

Sacred Space Lent Retreat 2009

Retreat for Lent 2009

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Thinking of doing the Lent Retreat?

It's a good thought and Lent is the ideal time for it. For many centuries Christians have made these forty days a special time of preparation to celebrate the mystery of God's boundless love in Jesus. The reality of Good Friday is too terrible and the wonder of Easter Day too glorious for us to comprehend without making some effort to ready our hearts.

One really great way to prepare is to set aside the better part of one whole day in order to be with the Lord for it is the Spirit of the Lord who knows best how to prepare our hearts.

A place apart

The spirit of the day is to 'go away to a quiet place apart', as we know Jesus did from time to time in order to be with his Father. During our Sacred Space Retreat Day we will make time to be alone with Jesus, his Father and their Spirit. That means that it is really important for each one to plan the day so that it can be quiet and peaceful, away from phones and media and all the other things that fill our day. The Retreat Day is time for me to be with my gracious God, which means that I am not alone at all. The 'place apart' could be different things for each person: a quiet room in my own house, a day's hiking in the countryside, a nearby church or oratory...

Come as you are

The most important thing is to be open and willing to be available to God's stirrings in your heart and to give the time and energy to it. You don't have to dress up for the occasion or put your best face on. God wants to meet – and love - you as you are, not as you think you ought to be. For many of us self-acceptance is the hardest thing. That is why we can encounter a stiff resistance in ourselves to the idea of setting aside phones and radios, books and newspapers and all the other 'background hum' that keeps us distracted.

Let the Word be your guide

Below we suggest three different scripture passages. Let them provide the texture of your day. After each passage we provide 'Pointers for Prayer'. Use them only if they are helpful. Don't feel you have to read everything. St. Ignatius says that our souls can be fully satisfied with a tiny little morsel. The purpose is not to have many great insights but to savour God's presence and grace.

Make a Plan

Make yourself a timetable for the day that could cover the three scripture passages suggested below. Here is a suggested timetable, to be adapted to suit your circumstances:

- 9.30am Preparation: take the time to prepare the place, the passage and your heart;
maybe write some hopes for your day ("What do I really want?")
- 10.00am **First Time of Prayer**
The Baptism of Jesus (Luke 3)
- 11.00 am Midmorning Break
Take a stretch, go outside, have some refreshment.
- 11.30 am **Second Time of Prayer**
"Can you drink the cup ...?" (Mark 10:35-45)
- 12.30 pm Lunch break
Have a light meal, get a walk
- 2.30 pm **Third Time of Prayer**
Mary of Magdala at the tomb (John 20:11-18)
- 3.30 pm Afternoon break
Stretch, walk relax
- 4.00 pm Review of the Day
*look back to see where the moments of light and life were,
acknowledging moments of darkness or difficulty without judging yourself,
writing this down can often help capture it.*

First Time of Prayer

Remembering how Jesus sometimes went off on his own to a quiet place to pray, I quite deliberately move aside to my 'prayer place' – a quiet room or a particular chair where I can give myself to prayer. I take a brief few moments to consider how God is present to me right now: holding me in being, gazing on me with fatherly care, looking on me as a loving mother might.

Now I read the passage of scripture, which in this instance is the story of the baptism of Jesus by John from the gospel of Luke. I read it slowly through. Then I read it again, more imaginatively, picturing the scene, sensing the atmosphere, above all looking at Jesus. If the pointers for prayer are helpful, well and good. If I simply allow myself to be caught up with the scene, perfect.

Scripture: Luke 3

Luke 3: 1...22

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Pointers for Prayer:

- John's voice is loud and clear. 'Repent. Turn back to God'. All the people round about hear him. Can I hear him?
- Herod the King hears him and is stung by his words. Neighbours and friends are hearing about John and they are heading out to the Jordan. Will I go out to see him too?
- Standing in the water John the Baptist is easily recognized. There is a line of people, all 'repentant', waiting their turn to approach him. Can I see myself joining the line, one of the sinners?
- Somewhere here, standing in line with all the others, is Jesus. Perhaps he's not so easily recognized at first; he fits in with all the others. Can I simply watch Jesus as he takes his place in the queue?
- What does this tell me about Jesus? What does it tell me about myself?
- Can I imagine my own encounter with John, the moment of my baptism with water?
- Can I watch Jesus and John as they meet in the water? What do I see as I look at this scene?
- I follow Jesus as he leaves the water and sits down to pray. What do I see? What do I hear?
- "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Can I hear the words 'You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased', 'You are my cherished daughter; I delight in you.' addressed to me?
- What is the Lord saying to me about repentance? About my past? About my present? About my future?
- What am I moved to say to the Lord? Father, Son and Holy Spirit have all been present to me, in the scene and in my heart.

At the end of the time I finish the prayer by saying the *Our Father* or in some other way that seems appropriate to me.

Reflection after prayer

When I am praying it is good simply to pray: to listen, to watch, to wonder and to speak to the Lord as I am moved. Leave the reflection on the experience until afterwards. However, when I am finished and the experience is still fresh it's good to look back and reflect on how it was.

- Did the time drag because I was distracted or felt bored?
- Was it easy and pleasant to spend the time?
- Can I remember any particular moment of enthusiasm, encouragement or uplift?
- Was there a little bit of light?

Sometimes if I look again at a moment in the prayer that seemed to be a struggle, I can begin to see the beginnings of a fresh understanding about my life, my relationship with God or with my world.

Second Time of Prayer

Once again I go to my special prayer place, reminding myself of whose presence it is that I want to enter. I pray that the Lord will continue to be with me, holding me and guiding me. I read the scripture passage slowly a few times as before.

Scripture: Mark 10:35 – 45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Pointers for prayer

- As I watch the sons of Zebedee approach Jesus with this request, how do I react? With a smile? With judgement? With compassion? Some other way?
- Does their desire for celebrity, to be special, touch a chord in my own heart? Perhaps well hidden?
- Can I see myself before Jesus hoping for something, perhaps something unrealistic?
- What is this 'baptism' of which he speaks?
- Have I already been united with Jesus in baptism? What might that unity with Jesus involve now and in the future?
- Am I afraid of what being united with Jesus might involve? What might it mean for me to be a 'servant' or a 'slave of all'?
- Jesus really challenged the sons of Zebedee. Can I ask him to explain these challenging words for me?

Reflection after prayer

What was going on in me as I prayed? I might learn a lot about myself by looking more closely at my reaction to the Sons of Zebedee as they tried to push themselves forward with Jesus. If I am actually too timid and self-effacing, even with the Lord, I might really envy their chutzpah, their boldness. Of course, another personality type might see it very differently. Praying with the Word really helps me to get to know myself as well as growing in familiarity with the Lord. The best prayer is when I learn to come into God's presence as I really am, without any pretence or artifice. There is no suggestion that the Sons of Zebedee felt put down by Jesus. He simply drew the closer to himself.

But, my prayer time might have gone in other ways entirely. What way did it go? Light and joyful? Heavy and sad? If I look back on it a little dispassionately I may find that the Lord has much to teach me through it.

Third Time of Prayer

As I go to my special prayer place, I make some deliberate gesture to help me underline how good it is to enter into God's presence. Some people take off their shoes, like Moses. Some people carry the book of the scriptures with special reverence. In my own way I ask that God's Holy Spirit will pray in me and keep me open to his promptings.

Scripture: John 20:11-18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Pointers for prayer

- Can I enter into the experience of Mary, weeping at the tomb of her friend; confused and shocked to find it empty?
- What was Mary to make of this? Angels whose questioning was unhelpful and a Jesus whom she couldn't recognize. What do I make of this? How does it resonate with me?
- 'Mary' – her name. Can I allow myself to hear my name just as she heard her name?
- Do I hear the words; 'My Father and your Father, my God and your God' addressed to me?
- What is the Lord saying to me and my life in this extraordinary scene?
- What do I want to say to the Lord?

Reflection after prayer

As I reflect on my prayer it is very important to remember that there is no right way that it should have been and no wrong way. I simply acknowledge what has happened in me, how I have been moved – or not moved. If it hasn't been a consoling experience that too may carry a very important lesson: perhaps I am being invited to be more patient with myself. If I have been aware that the Risen Lord is with me, then I ask for grace to persevere in future, even in times when I don't feel so consoled.

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Advent Retreat 2008
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