

# Walking the Path of Advent with Franciscan Hearts

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we enter this sacred season of Advent, I'm reminded of the beautiful parallel between our journey as Secular Franciscans and the spiritual preparation these four weeks invite us to embrace.

Pope Leo XIV's words for the Fourth Sunday of Advent particularly resonate with our Franciscan vocation: *"Looking without walking by, halting the frantic pace of our lives, allowing the lives of others, whoever they may be, with their needs and troubles, to touch our heart."* This is the essence of what St. Francis lived and what we are called to embody.

## Advent as a Franciscan Journey

Francis taught us to see Christ in the face of every person we encounter, especially those most marginalized and in need. This Advent, let us practice the spirituality of *noticing*—not walking by, but truly seeing:

- The person struggling with loneliness during this season of togetherness
- The family facing difficult circumstances while Christmas commercials promise joy
- The co-worker carrying hidden burdens behind their holiday smile

## Our Advent Practice

I encourage each of you to embrace the calendar's invitation to "reach out to those in your community who may be alone this Christmas" (December 20). Consider:

- Sharing the blessing of your nativity scene with someone who needs hope
- Offering your time, treasure, or talent as St. Nicholas exemplified (December 6)
- Creating space for silence and prayer amid the bustle, preparing your heart to truly receive Christ

As Isaiah 2:4 reminds us, we are called to beat our swords into plowshares—to transform whatever divides us into tools that cultivate peace and unity. In our fractured world, this Franciscan witness is needed more than ever.

## Preparing Room

Just as we light each candle on the Advent wreath, let us allow the Light of Christ to illuminate the places in our hearts and communities where healing and conversion are needed. May we "prepare to receive his Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist" (December 24) with hearts truly transformed by encounter with those Francis called our "brothers and sisters."

*"For it is in giving that we receive"*—Francis knew this truth deeply. This Advent, may we give as he did: generously, joyfully, and with eyes fixed on the Christ who comes to save us.

Peace and all good,

The Juan de Padilla Region, OFS

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*"Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you." - Isaiah 35:4*