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faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body.³³

It is our sincere hope that the advent of Cistercian associations offers such a contribution on behalf of the Cistercian Order.

The purpose of these reflections has been to recognize and validate the existence of the Cistercian associate vocation, to explore its manifestation in the world, to describe in general terms the relationship between associations and their Cistercian monasteries, and to raise a number of as yet unanswered questions about how these associations will continue to develop. These are, however, the personal reflections of two individuals and not of all Cistercian associates. In the months ahead we hope there will continue to be prayerful exploration, reflection, and discussion of these issues among other associates and Cistercian monks and nuns. Together let us strive with the Spirit's guidance to discern whether and how we are being led toward a new expression of the Cistercian charism in the world today.

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Christ in Ten Thousand Places: Cultivating the Art of Attention

by

Douglas Burton-Christie

It is 5:45 AM on the feast of Epiphany. I am sitting in the darkness of the Redwoods Monastery chapel awaiting the dawn. It is silent, except for the occasional crackling of a small flame burning before the altar. There are others here with me: the nuns who founded and sustain this small Trappistine community, a handful of guests, two friends who have accompanied me to this remote place. All of us keeping vigil, watching, waiting for the dawning of the light that has come into the world. All of us struggling against our own deeply ingrained habits of inattention. Which is why we are here, I think. It is certainly why *I* am here. To learn how to pay attention, how to give myself, heart and soul, to the dawning of God's presence within me, around me.

I find this difficult to do. My strategies for distracting myself, for doing anything to avoid paying attention, are legion. With all those plausible and not so plausible justifications—I have so many meaningful activities and relationships to which I must attend; I cannot really afford the time; I will get to it later—justifications that merely cloud and obscure the real issue: it is hard to pay attention. It requires a depth of devotion that I cannot easily muster. And it can be frightening. If I slow down long enough to listen—to the stirrings of my own heart, to the fecund images arising within my dreams, to the untended threads of those central relationships in my life—I may find myself challenged to confront issues and questions I would rather not face. But I also know this: if I fail to pay attention, I may never come to see the light shining forth from the depths of my own being, from the lives of others, from the living world.

I long for this light: the star in the night sky at Epiphany beckoning me to be reborn; the roaring flame at Pentecost inviting me to a fiery dance of renewal; the flicker of the paschal candle suddenly piercing the darkness, the cry of *Lumen Christi* sounding all around me as I stand trembling, once again, at the threshold of a new life. Too often I miss this light. I take it for granted. Or I am too preoccupied to notice it. Which is why I find myself lately so intent on learning how to pay attention, how to slow down and notice those faint traces of light washing over me. I do not want to miss all that I have been given to see and cherish.

³³*Christifideles laici* 20, accessed 1 August 1999, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html>.

Still, it is not simply that I want to see more. There are already too many claims upon my attention, too many opportunities to become scattered, dissipated. No, what I want is to see more deeply. I want to learn to pause and dwell within this particular moment—as if there will never be another, as if everything I yearn for is about to dawn before me in the very next moment. And it is. At least if I take seriously the eschatological expectancy at the heart of the Gospel and the sacramental truth of the Incarnation. Together, these Christian mysteries call us to cultivate what I would call the “art of attention.” How else are we to read the language of vigilance that emerges out of the earliest Christian experience, language borne of the hope, expectation even, that the long-desired kingdom (or long-feared judgment) was about to break into the present moment, perhaps already *was* manifesting itself? And how are we to understand the mystery of the Incarnation—“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”—if not as an intuition that dignifies and sacralizes the ordinary, mundane things of this world, that calls us to attend to the tiniest fragments of our lives with the greatest sense of wonder and delight?

That perspective is what I hope to learn by sitting here in the pre-dawn silence of this chapel: how to look out onto my life, onto the world with expectancy and wonder. How to pay attention.

Each Minute the Last Minute

This idea is an old one within Christianity. It is vividly and memorably expressed in Matthew’s Gospel in a phrase that is as arresting as it is chilling: “Keep awake . . . for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Mt 25:13). Jesus is commenting here on the story of the ten bridesmaids. Five of them were prepared for the coming of the bridegroom, having collected sufficient oil for their lamps. But the other five, the so-called foolish ones, did not prepare carefully, had to rush away in search of oil, and ended up being locked out of the wedding banquet. The conclusion to the story is abrupt and unequivocal; there is no recourse for the five foolish bridesmaids. The moment has arrived and they have missed it. It is this sense of finality, I think, that gives the story its edge, its urgency, its pathos. Nothing less than everything is at stake. One’s very destiny, the story suggests, the possibility of enjoying the presence of God, now and forever, hinges on one’s capacity, one’s willingness to remain awake, attentive to the moment.

A similar sense of urgency courses through Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians. Here was a community alive with expectation of the *eschaton*, but in danger of losing that sense of expectancy. Paul writes: “The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. . . . So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Th 5:2, 6). Wakefulness. Like the Buddhist notion of “mindfulness,” with which it has some affinity, wakefulness is a grounding *practice* that can, in time, blossom eventually into a rich, encompassing awareness.

Awareness of what? That our lives are full of possibility and danger. This sense of expectation and hope was central to early Christian experience, rooted in the conviction that the long-awaited fulfillment of time was at hand. Eternity was breaking into the present. But there was also a palpable sense of danger, an understanding that one could lose the necessary sharpness of attention and sobriety. How easy it would be to fall asleep at the crucial moment.

Many of us find it difficult to identify with this sense of urgency. We make plans for the future, take on mortgages. We hope, we expect to be around for a while. We act as though we had all the time in the world. We do not, of course. That is why, whatever one’s attitude toward the *eschaton* may be, the language of wakefulness and vigilance remains crucial for us. Without the habit of vigilance, the danger for all of us is that instead of living, we end up sleepwalking through our days.

This fact, I think, is one reason the character Mr. Stevens in Kazuo Ishiguro’s magnificent novel *The Remains of the Day* resonates so deeply for us. Stevens is a butler, one of the last of an old school of butlers that, as the twentieth century unfolds, seems to be disappearing. He has spent his entire adult life in devoted service to the household of Lord Darlington, a man Stevens admires immensely but blindly. Stevens has paid meticulous attention to the details of running Lord Darlington’s household, but he has remained oblivious to the wider concerns enveloping England with the approach of the Second World War, never noticing Lord Darlington’s growing sympathy for the Brown Shirts. Nor has Stevens paid sufficient attention to the clear if subtle signs of affection bestowed upon him by Miss Kenton, a woman who came to work in the Darlington household for a time. Nor for that matter has he noticed or taken seriously enough his own growing feelings for Miss Kenton. Not until it is too late, that is. Not until she has gone.

As his life draws to a close, Stevens reflects on their relationship, turning over in his mind a particularly charged moment when a possibility for intimacy presented itself to them:

Naturally, when one looks back to such instances today, they may indeed take the appearance of being crucial, precious moments in one’s life; but of course, at the time, this was not the impression one had. Rather, it was as though one had available a never-ending number of days, months, years in which to sort out the vagaries of one’s relationship with Miss Kenton; an infinite number of further opportunities in which to remedy the effect of this or that misunderstanding. There was surely nothing to indicate at the time that such evidently small incidents would render whole dreams forever irredeemable.¹

The stabbing sense of loss and regret expressed here says almost all there is to say about the value and necessity of vigilance. We struggle to “remain awake,”

¹Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (New York: Knopf, 1989) 179.

so that we do not miss the immense significance of “such evidently small incidents,” so that we do not render “whole dreams forever irredeemable.”

Here, it is the stark facts of mortality and transience that beckon for our attention. The recognition, the acceptance, that one does *not* have “available a never-ending number of days, months, years” creates a sense of urgency, of wakefulness, an alertness to all that life presents in *this* moment. That is why the practice of *memento mori*—meditation on one’s death—has always been such an important spiritual discipline. “Nothing so clears a man’s mind as knowing he’ll be hanged in a fortnight,” declared Dr. Samuel Johnson, memorably if glibly. Evagrius of Pontus, an early Christian monk, expressed the same truth more soberly: “Always keep your death in mind . . . then there will be no fault in your soul.”² For Evagrius, as for so many of the early Christian monks, the awareness of standing always before the day of reckoning was palpable and deep. It is a sense that many of us do not share. But we can still learn from the discipline. Especially if we understand consciousness of death in the way the monks seem to have done, as yielding a heightened sense of God’s presence in prayer and as leading toward a sharpened awareness of and compassion for the suffering of others. So Abba Poemen could say, as if summing up the entire Christian monastic life, “We do not need anything except a vigilant spirit.”³

How does one cultivate a “vigilant spirit”? At the risk of seeming to engage in a circular argument, I would say it is by *practicing vigilance*. That is, by looking closely and carefully at everything, as if it is the last chance we will ever have to do so. This intuition, I think, is behind Act 3 of Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town*. The story is familiar. Emily, the young woman at the center of the play, dies. But, through a kind of theatrical sleight of hand, she is given the opportunity to return, to visit her family, to relive a day in her life. She leaps at the chance, choosing her twelfth birthday. Entering the kitchen, Emily encounters her mother, bustling about, cooking breakfast, catching her up on the latest news. But Emily cannot seem to get her mother’s attention. Finally (with mounting urgency, Wilder tells us) she turns to her:

Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I’m dead. You’re a grandmother, Mama. I married George Gibbs, Mama. Wally’s dead, too. Mama, his appendix burst on the camping trip to North Conway. We felt just terrible about it—don’t you remember? But, just for a moment now we’re

²Evagrius 4, *The Desert Christian: Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (New York: Macmillan, 1975) 64.

³Poemen 135; *The Desert Christian* 186.

all together. Mama, just for a moment, we’re happy. *Let’s look at one another.*⁴

Her mother, though, does *not* look at her. It is not entirely clear whether she can’t or won’t look at her. Nor is it clear whether she ever did, at least not with the intensity and focus for which Emily now longs.

It is more than Emily can bear. “I can’t. I can’t go on,” she says. “It goes too fast. We don’t have time to look at one another. I didn’t realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed.” She gives up and asks to be taken back, up the hill, to her grave. But before she goes, she takes one last look, committing to her heart all that is most dear to her:

Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover’s Corners . . .
Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking . . . and Mama’s sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths . . . and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you’re too wonderful for anybody to realize you. . . . Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?⁵

The answer is too painful and obvious to need stating. But the haunting question reverberates long after the curtain has come down. And while there is no simple or easy way that any of us can answer that question in the affirmative, there is something here that we can hold on to, ruminant upon, pay attention to. I am referring to the particular, palpable persons and things that fill our world. In a moment of heightened awareness, Emily comes to notice and cherish those sacraments permeating her life: Mama and Papa, clocks ticking, sunflowers, food and coffee. And so, I think, it may be for us.

“Love calls us to the things of this world,” suggests poet Richard Wilbur.⁶ I wonder whether this is not another way of talking about the fruit of vigilance, attention? Is it really possible to pay attention to the endlessly varied expressions of life around us and *not* finally be drawn out of ourselves in a kind of ecstatic embrace of the world? Precisely because everything *is* passing away. This, says Denise Levertov, is what *living* means:

The fire in leaf and grass
so green it seems
each summer the last summer.

The wind blowing,
the leaves shivering in the sun,
each day the last day.

⁴Thornton Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) 99.

⁵Wilder 100.

⁶Richard Wilbur, “Love Calls Us To the Things of This World,” *New and Selected Poems* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988) 233–4.

A red salamander
 so cold and so
 easy to catch, dreamily
 moves his delicate feet
 and long tail. I hold
 my hand open for him to go.
 Each minute the last minute.⁷

Wonder

Can we learn to live like this, as though each minute is the last minute? Can we learn to pay such careful attention? I am not sure of the answer to that question. Wilder in *Our Town* says that only saints and poets—and only *some* of them—ever achieve this kind of awareness. If that saying is true, it cannot help but discourage us. But then I think: there are saints and poets in our midst to whom we can apprentice ourselves, from whom we can learn much about the art of attention. There is Joseph Wood Krutch, that eloquent chronicler of life in the deserts of the American Southwest, who once acknowledged: “It is not easy to live in that continuous awareness of things that is alone truly living . . . the faculty of wonder tires easily. . . . Really to see something once or twice a week is almost inevitably to have to try to make oneself a poet.”⁸ The *faculty of wonder!* How often I have thought of that faculty since reading Krutch’s wise statement. What is it? Do I have it? Why does it seem so elusive to me?

Then suddenly I find myself full of wonder—at the rise and fall of the mockingbird’s song outside my window, at the dozens of tiny, moist kisses my daughter has just planted on my cheeks in honor of my birthday, at the sight of the new moon etched against the blue-black sky. “Each minute the last minute.” Perhaps, after all, I *am* capable of wonder. But I begin to notice this also: my capacity for wonder is directly related to my capacity to *describe*, however imperfectly, what I behold. That is, I think, what Krutch means by having to “try to make oneself a poet.” To notice something, to care for it intensely and deeply, is to find oneself drawn to speak of it carefully. It is to abandon the imprecision of the generic and to devote oneself to the delicate precision of the particular.

Inscapē. That is the term that the great nineteenth-century Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins coined for the particular shape and texture of the things of this world. “All the world,” said Hopkins, “is full of inscapē, and chance left free to act falls into an order as well as a purpose.” This shape and texture can manifest itself in the most ordinary and unexpected places: “Looking out of my window I caught it in the random clods and broken heaps of snow made by the

⁷Denise Levertov, “Living,” *Poems 1960-1967* (New York: New Directions, 1966).

⁸Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Desert Year* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1981) 37–38.

cast of a broom.”⁹ To look carefully at things, to describe instances of inscapē, was for Hopkins an exacting spiritual discipline. In his journal, one can see the poet at work, practicing his discipline, searching for language that will express, even if only partially, the experience of inscapē. In an entry made on May 9, 1871, Hopkins writes:

. . . the bluebells in your hand baffle you with their inscapē, made to every sense: if you draw your fingers through them they are lodged and struggle with a shock of wet heads; the long stalks rub and click and flatten to a fan on one another like your fingers themselves would when you pass the palms hard across one another, making a brittle rum and jostle like the noise of a hurdle strained by leaning against; then there is the faint honey smell and in the mouth the sweet gum when you bite them. But this is easy, it is the eye they baffle.¹⁰

Reading this passage, one is tempted to ask: do bluebells really deserve such attention, such close scrutiny? From a theological or religious perspective, are they really that significant?

For Hopkins, indeed for anyone standing in the Christian tradition, the answer to both questions has to be yes. This is because of what we say we believe when we affirm the truth and reality of the Incarnation: that God has taken on flesh and dwelt among us. For the earliest Christians as for Hopkins, this mystery meant not only that every human person is shining with the light of Christ but that the entire cosmos is filled with this light. Already in the prologue to John’s Gospel, the cosmological significance of the *logos* is clear: “All things came into being through [the *logos*],” says the evangelist. *Panta*. All things. Then, even more astoundingly: “The *logos* became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). Together these two intuitions express a sense of just how deeply significant the seemingly unimportant things of this world truly are. Here, Christ as *logos* or word is understood as the utterance through whom the world has come into existence. The world is incomprehensible apart from the Word. But so too is the Word incomprehensible apart from the world. That is why Tertullian, struggling to articulate a deeply incarnational theology and spirituality in response to those who claimed that God was remote from the created world, found it so necessary to elaborate upon this cosmic Christology. He did so, for example, in borrowing from the Stoics this vivid image, claiming “that God permeates the world in the same way as honey in the comb.”¹¹

⁹*Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, selected with an Introduction and notes by W. H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1953) 130.

¹⁰Hopkins 125.

¹¹Adv Herm 36.4; Marcia Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol. 2: *Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990) 19.

No wonder that Hopkins could declare in wonder and joy that "Christ plays in ten thousand places/Lovely in limbs."¹² Ten thousand and more, one might say, rising up to meet us through the infinitely varied inscape of the world.

Attention as Resistance: Bearing Witness

Still, if we really pay attention to the world, we will notice more than its "dappled" beauty. We will notice all that we are doing to reduce the world to an almost unimaginably poor, thin facsimile of itself, as Hopkins himself did, looking out onto a row of stumps where his beloved Binsley Poplars had once stood. "O if we knew what we do," he cried, "When we delve or hew—/Hack and rack the growing green!"¹³ But we do not know. Or so it would seem from the rapidly accelerating loss of gorgeous and irreplaceable expressions of life all around us, the disappearance of what Thomas Berry calls "modes of divine presence." If we are to preserve a world where it remains possible to worship, to adore God in and through all that is, we will need to remain vigilant. We will need to translate our vigilance into meaningful acts of resistance, bearing witness by our own disciplined attention to the dignity and sacrality of all that we have been given.

Julia "Butterfly" Hill has been such a witness, living for the past year high atop a thousand-year-old redwood tree near the Headwaters forest in Northern California. It is an image that initially perhaps makes us feel like laughing: a woman living in a tree! And there *is* something wondrous and strange about it. What is it like, I have often wondered as I think of her, to live up there under the arching canopy of that great tree, to spend one's days in the company of hawks and ravens and Marbled Murrelets, one's nights in the company of owls? What is it like to greet the dawn from that little nest? To gaze out into the stars at night and know yourself as part of the sky? To sway to the wild winds pouring in off the mighty Pacific? In the end, the most important thing she has to teach us may be this: what it feels like to live in the presence of the wild.

But that is not what drew her to the top of that tree, at least not directly. It was the tree itself. She is there to keep the tree from being cut down. As long as she is there, Pacific Lumber Company cannot carry out its plan to cut this and other trees nearby, one of the last remaining stands of old growth redwood trees in existence. As long as she is there—and maybe for a long time to come—the trees will live, the wild life of that place will endure, and all of us will retain one more sign that the world is indeed a wild, holy place. Hers is a lonely, solitary vigil. But she is one of a growing company of those for whom maintaining vigil over this threatened forest has become as necessary as breathing. Attention to the life of the ancient forests is integral to the community at Redwoods

¹²"Inversaid"; Hopkins 51.

¹³"Binsley Poplars"; Hopkins 39.

Monastery, as it is for those thousands of people, from the local community and beyond, who recently filled a meadow near the Headwaters forest in protest against the rapidly accelerating pace of clear cutting of ancient trees by Pacific Lumber. A chorus of witnesses is rising up. In their midst stands a young woman holding fast to a single tree. All of us who struggle to pay attention, to practice vigilance, can learn something from the witness of this young woman, this contemporary Simon Stylites atop her wild green pillar.

Closer to where I live, on the west side of Los Angeles, lies another wild place, the beautiful if diminished Ballona Wetlands. The Gabrielenos called it *Pwinukipar*, full of water. Some days it *is* full of water, although the dams and channels built all around it makes this somewhat rare. Still, it is so full of life. On a recent visit, I caught a flash of something bright out of the corner of my eye—like a flame it appeared, rising, then banking and gliding over the salt marsh, tracing a luminescent arc across the late afternoon sky. It took me a moment to realize what I had seen: *Casmerodius albus* or, as it is more commonly known, Great Egret. It is a magnificent bird, surviving here in spite of the inexorable pressures that have left this place so diminished and have left Southern California almost completely bereft of open space. There are other survivors here. On this visit, I notice a Sharp-shinned Hawk perched on a distant fence post, Mallards floating through Ballona Creek, Black Phoebes and White Crowned Sparrows darting through the pickleweed, a Snowy Egret slowly lifting its elegant bright yellow foot from the water. Overhead was a Black Shouldered Kite, wings beating wildly, hovering in a kind of perfect stillness.

That this place exists at all owes much to the vigilance of those in the local community who have come to love and feel a sense of relationship with the place and the beings who live here, who have resisted attempts to consider the wetlands as one more piece of expendable open space. I myself am coming to know and love this place, as is my daughter Julia. I have noticed the transforming effect this place has on her. Like most children, she retains an easy and fluid awareness of the wild world as part of herself. Here, so close to her own home, in the midst of endless urban sprawl, she can feel that world, drink it in, know herself as a wild being. Vigilance, I begin to see, is also about preserving and calling forth those trace elements of wildness that pulse through us all.

It is also about paying attention to those things one would rather not acknowledge or face. This fact was brought home to me recently as I drove from Long Beach to downtown Los Angeles along the Alameda Corridor with a friend, Carlos Porrás, who works for the organization Communities for a Better Environment. The Alameda Corridor is one of the most heavily industrialized places in the world. It is also has the heaviest concentration in Los Angeles of what the Environmental Protection Agency calls Toxic Release Inventory Facilities or TRI's, facilities that manufacture or handle substances of such serious toxicity that they must be registered and monitored by the EPA. I had never driven along the Alameda Corridor before, so I had never noticed or known that laced all through this region of Los Angeles are residential

communities, like Wilmington Park, Cudahay, Bell Gardens, Maywood, and Huntington Park. These are mostly low income, working class communities, predominantly Latino. Traveling along the Alameda Corridor, you begin to sense something that is graphically confirmed if you place a map of the TRI facilities in Los Angeles over a demographic map that details income and ethnicity: most of the TRI facilities are located in low-income communities of color. The reasons for this correlation are complex. The effects, however, are clear: these communities bear a disproportionately high burden when it comes to living with the effects of a highly industrialized, heavily toxic industrial economy.

But this conclusion is an abstraction. It becomes more concrete as one moves through these communities, meets the residents, and hears the stories of what they have endured. A particularly alarming case concerns Suva Elementary School in Bell Gardens. During the span of a single year not long ago, eleven teachers in the school became pregnant. Of those eleven, seven had miscarriages. Of those seven miscarriages, four produced deformed fetuses (two on the same day). A sense of panic swept through the school, and the community embarked on a long and painful struggle to understand the meaning and cause of these events. They had not noticed until then, had not thought to consider the harmful effects of the chrome plating factory next to the school. But they soon found out. Monitoring of the air revealed the highest levels of hexavalent chromium ever recorded in the South Coast region. To give you some idea of how toxic the air was, let me cite a statistic. Two tenths of a nanogram of hexavalent chromium per cubic meter of air is enough cause ten additional cancers per million people. What they discovered in Suva was a level of *four hundred and thirty* nanograms per cubic meter of air, which translates into *twenty thousand* additional cancers per millions exposed.

The Perales family did not know any of this at the time of their son Alex's death from cancer. But now they know, as do the families of the twenty-two children and six teachers from the school who have contracted cancer during the past eight years. Not that this knowledge can do anything to change what has already happened. It cannot restore life to those who have died or restore health to those who have contracted terminal illnesses. But it can and already has begun to give the community a greater sense of empowerment. The chrome plating factory has been closed. There is a growing sense in the community that it need not and will not allow itself to be subjected to such callous, cynical treatment. There is a growing awareness of the need for constant vigilance.

Still, so many questions remain—for the community in Bell Gardens and for us. Will we continue to abide a system that allows human beings to be poisoned in their own homes and schools? Will we continue to tolerate a system that demands low income communities of color to bear a disproportionate burden of our toxic industrial economy? Can we learn to practice the kind of wakefulness that will ensure that this never happens again?

Conclusion

"To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work."¹⁴ These words from poet Mary Oliver might well serve as a reminder of the task before us: to watch, to remain awake, to pay attention—to our own mortality; to those difficult parts of our lives we would rather not face up to; to the impulses of love and generosity arising from deep within us. They are also a reminder to refrain from turning our gaze away from the almost endless pain and suffering all around us; and a reminder to be alert to the glorious beauty of this world, of our own lives, constantly unfolding before us in the tiniest of details.

So much like the light of Epiphany itself, always before us, always leading us on. A gradual unfolding. As in this very moment, the light of dawn seeping into the chapel and the world itself emerging once again from darkness. Slowly, I adjust my eyes to the forms taking shape around me: the bare altar, the tiny figures of the crèche, the long pine benches, my companions sitting in an almost perfect stillness, the branches of a giant redwood tree just outside the chapel swaying in the wind. "Each minute the last minute." Once again the world fills up with light. Once again I am invited to look, to pay attention. And I do, bathing for a moment in the light that has come into the world.

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¹⁴Mary Oliver, "Yes! No!" *White Pine: Prose and Prose Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994) 8.