
GANZ - FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

30 NOVEMBER 2025



Norman Rockwell (1894-1978), from his set of four paintings, *The Four Freedoms* (1934) – *Freedom from Want*. This set of four paintings was inspired by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 State of the Union address. The President spoke of the freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.¹

Did you notice how, except for those serving the meal, everyone is finding their delight not in looking at the food, but in looking at each other? Even that man, who is peaking out at us from the bottom right-hand corner, is looking at us. Do you see the humor in his eyes?

Biblical Text

¹ See: <https://www.mfah.org/blogs/inside-mfah/norman-rockwells-four-freedoms>.

Lamentations 3:21-24 (NJB)

- ²¹ This is what I shall keep in mind
and so regain some hope:
- ²² Surely Yahweh's mercies are not over,
his deeds of faithful love not exhausted;
- ²³ every morning they are renewed;
great is his faithfulness!
- ²⁴ 'Yahweh is all I have,' I say to myself,
'and so I shall put my hope in him.'²

Robert Davidson on Lamentations 3:21-24 - The end of the previous section leaves unanswered the question: If the Lord is responsible for the suffering and the tragedy being experienced, to whom does the poet turn for help? The answer, as in so many of the Psalms, is to no one other than the Lord, the same God who is the source of his trouble. Let us follow this answer through four stages in verses 21–39. (1) The answer begins in verses 21–24 by recalling what alone can be the foundation of hope, the true character of God as Israel had known Him in the past. All the great words of assurance come tumbling out: God's "steadfast love" (*hesed*), that constancy which means that he could never walk out on his people (see comments on Jer. 2:2 in vol.1, pp. 24–25); his "mercies", his warm compassion (*raham*, a Hebrew word that basically means the womb); and his "faithfulness", that dependable support which will never let anyone down. The words recall the description of God given, according to Exodus 34:6, to Moses when he received the stone tablets with the commandments: "The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..."³

Some Musical Versions of the Following Text

See: Fernando Ortega, *The Shadow of Your Wings: Hymns and Sacred Songs* (released 2006); Steven Curtis Chapman, *Deeper Roots: Where the Bluegrass Grows* (released 2019); Anthem Lights, *Hymn-Capella* (released 2020); Keith & Kristyn Getty, *Getty Kids [four girls!] Hymnal – Hymns from Home* (released 2021); Carrie Underwood, *My Savior* (released 2021).

² [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), La 3:21–24.

³ Robert Davidson, [*Jeremiah and Lamentations*](#), vol. 2 of *The Daily Study Bible Series* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1983), 193.

Text

“Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God My Father”⁴

By Thomas O. Chisholm (1866-1960)⁵

1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness,
Great is thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness,
Lord unto me.

2. Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above

⁴ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 348. “While many enduring hymns are born out of a particular dramatic experience, this was simply the result of the author’s “morning by morning” realization of God’s personal faithfulness in his daily life. Shortly before his death in 1960, Thomas Chisholm wrote: ‘My income has never been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. But I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, which have filled me with astonished gratefulness.’”

⁵ From *Hymnary.org* – “Thomas O. Chisholm was born in Franklin, Kentucky in 1866. His boyhood was spent on a farm and in teaching district schools [beginning at age 16]. He spent five years as editor of the local paper at Franklin. He was converted to Christianity at the age of 26 and soon after was business manager and office editor of the *Pentecostal Herald* of Louisville, Ky. In 1903 he entered the ministry of the M. E. Church South. His aim in writing was to incorporate as much Scripture as possible and to avoid flippant or sentimental themes.”

The M.E. Church South – “The Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E. Church South; pro-slavery) was a Protestant denomination formed in 1845 after a split in the Methodist Episcopal Church over the issue of slavery. It became the dominant Methodist body in the American South until merging into the Methodist Church in 1939.” (Microsoft CoPilot)

Join with all nature in manifold witness
To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Refrain]

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine and ten thousand beside. [Refrain]

A Close Reading of the Text

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father – That this hymn begins with the adjective “great” asks us to consider in what sense it is great. We can dismiss that it means “great physical size” and overlook any chance that it means that God is pregnant, as in “great with child”, though the idea that God is pregnant with faithfulness has poetic power. But we feel ourselves closer to what Chisholm means with “of long duration; lasting, or having lasted, a long time.” Is there not something implied in the very idea of faithfulness that it has gone on for a long time? Thus, we consider ourselves blessed when we have at least a few “old” friends – their enduring, tested presence in our lives.

When he writes “**O God, my Father**”, we notice how Chisholm is joining two utterly different realities: the created world and God. He articulates that this joining is through a relationship of mutual affection; there is tenderness in it.

One reality is referenced in the exclamation “**O God**”, which emphasizes God’s supreme otherness (the Hebrew sense of the word “holy”): no *one* and no *thing* is remotely equal to God.

Hosea 11:9 (NJB) –

for I am God, not man,
the Holy One in your midst.⁶

This exclamation expresses awe but also the fear (a “holy” fear, not a “servile”⁷ fear) that one feels in the presence of the Holy One.

⁶ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Ho 11:9.

⁷ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**servile**” – **1.b.** - **a1425** – Of, belonging to or proper to a slave or slaves; characteristic of or associated with slavery or servitude. Earliest applied (in **servile dread**; later also **servile fear**) to fear of or respect for authority (esp. God) which is motivated by knowledge of the possibility of punishment for wrongdoing rather than by love or reverence.

HOLY ONE [Heb *qādôš* (קָדוֹשׁ)]. A title used in the Hebrew Bible for God. The most frequent use of the title is in the book of Isaiah, where the phrase occurs thirty times as a reference to Yahweh. The term appears also in the writings of some of the other prophets (Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Habakkuk), in the book of Psalms, and in Job. To speak of God as “the Holy One” is to emphasize God’s separateness, God’s otherness, God’s mystery.⁸

The other reality is elegantly referenced in “**my Father**”. In this, we see proven the success of the mission of Jesus Christ, Who has made us able to say, and in truth, that the utterly transcendent God, the *Pantókrator*⁹, is Someone to whom we have been given access – “my Father” and “our Father / who art in Heaven”. The tradition speaks of how Christ came “to open for us the gates of Heaven”.

John 17:7-9 (NJB):

⁷ Now at last they have recognized
that all you have given me comes from you
⁸ for I have given them
the teaching you gave to me,
and they have indeed accepted it
and know for certain that I came from you,
and have believed that it was you who sent me.
⁹ It is for them that I pray.
I am not praying for the world
but for those you have given me,
because they belong to you. ¹⁰

Morning by morning new mercies I see / All I have needed thy hand hast provided –
We think of the Wilderness years, when God’s chosen people wandered and at considerable risk out in a harsh landscape that none of them knew, and where often they suffered thirst and hunger.

**From Frank Herbert, *Dune* (published 1 October 1965) referring to the
“Fremen” – the desert-dwellers of the planet Arakis: “The Fremen were supreme**

⁸ Mitchell G. Reddish, “[Holy One](#),” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 258.

⁹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**Pantokrator**” - A ruler of all things; (*Christian Church*) (a title given to) God or Christ as the Almighty. Hence: an artistic representation of Christ as ruler of the universe, esp. as an image in Byzantine and Orthodox iconography.

¹⁰ [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Jn 17:7-9.

in that quality the ancients called *spannungsbogen* [German: “the arc of suspense”], which is the self-imposed delay between desire for a thing and the act of reaching out to grasp that thing.”

But God, each morning, gave them *manna* (from the Hebrew meaning, “What’s this?!”), which was not what they *wanted* but what they *needed*. (Such an important spiritual understanding of broad application, so important for each of us to grasp.)

Exodus 16 (NAB): ¹⁵ On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, “What is this?” for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, “It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. ... ²¹ **Morning after morning they gathered it, as much as each needed [not “wanted”] to eat;** but when the sun grew hot, it melted away.¹¹

Join with all nature in manifold witness / To thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love –
We Americans (hardly us alone) are now daily in danger of being *whelmed* by “the human stain”, by the (human) world that, as William Wordsworth (1770-1815) noted, with grief,

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; –
Little we see in Nature that is ours;¹²

And which the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ (1884-1889) describes in this way:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.¹³

But what does “whelmed” mean?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the verb “**whelm**” – **1. – a1300-1513** –
† *intransitive*. To overturn, capsize. *Obsolete*. **2.d. – a1631** – To throw (something) over violently or in a heap upon something else, esp. so as to cover or to crush or smother it. **4.a. – 1558** – To cover completely with water or other fluid so as to ruin or destroy; to submerge, drown; occasionally to sink (a boat). **5. – transferred**. To engulf or bear down like a flood, storm, avalanche, etc.; hence, to involve in destruction or ruin.

¹¹ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Ex 16:15 & 21.

¹² See: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45564/the-world-is-too-much-with-us>.

¹³ See: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44395/gods-grandeur>.

What our poet enjoins us to do, writing in a day long before screens and their manifold artificial realities colonized our attention, is *to go outside*, to stare far less at screens and more at the natural world – *to go outside and learn to pay attention* to the “timely help” God gives us in Nature – “And for all this, nature is never spent; / There lives a dearest freshness deep down things”!¹⁴ For in Nature we have a “manifold¹⁵ witness” to God’s “great faithfulness, mercy, and love.”

Mary Oliver, *Red Bird* (2008), “Sometimes” –

Instructions for living a life.

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

Consider what an AI offered me today, when I queried it about how much time each day that we Americans are gaping at screens, at images of images,¹⁶ rather than getting ourselves out among the trees and plants and other wild things of this Earth, learning to pay attention there.

U.S. Adults (2025): About 7 hours and 2 minutes per day on screens.

Gen Z (ages ~11–26): Average 9+ hours daily, the highest among age groups.

Teenagers (13–18): Roughly 41% spend more than 8 hours per day on screens.

Children (younger ages): Entertainment screen time rose from 4h 44m in 2019 to 5h 33m in 2021 and continues to climb.

All Americans (broad measure): Some reports estimate 12 hours and 36 minutes daily, counting overlapping device use (e.g., watching TV while scrolling a phone)

An Advent Prayer

The opening stanza from the hymn *Conditor Alme Siderum* (“Gracious Maker of the Stars Above”) found in the Evening Prayer of the *Liturgy of Hours*, the Breviary, for the Season of Advent, Year A:

Gracious maker of the stars above,
Light everlasting for believers true,
Christ God, Redeemer of us all,

¹⁴ From the same poem by Hopkins, SJ.

¹⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**manifold**” – **1.a. - Old English** – Varied or diverse in appearance, form, or character; having various forms, features, component parts, relations, applications, etc.; performing several functions at once.

¹⁶ A reference to that particularly famous “Allegory of the Cave” in Plato’s *Republic* dialogue, Book VII, 514a to 520a.

hear the prayers of those
who plead with you.