Awakening to the Light Within

Reflection

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we gather in this season of Advent, a time of anticipation and waiting, let us reflect on the profound intersection of raw experience, silence and mysticism. Advent invites us to prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of Christ, and today, we'll explore how these spiritual traditions can deepen our understanding of this sacred journey.

Experiencing the Presence
Let us to turn our attention to the raw, unfiltered experience of the present moment. In the midst of the holiday hustle, can we pause and truly experience the beauty and mystery around us? Advent invites us to be present to the divine in our everyday lives, to recognize God's presence in the ordinary, and to open our hearts to the sacredness of each moment.

Embracing the Silence
Let us embrace the silence that Advent offers. The Zen practice of sitting in stillness, of being present with what is, mirrors the waiting of Advent. It's in the silence that we often hear the whisper of God's voice, calling us to a deeper awareness of our connection to the divine. As we light the weekly Advent candle, let it be a reminder to cultivate that inner stillness and receptivity.

May we recall that the first word of the Rule of St. Benedict *Ausculta*, holds significant meaning in the context of Benedictine monasticism. *Ausculta* is a Latin imperative verb that translates to (only just) "Listen" in English. The opening word encapsulates a central theme in the Rule and sets the tone for the Benedictine way of life.

Listen to God: The primary aspect of *Ausculta* is the call to listen to God. Benedictine monks and nuns are encouraged to cultivate a deep, contemplative listening in prayer and meditation, opening themselves to divine guidance and wisdom.

Listen to the Rule: St. Benedict's Rule itself is a guide for monastic living. By using the word *Ausculta*, Benedict urges his followers not just to read or recite the Rule but to truly listen and internalize its teachings. This involves a receptive and obedient posture to the guidance provided in the Rule.

Listen to Others: The spirit of *Ausculta* extends to interpersonal relationships within the monastic community. We can listen to others as reflections of our own self. Being in a monastic (*monos*, Gk one) community, we recognize that all is one. Moreover, fostering a spirit of communal listening promotes harmony and mutual support within the monastic community of each and everyone.

Listen to the World: Benedictine monasticism encourages a balance between the contemplative life and engagement with the world. "Ausculta" suggests that we maintain a receptive attitude toward the needs of the world outside the home, prompting Benedictines to listen empathetically to the cries of the poor and marginalized and respond with acts of charity and service as befits the moment.

In essence, *Ausculta* encapsulates the Benedictine ethos of humble listening, receptivity, and obedience (*ob+audire* L. though <the ego> + to listen). It serves as a reminder that the path to spiritual growth and communal harmony begins with a heart that is open and attuned to the guidance of God, the teachings of the Rule, and the needs of others. In short, recognizing Christ's basic instruction: Love God, Love neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30-31).

Union with the Divine
Christian mystics, like St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich, speak of a profound union with the divine. Advent, in its essence, is an invitation to enter into a mystical relationship with God. The waiting becomes a form of divine communion, a journey inward where we discover the Christ light within us. In the darkness, a light shines, guiding us toward the birth of the Holy Child.

As we move through the days of Advent, let us integrate these spiritual insights into our lives. Let us experience stillness amid the hustle and bustle, being the space from within which we emerge. In doing so, we prepare not only for the celebration of Christ's birth but also for the ongoing birth of Christ in our own hearts. May we awaken to the Divine Light we share with all as we area but children of God – however God may be beyond our mere human comprehension and understanding, that reality before our egos which *we are* in Unicity

As Fr. Bede Griffiths OSB writes:

There are three levels in all human action: physical, psychological and spiritual. The body and the mind are engaged in all, but beyond them both is … the Spirit, and ultimately every action comes from the Spirit of God. … If the spirit is free from the chains of selfishness and has rid itself of egoism, and if the mind is free of any ill will, then no evil and be conceived.

(Bede Griffiths, *The New Creation in Christ: Christian Meditation and Community*, ed. Robert Kiely and Laurence Freeman OSB. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992). 33.

Side note: What to do if you notice you are being egotistical (selfish, etc.) or are creating mental tension (anxiety, worry, anger-depression)? Simply acknowledge the condition, feel it then inhale, hold for a moment, exhale through pursed is and let your creation go consciously recognizing it as your own creation – let it evaporate into thin air.

Again, may this Advent season be a time of awakening to the light within, a light that dispels the darkness and guides us on our journey towards God. Amen.

Many blessings to you and yours.
Peace and Joy!
White Robed Monks of St. Benedict