

ADVENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
WISDOM
— *from* —
PADRE PIO

Daily Scripture and Prayers Together
With Saint Pio of Pietrelcina's Own Words

Compiled by Anthony F. Chiffolo



Liguori

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To Rusty and Lisa



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Epigraph

What do you seek on earth if not God?

—LETTERS

As the holy feast of Christmas approaches I feel obliged in conscience not to let it pass without wishing you a Christmas full of those heavenly consolations which your heart desires. Although I have always prayed for you who have been and will continue to be the person I love very dearly, during these days I shall not fail to redouble my prayers to the heavenly Infant, that He may be pleased to keep you from all harm in this world, especially from the misfortune of losing the Child Jesus.

—LETTERS

Introduction

“WHAT DO YOU SEEK on earth if not God?” So wrote Saint Padre Pio to the Ventrella Sisters, among those for whom he served as spiritual advisor, and so he might ask us the same question today. Pio, in fact, spent his entire life seeking God, longing not just to be close to God but to be one with God. And for Pio, the first step toward God was a spiritual engagement with the story of the Nativity.

It's easy to see Padre Pio as a Lent and Easter saint, a saint whose entire life was like a prolonged Good Friday on the cross. After all, beginning in September 1918, he bore the painful stigmata in his hands, feet, and side for many years, until just before his death in 1968. Yet it may be more difficult to see him as an Advent and Christmas saint, as a saint who leaps for joy at the news of an unexpected pregnancy, at the angels' announcement that a baby is born, at the Magi's discovery of a child beneath a star. But leap for joy he did. To express the incredible gift he experienced on Christmas day in 1917, the Christmas before his stigmatization, he wrote to his own spiritual director, Padre Agostino, “I cannot describe to you...all that I felt in my heart on that most happy night. My heart seemed to overflow with a holy love for our God become man....I was surfeited with spiritual joy.”

Pio knew with complete certainty that at all times his place was beside Jesus, whether it be Jesus the suffering servant or Jesus the innocent babe. Providing some pre-Advent counsel, he wrote



to the Ventrellas, “[O]ne thing only is necessary, to be close to Jesus....” This was his lifelong quest, and his premier advice to all of his spiritual children.

“Be close to Jesus.” It is good counsel for all of us as we experience another Advent. Perhaps in God’s presence we are shy and reticent, or nervous and talkative, or fearful and belligerent, or brave and boastful. Does it really matter what we say or feel, or if we say or feel anything? Pio’s enduring message to us is that only one thing counts: that we find a way to be with Jesus.

Will this Advent be different? Life-changing? It can be, if we accept as intended for us the invitation Pio extended to his spiritual children: “I urge you to unite with me and draw near to Jesus....”

This Advent, let us join him as he hastens to the God-Child, heeding the angels and following the star, to experience God’s nearness, where anything and everything are possible.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Advent—that period of great anticipatory joy—is a time of preparation for the celebration of Jesus’ arrival in Bethlehem as a helpless infant. In the Western liturgy, Advent begins four Sundays prior to December 25—the Sunday closest to November 30, which is the feast of Saint Andrew, Jesus’ first disciple. The annual commemoration of Jesus’ birth begins the Christmas cycle of the liturgical year—a cycle that runs from Christmas Eve to the Sunday after the feast of the Epiphany. In keeping with the unfolding of the message of the liturgical year, this book is designed to be used during the entire period from the First Sunday of Advent to the end of the Christmas cycle. The four weeks of Advent are often thought of as symbolizing the four different ways that Jesus comes into the world: (1) at his birth as a helpless

infant at Bethlehem; (2) at his arrival in the hearts of believers; (3) at his death; and (4) at his arrival on Judgment Day.

Because Christmas falls on a different day of the week each year, the fourth week of Advent is never really finished; it is abruptly, joyously, and solemnly abrogated by the annual coming again of Jesus at Christmas. Christ's Second Coming will also one day abruptly interrupt our sojourn here on earth.

Since the calendar dictates the number of days in Advent, this book includes Scripture and meditation readings for a full twenty-eight days. These twenty-eight daily readings make up part I of this book. It is suggested that the reader begin at the beginning and, on Christmas, switch to part II, which contains materials for the twelve days of Christmas. If there are any "extra" entries from part I, these may be read by doubling up days, if so desired, or by reading two entries on weekends. Alternately, one may just skip these entries that do not fit within the Advent time frame for that particular year.

Part III of this book proposes two optional formats for using each daily entry as part of a longer liturgical observance similar to Night Prayer combined with a version of the Office of Readings. These options are for those who may wish to use this book as part of a more-developed individual or group observance. The purpose of these readings is to enrich the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season of the liturgical year and set up a means by which individuals, families, or groups may observe the true meaning of the season.

PART I



READINGS *for*
ADVENT



DAY 1

Seeking the Infinite Good

I seem to be searching continually for something I cannot find, and even I myself do not know what I seek. I love and suffer very little and I wish I could love much more this thing I am seeking. I would like to suffer much more for the ideal I am pursuing.

But...although I don't know what this good is that my heart of its own accord seeks so avidly, I seem to know one thing for certain, that this good is inexhaustible and not circumscribed by limits. I seem to understand, moreover, that my heart will never be able to contain it entirely, for in my ignorance I feel that this is a very great good, an immense good, an infinite good.

Is this Jesus?

If not, then who is it? —LETTERS

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set

before him.’ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” –LUKE 11:5–13

PRAYER

Come to me, O Infinite Good, as I begin my Advent journey. Send me your Spirit, that I may have the desire to seek you, the courage to knock on the doorway that opens upon the road to Bethlehem, and the willingness to ask for what I need along the way. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

I will spend twenty minutes today contemplating what, if anything, is missing from my life, and I will organize a plan of action for this Advent from what I discern are my needs.

BLESSING

Don't tire yourself trying to find outside yourself that which is within you. Jesus is with you; He is yours and nobody will take Him away from you. –LETTERS





DAY 2

Desiring to Love

I want to love Jesus as I should. I desire this love; I know I love Him, but—dear God!—how inferior my love is to my desire to love! Ought it not to be the opposite, that my love should surpass the desire for it? —LETTERS

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. —PHILIPPIANS 1:9–11

PRAYER

My life is dry, analytic, detached—a wasteland. My desire to love consumes me, but I feel nothing—no love, no connection, no joy. O Love, ignite my passion. Move me beyond self-examination so that I might begin to live a lover's life, bearing your love to the beloved community and sharing in the love that animates all of creation. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Today I will list all those people, places, experiences, and things that I love. With whom or which do I feel the strongest connection? Who or which excites my greatest passions? What do these choices say about how I choose to love?

BLESSING

May the heavenly Child always be at the center of your heart; may He sustain it, enlighten it, inspire it and transform it to His eternal love!

This is the most ardent prayer I say for you in these days before the stable of Bethlehem. Oh how dearly I hope the divine Infant will grant you this prayer! May Jesus continue to grant His graces to all, especially to you, giving you courage and resignation up to the last day of your pilgrimage. —*LETTERS*



DAY 3

Saying Yes!

*L*isten: By saying “Yes,” only “yes,” *fiat secundum verbum tuum* [“let it be done according to your word”], in order to obey the will of God, Mary became the Mother of the Most High, declaring Herself to be His maidservant, but preserving Her virginity which was so dear to God and to Her.

Because of that “yes,” uttered by Mary Most Holy, the world obtained salvation; humanity was redeemed.

Let us, too, always obey God’s will, and always say “yes” to our Lord. —ARCHIVES

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort

of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus....” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God....For nothing will be impossible with God.” Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her. —LUKE 1:26–38

PRAYER

“No” is always my first response. “I can’t do it” comes out of my mouth automatically. “No way!” and “Are you kidding?” and “I don’t think so!” follow in sequence. I hesitate, I cavil, I demur, I decline, I refuse—and I die. O God of Yes! inspire me with your positive energy, that I might say “Yes” instead of “No.” Help me believe that “I can do this.” Open my mind to the amazing idea that with your Spirit, anything and everything are possible. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

I will keep track of my answers today. How many times do I say “No”? “Yes”? Is there any discernible pattern? What do my responses reveal about my priorities?

BLESSING

Let us pray to the Lord that He may never permit us to shut the ears of our heart to His voice that is speaking to us today....

—LETTERS



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DAY 4

Bursting with God-News

I tremble once more as I write to you. But why do I tremble? I find it almost impossible to explain the action of the Beloved. In the immensity of his strength, Infinite love has at last overcome my hardheartedness, leaving me weak and powerless.

He keeps pouring Himself completely into the small vase of this creature and I suffer an unspeakable martyrdom because of my inability to bear the weight of this immense love. How can I carry the Infinite in this little heart of mine? Because of the exultation of possessing Him in me, I cannot refrain from saying with the most holy Virgin: *My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*—LETTERS

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Eliza-

beth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

And Mary said,

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

—LUKE 1:39–47

PRAYER

O God of Good News, when you bless me with God-News, bless me also with the Spirit of Annunciation, that I might share your joy with the whole of creation. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Today I will remember to notice the good things that come my way, and I will share the news with someone else—a family member, a friend, a coworker, or even a stranger.

BLESSING

Mother Mary, lead me to the grotto of Bethlehem, so that I may indulge in the contemplation of the great and sublime event that is about to take place in the silence of the greatest and most beautiful night that the world has ever seen. —“TIME OF BIRTH”



DAY 5

Soaring Like Eagles

*A*t present I have come to the point where I am almost lost in this deep obscurity. Not a glimmer of light, not a moment's respite. I feel my courage failing and the thought that I am going astray, the idea that I may be offending God fills me with terror and paralyzes my limbs. Soul and body are pressed down by an enormous weight.

I feel as if all my bones were being dislocated and at the same time crushed and ground. The thought of God is what still sustains my soul. The idea that he is everywhere present affords scant consolation to my soul which no longer enjoys the presence of the Beloved and feels the harshness and the burden of its own solitude. —LETTERS

*Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?*

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their
strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint. —ISAIAH 40:27–31*

PRAYER

It seems that the moment I began to focus on the spiritual experience of Advent, Bethlehem became like a mirage shimmering across the desert, beckoning elusively, tantalizingly, then vanishing completely. O God of Soaring Eagles, raise me above this obscurity, that I might once again glimpse my destination, and discern the path that will lead me to you. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

I will spend thirty minutes today to “recharge my batteries” through simple prayer, quiet meditation, or a long-awaited nap.

BLESSING

May Jesus continue to totally possess your heart and treat you as a chosen one. —LETTERS

