



SIEBENQUELL

Advent Reflection II

**»That we may be flooded
with the breath of life!«**



SOURCE: LA CROIX

My hand has found like a nest
the wealth of the peoples;
and as mortals gather eggs that have been forsaken
so I have gathered all the earth;
and there was none that moved a wing,
or opened the mouth, or chirped.”
Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it,
or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it?
As if a rod should wield him who lifts it,
or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!
Isaiah 10: 14-15

In the Acts of the Apostles (9:11-15), God asks Ananias to go to Straight Street to find Saul, who has been lying blind in his room for three days, eating and drinking nothing. He is to lay his hands on him so that Saul can see again. Ananias expresses his concerns

and reservations loudly and clearly. God must then convince Ananias that he is not being sent to heal a notorious murderer and persecutor of the church. God's mission to him is to enter that house and awaken a holy instrument. »But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.«

Today we recognise that Paul, due to his Jewish heritage, his Roman citizenship and his classical Greek education under Gamaliel, was the ideal instrument for this task. In his story of transformation, Saul must ask himself the question: For what purpose was I created?

Let us return to Notre Dame de Paris and the awakening of the organ. Like Paul, this organ had a purpose and a mission, namely, to proclaim the good news in sound and melody. After the fire, the 8,000 pipes of this organ were dismantled, cleaned and tuned. Thus, like Paul, it became a suitable tool for its task. However, being suitable is not enough. Just because we can do or be something does not mean that we are willing to do or be it. Ability is not yet readiness. Here, too, the question must be asked: for what purpose were we created?

I recently visited a church and saw a sign in the entrance area with this quote: »The Church is not a museum of antiquities. It is like an old village well that provides water (grace) to people today just as it did in the past.« These words were spoken by Pope John XXIII. His words also apply to the organ of Notre Dame, because it was not dismantled, cleaned and tuned to become a museum piece. But the words also apply to us: we are not renewed, cleansed and retuned during Advent just to stand around uselessly and idly so that others might admire our holiness.

For this reason, Archbishop Laurent Ulrich sang the »eight invocations« of the blessing of the organ. Of course, these invocations never apply only to the sacred instrument but are also addressed to the organist. He or she should then play a series of improvisations. The celebrant assigns certain tasks to the organ, which the organist then performs.

If we are the sacred instrument, then God is the organist.

If we are to be more than a potential but lifeless instrument of God, we must be filled with air that flows through us. Let us remember Genesis 2. »Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.« (Gen 2:7) Like a dismantled, cleaned and tuned organ, we lay on the ground at the beginning, ready for life. But it was only when air, the breath of God, flowed through us that we became living beings, just as the organ only produced living sounds when air flowed through its 8,000 pipes. This is how the sacred instrument of a human being was awakened for the first time. When it comes to this art, God is an old hand.

If I were allowed to create an Advent awakening ritual for people, I would sing Huub Oosterhuis' song »That we may be flooded with the breath of life« to and over them.

Awaken, mortal, who has kept silence for too long about all that vitalizes you and lets you live, and sing:

That we may be flooded with the breath of life and shout, finally birthed.

Awaken, mortal, who has become dull and motionless and have forgotten the joy of companionship and life, and sing:

That we may be flooded with the breath of life and laugh, finally birthed.

Awaken, mortal, you who are distracted from all that is essential, suffocated by superficiality; remember your God-given and Spirit-woven vitality and sing:

That we may be flooded with the breath of life and know, finally birthed.

Biblical storytellers would call this process »being inspired by the Spirit.« The organ, like humans, has the potential to produce wonderful music. But both need a source of air. They need something outside themselves to realise their potential. Nothing will happen unless the breath of God blows into us and gives us life. True life, which goes beyond mere physical existence, comes through His Spirit.

Furthermore, we must be played by a hand that brings forth and evokes all that is still unheard yet within us. It is not the organ that gets the credit for what has been played. Let us consider the words of the prophet Isaiah:

**Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it,
or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it?
As if a rod should wield him who lifts it,
or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!**

Many people have enjoyed listening to my confrere Jörg Gattwinkel play the organ. However, I have never seen anyone approach the organ after Jörg has played to tell it how wonderfully it played. The honour belongs to the source, not the instrument. We admire the instrument; we praise the player.

May we continue into the Advent season renewed, purified and retuned, filled with the breath of life and played by a master's hand.

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Vallendar, December 13th, 2025