

Isaiah 11: 1-10
Luke 1:26- 38
December 5th 2010
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Christmas cards, billboards and disposable dinner plates portray Mary in this moment with the angel having a look of serenity on her face.

Open up the Christmas card and it says something like "May you and yours find peace in the season."

We smile, that's nice. Tape the card on the mantle or stick it in the mail holder, toss it in the trash... I don't know what you do with your Christmas cards. But what does that image, the word "peace" even mean?

Does peace mean that moment when our faces look like Mary's and we experience an inner tranquility?

Is peace the calm found when the kids tucked into bed, a glass of wine in one hand and a good book in the other? Oh wait, that would be my definition of peace.

Seriously, here we are a week and half after the big Thanksgiving meal and our calendars are full of other gatherings of our family and friends. So maybe peace for you is the harmony of making it through those events without Aunt Millie and Cousin Frank bickering about politics, religion or the color of your newly painted dining room.

Reading and watching the news over the past few weeks, peace might mean the absence of conflict. Peace is the stillness in bomb filled skies over South

and North Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq and countless other places all over the world.

Whether our heart longs for personal or global peace, our definition of the word defaults into the idea that peace means all will be well with ourselves and the world. God will take care of everything and we can finally rest easy knowing that the chaos shaking our lives will be over.

But what if peace isn't about stillness and calm? What if peace is about our waking up to the shaking in the world and responding with God to put things back where God wants them?

Father Alfred Delp asks this question very poignantly. Delp was a Jesuit priest who was executed by the Nazi army after being condemned as a traitor for his opposition to Hitler. A short time before his execution in 1945 he wrote from his prison cell a piece called "The Shaking Reality of Advent." In it he says:

Here is the message of Advent: with God facing us, the world will begin to shake. Only when we do not cling to false securities will our eyes be able to see God, and get to the bottom of things. Only then will we be able to guard our life from the frights and terrors into which God has let the world sink to teach us, so that we may awaken from sleep, as Paul says, and see that it is time to repent, time to change things. It is time to say, "All right, it was night; but let that be over now and let us be ready for the day." We must do this with a decision that comes out of these very horrors we have experienced and all that is connected with them; and because of this our decision will be unshakable even in uncertainty.

If we want to transform life again, if Advent is truly to come again—the Advent of home and of hearts, the Advent of the people and the nations, a coming of Christ in all this—then the great Advent question for us is whether we come out of these convulsions with this determination: yes, arise! It is time to awaken from sleep. It is time for a waking up to begin somewhere. It is time to put things back where God the Lord put them.

Alfred Delp "The Shaking Reality of Advent"
from Watch for the Light: readings for Advent and
Christmas.2001 pp.82-85

In this time called Advent we are offered an opportunity to reflect on how we can resist the temptation to "go back to sleep" after times in our lives when we have felt "shaken." We are given this Advent time to turn away from the urge we have to switch on the "auto pilot" and pretend when we wake up all will be well with the world.

Advent is a time when we can hear God's promise of peace amidst the shaking that is going on around us and be deliberate about working with God to put things back where God wants them.

I know the Christmas cards show Mary all calm and serene, like after the angel visit she could use a nap to digest everything that has been said to her. I bet if we could be there with her, in that moment we would see Mary physically shaking beneath her pastel blue head covering in the shadows of the angel. Mary has no idea what is going to happen to her. And the shaking does not stop for her envision the world as tranquil place where "all is well."

From that moment with the angel on she will experience all the uncertainty and pain of bearing and birthing a child.

Along with Joseph, Mary will go through the unsettling times of raising a child that won't go to bed on time, that will run off by himself, and cause constant worry and concern.

Mary will stand at the foot of the cross and tremble with anguish watching her son die.

The world continues to shake with violence, injustice, and suffering and instead of closing her eyes with hope that God's peace will make it all go away. Mary opens them and says "here am I!" She accepts God invitation to work together to put things back where God wants them to be, no matter how impossible that may seem.

This Advent we know that the world is shaking all around us. There is pain and loss in our own lives. There is economic disparity in our own back yards. There is violence and discrimination, poverty and human trafficking and while we might close our eyes and go to sleep hoping that peace means it all just goes away. God invites us all into the impossible, to put things back where God wants them to be. May it be so.