

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

DO YOU SEE THE ORCHARDS?

For many of us, apple-picking comes in at the top of a long list of seemingly obligatory Autumn activities — alongside hayrides, cider donuts and posting memories on social media.

As winter fast approaches, perhaps this is an experience you have had recently: leaves crunching underfoot as you peruse row after row of trees studded with fruit of all hues. Perhaps with family following close behind, you carry overflowing bags of fruit in either arm as a breeze rustles the branches that surround you. As you walk, you listen to the birds sweetly singing who have made their homes in these trees and feel grounded in a way that you have been lacking for a while.

Surely, to imagine or experience an orchard on its own can be a spiritual experience in and of itself. At a deeper level, however, orchards are also a wildly humbling physical representation of how our own labor and God's come together in harmony. We toil tirelessly to care for and cultivate the seeds that will grow into fruit-bearing trees. Then, we work even harder to prune, water and pray for conditions that allow for the trees to flourish. All the while, God's hand is at work orchestrating these necessary conditions. Not only this, orchards are a metaphor for how we experience God's love in our daily lives. As you imagine yourself in the orchard, recall how trees span as far as you can see, enveloping us in their beauty. So too, is God's love.



The feeling of hope in God's love and the feeling of being grounded by our connectedness is echoed by today's reading from the Hebrew scriptures. Images of the deaf gaining their hearing, and the blind claiming their sight, an end to tyranny and arrogance. The passage continues, when the "children see the work of my hands in his midst, they shall keep my name holy" (Isaiah 29:23).

Like the laborers of the orchard whose work comes together with God's in harmony, how is your own work interwoven with the work of God? Where have you felt God's expansive love in this season? How have these experiences encouraged you to "keep God's name holy"?

Visit the Online Advent Calendar at CHAUSA.ORG/ADVENT