

Your Retreat Day

how to cooperate with God

God has already whetted your desire or awakened your awareness of your need for a retreat day. What is God's invitation to you? Prayer is always a response to God's initiative, and retreat is the same. Retreat, at heart, is simply about making ourselves available to God.

This guide invites you to cooperate with God as you plan your retreat time. Less is more. We hope the suggestions in these pages will set the stage, so that you can receive God's gift of love in a time of retreat.



Don't frontload your retreat day with "guilt appeasement": catching up on overdue correspondence, organizing your closet, reading the stack of books that is gathering dust. Don't have your electronic gadgetry close at hand. (Take a digital sabbath!) Keep a "Not for Now" pad of paper at hand, on which you can make a cryptic list of the niggling thoughts and reminders that surface on your retreat day... things to which you will attend *after* your retreat day.

the current longing of your soul

Do get current with the longing of your soul.

- * From what do you need freedom? Perhaps from fear, despair, anger, jealousy, loneliness, discouragement, grief, overwhelmedness ...
- * What do you crave? Perhaps hope, forgiveness, peace, love, light, compassion, wisdom, encouragement, joy...

Your retreat won't be about *everything*. It *will* be about something which has caught your heart's attention. God is behind that.



setting the stage

Where can you be still and silent?

What setting will be re-creative for your soul? An inside space, or outside space, or both?

What "accompaniment" do you need? Perhaps:

- * music, a window, a candle, an icon
- * a comfortable chair, a prayer cushion, a kneeler
- * a Bible, a book of poetry or meditation, a journal
- * food and drink (enough, but not too much)
- * a place to rest; a place for physical exercise
- * gentle re-creative activity
(e.g., drawing or painting, sewing or beading, photographing, playing a musical instrument)

What is necessary and helpful?



a loose schedule

When will your retreat day begin and when will it end? *How* will it begin and end?

The entire day will offer you space to "pray your life"; however you might find it helpful to demarcate three specific times in the day, each for about an hour, when you will be especially focused in your prayer. You know your own "biorhythms." When are you most attentive between the early morning until the evening? The bright times will be the right times for you to be intentional in your prayer.



getting ready to pray

To begin, you want to come into a clearing, as best as possible. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, when asked if he spent much time in prayer said, "No." But, he said, he spent a great deal of time "getting ready to pray." How to prepare? Use the preparatory practice that is meaningful to you, or, if you are out of practice:

- * You might find it helpful to use your breathing as respiratory therapy for your soul. Breathe out what is in the way. In a word, repeatedly name the "blockage" with each exhalation. Breathe in the elixir. In a word, breathe in what is healing, or helpful, or hopeful. Do this repeatedly with each inhalation.
 - ✦ You might get in touch with more than one thing that is in the way, and more than one thing that will help you get on the way. Breathe your prayer.
 - ✦ How long? Long enough.

- * You might find it helpful to prepare with a passage or scene from the Bible, or with some poetry that helps you recollect your life in God's presence. For example:

"I waited patiently upon the LORD; he stooped to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay; he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure." (Psalm 40:1-2)

- ✦ What do you need to be lifted out of?
- ✦ What do you need to be lifted into?

Or:

"Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring up from the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven." (Psalm 85:10-11)

- ✦ God already knows the truth about you, and about others. Name the truth God already knows.
- ✦ And ask for mercy:
 - God's gift of mercy for you.
 - God's gift of mercy for some other person whom you carry in your soul.



The Prayer

receiving the gift

Prayer is a gift. If you are out of practice, or if you have lost your way, here are two suggestions.

- * Pray your gratitude. Being thankful to God is Eucharistic, absolutely transformative. Being grateful for your life will help you pick up the scent on the trail of life.
- * Don't do all the talking. The psalmist says, "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (Psalm 46:10). Prayer is our relationship with God, at God's initiative, and God has something for you. Listen up. All of your preparation to pray may simply leave you in a clearing where you can listen. Listen up.



Post-script

collecting the day

At the end of each prayer session, "collect" the grace of your prayer. What did you say; what did you hear? What did you receive; from what were you relieved? In the Gospel according to John, after the feeding of the multitude, Jesus says to his disciples, "*Gather up the fragments that nothing be lost.*" Gather up the graces. You might find it helpful, at the close of each prayer time, to write what is clear to you: your questions or answers, the gifts you've been given or the help you need, the next step to take.

Finally, at the end of the day, collect and pray your gratitude for your day and for your life. The psalmist asks, rhetorically, "*How shall I repay the LORD for all the good things he has done for me?*" (Psalm 116:10). Start and end with gratitude. 🙏