



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — December 2, 2020

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## From Our Bishop

### A different way to walk through Advent

*This is a transcript of a video message.*

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. And I want to talk with you about this time we have just entered, these four weeks, as we walk our way through Advent into Christmas. I also want to expand the way we look at this particular time, this time that is so full of worry and anticipation of how we will make people happy on Christmas. That no sooner have we had the last bite of turkey in the most unusual Thanksgiving celebrations that most of us have had, that we've started worrying about how we will handle Christmas, how will we get presents done, how will we gather, how will we celebrate at a Christmas celebration that is different than any Christmas that we have ever had. And in the midst of that we are hearing the constant news about increased infection rates and hospitalizations in northern New Jersey, and we're in that time where the pandemic is beginning to look – here it is in late November and early December – beginning to look like March and April did early this year, and none of us wants to go back to that time. How are we to walk towards the joy of Christmas, knowing that there is much for us to do spiritually, that this time is full of expectation and we are wary of disappointment and pressure that comes with it. And then there is that sense of

fear, the fear of pandemic and the constant worry that we have about the division that has just set up shop and has come to stay in our country. How do we walk towards Jesus' appearance in our life, the celebration of his coming that first time and his coming time after time after time for us.

Two weeks ago at a Sunday morning visit with St. John's in Montclair, Mother Candace Sandfort's husband John Sandfort sang one of the hymns that morning. He sang by himself playing the guitar, which apparently he does quite often, and he's singing, "King of Glory, King of Peace." It's an old favorite in the Episcopal Church – it's certainly one of my favorites – but I heard it in a new way, without an organ, without a choir, without four-part harmony and a descant. I heard just the simple words the way that hymn begins: "King of glory, king of peace, I will love thee."

Gosh does that give us a different way to walk through this time. To remember that in this time part of what we do as children of God is to love God, God of glory and God of peace, God of all power, God of generosity, we love thee. To walk our way through each and every day, to walk our way through the worry, to walk our way through the sense of pressure, to walk our way through wanting to be more faithful, to walk our way looking for ways to love God through this time. Whether this time is Advent, or this time is the holidays, or this time is pandemic, or this time is division – to know that the king of glory and the

king of peace loves us first and that we love God right back.

I love the beginning of the third verse of that hymn: "Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee." And I think that's another way that we can walk through this time. That if we love God and we praise God, if we find things to say thank you to God for, if we find things to just admire that God has done around us, for us, with us, through us, through the people we love to the people we don't know, the many ways that God is present in our world and in our lives.

That if we can learn to look for the king of glory and the king of peace and if we can do that seven days, every day, not just one day, not just one morning a week when we gather with friends to worship. But if we do that seven whole days, not one in seven, I think this walk through Advent, through pandemic, through holidays, is something that we might remember is one of the most deeply spiritual times of our lives.

## From Our Canons

### Reflections on Advent in the time of pandemic

*By the Rev. Canon Margo Peckham Clark*

Bishop Hughes has invited the whole diocese to reflect on the book of Esther and the inspiration it offers us for living "in such as time as this," for faithfulness and discernment. Studying scripture and becoming familiar with its sweep can help us see themes and identify times and situations that resonate with our lives – even when that situation is quite different.

In addition to reading Esther, I have also been reflecting on other themes in the Bible. These include the significance of paying attention, focus, and patience. While these are always important for the development of a mature spiritual life, they are especially important right now. Our ability to focus

and pay attention may help save lives (including our own), help us see need, and discern ways to truly address that need. Focus and prayerful attention can also lead us to ways to speak for justice as an entire diocese. Prayerful attention is key to seeing the grace that surrounds us even in such a time as this.

One of the other realities found in holy scripture is that evil functions best in, and seeks to sneak in through, the confusion created by lack or distortion of focus. When people overdo or underdo, things go wrong. Similarly, when people revise things out of anxiety and create their own versions of rules, instructions or priorities, things go wrong. There are all kinds examples of such distractions and lures that pull people off focus. Probably the most familiar example of this is when Adam and Eve dramatically embellish what has been told to them about the trees in the garden. (Genesis 2-3). Other situations go wrong when people, individually or collectively, lose sight of who and what is God. People today still make idols, as God's chosen people did with the Golden Calf in the wilderness (Exodus 32). They follow their own ways and fail to keep their attention on God's way.

In contrast, clarity allowed Jesus and Esther and Paul to overcome, because they listened, discerned, and then acted in accordance with those insights. Paul holds fast to his sense of being called by God as an apostle, even when challenged or imprisoned. Jesus refutes the devil by not falling prey to distortions of what is important in life. (Matthew 4: 1-11). Jesus' whole life and ministry is shaped by his profound awareness of where he must go and what he must do in response to the Father.

What does this have to do with the moment we are living right now? After all, we are contending with an ongoing pandemic, we are worried and frightened and overburdened – isn't that requiring focus and then some? Many of us are overwhelmed by the focus this time has demanded. It could be argued that all that hyper-

focus we have been living with is itself a kind of distortion, even if it may be necessary. This means that we all need even more quiet time for prayer and reflection on scripture – to balance ourselves out, to remain healthy and to seek and do the work that God has given us.

Focus and paying attention in our life in Christ doesn't mean we know the way or even the exact outcome. They mean staying still to hear the voice of God and remembering that we are God's children first and foremost. The first disciples and earliest Christians faced many dangers and had no idea how things would go or where their lives would end up, but they did know they needed to follow Jesus. The same is true for us. After all, God looks always with attention and infinite love at each one of us; we become more like God when we seek to pay similar attention. We need to actively listen to each other and God and seek the will of God. That will be our way forward, following Jesus.

I am inspired every day by the focus and care and listening I see around our diocese. Grace means that it is possible and even necessary to grow spiritually as we also honor the practical and urgent needs of this time and the call of justice. In this, we can, as St. Paul said, run the race with patience. (Hebrews 12:1) In that way lies joy and freedom and the power to be agents of God.

This Advent season as we wrestle with "COVID Fatigue" and all the fear and frustration of this moment in time, let us remember that the spiritual essence of the season is waiting and paying attention – of looking with patience and hope for the future that God has prepared for all people and the joy that will come.

# Diocesan Resources & Announcements

## Await, allow, accept, attend – An Advent "body" prayer inspired by Julian of Norwich

*By Your Friends at the Episcopal Mental & Spiritual Health Crisis Ministry*

Julian of Norwich was a 14th-century mystic, anchoress, and spiritual companion whose account of her life-changing mystical experience, *The Revelations of Divine Love* (also known as *Showings*), is a wonderful reminder of God's love for us – as well as being a prime example of medieval English writing.

A form of body prayer has become popular that is known as the Prayer of Julian of Norwich. Some sources claim that Julian originated the prayer, but most say it is a contemporary body prayer that uses four key words from the Order of Julian of Norwich, which in turn come from Julian's writings. The words are Await; Allow; Accept; and Attend. Each word has an associated body movement with it, which you may do either standing or sitting. However, you may also use those words – without the body movements – to pause and pray in a moment of anxiety or stress, in order to help you reconnect with God.

Richard Rohr offered this version of Julian's body prayer in 2014:

**AWAIT** (hands at waist, cupped up to receive): Await God's presence, not as you expect, hope, or imagine, but just as it is in this moment.

**ALLOW** (reach up, hands open, above shoulders if you can): Allow a sense of God's presence (or not) to come and be what it is, without meeting your expectations.

ACCEPT (hands at heart, cupped towards body):  
Accept as a gift whatever comes or does not come.  
Accept that you are not in charge. Accept the  
infinity of God's presence, present whether or not  
you are aware.

ATTEND (hands outstretched, ready to be  
responsive): Attend to what you are called to,  
actions that God invites you to from this stance of  
openness.

Then you may repeat the prayer several times in a  
row, so that the movements flow, one into the  
other, like a dance or yoga postures. A beautifully  
done video may be found here that demonstrates  
the body prayer.

May Julian's prayer help you to find peace during  
this anxious and hectic time.