

Session 3: Do not be afraid

Session 3: Do not be afraid

Stillness

As you come into God's presence, know that God is already here, waiting for you. Allow yourself to let go of any tensions you may be carrying in your body, allowing the muscles to relax from your head, neck and face all down your spine and lower body to your feet. Let the stillness take over and lead you to a space where you can make room for the God of dreams to be with you. The reading for today's session is from the Prophet Joel.

Reading (Joel 2: 21-29)

Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green; the tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield. O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before. The threshing-floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame. I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

Reflect

The Joseph of the Old Testament, Joseph with the coat of many colours, was called The Dreamer by his brothers, and they didn't mean it kindly! They didn't need people of vision – they needed people who could be realistic about the problems facing them... Joseph the carpenter of Nazareth is also portrayed as a man of dreams, but his dreams are nightmares. Mary, the love of his life, appears to have shamed and betrayed him. His dreams of love, marriage, a home and family are shattered. But in his dream he is told by the angel, 'Don't be afraid'. The same greeting as for Mary, the same invitation to a leap of faith, hope and love.

In Joel's prophecy, old men dream dreams and young men see visions. Medieval art often portrays Joseph as an old man, beyond the longings of romantic love, but we don't know how old he actually was. If he was a young man he would have had hopes of fruitfulness – the 'quiver full' of children promised as a blessing in the Psalms, but now he feels cheated – empty and barren, without hope for the future.

But the prophecy promises overflowing fruitfulness as God's Spirit overshadows the whole earth – not just the insiders, those who belong to the Covenant, but outsiders and rejects, the slaves on the margins of society. God's Spirit doesn't just bring human beings to life but the soil and the animals – everything is brought to fulfilment in this great promise of the Day of the Lord. The angel reassures Joseph: it's good to be a dreamer, take Mary as your wife, follow your heart, for the dream you share is God's dream for the whole of creation, made flesh in the Incarnation.

Talk to God

I let the words of Joel's prophecy sink into my heart and mind. Perhaps one phrase or word has particularly struck me and I take time to savour it, allowing God to touch my heart. Advent is a time for reflecting on God's promised gifts of grace and truth. What graces do I want to ask for right now? What truth do I want to understand and live more deeply?

Perhaps I've had disappointments, like Joseph. The pandemic has brought many hopes and dreams to nothing, putting life on hold and limiting our choices. The disappointed disciples on the road to Emmaus had lost hope, saying to Jesus; 'we had hoped...' Can I share with God any hopes or dreams that have been frustrated, and what that feels like?

God also invites us in this Advent time to enter deeply into his dream for the whole of creation. Pope Francis speaks of God calling us to live together as sisters and brothers, filling the earth and making known the values of goodness, love and peace. All creation will enjoy the fruits of this promise which appears in the prologue of John's Gospel – those who accept Jesus into their lives will become children of God. How does it feel to be filled with the hope of that promise?

I take time to talk to God of any disappointments or hopes that come to mind, putting all my dreams for the world into the hands of our loving Creator.

O Wisdom

Lord and Ruler

Root of Jesse

Key of David



Rising Sun

King of the Nations

Emmanuel

Come, Lord Jesus