



Archdiocese of Southwark Spirituality Commission

'Follow me' - Making a retreat from home

A retreat is a focused time of seeking God through prayer and attentive listening to experience. Most retreats take us physically away from our usual surroundings, perhaps to a religious community or a retreat centre. Retreats at home helps us seek God within the ordinary rhythms of our lives. A retreat helps us stop and become aware of how God is alongside us now and here – in however life is for us. The same Jesus who called people to follow him, invites us to turn to him, to walk in his footsteps and find fullness of life.

The word 'retreat' suggests stepping back. What are we stepping back from? For most of us commitments to work, family and maintaining the home are going to continue. What we step back from is being so busy and occupied in our minds that we don't have time to catch up with how we really are or to be present to God with us. In a retreat what we step into is attentiveness. We express our desire to be open to God, and we do this in practical ways.

Taking part in this retreat will involve the following:

Watching the weekly video

We will send you a video link each Wednesday so that you can view it when it suits you.

Setting aside some time during the week to reflect and pray

You will also receive a link to some suggested prayer and reflection exercises, linked with the themes explored within the video. You will need to set aside some time – that works practically for you – to pray with one or more of these exercises. Since God also speaks to us through what we experience, think and feel, it will be helpful to notice things that seem significant to you as you go through the retreat. We will suggest some ways you might do this.

Sharing with others

This part of the retreat is optional, but many people find they can make more sense of their experience when they share it with others. Your parish may offer a weekly online group where you can reflect with others about what you have heard, thought and felt. If not, they may be another group running in the Diocese that you can join.

Here are some practical suggestions for helping you make space for the retreat whilst being at home:

Finding time

When something is important to us, we find time for it, even when a whole host of other commitments remain for us. Having said that, for some of us space for prayer can be difficult to find. Perhaps you tend to have more time on some days within the week than others. On more pressured days look to set aside a shorter time for prayer and reflection – perhaps using the prayer practice suggested for each week. On the day when you have more time, use one of the reflection exercises given for the week. Try to 'honour' the time you set aside – so if it is only 10 minutes on some days, make it a good 10 minutes. If you do have more time available, you can be more generous. Perhaps you can pray for 30 minutes each day. However long the time you decide on as being practical for you, God will work through it.



Where possible, decide ahead when your chosen time for prayer will be. With regularity, when that moment comes around, you know what it is for. You will move more quickly into an open space before God.

You may find it helpful to use a timer for your prayer period. This will stop you becoming distracted through clock watching.

Life is unpredictable and the unexpected will come in and disturb the pattern you have set. This is normal and nothing to feel a sense of failure about. When you are able, go back to the rhythm you have decided upon, or if you need to, adjust it.

Finding a place

Make a particular room or seat a habitual place for prayer. Of course, we can pray anywhere. But through repetition the mind and spirit begin to recognise that in entering this place I am setting myself to pray. Your 'place' might be your kitchen table at a quiet time of the day, a corner in your bedroom, or a seat in your shed.

To help build up the sense of this space being your meeting place, add to it whatever helps to draw you into awareness of God: a candle ready to be lit, a cross or an icon, an image on a postcard, or something you picked up on a walk that reminds you of God presence within creation. If possible, leave these things there. They will begin to invite you into spending time with God.

Some other meeting places with God within the retreat

Walking

A regular walk can become a conscious and chosen time of being with God. Imagine you are walking in step with Jesus, being alive to what is around you. Sometimes you might share what is on your mind, just as those disciples did on the road to Emmaus. At other times it is enough to rest in Jesus' company.

You are walking on holy ground. Take time to notice what is around you. The rhythm of your steps will begin to slow you down so that you see and hear more. In becoming more present to where you are, you will also become more aware of God's presence.

A regular activity

In a retreat in daily life we can begin to meet God within daily activities, rather than see them as interruptions. Is there a regular physical task that begins to slow you down, allowing your mind to wander as your body is engaged in work? It could be ironing, washing the dishes or making bread. Make this activity a time to quietly be with God, sharing your thoughts, desires, fears and hopes – or simply resting in that presence.

Keeping a prayer journal

A retreat is a time to be aware, using all your senses. God reaches out to you in all things. Notice what draws your attention. Perhaps it's a particular phrase in the Sunday Gospel, something you hear in a phone conversation, a dream you have that feels significant or something that draws your attention as you walk. During the retreat we will be saying more about some practical ways of staying alive to the presence of God within what we experience, think and feel. For now, one suggestion is that you begin to keep a journal.



This could be a notebook or even a computer file. What's important is that it is set aside for this process of noticing what seems to speak to you. You can write, or draw in it, or add images – whatever helps you note what feels significant for you. It's your journal – you don't have to share anything in it with anyone else unless you want to.

About prayer

During the course of the retreat we will explore some different ways of prayer. Keeping it simple, prayer is what takes place when someone chooses to be with God. Prayer happens the moment we turn our attention towards God, even when our efforts feel haphazard and clumsy. Sometimes we are aware of God as we pray and sometimes not; if our desire seeks God that is enough, whatever the results might be.

Here are some points you may find helpful in reviewing your attitude towards prayer:

Prayer begins with God.

You do not have to 'make God happen' through the power of your attention and your freedom from distraction. God is already with you...loving you...there for you.

We can pray with or without words.

For many of us, our prayer journey began with set prayers or acts of thanksgiving or contrition. Whilst words are important in expressing what we feel, prayer can also be resting in God's company without words, just as the disciples of Jesus enjoyed the simple act of being with him.

Prayer is abiding in God.

In Jesus' parable of the vine and the branches [John 15.1-17] Jesus says, 'abide in me as I abide in you'. Jesus is at home with us always. He invites us to make our home in him.

We can come as we are.

When we are at home, we can be as we are, without putting on a face for other people. We can be comfortable and real. God invites us to come as we are in our prayer, without pretence. We can say what we feel and share how we are without fear.

Ways into Prayer

There are many ways to actively choose to be with God and abide in that company; it is always possible to find means of prayer that work with our personality and circumstances. The Archdiocese of Southwark Spirituality Commission has prepared a resource called 'Ways into Prayer' with practical guidance on a variety of different expressions of prayer. For more information follow this link:

www.southwarkdsc.org.uk/ways-into-prayer