



A Reflection on the First Week of Advent

As we enter the time of Advent and prepare for the birth of the newborn baby Jesus, we are reminded of how much we need gentleness in our world and in our lives.

Perhaps we can begin by being gentle with ourselves, as Elizabeth's story illustrates. When Elizabeth was only 13 years old, her mother died, and for years Elizabeth carried an enormous burden, the feeling that she was somehow to blame for her mother's tragic death. Trapped by that sense of guilt and shame, Elizabeth blamed herself for every mistake and shortcoming, real and imagined. After years of struggling with her burden, Elizabeth made a discovery. To a friend she said, "I just figured it out. I try to be gentle with myself, yet when I'm not, I get angry with myself all over again. Today I realized that maybe I can just be gentle with myself about not being gentle with myself."

In health care, too, we strive to be gentle with others and ourselves. We are expected to be, and want to be, people of tenderness and compassion. However, health care is filled with powerful pressures and challenges, and the stresses of our daily lives can put us in fighting mode. In our work life we battle illness and suffering on a daily basis. We experience the pressures of limited time and restricted resources. We struggle against the barriers to good health in our communities. Our families and dear friends ask us to balance the demands of our work lives and our personal lives. Sometimes, like Elizabeth, we see everything as a conflict, and that is when we need to open up to a new way of being.

In Advent we recall that Christ comes into the world, not as a warrior but as God's Suffering Servant. The words of the prophet Isaiah describe Him, God's Chosen One, who will bring justice to the nations.

"He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."



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In the Gospel of Matthew we find the gentle words of Jesus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart;

and you will find rest for yourselves.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

As we begin this season of Advent, let us cherish ourselves and others with a sense of gentle compassion, and let us open a gentle and peaceful space in our hearts so that Christ might be born among us.

The author of this reflection is Dave Ebenhoh. Visit his website at www.stillwaterspeaks.com.

The Catholic Health Association would like to thank Jon Sarta for allowing us to use his music from the albums Catholic Piano Music Vol 8 - Advent and Catholic Piano Music Vol 4 - Christmas for the podcast. His Music can be obtained from mjmusic.com.