



SMI Holy Week Retreat Day 2021

*A Guide for Doing Nothing with God ~
Creating Our Own Silent Retreat Day*

Holy Week Retreat 2021

It has been the tradition for Spiritual Ministries Institute (SMI) to offer a Silent Retreat Day on the Tuesday of Holy Week each year. Because we are unable to gather due to the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided that the Silent Retreat for March 2021 would be offered at no cost as a “how to” guide posted on our website.

The Guide which follows is designed to help us create our own silent day of retreat during Holy Week, the week of March 28. The retreat guide includes four parts: I. Pre-Planning for our Retreat Day; II) Creating our Retreat Schedule; III) Closing our Retreat Day and an optional IV) Appendix.

SMI Board Members, Eunice Cheshire together with M-J Junkin and Cathy Irby pray that you will retreat with us in your solitude from your own home or quiet place.

A Guide for Doing Nothing with God ~ Creating Our Own Silent Retreat Day

"a contemplative retreat need(s) three things: time to do something, time to do anything, and time to do nothing." from Be Still, Jane Vennard

Especially in days of stress and worry, giving ourselves quiet time, the gift of silence and solitude, is important for spirit, body, and mind.

In this modern age of a pandemic, we've had to learn to do things differently. With retreat centers closed, we must even learn to do a retreat differently. Creating our own silent retreat day is easy if we remember three things: God is our spiritual director, our goal is to rest in God's love and presence and listen, and less is more.

I. Pre-Planning for a Silent At-Home Retreat (or in a designated “safe” place)

- A. Setting the Time: At least a week in advance, we set a date and time; finding a time on our busy calendars likely takes advance planning. We remember to be realistic. It is better to set aside a shorter time than to put ourselves under the pressure of attempting too long a time. Then we block off that day and time.
- B. Family Support: To have a day of silence and solitude we will likely need “buy-in” from our family or colleagues. It helps to be honest about what we need from them.

C. Prepare our Retreat Environment in Advance:

It can serve us to consider the following tasks and then plan ahead.

1. Choose the space for our retreat day. If holding a silent retreat in our own home is not suitable, we look for another place where we can pray undisturbed without worrying about exposure to COVID-19.
2. What do we need for inspiration, the things that connect us to the Spirit, like our Bible, a journal and pen or pencil, a candle, a finger labyrinth, prayer table, or paper and colored pencils or crayons?
3. What do we need for comfort: warm socks, a shawl, a comforter?
4. What do we need to protect the silence and solitude of our retreat space? A sign on the bedroom door? White noise machine? Soft music?
5. What do we need to put away in order to protect our heart space?
Stresses, work, worry, electronics? It may help to put some distractions in a God box: like the cell phone, our worries or “to-do” list. Freedom comes when we can entrust these to God for the time set aside for our retreat.
6. What do we need in the way of refreshment and/or meals? Simpler is better. It serves us well to have these planned and/or prepared the night before. Consider a “mindful eating exercise” described in the appendix.
7. Is there outdoor space where, weather permitting, we can relax or take a walk?
8. Does our retreat space have a place where we can take a nap?

II. **Creating our Retreat Schedule**

- A. Simply resting in God is a perfect way to have a silent retreat and an especially good way to open our retreats.

We begin with deep gentle breathing and relaxation for at least 10 minutes. Sit in silence with the awareness that God is with us. Take as much time as needed to come to a place of inner quiet. We may wish to add soft spiritual music and use a timer.

Then we gently move into our day of resting with God and noticing God's presence. It can feel like nothing is happening, yet we trust that God is present.

- B. If there comes a time in our day when even the silence seems distracting and we cannot settle in mind, body, or spirit, we may need something to lead us into the contemplative prayer of inner quiet and bring us back to relaxation and contemplation. We may want to try one of the suggestions in the Appendix. But we take care not to be distracted by doing more than necessary to settle back into silence and God's presence.

III. Closing our Silent Retreat Day

At the appointed time we begin to end our day with deep breathing and relaxation again. With gratitude we review our day. What emerged: gratefulness, desire, awareness of, wonder about, resistance of ...?

We may desire to wrap up the day with music or with journaling: What emerged in this day of retreat that we want to record?

We close with gratitude and suggestions for how we can carry the gifts of this day into the rest of our week.

IV. Appendix of Options for Meditation

Let's not forget that less is more. Our goal is to keep our time as simple and focused as much as possible on God present with us. The following are offered only to assist us in connecting with God. Let's avoid incorporating too much into our one day.

Journaling

We suggest keeping a journal on our silent retreat. As we pray, it is often helpful to stop after a time and record our insights and questions and explore our images with spiritual journaling which is different from a diary or even an account. We do not have to be a writer or even enjoy creative writing to keep a spiritual journal. It does not require any order, good grammar, or complete sentences. A haphazard recording of words can work well. We just put to paper random thoughts and insights, words, or images following a prayer time. A notebook or several sheets of paper and a pencil, pen or colored pens or pencils, even crayons work well.

Setting our intention for journaling is important: we journal to deepen our awareness and to grow spiritually and we ask the Holy Spirit for guidance to that end. Our journal is for us only and often enables us to reveal new insights. Therefore, we need to keep our entries to ourselves and keep the journal in a safe place. We share our journal only when prompted by the Holy Spirit of God.

Lectio Divina

The practice of Lectio Divina is familiar to many, that is, read a short passage of Scripture or another spiritual reading, notice the word or two words that speak to (touch or move) our heart. Then pray with that word or words, having a conversation with God about why this word or words are important for us today. Recall that a conversation is two-way, we talk and we listen.

If we are not familiar with Lectio Divina the following Four Steps will be helpful.

Four Steps to the Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) A non-analytical approach to spending time with God using scripture:

1. Lectio (Reading) – We choose a short passage and read it silently first. Then read it aloud so we can listen to it.
2. Meditatio (Meditation) – We read the passage for a third time slowly. Then we choose a word or two that seem to have meaning for us, and allow the word(s) to flow into our thoughts. How does this word or phrase speak to our life right now?

3. Oratio (Praying) – Again we read the passage slowly and consider what God is saying to us through this passage. How might we respond to God when considering this message? And if we did, how might our life change? What would we like to say to God in response to this message?
4. Contemplatio (Contemplation) – We allow ourselves to settle into the Beloved Presence of God. In silent love allow ourselves to simply be with God and be loved by God.

Suggested Scriptures:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.”

- Matthew 11: 28-30

Read the Passion of Jesus: Mark 14:1 – 15:47 and select a few verses for Lectio.

Just as we practice Lectio Divina with the Word, we can pray in a similar way with a picture (visio) or music by noticing what touches our hearts (our feelings, longings, or thoughts) and then praying with that.

Note: If links don't work, please copy them and put them in your browser.

Visio Divina

Select a picture. Open one of the links below and sit before the picture and allow God to “speak” to you through it.

A Path: <https://unsplash.com/photos/A4iL43vunlY>

The Ocean: <https://unsplash.com/photos/ap9AvVzIBe0>

Audio-Visio Divina: Allow God to speak to you through this hymn of God's presence.

The Deer's Cry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGHWiAGpIP0&t=0s&index=50&list=WL>

Musica Divina

Hymn “Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaAWvshg6xw>

Taizé hymn with simple visual: “Jesus, Remember me, When You Come into Your Kingdom” <https://youtu.be/6b3MPGBLNeE>

Mindful Eating Exercise

Mindfulness can enable us to slow down, enjoy eating on both the physical and spiritual levels. This can make eating a spiritual practice of awareness and gratitude. When we snack or have lunch, we try this contemplative practice following 7 simple steps.

1. Reflect. Before we begin eating, take a moment to reflect upon how we feel. Are we rushed? Stressed? Sad? Bored? Hungry? What are our wants, and what are our needs? We try to differentiate between the two. Then we choose what we want to eat and arrange our snack or meal on a plate.

2. Disconnect. Turn off the TV and everything else with a screen.

3. Sit down. We have a seat, rather than eat on the go. We're less likely to appreciate our food when you are multi-tasking.

4. Offer gratitude. Before we start to eat, we pause and take a moment to acknowledge our food as a gift from God and the labor that went into providing our meal — be it thanks to the grocers, the farmers, the factory workers, the animals, Mother Earth, the chefs, or even our silent companions at the table.

5. Chew each bite of food well. We take time to be conscious of, and to enjoy, the food's consistency and texture, flavor, tastes, and smells in order to fully appreciate the meal. We put down our spoon or fork between bites and wait until we have swallowed before picking them up again.

6. Eat in Silence. When it's quiet it is natural for the mind to wander; we acknowledge these thoughts, and then gently return to our experience of eating and being aware of the food's qualities. We continue to try to fully appreciate the moment.

7. Finish with gratitude. We offer gratitude for the experience and our increased awareness of the gift of eating.

[“Be Still, and Know that I Am God.” Psalm 46:10](#)