



It does not start in a church. It starts on a hillside, in a park, looking out a window. It is what people with my heritage call “Advent” — the coming. Those folks with whom I share a cultural legacy include just about everyone I know. The current paths may be different; progressive Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist, secular humanists, atheists. But way back there were spiritual roots which, like it or not, we share. And, there is something rather deep and difficult to define that we have in common at this time of year.

I have looked on to a great many winter holidays and they have become increasingly troublesome. Many are aware of an almost indefinable longing which cannot be satisfied with the trivial, glitzy, forced joviality, commercialism, which surrounds our festivals. Can there be another approach?

Let it begin with the bare trees around us, and the gray skies, and the coldness. Above all let there be a slowing down. Let us prioritize the need to step off the bullet train of contemporary life. Many years ago I heard the psychologist Carl Rogers (1902–1987) predict that the greatest challenge of the present age would be the increasing rapidity of change itself. He was right.

Advent — not a time for gift lists, party planning, outdoing the neighbors in decorations, elaborate church events— but a time for waiting, stepping off the fast train.

Also, it is a time for looking around and at least becoming aware of the people existing on the margins of our society. In the county where I live there are times during the year when there is one fabulous wine event after another. There is also a rapidly growing number of people who rely upon food pantries to help make sure that their children are not going to bed hungry. And yet on this planet 1 in 8 people do go to bed hungry. Economically in this country the gap between the 1% and 99%, as we have learned to term it, is rapidly growing. And, we each know of many other examples of gaps. So what are we to do?

Japanese haiku poets, like Issa (1763–1828) used terms such as “*crossing the roof of hell*” and suggested that during those/ these times we should be looking for flowers. Basho (1644–1694) put it this way when he was approaching a difficult high summit; *On the mountain path / what is this special thing? /A simple violet.*

Well, fellow violet seekers, let this waiting season begin for us by

touching a leafless tree, or looking into the sparkling eyes of a child at a food pantry, or watching the flight of a visiting bird.

Whatever path you travel in these days, may it be in peace and in all ways good.

Brother Toby

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