

Waiting for hope



retreat November 2025

Formation and Spirituality

PROVINCE OF OUR LADY OF PILAR

We begin our retreat this month with a question-prayer to ponder throughout the day:

Sister, what are you waiting for?

Let us take a moment of silence, without letting the opportunity pass us by; in fact, let us try to answer it... We have been thinking about hope along the year. Advent is beginning, we are sustained by what is to come, with the certainty and desire that it will be better than what we have now... so, what are you waiting for? Please take a long time to answer this question.

Because waiting that has to do with hope is not magic, it is not the lottery of dreamers, it is not the excuse of optimists (delighted with themselves), nor the easy and lazy answer of pessimists (mere spectators)... Hope is the courage to persevere, the generosity to sustain, the frankness to acknowledge, the bravery to raise your hand and ask for help... the effort to recognise the human condition: fragile and precious, striving every day to achieve that without which we would not be fully happy.

And so as not to be naive, we must recognise that we are often overcome by scary stories and allow fear to take hold of us. We allow fear to defeat hope, forgetting God's promise, and we make ourselves responsible and deserving of our own despair.

We are afraid of the unknown, of the other, of what is different, of those who arrived last or from far away. We are afraid of novelty, of what we cannot control, of new forms, of technology (which, on the other hand, we do not intend to give up). We are afraid of the world situation and globalisation: climate change, wars, crises and pandemics.

And we replace hope with a return to the past, giving way to nostalgia and idealising times and ways that... will never return.

I insist, sister, what are you waiting for?

Waiting is just a way of life, possibly the only Christian way of life. And even more so in the time we are about to begin. For all these reasons, we are going to focus on three Advent verbs in this retreat: wait, wait and wait.

Do you remember "the little hope", the one that sleeps every night and has to be awakened every morning?¹

WAIT [FROM MEMORY AND REMEMBRANCE]

Waiting by remembering, reviving memories, regaining enthusiasm, giving thanks for the past, catching up on pending coffee dates.

I wait because I have a memory, a feeling, a transformative experience stored away. I wait because, without knowing how, there are events that ignite a spark in me that could turn into fire. I wait because it is the best way to face fear, novelty, the unexpected. I wait because I don't want to keep giving the same answers, because I am "capable of God" and I declare myself available to his plan once again.

Remembering, recalling, is not repeating past events. Let us not cheat, let us not substitute experience for strategy. Today we are invited to "revisit in our hearts" the story of God's faithfulness.

Genesis 12:1-5:

The Lord said to Abram: 'Leave your native land and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name famous, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you.

All the families of the world will be blessed through you. Abram set out as the Lord had commanded him, and Lot went with him. Abram took his wife Sarai with him.

Looking at the story of Abraham and Sarah, we discover that hope is always born in places where everything seems to be over. God breaks in precisely in their vulnerability, in the

¹ We named it back in February: *Clothed in patience, deliberately determined to remain, hope endures amid our complex and disillusioned history, blossoming in the fragility and beauty of a small sprout, becoming a small and vulnerable presence, but persistently sustained, wherever there is a cry, a lament, a need, a misfortune, a door that closes, a dream that is cut short, a life that slips away. Without great luminaries, without provocative titles, without noise, without space in the media, without recognition in social gatherings... the small light of hope continues to burn and spark fires where "someone" has given up their time, cancelled their appointment with their desires and said goodbye to their legitimate aspiration to fulfil them, has postponed their work, ignored their fatigue and forgotten their pains, their years and their fears... to go out and meet 'the other', to - in the midst of darkness, meaninglessness and the absence of a future - make present the God of hope*

(N. Mtnes-Gayol, quoting Péguy).

barrenness and emptiness that they could not fill by themselves. Where they touched their own limits, God becomes the Word of the future and links them to a new story.

God chooses those who seem to have nothing to offer. But it is precisely in this dispossession that they can open themselves to mystery. Faith begins when we recognise that we cannot save ourselves and allow God to set his plan in motion.

Abraham and Sarah listen and set out; they do not know the destination, they do not feel particularly secure, but they set out because they know they are sustained by a welcome and grateful hope: God loves first, promises first, walks first. Abraham and Sarah embark on a journey of freedom where everything will be reordered around God: memories, thoughts, affections, decisions, belongings.

The memory of the promise sustains their hope in doubt, stumbling, weariness: there will be resistance, fears and mistakes, but God remains. They no longer live in reference to themselves, but to the Promise that sends them forth.

Our communities also need this "pilgrimage backwards": to return to our origins, not to yearn for the past, but to revive the inspiring spark that ignited our vocation.

When we forget how the Lord called us, we replace fruitfulness with efficiency. Desire brings us back to the beginning: a personal call (with others), gratuitous and exciting.

- What scenes from my vocational history do I wish to relive in my heart?
- What gestures of God have sustained me in times of difficulty?
- Leave your heart empty and permeable so that God can speak to you in your daily life.

WAITING [FOR SOMEONE]

Seeking is the attitude of a heart that knows it is incomplete. It is not a lack, but a vocation. This waiting has much to do with making a conscious move that shifts the focus from what *I can expect* to discovering *what God expects of me*.

It is true that it can make us tremble a little, but *it is only a matter of discovering that our existence is already anchored in a future that we do not yet possess, that we so often feel distant and may even doubt, but that is a given. And because our lives are rooted there, we can make this shift that leads us to "decentre" ourselves and "take care" of the future of others and their hopes, because ours already dwells in another land.*

We are sustained by the hope that Someone has already won for us. Jesus, our hope. We do not wait for 'something'. We wait for Someone. Christian hope always has a relational character; it implies otherness. We wait for Someone in whom we trust and whom we desire (hence the inseparable nature of faith and hope). An absolute hope, an absolute trust, which necessarily points to God.

Who else could we wait for everything from, and at the same time abandon ourselves absolutely to, with the certainty that our life is in good hands? Who could be that 'someone' whom we trust totally, on whom we can 'depend' as our only reference point, and to whom we can surrender our own life without fear of being absorbed or dissolved, but with the certainty of being affirmed in love?²

² Cf. Christian Hope. N.M Gayol.

Deut 8:7-11:

Remember when the Lord your God brings you into the good land, a land of torrents, of springs and wells that flow in the mountains and plains; a land of wheat and barley, of vines, fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey. A land where you will not eat bread made from fine flour, where you will not lack anything; a land whose rocks contain iron and from whose mountains you will extract copper; then, when you have eaten your fill, bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

Be careful not to forget the Lord, your God.

The people of Israel are invited to remember because forgetting kills relationships. Forgetting leads to idolatry, to trusting in our own strength and structures, to setting our sights on those little gods we carry within us and who make us wonder only about what **we** can expect, occupying all the space of our ego and preventing us from discovering that hope only exists when we hope with **others**.

Only those who seek remain alive. In the psalms, seeking the Lord is equivalent to obeying him, to turning towards him. Seeking is the other face of trust: *'Those who seek the Lord shall not want' (Ps 34:11).*

The danger we face every Advent is believing that we have already found God completely. When we believe we possess Him, we cease to be surprised, the search fades away, and faith becomes fossilised. Seeking requires humility, openness, and a faith that listens.

- What am I really seeking each day in my consecration?
- What desire do I need to rekindle in order to walk towards Him again?

WAITING [FROM PROMISE-FOR SO MANY]

And one more step: to wait with confidence in a promise that does not disappoint, that has already taken us out of ourselves and now requires us to look broadly and around us, so that we can respond to the cry of so many who have not been able to cling to the anchor of hope. Where waiting-trust becomes the ripe fruit of memory and search. Only those who remember God's faithfulness and keep their desire alive dare to step outside themselves.

This year, the liturgy once again gives us that amusing question we ask Jesus whenever the wait seems long or we are overwhelmed by the signs of contradiction that abound around us: *"Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?"³* ". Because apparently things are not going well at all, it seems that the Kingdom is slow in coming, that we do not have many reasons for hope.

Let us not lose the battle, for there are many people sharing generously, organising themselves creatively to respond to urgent needs and dedicating themselves to defending and caring for what belongs to all. We know those who transform their way of life and make real choices to protect creation and demand paths of justice that make life possible, especially for the most fragile and vulnerable.

These are discreet signs, not very visible in the media, but true signs of the Kingdom present among us. During this Advent, we are invited to discover where they appear in our lives, because recognising them enlivens hope. We are also invited to ask ourselves how we

³ Mt 11:2.

ourselves can be a sign of the Kingdom for others, how we can help someone regain courage, dignity or a future.

Waiting and bringing the promise to life is never something we do alone. It is always waiting *in others, with others and for others*. It is not about the false security of waiting only for oneself, but about opening oneself to the most vulnerable and authentic experience: trusting in the other as a space of salvation.

Hope springs forth in that "between" that exists between two or more people⁴, in that shared space that is the terrain of Encounter and Relationship. We are called to hope together, in Community and in community, where each one is responsible for the others and, in some way, also depends on them. We cannot experience the joy of hope if we do not include others, if what I hope for myself I do not also hope for those I love and those I must love most.

1 Jn 4:16-21

We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us. God is love: whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. Love will reach its perfection in us if we are in the world as he was and wait confidently for the day of judgement.

There is no fear in love, but love drives out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

We recognise our need for Him and His desire to give Himself without measure, that what we hope for this Advent (and has already been given to us) is not to love God, but to welcome the promise that He loved us first (and everyone).

Let us learn to say "*Come, Lord Jesus*" from listening deeply to the cries of humanity. A cry born of solidarity with people's deepest longings: concrete hopes, flesh and blood, with faces, stories and names. Let us look squarely at the world of despair: the silent humiliations, the misguided searches, the wounded desires, the big and small struggles of each day, the forced journeys, the unbridled fear, the absurd sufferings, the constant pain, the urge to run away... and let us say a prayer: "*Come, Lord Jesus*".

In this way, the wait becomes shared, awaiting the "joyful hope" hand in hand with our sisters and brothers, accompanying their desires and allowing ourselves to be touched by them. It is true that this attitude may not immediately change external circumstances, but it does transform the heart of those who live it. Because Advent — when properly welcomed — does not seek to change the world at once, but **to change the person**, to open them to tenderness, compassion and a more incarnate hope.

And from there, from that heart that learns to listen to the cries of the world, the plea "*Come, Lord Jesus*" takes on a new, true, luminous weight.

"Hope does not reassure, it unsettles; it introduces contradiction with reality, generates protest, awakens us from the apathy and indifference typical of contemporary man, it unsettles us. When we hope for and love liberation, the chains begin to hurt" (Moltmann).

⁴ Mt 18:20.

- What departures is the Spirit asking of me today?
- What fears or securities prevent me from accepting the love of the one who took the initiative?
- With whom do I feel called to walk today?

WORDS FOR ADVENT

Advent is a time of longing, hope and waiting. It is a time of open eyes, of gazes as long as the horizon and of light steps over hills and valleys. It is a time of announcements, proclamations and surprises; of watchmen, sentinels and postmen; of town criers, troubadours and prophets. It is a time of waiting rooms, of the good dreams we dream and of the pregnancies of life.

Advent is a time to go out and walk, light in weight and luggage, upright, free and willing, through the streets of the world without fear; it is a time to touch the creation that is offered to us and greet people; to listen to the murmur of life, let ourselves be immersed in it, illuminate it with divine lights and give gifts of hope.

Advent is a time of lights, lamps and candles; of half-open doors and windows; of stars, whispers and surprises; of paths, canoes and small boats; of breezes that rock and refresh; of footprints in the sky and on the earth, and also in people's hearts. It is a time for breaking chains, jumping fences and opening prisons and borders; it is a time for north winds and rosy dawns, and for leaves that fly and fall with good news.

Advent is a time for the poor and migrants, for outcasts, exiles and displaced persons, for those evicted from their homes who get wet and soaked in the street, and for all those who have no name and live poorly on the other side of history. It is the time of those who walk and dream, fall and rise, do not arrive and pray; of homes that are renewed and recreated, of people who discern serenely and of those who suffer the crisis, more strongly, despite so many electoral promises. It is the time of men and women who long for a new life.

Advent is a time to start or resume the journey, of promises sown and blossomed, of having life and history close to the surface and remaining serene and smiling. It is a time of good hope, despite what we see and what the prophets of doom announce to us every day.

Advent is a time of paths, trails and highways of search and hope to be travelled at a brisk pace, hand in hand with Isaiah, prophet of a new world; Jeremiah, attentive to the signs of the times and sensitive to history; John the Baptist, humble and conscious precursor; of Joseph, whose life was altered by the divine plan and the person he loves; of Mary, pregnant and with her eyes fixed on the one who will be born in any place and circumstance.

Advent is a time to return with dusty feet, a tender heart and a pregnant womb; to tell what has happened to us, to listen to everyone as friends and to sing with a human voice praises to the God of life who visits us and stays with us. It is a time to be silent, contemplating the mystery and caring for the life that is blossoming.

Advent is your time and my time; it is our time to live as people, as Christians, as sons and daughters of the God who loves us, caresses us and impregnates us; it is a time to prepare ourselves for the encounter with the Lord, who becomes incarnate.

F. Uribarri [Brisa y Rocío. Ed. Verbo Divino]

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