# Advent Reflection Part 2

**December 8th – 14th (Days 8-14)**

### Written by Rev Mark James, inspired by Henri J M Nouwen

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**Day 8: Compassionate Isolation**

The Hermit Fathers, who are also known as the Desert Fathers, were early Christian monks living in the Egyptian desert in the 3rd to 5th century AD. They cultivated solitude not as an end in itself but as a means to spiritual enlightenment and a deeper connection with God and humanity. The philosophy that solitude breeds compassion is a profound one. By being in solitude, individuals are forced to confront their own thoughts, biases, and judgments. Without the distraction of others and societal pressures, they have the opportunity to introspect and question their preconceived notions about others. This process leads to the shedding of these judgments, fostering a more compassionate outlook. This idea aligns well with the biblical verse Luke 6:37-38 NIV. This verse stresses the importance of forgiveness and generosity. When we let go of our judgments, we make room for understanding and empathy, which are the cornerstones of compassion. Giving freely, as advised in the verse, can also be interpreted as the giving of love and compassion without expecting anything in return. Therefore, this philosophy of the Hermit Fathers suggests that solitude can be a transformative experience. It encourages introspection, fosters compassion, and promotes a deeper connection with others by helping us let go of our judgments. This interpretation supports the idea that solitude doesn't isolate us but rather connects us more deeply with the world around us.

**Luke 6:37-38**

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

**Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, In the quiet moments of solitude, I come humbly before Your throne of grace, seeking Your divine wisdom and guidance. I reflect upon the words of the Scripture, particularly Luke 6:37-38, and wish to embody its teachings in my daily life. Help me, O Lord, to surrender my urge to judge and evaluate others, to replace it with compassionate understanding. Remind me that our shared humanity binds us together, and that each of us carries the divine spark within us. Let me remember that by serving others without judgment, I am truly serving You. Grant me the strength to offer forgiveness freely, just as You have forgiven me. Remind me that in giving, I am participating in the divine act of love and generosity, echoing Your infinite giving nature. Help me to live each day with a compassionate heart, a forgiving spirit, and a giving hand.

**Action**

Refrain from forming immediate judgments about people and situations. Instead, take a moment to understand the person or situation better before forming an opinion. Forgiveness can also be practiced this week, by letting go of any grudges or resentment you may be holding onto. Even if the person has not asked for forgiveness, forgiving them in your heart can bring you peace.

**Day 9: Reflection on Mary, Our Divine Mother**

Mary offers us a safe and pure space, much like she did for Jesus, encouraging us to embrace our innocence. She aims to provide us with an environment for spiritual growth, similar to Jesus's experience. This sense of innocence is not just a feeling but a state of being that Mary encourages us to embrace. It is a purity that is untainted by the disloyalties and deceit often found in human relationships. Mary's love for us is genuine, unadulterated, and devoid of any ulterior motives, offering us solace without inflicting any pain. Her love is a testament to the absolute and infinite love that God has for all His children. We are called to live out this divine heritage by mirroring Mary's important role in God's plan. Mary was chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus, playing a pivotal role in humanity's salvation. Reflecting on 1 John 3:1-2 deepens our understanding of Mary's love. The scripture shows the divine love that we receive from God and our transformation into His children. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him." This verse not only enlightens us about God's love but also reminds us of our divine heritage and our duty to live it out.

**1 John 3:1-2**

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be, has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

**Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father,

We come before You in humility, acknowledging Your boundless love and grace. We thank You for the gift of Mary, our spiritual mother, who nurtures us with an enduring love. Dear Mary, we seek your intercession. You, who mothered the Savior and offered Him a sanctuary of purity and love, guide us to emulate your virtues. Help us to reclaim the innocence of being children, just as Jesus did, and to experience the spiritual rebirth that comes from embracing God's love. In our moments of doubt, remind us of your authentic love, a love untainted by the disloyalties of humanity. Teach us to seek solace within it, and find comfort knowing it will never inflict pain upon us. As we reflect on the scripture of 1 John 3:1-2, we are reassured of the divine love we are bestowed with - a love that transforms us into God's children, promising a future beyond our earthly comprehension.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**Action**

To marry the concepts of honouring Mary, our Divine Mother, and the teachings of Pope Francis in "Laudato Si'", you could consider creating a personal sanctuary (space) in your home or garden. Dedicate this space to God and make it a place where you can reflect on your divine heritage, as mentioned in 1 John 3:1-2. Spend time in this sanctuary each day, praying, meditating, and seeking guidance in living a life that respects both our spiritual heritage and the natural world. OR You can choose a quiet corner of your home, hang a picture, or place a symbol (candle), add a chair or cushion for comfort, and perhaps a small table for a bible. This can be your dedicated space for reflection and prayer for the remained of Advent.

**Day 10: The Power of Patient Anticipation**

In a world that thrives on instant gratification, waiting can be challenging. But within the Christian realm, waiting takes on a deeper significance. It isn't about passivity but is an act of obedience, actively seeking and finding delight in God's way and plan. It's about being faithful and obedient, even when it contradicts the culture around us. This obedience not only keeps us connected to God but also brings joy and fulfilment in our lives. Waiting on the Lord is not about doing nothing, but rather it's about giving God the time to work on us. It prepares our hearts for what is to come and allows us to see God in new ways. It's about being thankful, walking in obedience, being honest in our struggles, seeking God for strength, and realising that the waiting is part of God's ultimate plan.

Delving into the passages of Isaiah 25:6, 8-9 can enhance our comprehension of the beauty of waiting. These biblical verses provide a profound understanding of how waiting is not simply a passive state but a journey of spiritual growth. Examining these verses shows us that waiting helps us view the splendour of God through a refreshed lens. When we are in a state of waiting, our perception of God is revitalised, allowing us to appreciate His greatness in a new, more profound manner. It's a transformative process that ignites a renewed sense of awe and admiration for Him.

This waiting period is a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage of self-discovery and deepening faith. It's a path that not only brings us closer to God but also sheds light on the core of our existence as human beings. The journey illuminates our purpose in life, giving us a clearer understanding of our role in the divine plan.

**Isaiah 25:6, 8-9**

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.

**Prayer**

We come before you today with hearts eager to understand Your divine love. Teach us, O Lord, the virtues of patience and obedience, that we may wait upon Your perfect timing, trusting in Your eternal wisdom. In our waiting, let us not become idle, but instead use this time to grow, to learn, and to deepen our relationship with You. May we see the beauty of Your love in a renewed light, and may this vision transform us. Guide us, O Lord, as we embark on this spiritual journey. Help us to understand our humanity in the light of Your divine love. May our patient wait reveal to us the power of Your love and the glory of Your kingdom. Thank you, Father, for your infinite love and the promise of a glorious future. Teach us to wait with patient anticipation for the fulfilment of Your promises.

In Jesus's name, we pray, Amen.

**Action**

Bible Study and Reflection: Spend time today reading and meditating on Isaiah 25:6, 8-9. Write down your personal insights and how it relates to your life. If you have time you may want to also identify areas in your life where you are rushing or impatient. Make a conscious effort to slow down, be patient, and wait for divine intervention.

**Day 11: Embracing Genuine Serenity**

Focus your attention on the harbinger of harmony, the entity who doesn't grasp onto His celestial authority. This is the same entity who declines to transform stones into loaves of bread, or to leap from towering heights, or to assert control with overwhelming might. This is the entity who reaches out to those who are incapacitated, and who imparts words of pardon and motivation. Maintain your focus on this celestial being who aligns Himself with the impoverished and the frail. He is the wellspring of all tranquillity. In the context of Colossians from the New International Version (NIV), we are encouraged to "set our hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). This suggests that we should align our focus and priorities with those of Christ, who embodies peace and humility. By focusing our attention on Him, we are able to find a sense of peace that transcends our earthly troubles. His actions and teachings serve as a guide for us to follow, providing a clear path towards true peace. Even in times of uncertainty or difficulty, His presence provides comfort and stability, reminding us of the enduring nature of His love and the promise of eternal peace. Reflecting on Colossians and the actions of Christ encourages us to seek and embrace this genuine serenity. It is in this pursuit that we find not just peace, but also a deeper understanding of ourselves, our purpose, and our place in the world.

**Colossians 3:12-15**

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

**Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, we come before You today, seeking to find peace and serenity in our hearts. We yearn for the genuine tranquillity that can only come from aligning our minds and hearts with Your divine purpose. As we reflect on the teachings found in the book of Colossians, we are reminded of the peace and humility that You, Lord Jesus, embodied. Help us to truly understand these teachings and apply them in our daily lives. Let the words of Colossians guide us towards the path of true peace, casting aside the earthly worries and distractions that often cloud our judgement. Help us to remember that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7), and it is this peace we seek. In moments of chaos or confusion, remind us of Your unwavering presence. Encourage us to pause, to reflect, and to seek Your face. May we find solace in the promise that we can cast all our anxieties on You because You care for us (1 Peter 5:7).

In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, we pray. Amen.

**Action**

Building on the reflection from Colossians in the NIV, one could seek to embody the teachings of Christ in everyday interactions. This could be as simple as practicing active listening when someone is speaking to you. Active listening involves giving full attention to the speaker, showing empathy, and responding thoughtfully. This act alone can serve as a testament to the peace and love Christ teaches us to extend to others.

**Day 12: A Journey in God's Presence**

The first commandment, according to Jesus, is straightforward yet profound - 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind'. But how often do we truly acknowledge and uphold this commandment? It seems our actions often reflect a different priority, devoting our heart, soul, and mind primarily to our fellow human beings, while God becomes an afterthought. However, Jesus urges us to a far more radical commitment. His call is for our undivided attention towards God and God alone. He invites us to give every part of ourselves - our hearts, our minds, and our souls entirely to our Creator. Reflecting on Matthew 22:34-38 (NIV), it is clear that this call is not just a command but an invitation to a deeper connection. The love Jesus speaks of is not just about obedience but about relationship, about walking in the presence of God. As we continue to remind ourselves of this command, may we strive not just to remember God, but to give Him all of us. This is what it means to truly walk in the presence of God. Day 12 is a reminder of this profound truth.

**Matthew 22:34-38**

### The Greatest Commandment - Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+22%3A34-38&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23910a)] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

### Prayer

### "Dear Almighty God, In the quiet of this moment, we come before you with open hearts and minds. We acknowledge that you are the source of our life and the foundation of our being. We thank you for the invitation to love you with all our heart, soul, and mind. Often, we find ourselves distracted by worldly cares and human relationships. We confess that we have not always prioritised our relationship with you. Forgive us, O Lord, and help us to realign our hearts towards you. As we reflect on Matthew 22:34-38, we are reminded of your call for a radical commitment. You invite us to give every part of ourselves to you, our Creator. Help us to respond to this call with sincerity and unwavering faith. Fill us with your divine love, that we might love you more deeply. Teach us to walk in your presence, to experience the joy of a deeper connection with you. May our love for you overflow into our interactions with others, that they may also come to know and love you. We ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, Amen."

**Action**

Today you have a choice.

1. Practice Mindful Love: Make a conscious effort to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This could involve setting aside a specific time each day for prayer, meditation, or reading scripture to cultivate a deeper connection with God.
2. Act of Kindness: Show your love for God by loving your neighbour. This can be done through acts of kindness or generosity towards others. It doesn't have to be grand gestures, even simple acts like helping someone with their groceries, lending a listening ear, or simply smiling at a stranger can make a difference.
3. Reflection and Forgiveness: Reflect on the times you've prioritised other things over your relationship with God. Seek His forgiveness and recommit to making Him the centre of your life.
4. Love in Action: Decide to respond with love when faced with situations that may otherwise provoke anger or frustration.

**Day 13: Attentive Hearing: The Path to Genuine Understanding**

The Latin word for "listening" is "obedire," and "audire" signifies "listening with immense attention," which is the derivation of the term "obedience." Jesus is often referred to as the obedient one, symbolising the listener. On the contrary, the Latin term for not listening or being deaf is "surdus," which is the root of the word "absurd." It provides an interesting perspective, suggesting that a person not listening is living an absurd life. To transform into a listener, one approach could be to ponder, "How can I let the phrase 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing,' travel from my intellect to my heart?" It might be a mere statement at first, but it morphs into a prayer once you feel God's nurturing presence in the core of your being. Listening truly begins when you transition from the cognitive to the emotional, allowing the truth of your existence to ground you. Reflecting on Psalm 23:1-4 NIV, it speaks of God as a shepherd, guiding us through life's valleys and leading us to green pastures. It reassures us that with God, we will not want for anything, and even when we walk through the darkest valley, we will fear no evil. This Psalm presents a beautiful image of obedience, listening attentively to God's guidance, and trusting His divine providence.

**Psalm 23:1-4**

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

**Prayer**

Dear God, In the quiet of this moment, we seek Your presence. Guide us, Lord, to truly listen; to hear not just with our ears, but with our hearts and souls too. You, who are the great shepherd, guide us in Your paths of righteousness. Help us to understand the profound significance of listening, of being an attentive audience to Your word and Your world. Remind us that the Latin roots of 'listening' and 'obedience' are intertwined, and that to truly listen is to obey, to heed Your guidance. Instil in us the patience to pause and absorb the messages that surround us. Nurture in us the humility to accept and the wisdom to discern the truths that resonate within. As we reflect on Psalm 23:1-4, 6, remind us of Your eternal love and guidance. As our shepherd, You lead us to green pastures and still waters, restoring our souls even when we walk through the darkest valleys. Help us to listen with a spirit of openness and understanding, to hear beyond the noise and clamour of our world. Let us be cantered in our truth, grounded in Your love, and guided by Your wisdom. In Your holy name, we pray. Amen.

**Action**

One pragmatic and sensible action you could apply this week is to actively practice respect and obedience in your interactions with others. This doesn't mean blindly following, but rather showing consideration for their perspectives and responding to their requests and thoughts in a polite and understanding manner. If you disagree with something, calmly express your viewpoint and engage in a constructive dialogue. This practice extends to any situation. Furthermore, you could also take the initiative to explain the importance of obedience and respect to a younger person in your life, helping them understand these values are not about subjugation but rather about wilful submission and mutual understanding.

**Day 14: The Divine Encounter**

The narrative of the Visitation, an encounter both straightforward and profoundly mystical, stirs deep emotions within me. Two women, Mary and Elizabeth, meet and recognise the divine promises bestowed upon them. What seemed impossible in the realm of human understanding has unfolded in their lives. God has chosen to intervene, marking the commencement of the long-awaited salvation. Through their experiences, the trajectory of history is forever altered. The depth and significance of this event are difficult to grasp, but it is a belief and acceptance that is required.

For a quarter of a year, Mary and Elizabeth share each other's company, providing mutual support to fully embrace the unique motherhood each has been granted. Mary's presence illuminates Elizabeth's understanding of her role as the mother to the "prophet of the Most High" (Luke 1:76). Simultaneously, Elizabeth's companionship allows Mary to mature into her role as the mother of the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). The Visitation story enlightens me about the real essence of friendship and community. How can I fully experience God's grace unless I'm part of a community that can affirm, deepen, and strengthen it? Reflecting on Luke 1:39-41 and verse 56 the Visitation's significance is further highlighted. The verses describe Mary's visit to Elizabeth and the miraculous recognition of each other’s divine roles through the leaping of the baby in Elizabeth’s womb. This encounter becomes a testimony to the power of faith, community, and divine intervention, demonstrating how God works through ordinary people to bring forth extraordinary event.

**Luke 1:39-41**

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

**Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father, In the quiet moments of this day, I come before You, reflecting on the profound encounter of Mary and Elizabeth, seeking to understand and apply their divine wisdom in my life. Just as You chose these ordinary women for extraordinary roles, I humbly ask for Your divine guidance in my everyday life. Show me my unique role in Your grand plan and equip me with the faith to embrace it. God, their story reminds me of the power of community and friendship. I pray that You surround me with supportive, faithful companions like Elizabeth and Mary, who will walk with me in this journey of faith, encouraging me and helping me to see Your presence in my life. Let their story remind me that, like them, I am an instrument of Your divine plan. Encourage me to listen to Your voice, to say 'yes' to Your callings, and to carry out Your will with unwavering faith and love. In all things, may I strive to glorify You, just as Mary and Elizabeth did, embracing the divine promises with open hearts and open hands. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

**Action**

Reflecting on the spirit of the Visitation, a pragmatic and sensible action one could take this week is to dedicate time to nurture personal faith and relationships. This could range from spending quality time with loved ones, volunteering in the community, or even taking time to foster personal spiritual growth. Such actions not only promote individual well-being but also strengthen the sense of community and mutual support, reflecting the lessons learned from the Visitation.