

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

# AWAKENED

*by Grace*

*by Rev. James R. McDonald, CSsR*



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# Introduction

Advent begins in the dark—not with answers, but with longing. As the days grow shorter and the world moves faster, the Church invites us to slow down, to watch, to wait. Waiting is hard, especially when life feels overwhelming or uncertain.

This devotional is meant to be a companion through the waiting. It does not offer easy answers or perfect joy. Instead, it offers a space to reflect, to pray, and to be honest before God. Each entry is centered around a spiritual theme drawn from the Sunday Scriptures—themes such as wakefulness, grace, joy that holds sorrow, and love that takes risks.

My reflections were born out of preaching these texts to real faith communities—sisters in religious life, parishioners young and old, and people carrying both deep faith and heavy questions. What emerged was not a performance of piety, but a quiet and honest encounter with the living Christ.

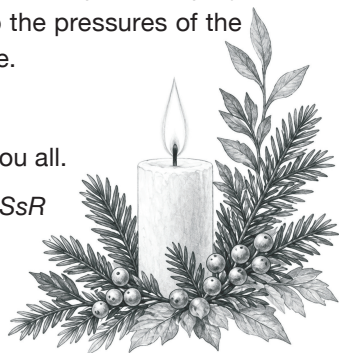
This devotional is designed for both personal and small-group use. Each week includes a brief pastoral contemplation, questions for reflection, a simple spiritual practice for the week, and a closing prayer. There are also special devotions for Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, the solemnity of Mary, the feast of the Holy Family, Epiphany, and the baptism of the Lord.

Whether you are spiritually weary or full of anticipation, I pray that these pages help you wake up—not to the pressures of the season, but to the grace that is already here.

Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus.

May the peace of Advent be a blessing to you all.

—Rev. James R. McDonald, CSSR



## WEEK 1

# The Wake-Up Call

*"It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep."  
(Romans 13:11)*

The season begins not with lights and jingle bells, but with a jolt—a wake-up call from the Apostle Paul. “Wake up,” he says. Not just from sleep, but from the kind of living that dulls our souls. From living on autopilot; from distraction; from trying to find meaning in what does not last.

Paul warns us not to be ruled by the cravings and impulses that so easily steal our peace—the desire to control, to compete, to be seen, to prove ourselves. Advent is our chance to loosen our grip on these distractions and make space for something deeper—Christ himself!

Advent invites us to shrug off the burdens and cares of the year and begin again—not with more pressure, but with more presence, which is not easy. By the time Advent rolls around, many of us are worn ragged. The headlines are heavy, our schedules full, and, often, our hearts laden with grief, anxiety, or plain numbness. This is the time the world expects us to decorate perfectly, buy joy for everyone, and pretend that all is magical.

But as Paul reminds us, you do not have to fake joy. Instead, during Advent, you can wake up to real joy, which is that Christ meets us right here, in our mess, our longing, our restlessness. The gift is not under a tree, but already planted in us: the hope that God is with us, God is coming, and God is making all things new. Our joy comes not from having everything in place, but from realizing that he has entered our homes, our lives, our hearts, our waiting—not just at Christmas, but right now.

And so, with the Church throughout the ages, we pray:  
Maranatha—Come, Lord Jesus.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What part of your soul feels asleep right now?
- What is God nudging you to discern and wake up to?
- What would it mean for you to desire more of God—not more stuff, more success, or more control, but more of God's presence in your daily life?

## PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Choose a time each day to sit in stillness for 10–15 minutes. No agenda, no list, no phone. Just breathe deeply and pray this simple phrase slowly: “Come, Lord Jesus.” Let it rise from your heart as a longing; let hope fill the spaces created by entrusting your worries to the Lord.

## PRAYER

*God of light, awaken what has grown weary in me. In this holy season, help me to make room, not just for tradition or memory, but for you. Quiet the noise around me. Help me desire that which truly satisfies, which is you, Lord Jesus. Come into my heart, my home, my life—today. Amen.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Rev. James R. McDonald, CSsR**, is a Redemptorist priest whose ministry has taken him from parish and prison ministry to retreat work and long-term pastoral accompaniment of religious communities. He holds a B.A. in philosophy from St. Alphonsus College in Suffield, Connecticut, and a DMin from Washington Theological Union in Silver Spring, Maryland. His ministry has included parishes throughout the eastern United States, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Ohio, as well as retreat house ministry in New Jersey. He currently serves as resident chaplain to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace in northern New Jersey. His interests include preaching, spiritual accompaniment, retreats, and writing.