



**CHURCH OF THE SAVIOR SUMMER RETREAT  
AUGUST 4, 2018**

**EXPANDING YOUR WAYS OF  
CONNECTING WITH GOD**

This day is set aside for you to enjoy God's presence in whatever way you see fit. Perhaps you have come ready with materials. Feel free to use those. Perhaps you have something you know you want to process with the Lord. Go with that. You have all the freedom of space and time that this day provides. Receive that gift.

Provided here are some prompts for a variety of spiritual discipline exercises. They are not intended as a packet to be completed, but instead as optional resources to be used at your disposal. You may want to peruse the options before you begin and pay attention to any that peak your interest. As you decide what you want to try, remember to take your time and receive the grace of the Lord every step of the way.



Johannes Vermeer, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, 1655

## VISIO DIVINA

The gift of visio divina, like lectio divina, is the space this practice creates to slow down and allow a story, image, or moment to unfold with more complexity. The beauty of a painting is that it can work on other parts of ourselves--our hearts, our souls and our minds--that we may not generally experience.

As you sit with this painting, ask God to make you open to his word of grace in this scene.

For some, simply sitting with a painting or image with no word prompts is enough to engage.

If prompts seem helpful, consider the following:

Start imagining yourself in this scene.

**Are you one of the three pictured here?**

**Perhaps you are Mary**, sitting at Jesus' feet:

- \* What moved you to sit here?
- \* Was it any easy decision for you today?
- \* If not, what did you have to overcome to be here now?
- \* What are you hoping to receive from the Lord?

**Or maybe you are Martha**, bringing out the food, waiting to see what else Jesus might need:

- \* What thoughts, emotions or motivations are at work in you right now?
- \* What are you hoping to do for Jesus?
- \* Are you hoping Jesus might do something for you?
- \* What do you sense Jesus might have to say to you now?

**Maybe you are an onlooker**, a friend who cannot be seen in the painting itself:

- \* What do you see, hear, smell?
- \* Where are you sitting or standing?
- \* Why are you here today, at this house?
- \* Were you hoping to find something here today? Does God have an invitation for you here?

## SCRIPTURE, VISUAL ART AND POETRY REFLECTIONS

The summer is a good time to reconsider a familiar passage from the book of Matthew. Spend some time reading through it slowly, noticing what stands out to you. What questions arise? What emotions?

As you meditate you may want to use the painting and poems on the following pages to engage with the themes in this passage in a different format.

Jesus encourages us to simply consider his Creation and allow its beautiful simplicity to speak to our concerns and worries. What might this look like for you right now?

### SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 6:25-34

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

## VISUAL ART



Jean-François Millet, *The Angelus*, 1857-59

This painting's name comes from the Angelus prayer, which was traditionally prayed three times daily to remember the incarnation, the Annunciation and the passion of Christ. Two ordinary people stop their work to contemplate the wonder of God's grace and the reality of his presence even in this ordinary day, this ordinary time.

What might it look like for you in these ordinary days, to stop and consider God's presence and provision?

Are there worries or concerns that may be clouding your vision of God's goodness or grabbing your attention?



## POETRY

“Lillies,” and “The Summer Day”, two poems by Mary Oliver, reflect on some of these same themes. Are there themes here that speak to your own thoughts and feelings?

“Lilies”

I have been thinking  
about living  
like the lilies  
that blow in the fields.

They rise and fall  
in the edge of the wind,  
and have no shelter  
from the tongues of the cattle,

and have no closets or cupboards,  
and have no legs.  
Still I would like to be  
as wonderful

as the old idea.  
But if I were a lily  
I think I would wait all day  
for the green face

of the hummingbird  
to touch me.  
What I mean is,  
could I forget myself

even in those feathery fields?  
When Van Gogh  
preached to the poor  
of coarse he wanted to save  
someone--

most of all himself.  
He wasn't a lily,  
and wandering through the bright fields  
only gave him more ideas

it would take his life to solve.  
I think I will always be lonely  
in this world, where the cattle  
graze like a black and white river--

where the vanishing lilies  
melt, without protest, on their tongues--  
where the hummingbird, whenever there is a fuss,  
just rises and floats away.

“The Summer Day”

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean-  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

## A CENTERING PRAYER EXERCISE

Centering prayer is all about being aware of and attentive to yourself and where you are so that you can likewise become aware of God's presence with you. Oftentimes, it is helpful to begin this time with a short breathing exercise.

Find a comfortable place to sit and begin by just breathing--in and out. Breathe normally. Don't take too long or rush too quickly. Just breathe normally and as you do so, be aware of your breathing.

Take some moments to sit and just breathe. Your breaths may be short, or long. That is not important. Just being aware of your breath is all that matter right now.

Now you might want to notice how your body is interacting with your breath. Do you notice anything about the way you are sitting or holding yourself?

Continue to breathe and as you do so, become aware of God's presence here with you. Where is Jesus sitting or standing? Can you see the look on his face? What do you notice about his presence right now?

Ask God to help you now to notice what you are thinking, feeling, what you have brought into this time with you today.

At first, it may not be easy to focus yourself in this way. Don't be discouraged. You are not alone. Often when we begin to try to center ourselves with God, we are even more aware of how fractured and anxious we are. Romano Guardini expresses this experience well: "When we try to compose ourselves, unrest redoubles in intensity, not unlike the manner in which at night, when we try to sleep, cares or desires assail us with a force that they do not possess during the day." If this is your experience, be gentle with yourself. God is here with you and has all the time that you need. So take that time and just be aware of what's in your heart and mind.

Now imagine that you are holding out your palms and that you can put all these thoughts, feelings, distractions, into the palms of your hands.

Then, being aware of Jesus' presence, see if you can hand over to him whatever is in your hands. Joy or grief. Anger or fear. Boredom or elation. Give it to him as your offering in this moment. Again, this make take some time. That's ok.

As you take a deep breath now, open your hands again as you sit with Jesus, and ask him to place in your hands whatever you need right now.

You may or may not have anything specific come to mind. If not, just imagine yourself in his presence and sit here as you continue to breathe.

Perhaps a particular image or phrase or Scripture came to your mind. How can you take that gift with you as you go forward from this place?

A word of encouragement:

- \* For some people, contemplative or imaginative exercises are not very fruitful. There can be a variety of reasons for this, not the least of which is that we are all uniquely made and connect with God in lots of different ways. God knows this and invites us to find ways to be with him as we are.
- \* Also, at times we may be in such a state of anxiety, fear, or otherwise that these sorts of exercises bring up more than they relieve. If you find yourself in such a place, please reach out to a pastor, friend or spiritual director.

## PRAYING WITH NATURE

### NATURE EXAMEN

One way to expand our ways of connecting with God is by praying with nature. All of creation bears witness to the glory of God and reminds us of God's care, concern, and attention to both the great and the small. Our bodies are an important part of God's creation, too, and he wants to speak to us through both. The following nature examen is meant to guide you into an attitude of prayer and listening to God through your body and nature. Use the guide as it assists you; disregard aspects that distract you.

Take a brief walk along the Prairie Path or find a place to sit where you can comfortably observe the nature around you.

- \* Notice how you are breathing. If you are walking, take note of your pace; if you are sitting, consider how tense or relaxed your shoulders or hands are. Take some time slow your breathing, your pace, and relax your muscles. Open yourself up to what is around you. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- \* Look around you. What do you see? What do you hear? How does the air feel on your skin? Do you notice any particular smells? As you look around, notice what aspect of nature you feel most drawn to; take extra time to observe that.
- \* Describe in a journal or think about what has caught your attention. Ask God to bring to highlight what you might learn from him or yourself through your observation of nature. Notice how you're feeling. Talk to God about what is going through your mind heart right now.

## PRAYING WITH A PSALM IN NATURE

Take a moment to meditate on a nature psalm (see Psalm 1; 16; 19; 62; 72; 92; or 104). Reflect to God the associations you make between a particular passage and what you are observing. Or use one of these guided reflections with a psalm and an aspect of the nature around you.

### Psalm 104 and the Birds

- \* Look and listen for the birds. Notice how joyfully they sing! The same Father that cares for them cares for you. Let the birds lead you to give thanks and praise to God. With the birds and the angels of the heavens you are joining God's love song—he sings his love over you first!
- \* Meditate on the birds and on Psalm 104:1, 12, 28, 30: "Praise the Lord, my soul. Lord my God, you are very great . . . The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches ... When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things ... When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground" (NIV).
- \* Perhaps you have a joyful song to sing. Or perhaps your heart is longing for this kind of joy.
- \* You may want to pray this simple prayer from Every Moment Holy:

You draw praise  
from the frailest of things.  
So also draw praise  
from me.
- \* Now spend some moments expressing to God what is in your heart.

## Psalm 1 and a Tree

- \* Sit near a tree as you meditate on Psalm 1. Reflect on what you fill your mind with as you go about your daily life. Perhaps there's some clutter in your head (e.g., worries, gossip, wishing things were different in your life, self-criticisms, angry conversations, lustful thoughts, lists of things you need to do, diversions).
- \* Contrast that cluttered, perhaps unfettered feeling and the spoiled fruit it is producing with the rootedness of a tree planted by the streams of water that easily and naturally bears fruit (verses 2-3).
- \* Ask God to open your heart and mind to what word or invitation he has that you might delight in today.

## Psalm 16 and a Path

- \* Take a walk with Jesus on a path. Consider a decision you need to make and with that in mind imagine yourself following Jesus or walking beside him as you would a good friend. Talk to him about the different directions this decision might take you.
- \* Let David's words in Psalm 16 inspire you: "I have set the Lord before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also rest secure... You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (verses 8-11).
- \* How does knowing Jesus is with you on this path change the way you experience the uncertainty of it? As you go forward from here, what in your daily life could help you to walk in the joy of the Lord's presence?

## Psalm 72 and a Grassy Area

- \* Sit in a grassy area – you might want to take your shoes off and let your feet feel the grass! Consider how you, like the grass, need continual water to live.
- \* Let the grass help you to meditate on Psalm 72:6: "May [the Lord] be like rain falling on a mown field." Feel your thirst for God's living waters.
- \* Try using this breath prayer: Breathe in slowly as you whisper: "Fall on me, O Spirit of Christ..." Breathe out slowly as you whisper: "Like rain falls on a mown field."
- \* Are there specific areas of your life that particularly need refreshment right now? Allow God to fill your mind with the promise of his restoration as you sit and breathe.

The pray a Psalm in nature exercises have been adapted from <https://www.soulshelping.org/pray-a-psalm-in-its-nature-setting/>

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