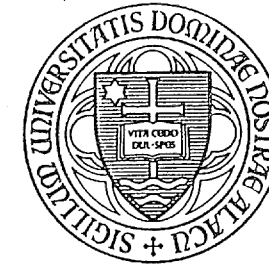


Prayer Starter . . .

Görmek

The art of medicine, the love of humanity.



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Advent is a liturgical season which begins the Church year. It is a time for preparation for the celebration of the Birth of Jesus and normally it is observed with some fasting, prayers and meditation. Although it has a penitential dimension, it is also full of a spirit of joy, hope and genuine expectation.

Because Advent coincides with the onset of winter in North America, there is a sense of purging as we prepare for the harsher climate ahead. We go back to the simple things, to life and death, forgiveness and sin, hope and pain. It is a good opportunity to re-examine the direction of our lives, especially the room we give over to prayer and concern for the things of God.

I would suggest adopting some personal practice of piety beyond one's typical routines. A regular visit to the Grotto or some quiet moments of Scriptural reflection would be points of preparation for Christmas. Whatever we do the season of Advent calls us to be more intensely involved in the Christian life. It leads us to be concerned about the form that our discipleship takes.

May we all attempt to put ourself in the world of miracle, a time and place where God's great love for us is fully manifest. Let us prepare for the coming of Jesus, our Savior and our Brother.

(Rev.) Edward A. Malloy, C.S.C.

For a moment Izmet didn't comprehend.

Then, mentally, he translated the doctor's words into his native tongue.

Izmet turned to Farah, his bewildered wife, and spoke to her in Turkish. The doctor, he explained, had said their little boy was going blind.

Through her sobs, the woman asked how much more her baby must suffer.

How much, indeed, Izmet thought. Wasn't it enough their baby had been born with something wrong with his pancreas? Something that had forced the doctors to operate before the child was three months old.

And now this.

The doctor was speaking again. There was a chance their son's sight might be saved.

But there would be risk, great risk. Several operations might be necessary. And in the boy's weakened condition, any one of the operations might

kill him.

She seemed a kind woman and very patient, this St. Vincent's doctor called Ivy Shen. Izmet tried to follow her words, so he could explain to Farah. Something about pressure inside their baby's eyes. Something about needing to operate quickly or the child would go swiftly, painfully blind.

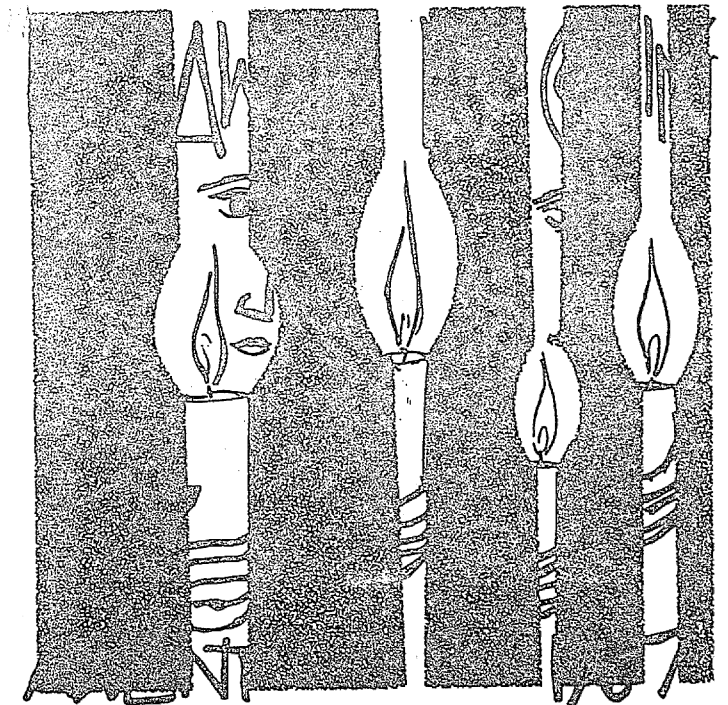
Alone now, Izmet and Farah talked. They prayed. When the doctor returned, they would ask her to operate.

The store where Izmet works is closed today and he has taken his son to the park. The boy will be big, he believes, like his grandfather. Even at two, it shows.

The child toddles over, shows an oak leaf to his father. And although he wants his boy to be a good American, Izmet is proud of the Turkish word his son has learned.

The word is görmek. It means to see.

First Sunday of Advent



Lord, let us see
your kindness,
and grant us
your salvation.

Let us prepare
for the celebration
of the birth of Jesus. . .

let us be filled
with the spirit of joy and hope!



Mary Had A Baby Boy

... Doris Donnelly

No drugs. No Benettons. No Cybill Shepherd.
No caffeine.

Not a promising beginning for a plot these days, but the story of Christmas thrives in spite of the odds against it. A young couple give birth to a baby boy. A family comes into being, angels sing congratulations, and the world hopes for the best from the new generation, the new age of Jesus.

Most of us reconnect with families of our own around Christmas by going home. We hope for the best, too, but the experience of family reunions is often mixed: they are painful, soothing, anticipated, dreaded, frustrating, boring, exhilarating, too brief, interminable, irritating, restful, awkward, tender.

Is there some way to make them better? The Gospel offers some wise guidance.

Strategy No. 1



Keep expectations realistic. You're going home to a real family, not the Brady Bunch where all problems are solved in a half-hour and never come back again. Your family is not perfect; neither are you. Idealizing the visit or the relationships as one continual high is setting yourself up for disappointment. Even life in Nazareth was routine and uneventful; maybe that's why four evangelists decided not to write about the childhood and adolescence of Jesus. All families, yours included, deal with ordinariness much of the time. Be prepared for the human.

Strategy No. 2



Expect to meet people who have changed. No matter how well you've kept in touch, decisions were made, milestones commemorated, flu conquered, leaves raked. Without you. The same happened with you: you passed tests, ate cold pizza, began new relationships, explored a different world. Without them. Give yourself the gift of time to catch up. One way is by responsive, patient listening. Carve time out of your schedule to hang out at home with your family just to talk. The atmosphere in the Bethlehem stable was gentle and respectful of where people were. Help to create that climate at home.

Strategy No. 3



Decide you're going to make it work. All successful relationships are the product of work, communication, compromise, honesty, negotiation, humor, humility, forgiveness. There's no free lunch when it comes to quality relationships in a family. Come with a commitment that you will try to hurdle obstacles. Making a gesture at harmony (going along with someone else's choice over a movie, backing off an argument) goes a long way to making peace on earth, or at least peace in your own home. The peace comes at a price but it is always worth the cost. Always.

Strategy No. 4



Be direct with Mom and Dad. Ask them for what you want. If that means that you've changed and no longer want to be treated like a child, say so. Even Jesus asserted himself when He claimed He was about His Father's business. The opposite indirect style is guarded ("I'm not going to tell you who I am"). confusing and counter-productive. It shuts your family out of your life.

Strategy No. 5



Express gratitude for opportunities created for you. You could begin by saying thank you for your college education. No matter how solvent you regard the family finances, it would be bliss for your mom and dad to hear "I appreciate the thirteen grand a year you're spending on me. Thanks." The first Christmas was about God's personal gift of a Savior. While you're at it, find a way to be thankful for a Savior, too.

Strategy No. 6



Give your family a gift they will appreciate. Let it show thoughtfulness and care in selection. Consider giving a gift that cost more than money; promise to plant a flower bed in the Spring, blacktop the driveway, cook a gourmet meal. Give them more than money can buy.

Strategy No. 7



Take an unhurried look at your life. What can you do to improve your relationship with family, friends, roommates? What can you do to nourish the gift of faith in your life. What can you do to improve the most important relationship of all--the one with the unconditional Giver of life itself? Whoever called Christmas a "silent night" had the right idea. The best discoveries (and answers to the hard questions) almost always come when our hearts are quiet, expectant, ready to be surprised. Be open to that possibility.

Dr. Donnelly is co-director of the Center for Spirituality at St. Mary's College.