

# ***Winter Solstice Prayer for Peace***

## ***December 21, 2021***

***Marianist Environmental Education Center, Mount Saint John***

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### **Call to Prayer** *(Begin in darkness/dimly lit area)*

*Everything beyond a certain distance is dark, and yet everything is full of being around us. This is the darkness, heavy with promises and threats, which (we) will have to illuminate and animate with the divine presence*

*- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

**Reader:** Today we commemorate the longest night (shortest day) of our year in the northern hemisphere and the return of lengthening days. With the rising of the sun is the promise that light conquers darkness; that new life is obtainable and that death is overcome.

Our ancestors, not knowing exactly when Jesus was born placed the feast of Christmas at this time of solstice to celebrate Jesus as the Light overcoming all darkness. People of many traditions light candles and decorate with festive lights in this season, as a reminder of the promise of God's light within us, a light that overcomes all darkness. Our Jewish brothers and sisters just celebrated the Hanukkah festival of lights. In the face of climate change, what actions will we take with and for future generations?

Today, we are reminded to trust the promise of light, to enkindle the flame of God's love within us and to pray that we might let go of all that impedes us from transformation, that we live as peacemakers who overcome the deeds of darkness with actions of light and love. The world needs our peace. Let us pray for courage to live in harmony with all the earth as peace-makers.

**ALL: O radiant Dawn, Splendor of eternal light, sun of justice; Come shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.** *(Vespers antiphon)*

**Sing:** (Dec 21 O antiphon verse - O Come O Come Emmanuel)

**O come O Dayspring from on high, & cheer us by your drawing nigh. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadow put to flight.**

**Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel**

### **Reflection on Advent in view of *Laudato si***

*Adapted from LSAP Advent gathering prayer by Sr. Colleen Dauerbach, SSI*

As we gather to celebrate the first turning from winter to spring, we are invited to recognize and honor the beauty and renewal of hope in the often-unwanted season of winter. We find our hearts conflicted. It is a time of waiting. Yet our concern for this Earth, our home, sparks fear that time for waiting may be growing short, even as the hours of sunlight shorten. We see rising seas and spreading drought. Wildfires and floods seem ever more common. Devastation abounds. Yet we know our sun will return.

We know that nature is capable of great self-healing. Our ordinary experience gives us hope. Grace abounds as well in this time of repentance. We repent the harm our human carelessness or selfishness causes to all creation, especially to the most vulnerable of peoples and other species alike.

We repent our failure to see and to nurture the gifts of life that surround us. We ask for greater openness to hear and respond to the anxiousness and concerns of young people. We turn our hearts to those impacted by severe storms and droughts, and the migrants, immigrants and homeless who make their journeys in this more unforgiving winter season.

We pray now for wisdom to meld our hope and our repentance. We pray for courage and determination to mend what we have broken. We resolve to hear the cries of the poor and the cry of our common home. We resolve to promote ecological and environmental justice, to protect all human life and to respect and cherish the life forms that share this Earth with us.

May our prayer today inspire us to actions that will protect biodiversity, support carbon neutrality, and give justice and relief to

our vulnerable neighbors, with special awareness of indigenous communities, refugees, migrants and all our children at risk.

Let us listen to Pope Francis as he calls us to develop a “loving awareness” of this home we share. (LS220) May we be empowered by our observance today to act on the values we hold dear. (LS220) As the planet experiences the first slow turn toward greater daylight, we pray for ecological conversion and transformation as peacemakers. To this we say AMEN.

**Leader:** Let us pray:

**All: God, in the quiet darkness of this moment we search for the sacred light that shines on in our darkness. O Source of All Peace we have not always acted for peace. We have caused division and brokenness. We ask for your forgiveness & healing. Help us live out our calling as peacemakers and earth healers.**

May our journey through darkness to light today help grow your courage & strength to change. To find the light we must go into the dark. Go with us into the dark places where we must travel. Take away our fear of darkness. Be a lantern for us that we may be lanterns for one another. Help us find your WAY of Peace, Hope & Light.

- *Light Solstice Candles while chanting, and then prepare for a walk. At Mount St. John we walk through the Marianist Nature Preserve woods lit with luminaria to the prairie overlook bonfire.*

**MEEC Solstice Chant: Light our way, Light our way, Light our way in the darkness; Light our way, Light our way**

- 1. Be our path of Peace**
- 2. Be our path of Hope**

**Winter Solstice Fire Prayer** - from *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim* c, 1989  
by Edward Hays

**Leader:** Let us welcome the light of the sacred solstice fire.

**All: We pray on this night of ancient fear, When those who have gone before us were fearful Of what lurked outside the ring of fire of light and warmth. They feared all that prowled in the darkness: Evil, disease, death, beasts that might destroy them and the hidden dangers of winter.**

*Prayers outside after walking to bonfire and encircling it in silence*

## ***Sending Hope and Peace to the Four Directions***

– adapted from *Carrying Winter in My Heart In: The Circle of Life: the Heart's Journey through the seasons. C. 2005 by Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr*

**Leader: We turn to the east**, the direction of the rising sun and the season of springtime and new beginnings. We breathe in deeply, uniting our breath with all living things as we take in the oxygen plants have produced. May each dawn offer us hope and remind us of the coming of the Christlight, the sun of justice to our world.

**ALL: Great Spirit of the East, our dreams grow dim and weak. Songs of hope fly away like ghosts of long ago. Enter our lost and wandering hearts. Greet us with your promise of blossoming new and revitalizing energy. Speak to us of blessings to come while the hidden and the unknown gestate in the dark spaces of our inner caves ... [pause]... We open our hearts to receive this Divine Light and we offer this Birthing Light to all in the east who need hope.**

**Leader: We face the south**, the direction of fire, midday and summer with its energy of growing vitality and abundant fruitfulness. We remember all in the southern hemisphere who begin their summer season. We open our hearts to embrace the Divine Light, source of all spiritual transformation, and to ask that our hearts be re-kindled with the fire of love and compassion.

**ALL: Great Spirit of the South, the sun hides from our bereft hearts. The light of consoling love has dimmed. Soften the pain of our depleted spirits, and all we grieve during this Covid time. Surround us with the assurance of love. Strengthen our trust when we stand in the shadow of life. May the remembrance of fruitful times gently hold us... [pause]... Let us offer this Radiant Love to anyone dwelling in the south who is experiencing darkness.**

**Leader: We face the West**, direction of the setting sun, of water, ending of the day and the season of autumn just past. We open our hearts to receive the Divine Light that guides us in our times of farewell and releasing, and seek to go with life's flow.

**ALL: Great Spirit of the West, the leaves of our good fortunes wither while the wind whispers the need to let go. Our good works fade and blow away. We bend with vulnerability and weakness, the basket of happiness empties of its fruit. Part of each of us fears the surrender required, and the pain of loving. Empty us of what keeps us from growth. Protect us from what leads to despair ... [pause]... Let us offer this Divine Wisdom to all who need guidance in their darkness.**

**Leader: We turn and face the north** to welcome winter with its strengths and challenges. The direction of the night and ancestral wisdom. We welcome its natural beauty, cold, barrenness and quieter, resting moments to ponder and trust the unseen inner life. We open our hearts to receive the strength of the Divine Light.

**ALL: Great Spirit of the North, our hearts are frozen, and minds barren. A glacial wilderness often pervades yet the seeds of hope are secretly planted. They gestate and turn within me, silent messengers of transformation. We wait with faith-filled confidence, hearing songs without a sound. We will stand with full courage, breathing deeply the ancestral air which strengthens us... [pause]... Let us offer this Divine Courage of the Divine Light to all in the north who yearn for new life to sprout from the darkness.**

### **Advent Reflection on Laudato si**

*-adapted from Bishop Robert McElroy, 2020, (LSAP Advent Prayer)*

The Psalmist proclaims: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the sky above declares God's handiwork."

And Laudato Si' responds: "God has written a precious book 'whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe.'... 'To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope.' "

This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God hands on to us, since 'for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice.'" (LS 85)

Pope Francis points us to the very core of Advent reality in drawing together the themes of paradox, hope, glory, and divine grace that surround our pilgrim journey on this Earth and the created order that caresses us in every moment of our life. Advent is uniquely a time of paradox in the life of the Christian disciple, for it co-mingles the overwhelming gift of our redemption accomplished in the beauty of the Incarnation and the continuing human frailties that prevent us from seizing the fullness of grace offered by God...

Seen against the backdrop of this Advent faith, we are invited to ponder deeply the message creation is bringing to us, listening to a paradoxical and silent voice. The voice of creation speaks of the intimate and overpowering love that God has for each of us. The sheer beauty of creation leaves us breathless, in the exquisite design of an orchid, the magnificence of the lion, and the splendor of a plumed ostrich. The staggering allure of a magnificent sunset, or a granite etched mountain, or the vastness of the oceans all point to transcendence and benevolence linked together in the face of the Triune God. These realities shape the words of *Laudato Si'*: "... in my effort to decipher the sacredness of the world, I explore my own."

Yet sadly this is not the only message that the paradoxical voice of nature brings to us at this moment of human history. Francis writes that for the believer to contemplate creation is to hear a message from our God. And that message tragically reverberates with the screams of creation that are generated by human selfishness, greed, and the drive to dominate... For the faithful disciple who basks in the glory of the creation and Incarnation, even while recognizing the yawning gap between God's justice and peace and the reality which the world has wrought, recognizes that human striving in faith and hope is always accompanied by God's work and grace... May we join God at work and look toward the light of the new day and season with hope.

Silent reflection, then transition to intercessions:

**Intercessions** adapted from Fr. Art Purcaro, OSA (LSAP Advent)

**Response: O Come, Welcome the Sun of Justice, Emmanuel**

1) Awesome God, you draw close to us and invite us to contemplate your presence in all that exists. • Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey together toward your infinite light.

**RESP: O COME, WELCOME THE SUN OF JUSTICE, EMMANUEL.**

2) God of harmony, diversity in unity, encourage us in our struggle to grow more, mature more, be sanctified more by going out of ourselves to live in communion with you, with others and with all your creatures. • In every encounter, help us to grow ever more aware of the interconnectedness of all that exists.

**RESP: O COME, WELCOME THE SUN OF JUSTICE, EMMANUEL.**

3) Loving God, you are the fountain and source of everything that exists, bestowing all good gifts on all of creation, not simply for the enjoyment of a few. What you freely bless us with, you ask us to cherish and share. • Move our hearts to be forever restless, that we might continue to grow and become more responsible stewards who respectfully reach out beyond what is, towards what all is called to be.

**RESP: O COME, WELCOME THE SUN OF JUSTICE, EMMANUEL.**

4) Compassionate God, earth is our common home, our shared inheritance. • Allow our hearts to be open and committed to building together a better world where all can flourish and become more fully alive.

**RESP: O COME, WELCOME THE SUN OF JUSTICE, EMMANUEL.**

5) Merciful God, the poor and the earth are crying out; open our minds and hearts to be attentive and to truly listen to the clamor of your voice. • Enlighten those who possess power and money to resist individualism and indifference, love the common good, stand alongside the weak and care for this gift you so generously share with us.

**RESP: O COME, WELCOME THE SUN OF JUSTICE, EMMANUEL.**

*Leader: Take a moment to silently offer your own prayers of hope*

## **A Blessing of the Solstice Feast**

*- Edward Hays, from Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim, c.1989 –*

As our great star, the sun,  
Graciously shares light, warmth, and energy with us,  
May we, as children of the earth and the sun,  
Share with one another the life and joy of this meal.

We acknowledge that the food and drink before us  
Is sun-soaked and filled with star energy.

In this food and drink is the taste of the heavens;

May we partake of it in peace

With each other and with all the earth.

A winter solstice toast to the sun

And to the joys of the winter season. **HAPPY WINTER !**

**(Enjoy Refreshments)**

## **Concluding Prayer after the Solstice Feast**

*- Edward Hays, from Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim, c.1989 –*

Today we stand at the threshold of the feast of Christmas the birth of the Son of God, born of Mary. May our celebration be in harmony with that most holy day of our tradition. May it help us to truly rejoice in the birth of the Light of the World. May this our winter solstice celebration bring us into communion with all those who prepare to celebrate the feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. May we also be in communion with our Jewish brothers and sisters who celebrated Hanukkah and those of many other traditions, who with us seek peace and light for our world.

**All Respond: AMEN, LET THERE BE LIGHT.**

**May Peace Prevail On Earth! HAPPY WINTER!**

LSAP Advent Prayer - Selections generously shared by the USA Vowed Religious Orders working collaboratively together on the Laudato si Action Platform (LSAP) <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org>. Contact MEEC if you would like to learn more/get involved in. Laudato si text: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)