



There is perhaps nothing we modern people need more in Advent than to be genuinely shaken up! *Alfred Delp (1907–1945)*

What a peculiar Christmastime thought, and who the heck is Alfred Delp? Well, it isn't surprising you've never heard of him unless you happen to collect German stamps – he is on one.

Alfred had a Catholic mother and a devout Lutheran father which was a very unusual situation at that time in Bavaria. He became a Jesuit priest but was noted as an early advocate for ecumenism and finding the common roots for all spiritual paths.

When Hitler came to power Alfred became a core member of the Kreisau Circle resistance group. After Kristallnacht he was active in offering protection whenever he could to Jewish people. He also supported the attempt to assassinate Hitler. Eventually he was arrested and condemned to death by hanging. His cell was three paces one-way and three paces the other way, with a high-up small window facing a gray sky, and his hands were chained both day and night.

Remarkably, during his prison days Alfred wrote some very inspirational reflections, including a collection designed for Advent. To oversimplify greatly, he said, first we have to turn away from the enforced and false gaiety of the season. We have to be aware of life as it really is. *“The world today needs people who have been shaken by ultimate calamities and emerged from them with hope.”*

Here is a guy who knows he is going to be hanged soon, talking about the need for hope! Alfred speaks of “golden seeds” which are delivered to us by angels. Not the ones with wings and celestial harps but by friends and strangers. After an encounter with one, we discover in our hand a "golden seed" for a better future. Our job, our Advent task, is to plant that seed *“in the fertility of the silent earth.”* We will never see the harvest but it will eventually happen.

Got it? Let us be aware of those “golden seeds” in our hands.

Today, December 13, is the feast of St. Lucy (283?–304?) It is a big deal in snowbound Scandinavia. Girls clad in white, wearing a

crown of candles, serve delicious rolls. The strange thing is this most famous saint in the far North had never seen snow. She had in fact never been off the Mediterranean island of Sicily. Yet she became a symbol of hope for those struggling to survive the rugged dangers of a Scandinavian winter.

Who was Lucy? No one knows for sure but the traditional tale runs something like this. There was a wave of persecutions against those living the way of Jesus in her hometown of Syracuse. An angry rejected suitor reported her to the Roman authorities, who sentenced her to be removed to a brothel and forced into prostitution. Then, as the legend goes, when they came to take her she was immovable. Next, she was condemned to death by fire but the flames did not hurt her. Finally, the Romans managed to kill her by piercing her neck with a sword. Somehow by resisting the suitor and the Roman authorities she managed to plant one of those “golden seeds” and centuries later it was harvested in Scandinavia by people needing encouragement.

There is a Swedish Santa Lucia song for hope in bad times. It goes,

*Night goes with silent steps round house and cottage.
O'er earth that sun forgot, dark shadows linger.
Then on our threshold stands, white clad in candlelight
Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia.*

Let's all look for those “golden seeds” and, like Lucy and Alfred, get them planted!

And, should a girl with a crown of candles happen to offer you some rolls, take them, they're very good! They are called Lussekatter, "Saffron Cats." There is no saffron grown in Sweden — but that's another story.

Brother Toby