



Could but thy soul, O man,
Become a silent night!
God would be born in thee
And set all things aright.

-Angelus Silenius, 1657

Pope St. John Paul II wrote that we are an Easter People, and 'Alleluia!' is our song. We are also an Advent people.

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."

-Robert Frost

We have two roads to choose from in Advent.

The first is the safe road. It's the most obvious; the cozy, comfortable, much-traveled road of busy Christmas preparation and fragmentation. **The roadmap is a checklist of ways we plan to make this the best advent ever by accomplishing all of our goals and making our homes look Pinterest worthy for the Holidays.** Many of us have been traveling this road every December for our whole lives. We're used to it, we look forward to it and the many lovely things along its path, and yet we also long for something more. This road lets us chart out and accomplish our own comfortable spiritual plans and goals for advent- what we want to accomplish in our own souls before December 25th, making ourselves the navigators and captains of our own spiritual

journeys. We may work hard on some important virtues, and try to keep our eyes on Christ, but our focus is often a bit lost in the plans and work we plunge into as we prepare for Christmas.

We also have the less traveled road, a dangerous road, an unknown but beautiful road, on which we abandon our map and simply follow Christ's voice. The map is the liturgy of the Church, and He is the navigator who holds it, telling us in prayer where we must go. We simply ask our Lord to guide us as sees fit, to create in us a pure heart to welcome the Christ-Child, and then take one step at a time with him. The chaos of the first road still exists on this path, but in a way that is more distant because we are intensely focused on listening to the voice of the Shepherd leading us, not getting distracted by the flashing billboards along the way. It's the Advent road of the prophets who for centuries waited for the Messiah. We join them in their longing for our Savior, and like them, bravely invite God's pure and burning light in our souls to illuminate us in ways that we can't plan or control. We walk with the prophets and like them, experience both God's extreme tenderness and his powerful purification.

This is the road that truly leads us to Christ in Advent, but it's dangerous. It's dangerous because we are guaranteed to be challenged and purified on the journey, often in ways we wouldn't choose for ourselves.

The love that descended to Bethlehem is not the easy sympathy of an avuncular God, but a burning fire whose light chases away every shadow floods every corner and turns midnight into noon. This love reveals sin and overcomes it. It conquers darkness with such forcefulness and intensity that it scatters the proud, humbles the mighty, feeds the hungry and send the rich away emptyhanded (Luke 1:51-53) –Watch for the Light, Plough publications, xvi

A dangerous advent is purifying, and filled with extraordinary love. God invites us to open ourselves to his light, to let him bare our hearts and souls, and heal the sin and wounds there. If we desire him to scatter our pride, we must let him bring it to the light. If we want him fill our poverty, we allow him to first take away what riches we hold in his place. If we ask him to feed us, he will first make us hungry.

A dangerous Advent is uncomfortable, in a beautiful way that promises lasting joy. God draws us close to himself and changes us with his love. He carves, purifies and prepares the "God-shaped hole in our hearts" to be filled completely by him in his nativity.

Seeing Mary's Advent, we gain new insights into our blessed mother and watching her, we gain courage to live our own advent dangerously. The handmaid of the Lord walked God's path and not her own. She began her advent open to the light and will of God, not knowing what it would be. She just said YES. Her serene smile confounds our fearful

self-sufficiency when we see that this peaceful mother went forward with courage and perfect trust even though she was afraid (Luke 1:29), and confused (Luke 1:34). She was young, pregnant, and on the verge of divorce as she walked in trusting darkness (Matthew 1:19), hoping in the promise of God. About to give birth, God's plan was still hidden from her. As they went from inn to inn during the cold night, looking for a place to welcome the Child, they discovered their Son's deep humility in choosing to be born in a barn despite all of their efforts (Luke 2:7).

In our dangerous advent, the obstacles may be similar or different. We may have difficulties with our marriages, our children, our temporal needs. Or we may be pulled in many directions by circumstances that send us not on a road to Bethlehem, but to the grocery store, to kids activities and social events. **The important thing is to listen to the still small voice of God leading us at all moments.** If we live these circumstances and walk these roads like Mary did, we find the purpose of Christ in all of them. We find what he wants to change in us, we recognize the gaze of love he fixes on us in each moment, and we gain trust to say FIAT to the ways he wants us to serve and love others whom we find along our advent path. Mary lived an Advent of challenges and unknowns with unconquerable peace and brave love. This allowed God to give His son a warm, welcoming heart that said yes to Him and not her own plans, and soft hands to hold him, empty of any attachments, simply ready to embrace the Christ Child.

He wants to do the same with us. Are we ready to say yes? **This advent, under the surface of all of the external preparations and celebrations, let's ask God to give us the simplicity, courage, and trust to live advent in a real and dangerous way, the way Mary did.**

We are an Advent people this December, and 'O Come O Come Emmanuel' is our song.