



Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

MARYKNOLL OFFICE FOR GLOBAL CONCERNS



# Advent

## REFLECTION GUIDE

A SEASON TO WELCOME THE STRANGER

“

*Welcoming others means welcoming God in person.*

”

Pope Francis

# About this resource

In this Advent Reflection Guide, we offer reflections, questions, prayers, and actions based on each week's Gospel reading and the experience of Maryknoll missionaries who have lived and worked with communities affected by forced migration in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As the number of people fleeing wars, violent conflict, and political persecution reaches new heights, countries around the world are struggling to meet the demands of receiving these vulnerable people. Maryknoll missionaries have the unique perspective of having been the stranger who has been welcomed, often by marginalized communities in some of the most isolated parts of the world. What a transformative experience it is! This lived experience of welcome has deepened our faith in the strength of God's compassion and mercy and challenges us to create a culture of welcome for all migrants and refugees. We believe, as Pope Francis says, "Welcoming others means welcoming God in person!" We invite you to use this guide individually or in small groups to reflect upon your life patterns, to pray more deeply, and renew your spirit to face the realities of our world.

Cover image: Volunteers from the humanitarian group No More Deaths/No Más Muertes carry water to some of the most remote trails to help migrants in the desert in Arizona. Photo courtesy of No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, <http://forms.nomoredeaths.org/en/>.

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## 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.

MOGC Washington  
Washington Office  
200 New York Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
(202) 832-1780; [ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org)  
[Facebook/maryknoll.globalconcerns](https://www.facebook.com/maryknoll.globalconcerns)

MOGC Maryknoll NY  
P.O. Box 311  
Maryknoll, N.Y. 10545-0311  
(914) 941-7575  
[ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org)

MOGC UN Office  
Office at the United Nations  
777 First Avenue, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, N.Y. 10115  
(212) 973-9551  
[ogc@maryknoll.org](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org)

[www.maryknollogc.org](http://www.maryknollogc.org)



# First week of Advent

“Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.”

MARK 13:33

## The Hope of Advent

We begin the Season of Advent with a simple message from the gospel of Mark: “Stay awake for the Lord!” Jesus urges an attitude of attentiveness and hope that God will come to set right a world gone awry.

“Watch, therefore; you do not know when the lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’” (Mark 33:34-37)

The four watches of night named by Jesus symbolize moving deeper into despair, until an all-consuming fear induces a "sleep," a loss of one's sense of purpose.

Not only do we not know *when* the Messiah will return to judge the living and the dead we also do not know *where* to expect it. The Advent scriptures focus our attention on these stark realities and remind us that we are called to wait and watch, not passively, but with a hope that comes from faith rooted in a God of love and in the goodness of humanity.

For the 11 million undocumented people living the shadows in the United States, and especially for the nearly 800,000 young immigrants who lost their protection from deportation when the Trump administration rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, it may be difficult to feel hopeful this Advent. The long night of the watch may resonate more easily.

“After Trump’s decision on DACA, I was left feeling completely vulnerable,” said DACA recipient Emmanuel

Ramos Barajas in a short [video](#) posted on “We are mitú” a Youtube channel that describes itself as having a Latino point of view. “The political system and immigration system are very overwhelming,” Emmanuel went on to say. “It’s literally out of my control. So it’s very easy to feel powerless.” Consumed by fear, Emmanuel called his mother.

“She reacted so calmly. That made me angry. But the more she spoke, the more peaceful I felt, because she reminded me: No matter how alone you feel, or how powerless, or how broken, or how tired, there’s always your community there to back you up.”

“Strong winds whip against us, but there is always, always, always, another way,” Emmanuel’s mother told him. “When a plant starts to bloom once you’ve trimmed it, it sprouts new blossoms all over. Our plant will bloom again. Our roots are already there and they run deep.”

The Advent season reminds us that God has never forgotten us. It invites the discouraged to rekindle hope and prepare to see God’s love and truth in people and places where we may have never looked before.

## Questions for Reflection

When have you felt like Emmanuel, vulnerable and powerless?

In what ways can we be “community” for each other and offer hope?



## Prayer for Encounters with Strangers

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (MT 25:35)

In earlier times, perhaps we found it easier.  
The brokenness of our modern world has released  
an unending tide of humans in migration.  
By land and by sea they come, from Sudan, Syria,  
through treacherous waters to Lampedusa,  
across parched deserts to the Mexican border.

From the rubble of Aleppo a seven-year-old girl tweets,  
“Can we build a country called Republic of Refugees? It  
will be the most peaceful country in the world.”

Our brother Francis implores us to open our hearts wide to  
God and says:

**RESPONSE: “Every stranger who knocks on our door  
brings an opportunity for encounter with Jesus.”**

How to understand? How to welcome, when this migration  
touches our own exile?

We the receivers; they the strangers. Their lives disrupted  
and now ours disrupted.

But you, O God, call us to be a Eucharistic community in  
which all are WE and none are strangers.

From the rubble of Aleppo a seven-year-old girl tweets, “I  
take a mission to save as many lives as I can. It’s my duty.

**RESPONSE: “Every stranger ...”**

The numbing of UN statistics: 65.6 million persons in the  
world today are displaced.

O God, we cannot hold all of this. And how can we see so  
many as our brothers and sisters when cultures rub against  
cultures, communities transform overnight and fears  
constrict our hearts?

Can we see the woman in her hijab as Mary fleeing with  
Joseph into the land of Egypt?

“When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat  
him. The stranger who lives as a foreigner with you shall  
be to you as the native-born among you, and you shall love  
him as yourself; for you lived as foreigners in the land of  
Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

From the rubble of Aleppo a seven-year-old girl tweets,  
“Dear world, can we stop killing each other and Instead  
love each other? YES WE CAN.”

**RESPONSE: “Every stranger ...”**



“What is it like to be a refugee in a camp? The  
children run around while parents try to keep busy  
with some of the ordinary duties of parenting. I  
watched young adults sitting, waiting. So many of  
the young men in the camp have no work and no  
opportunity for school. They just sit and wait.”

– SISTER ROSEMARIE MILAZZO

Maryknoll Sisters

*Pictured on left, with a refugee in Kurdistan, Iraq*

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.” (Hebrews 13:2)

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

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.”

**RESPONSE: “Every stranger ...”**

*Written by Dr. Ann Carr of the Maryknoll Affiliates*

## Response

Read stories shared by migrants and refugees at  
<https://www.sharejourney.org/>. Consider answers to tough  
questions about immigration provided by the U.S. Catholic  
Bishops <http://bit.ly/2xmDJWK>

Learn ways you can support young undocumented  
immigrants affected by the end of the DACA program.

<http://bit.ly/UnderstandDACA>



# Second week of Advent

“A voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.’”

MARK 1:3

## Prepare to change the direction of your heart

**F**or the second week of Advent, we hear John the Baptist, the prophesied predecessor of the Messiah, “crying out in the wilderness” with the urgent message to repent and reform of our lives and prepare for the Messiah whose time is at hand. We are called to make John’s message our own message, to change the direction of our hearts and bring good news and comfort to those who are oppressed.

In El Salvador, Maryknoll Lay Missioner Rick Dixon lives with people in a constant state of migration to find work or escape violence or both. Here Rick recalls a visit with a one such family very much in need of good news and comfort.

“My friend Eduardo recently decided to risk his life and cross through Guatemala and Mexico to search for a job in the United States. A few days after Eduardo left for the States, I visited his wife and five children.

“In the center of the courtyard at their home is a wooden table. Eduardo’s guitar is resting on it. Besides working as a handyman, he is a musician and sometimes plays with a mariachi band. Spread around the guitar is Eduardo’s mariachi uniform: brass studded *charro* pants (traditional Mexican horsemen’s pants), a red scarf, a wide-brimmed *sombrero* hat, and a black jacket with a beautiful red heart embroidered between the shoulders.

“We put his uniform out to remember him, to keep him in our prayers,” Eduardo’s wife, Reina, says.

“Six-year-old Damaris traces her finger over the jacket’s red threads. Her yellow calico dress is worn thin but clean, obviously a hand-me-down. Her face is covered with sores and her nose is running but I can see the soul of the father she loves beaming in her eyes.

“Damaris makes her way around the table and picks up the red scarf, puts it to her nose, and inhales her father’s scent. She reaches out and plucks the low E string on the guitar. It must hum ‘new dress’ to her ears. That’s what Damaris says her father is going to bring her.

“Once again she inhales through the scarf, then she picks up the sombrero and puts it on. It falls to her chin. With her face shielded, she can hide her emotions and she begins to cry. Her mother and older sister comfort her.

“*‘Quiero mi papá. Quiero mi papa’* (‘I want my father. I want my father.’), she wails to no one in particular.”

Maryknoll missionaries hear the cries of families like Eduardo’s and repent the suffering caused by economic and immigration policies that do not protect life and human dignity and do not promote family unity.

## Questions for Reflection

Who is a voice in the wilderness calling you to repent?

In what ways can you adopt a posture of openness to reform and change the direction of your heart?



# Prayer for Our Shared Journey

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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 too often 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.

*Written by Father Paul Masson, M.M., who was on mission for ten years in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, just across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas and now serves in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Father Masson wrote this prayer for JustFaith Ministries' "Exploring Migration" module in 2017.*

## Response

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The number of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people around the world is at a record high. Learn what is causing people to flee their homes, from where refugees are coming, the top hosting countries, and much more at the UN High Commission for Refugees website.

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

Learn about the hundreds of thousands U.S. immigrants from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti who may lose "Temporary Protected Status" (TPS) and become vulnerable to deportation in 2018. <http://bit.ly/TPSreport>

Take action to protect the TPS program <http://bit.ly/TakeAction4TPS>



“At the United Nations camp for internally displaced people in Malakal, South Sudan, where I serve people whose lives have been shattered by the county’s three-year-old civil war, we had a processional cross that we used every Sunday for our liturgical celebrations. In February the cross disappeared during an outbreak of fighting in the camp between different ethnic groups. We believed it had burned along with so many of the tents where the people were living.

“A few days later, though, one of the women of our camp’s Catholic community saw children playing with it. She asked the children to give it to her and noticed the cross was badly burnt and Jesus’ left arm was broken off. She returned the cross to the church and we fastened it to a pole to be used for our Easter celebration. Even though the arm of Jesus was gone, I told the people that we are now the arms and hands of Jesus to reach out to one another in bringing peace to South Sudan.

“The cross has become for us a crucifix of hope. Even though the people suffer, their resilience and vibrant faith are signs that God is with us, ensuring a better time to come in their lives.

– FATHER MICHAEL BASSANO  
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

*(Image: A woman in Malakal, South Sudan receives sorghum and oil at a food aid distribution center. Shipments had been delayed by rains and many of the 18,000 people in the tent camp on the UN base had begun severely rationing their supplies, not knowing when the next shipment would arrive.)*



# Third week of Advent

“John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.”

JOHN 1:26-27

## Rejoice in the Lord always

**T**he Mass in Latin for this Sunday begins with the words: “Gaudete in Domino semper” (“Rejoice in the Lord always”). This antiphon and the subsequent readings remind us that as we go about the work of Advent – to remain watchful for the Messiah’s return and prepare our hearts to live holy lives – we have a joy in the journey: our salvation is already at hand, thanks to the grace and goodness of God.

In the Gospel reading this Sunday we hear that John the Baptist was a witness who testified to the light. The light is Jesus, who came to remove darkness from the world. We are like John the Baptist; we are chosen to witness to Jesus, the light of the world. The salvation we await will liberate both the individual and the community, and its special focus will be the afflicted and marginalized.

Maryknoll missionaries often meet ordinary people who live extraordinary lives, shining God’s light in out-of-the-way places. Father David Schwinghamer met one such person in the refugee camps of Ngara, Tanzania.

“Juvenalis Niboye was a reluctant leader who had to stand up to a death threat,” the Maryknoll missionary recalled. “He was a catechist from Burundi who was designated leader of the Christians in a camp of 20,000 Burundian refugees. They had chosen Juvenalis because of his honesty and trustworthiness in the chaos of the camp.

“One day Juvenalis appeared at my house holding a letter that had been left at his door step. He was obviously

shaken by the contents of the letter. It contained a fearsome warning: either turn over the Sunday collection or be killed.”

“I have two choices,” Juvenalis said, “leave the camp and return to Burundi where I could be arrested, or stay here and take my chances with those who threaten me.”

A few days later, Juvenalis had made his decision. “It is not easy because my wife wants us to return home,” he said, “but I am afraid to go back to Burundi. So, I have decided to put my life in God’s hands and stay here.”

It takes nerve to be faithful! To risk it all, including the safety of one’s family, takes courage. Fortunately, neither Juvenalis nor his family was harmed; and after several more years in the distress of a refugee camp, the entire Burundian community was able to return home.

We can look to both Juvenalis and John the Baptist for help in remembering the origins and purposes of Jesus. Both men challenge us to be faithful witnesses of God’s light, even in dark places.

## Questions for Reflection

What gives you joy during this Advent season?

What opportunities do you have to bring joy to someone who needs encouragement to persevere?

# Prayer for Welcoming Others

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*Begin with a gong and a moment of silent prayer.*

**ALL: “My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together!”** (Desmond Tutu)

“The birthing of a new consciousness reveals we are persons with an enormous capacity for goodness, creativity, generosity. We can forge a better society, one that shines with beauty, radiates truth and encourages us toward a sustainable future.” (Barbara M. Hubbard)

“Diversity is the essential richness of the earth.” (Cletus Wessels)

Let us remember: “It always seems impossible until it is done!” (Nelson Mandela)

“All Creation, from the distant stars to the depth of the sea, is held together by Love.” (Nan Merrill)

“We are called to a new vision of collaboration involving a communion of peoples with the maximum diversity.” (Cletus Wessels)

“To affirm the mysterious origins of all beings allows for ecstasy, admiration, surprise and wonder!” (Brian Swimme)

“First do what is necessary, then do what is possible, and before long you will find yourself doing the impossible!” (St. Francis of Assisi)

“The point of our existence is that together we co-create a world of unconditional loving.” (Diarmuid O’Murchu)

“We are radically connected in the world. We are radically responsible for the world!” (Ilia Delio, OSF)

“The Earth belongs to Love, Who yearns to see humanity and all of creation healed!” (Nan Merrill)

“Ring the bell that still can ring. There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in! Every heart, every heart to love will come like a refugee!” (From the song, *Anthem*, by Leonard Cohen)

**ALL: “My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together!”** (Desmond Tutu)



“As a Maryknoll lay missionary working at our offices in New York, I go each week to the local prison to join a Bible study in Spanish with the Hispanic prisoners. We end each session with prayer. When I first began meeting with them, the guys would rapidly say the Our Father, finishing before I had hardly begun. Since Spanish is not my first language, I asked them to please slow down. After I had been with them for about five years, one of the prisoners remarked that they and I were now in sync. I don’t know if I am able to say it faster or if they are saying it slower. Perhaps it is a combination of both as we have become more accustomed to each other.”

—DEBORAH NORTHERN  
Maryknoll Lay Missioners

*(Image: Maryknoll Lay Missioners Class of 2016 at Maryknoll, N.Y. These new missionaries began serving in Bolivia, Brazil, Tanzania and El Salvador in 2017.)*

O Gracious One, You remind us to welcome strangers always, for by doing this some people “have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13). This is more than hospitality. It is a readiness to be open to the unexpected in human relationships. It is to entertain mystery and to make room for You in the many ways You reveal the Christ to us, especially through the stranger. It is the discovery of Your hidden presence in everyone and in all of creation! May it be so!

*After a moment of silent prayer, end with the gong.  
Written by Sister Theresa Baldini, M.M.*

## Response

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Join the Catholic Church in creating a culture of welcome for all migrants in the U.S. through the Justice for Immigrants Campaign. (<https://justiceforimmigrants.org/>)





# Fourth week of Advent

“Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

Then the angel departed from her.”

LUKE 1: 38

## Trust in God’s ways

**F**inally, in the fourth week of Advent, the Gospel reading begins our reflection on the mystery of the Incarnation – how it is that the Messiah came to be with us. The Gospel of Luke tells the story of the announcement of the birth of Jesus from Mary’s perspective. Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel – “Let it be done” – tells us about her complete faith in God.

Mary, already full of God’s grace, cooperated with God’s plan to bring salvation to all humanity through Jesus, who was fully human and also fully divine. In the model of Mary, we pray that we will be people of faith who recognize God’s saving plan for us all and are able respond with obedience.

On the first pastoral visit of his papacy, Pope Francis chose to visit the tiny island of Lampedusa off the coast of Sicily to pray for refugees and migrants lost at sea. Just days earlier, more than 300 Eritrean and Somali asylum-seekers drowned within sight of the island. When their boat caught fire and sank, they had already travelled nearly 3,000 miles from their home countries in Africa.

Pope Francis used his visit to Lampedusa to expose the dark side of globalization that flows from the effects new communication technologies and the growing consumer culture have on our humanity. While addressing the survivors, Francis said “The culture of well-being, that makes us think of ourselves, that makes us insensitive to the cries of others, that makes us live in soap bubbles, that are beautiful but are nothing, are

illusions of futility, of the transient, that brings indifference to others, that brings even the globalization of indifference.”

In lamenting the needless deaths of the African asylum seekers – both Christians and Muslims – Francis asked us to weep for “all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations” like Lampedusa. Likewise, he begged God to have mercy on those who “by their decisions on the global level have created situations that lead to these tragedies.”

The pope asks us: “How many of us, myself included, have lost our bearings; we are no longer attentive to the world in which we live; we don’t care; we don’t protect what God created for everyone, and we end up unable even to care for one another!”

After Lampedusa we can no longer look at asylum seekers, migrants, refugees and internally displaced peoples as disconnected from globalization. To do so would be to continue to live in a bubble.

## Questions for Reflection

In what ways are you living in a bubble?

How can you regain your bearings and become more attentive to the world in which you live?

## Prayer for the Eternal Moment

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Sweet, Spirit of Jesus, teach us ‘I am’ relationships, relationship in the present moment, relationships which belong to all humanity, in which all things have their being and come into being.

**Response: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

The immigrant child becoming flesh the moment I see her, believe in her, reach out to her. Of her presence, full of grace and truth, have we all received.

**Response: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

The barefoot child selling bread on the streets of San Salvador. The moment I gift her a smile and something to eat,

**Response: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

The child of poverty who cannot go to school. The moment I buy a book and help find a way,

**Response: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

The teenager who dies in a hail of gunfire. The moment I mourn and weep,

**Response: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

A family fleeing war and violence. The moment I give them shelter,

**Response: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

A child finding a word of life. The moment I imagine and care,

**Response: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.**

*Written by Rick Dixon, Maryknoll Lay Missioner in El Salvador, for JustFaith Ministries’ “Exploring Migration” an eight-week prayer and study module. (<https://justfaith.org/exploring-migration-faith-journey> )*



“A young couple who lived in the neighborhood of one of our chapels in Juárez, Mexico gave birth to their second child in El Paso, Texas, where the father had found work. The baby girl was born with a serious brain problem and without the level of care in El Paso, she would die. While there was no way that the young couple could get a work permit to live legally in El Paso, there was also no way they were going to do anything but stay. Their story epitomizes our failed immigration policy and the ongoing tragedy on our southern border.

—FATHER PAUL MASSON  
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers  
*Pictured celebrating Mass in Juárez, Mexico.*

## Response

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Take action for South Sudan. Years of civil war have resulted in famine in some parts of the county and one of the world’s largest refugee crises. Urge U.S. leaders to pressure armed actors to halt the conflict, provide humanitarian access, and bring stability back to South Sudan. <http://bit.ly/Act4SouthSudan>.

Read and share the new pastoral letter on the issue of immigration by Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, in which he calls for a moratorium on deportations by the United States until it adopts comprehensive immigration reform. <http://www.bordermigrant.org/>

Follow the Vatican’s new 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/>