outreach Office, the county’s Social Services...everyone had left for the holiday. I called my husband to ask if she might stay with us just until Monday when offices reopened. She ended up staying for months, until she could find childcare, employment, and housing. She struggled mightily raising this baby, who is our godson, and is now twenty-six years old. Even though we now live half a country apart, we still talk weekly by phone to stay in touch. Last Saturday she called to tell me that she had finally passed the citizenship test and will be sworn in later this month. Oh, how I wish I could be there!

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” And who am I that the bearer of the Sacred One has come into my presence, and I have recognized her? ✞

- by Ann Coady, Maryknoll Affiliate

Questions for Reflection

Has someone in your life come from far away to offer you comfort and joy? Or has your journey and arrival brought joy to another?

What was it about that encounter that spoke to you, brought you hope, or gladdened your heart?

Readings

Mi 5:1-4a | Heb 10:5-10 | Lk 1:39-45

Lighting the candles

Three purple candles and one pink

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we trust in the coming of the Messiah.

Prayer

Help us to remember, O God, that you call us to welcome, protect, promote and integrate.

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Touch our hearts with courage as you have with our brothers and sisters in Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, Ethiopia and Uganda who have opened their doors most widely to your searching and migrating people.

And from the rubble of Aleppo a seven-year-old girl tweets, “Dear children, never lose hope. You are future of this world, we suffer now but we shall overcome. We are weak now but we shall be stronger.”

R: Every stranger who knocks on our door... brings an opportunity for encounter with Jesus the Christ.

- *Dr Ann Carr, Maryknoll Affiliate*

Response

Follow the Vatican's website on migrants and refugees, to join the Church's efforts to ensure that those forced to flee are not left behind.

<https://migrants-refugees.va/>



I was in awe of the migrants. One jumped right in to help me with the laundry and folded big sheets without any help. She helped other migrants find what they needed when our Spanish was inadequate.

The migrant fathers rushed to wash dishes, mop, clean bathrooms, and empty garbage. I ache for the mother who walked for months from Venezuela with her three children, the woman who broke down crying during prayers, the boy who lost his brother on the way north, and the mother who was separated from her son.

I was amazed at the generosity of El Pasoans, especially those who volunteer at the shelter. They come with great pans of food prepared with love, to share with the migrants. One husband and wife volunteer at separate times so that one of them will be at home with their disabled son. Groups of older ladies bring friends from their parishes, many of whom had been immigrants themselves. They insist El Paso is a special place: “El Pasoans help each other, we cooperate.” I remember the words of Bishop Seitz who drew us to El Paso over four years ago, “We will not leave the migrants to sleep on the street.”

- Mary Ryan-Hotchkiss
Maryknoll Affiliate - Portland Chapter

About this resource

In this Advent Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Scripture readings in light of Catholic social teaching and Maryknoll mission experience. Use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and to renew your spirit to face the realities of our world.

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<https://pixabay.com/photos/candles-flame-advent-romantic-cozy-4671226/>

Quotes from Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers and Maryknoll Sisters from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns online Scripture Reflection series. Maryknoll Lay Missioner quote from the website, www.mklm.org. Maryknoll Affiliate quote from *Not So Far Afield* May/June 2024.

First Sunday of Advent: Photo of Maryknoll Father Michael Bassano by Paul Jeffrey, photo of Maryknoll Father Ken Thesing by Sean Sprague, both courtesy of the Maryknoll Magazine.

Second Sunday of Advent: Photo of Sacred Heart Church, El Paso, Texas, courtesy of <https://www.sacredheartelpaso.org/> Photo of the Maryknoll Sisters in Istanbul, Turkey en route to Chad, courtesy of the Maryknoll Sisters Facebook <https://mogc.info/MaryknollSistersChad>

Third Sunday of Advent: Photo of memorial of Juan Lopez in Tocoa, Honduras, courtesy of Guanipol Despierta. <https://mogc.info/JuanLopezMemorialPhoto> Photo of Heidi Cernaka courtesy of Heidi Cernaka.

Fourth Sunday of Advent: Photo of Bethany House in El Paso, Texas courtesy of the Maryknoll Lay Missioners. Photo of Maryknoll Affiliate Mary Hotchkiss in El Paso, Texas, July 29, 2022 from the Maryknoll Affiliates website. <https://mogc.info/AffiliatesBorder>

About us

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) represents Maryknoll missionaries, who are Catholic men and women serving in impoverished communities around the world. The MOGC provides analysis and advocacy on issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation that affect the countries and communities where Maryknoll missionaries serve.

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