The holidays are a time for reconnecting with loved ones yet sometimes these loved ones are not always “liked” ones. Some longstanding relationships carry immense amounts of baggage, frustration, annoyance, and hurt. Sometimes the holiday joy doesn’t seem so cheerful. Advent grounds us, asks us to be realistic and hopeful in the midst of the holiday hype.

Sunday’s readings offered glimpses of light. A phrase in the second reading (Romans 1:1-7) includes the phrase “obedience of faith.” As shared before, Benedictines take a vow of obedience, which comes from the Latin term meaning “to listen.” In fact, the Rule of Saint Benedict begins with the phrase, “Listen with the ear of the heart.” Benedictine obedience is much different than that of a dog with his owner. Benedictine obedience calls us to listen, with an open and loving heart, to the situation and people involved, then to ponder ways could God be breathing through the moment. One must be obedient to cultivate this mindset on a regular basis. We are all human. Assuming, short, and negative thoughts could easily become the norm without continually calling our minds and hearts back to a state of obedience. When we practice “listening, with the ear of the heart” we are more likely to invite God, our better selves, and loved ones into a moment of grace.

It wasn’t just the word “obedience” that jumped from the reading yesterday but “obedience of faith.” Yesterday’s Gospel reading (Matthew 1:18-24) focuses on the moment Joseph found that this fiancé was pregnant and the child wasn’t his. He didn’t lash out right away or throw a fit when Mary said it was God’s child. He took some time to ponder and even slept on it. For some, it is very difficult to hold back our initial thoughts and react rather than pause before responding. His fiancé was pregnant *with God’s child*! What?!?! That could be surprising, confusing, infuriating, and could seem like a flat-out lie. But, Joseph cultivated a sense of obedient faith. After stepping away from the situation and sleeping through the night and listening to the angel in his dream, he returned to the unique situation with faith in Mary, God, and their journey together.

So often we assume. We assume we know people, their circumstances, and intentions. When things happen to them, we assume they did something to deserve it. When they do something, we assume we know why. The people closest to us often bear the brunt of our assumptions. We are too short to give them the benefit of the doubt. We know them too well to ask good questions because we assume we know the answers, how they think, and what they’re feeling. Everyone on this earth deserves the benefit of the doubt. We are all trying to be the best people we can be. We all fail and fail and fail again. “Obedience of faith” challenges us to step back, “listen with the ear of the heart,” and have faith in our better selves, others, and God.