

## What To Expect On A Silent Retreat

Dress casually and comfortably. Please bring an alarm clock, pen, journal or notebook. Please do **NOT** bring ipods, CDs, cell phones, or anything that might be a distraction.

During the silent retreat, you will meet once a day with a Spiritual Director, for about 45 minutes to an hour.

Apart from that and mealtimes, you will have an awful lot of unstructured time to yourself...so, what do you do?

- Pray—either formal prayers (i.e. the Rosary) or spontaneous prayers.
- Reflect/Evaluate your life ---on where you have been, what's going on right now, and where you might be headed for the future...Ask God for an idea.
- Journal---What are your feelings telling you, in regards to your life? What do you hear or not hear God telling you? Write down a scenario in your life and a possible conversation about it between you and God. What would you say? What would God say?
- Meditate
- Do Yoga
- Draw/sketch something that represents your feelings about God and the world.
- Read spiritually-related books
- Listen... to your breathing...to the sounds of the environment...to what God may be trying to tell you.
- If possible, go outside and sit in nature
- Weather permitting—take a walk
- Sleep—if you have been exhausted this is a good time to recharge
- Write poetry or a song –good or bad
- Knit, or do anything slow & rhythmic to help one meditate

Ignatian Spirituality asks you to examine your own experiences and feelings. It asks you to recall the times you felt God's Presence (*spiritual consolation*), as well as the times when God felt distant (*spiritual desolation*). It asks you to reflect on what you have learned from those experiences. It asks you to trust your "gut-feeling" as a signal of where the Spirit is leading you.

Attached, you will find some questions that you may find helpful to guide you during your retreat.

Yes, it can be challenging to be only with yourself and God for an extended period of time...but it can be rewarding, too!

## ATTITUDES WHICH HELP DURING A SILENT RETREAT

Prayer, especially in a retreat, is truly an exercise. The purpose of prayer is to discover and confront areas of unfreedom in us, and so to be able to find the will of God about how we are to live. This means using the mind, heart, and spirit in sometimes taxing ways. It can leave you tired, a little more hungry than usual, and a little "sore" in those spiritual faculties that are not accustomed to such activity. Consequently, it is more important to assess your capacities accurately, and, with your spiritual director, to pace yourself accordingly. Therefore, be sure to get enough food and rest, and try to get some physical exercise each day – at least a walk – with the mind and spirit only quietly engaged.

Your own willingness and generosity are important throughout the time of silence. "In the measure with which you measure, it shall be measured out to you" (Luke 6:38). This passage is both consoling and challenging. It is consoling in that God has promised not to overrule our freedom, not to sweep us away by force. It is challenging in that we are asked to take account of our capabilities and to use them the best we can.

Our "measure" may be a cup or a bushel, but whatever it happens to be, we can try to bring it to God filled up – if only a level measure. God returns to us the same measure, but "pressed down, shaken together, and flowing over" (Luke 6:38). To catch everything God offers us, we might have to abandon the measure we are using for one that is a little bit bigger, and so we grow.

Pause awhile,  
be still  
and know  
that I am God.  
- Psalm 46:10

In your generosity, you have taken these days of retreat to give yourself to prayer. God takes the initiative in prayer and God decides the course of your prayer – not you or the director.

When God speaks, it is usually simple and concise. Therefore, it is more important to have a few key insights and take them to heart than to fill yourself with great amounts of new information. Mostly, God tells us what has been done for us – in history, and in the mystery of our own being. Become familiar with that first, and then wait for God to reveal more of what is in store for you.

This is my strategy of love:  
to lead you into the  
wilderness,  
but once there,  
to speak tenderly to your  
heart.

- Hosea 2:14

Discovering the richness of God and deepening your friendship with God takes time and effort. Not all communications will be immediately understood; not everything that is told will be pleasant; not every challenge will be easy to accept. So when your time at prayer seems tedious or slow, be true to what you can do: spend the full time, or even a little more, watching, waiting, trusting.

It is very important that you keep your attention focused on the matter of the retreat. For the time that you are here, try to be completely present in

mind and heart. The difficulties that exist where you live and work will not evaporate in the time that you are here, but they might seem different if you can return to them with a renewed spirit and a new outlook.

Usually a retreat is not aimed at solving a specific problem, but for deepening your relationship with God. If there is a problem you cannot get off your mind, discuss it with your director early in the retreat. Try to deal honestly with your director. If what your director says is unclear, or if you think you have not understood, ask for clarity until you are satisfied. Your director does not have all the

answers, nor does s/he profess to be more intimate with God than you are. Your director is merely another human being, trying to be of service to God and to you by assisting in the process of prayer.

This is a time of amazement, adoration, and reverence, a time of being able to taste more fully the truth of being uniquely loved by God. It is a time to discover anew the intimate and personal ways that God has chosen to love you. From the start, the retreat should be a time of peace, consolations, and joy. Be confident that if you approach prayer with openness and generosity, God will approach you with wisdom and tenderness and will gradually reveal the depths of the relationship to which you are called.

*Adapted from the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth in Wernersville, PA*

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## ABOUT SILENCE

Silence is not shutting down communication with the outside world. Rather, it is a means of coming to stillness.

A busy person caught up in daily affairs once went to a desert solitary and complained of frustration in prayer, flawed virtue, and failed relationships. The hermit listened attentively to his visitor's rehearsal of the struggle and disappointments in leading the Christian life. He then went into the dark recesses of his cave and came out with a basin of water. "Now watch the water as I pour it into the basin," he said. The water splashed around on the bottom and against the sides of the container. It was agitated and turbulent. At first the disturbed water swirled around the inside of the basin, but then it gradually began to settle. Finally the small fast ripples gave way to larger swells that oscillated back and forth, and the surface became tranquil and calm—so smooth, in fact, that the visitor could see his face reflected in the placid water. "That is the way it is when you live in the midst of others," said the hermit. "You do not see yourself as you really are because of all the confusion and disturbance. Nor do you recognize the divine presence in your life."

It takes time for the water to settle and become quiet; it is a process that one must wait for, since attempts to hasten it are an interference that only stir up the water anew.

Retreat silence is both exterior and interior. Exterior silence precludes speaking with any person other than one's spiritual director. It bespeaks reverence for God whom alone one is intent upon hearing within, and for the solitude of others who are similarly waiting upon God's voice. Exterior silence represents the settling on the surface that must precede the deep interior stillness of prayer. Interior silence consists in tuning out that inner dialogue with oneself that is a jumble of frivolous thoughts, worrisome cares and negative feelings. The careful observance of silence can be frightening at first and easily lead to the temptation to seek diversion before one has been able to hear the voice of God above the clatter that surrounds our minds and hearts. Silence is an exercise of faith and hope, and it seldom fails to result in an inner peace that is a sign of God's presence.

Silence is not an end in itself, an exercise in self-control for greater self-discipline, but a means to an end; that end is prayer. Prayer in the first place is listening to God. Silence establishes that necessary condition for hearing the Lord speak, for recognizing the personal love that God wants to reveal and the word of truth that God wants to communicate.

"We need to find God, and God cannot be found in noise and restlessness.

God is the friend of silence.

See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence...

We need silence to be able to touch souls."

- Mother Teresa

A silent retreat is an extended period of prayer, a time to experience transcendence and to grow in intimacy with God. We must spend time alone with another if we wish to come to know them deeply. Silence is a way to come to know God more deeply.

The hermit Arseuius once said, "I have often repented of having spoken but never of having remained silent." That is wise counsel for every disciple, but especially for every retreatant.

**In Silence - Thomas Merton**

Be still.  
Listen to the stones of the wall.  
Be silent, they try  
to speak your

name.  
Listen  
to the living walls.

Who are you?  
Who  
are you? Whose  
silence are you?

Who (be quiet)  
are you (as these stones  
are quiet). Do not  
think of what you are  
still less of  
what you may one day be.

Rather  
be what you are (but who?)  
be the unthinkable one  
you do not know.

O be still, while  
you are still alive,  
and all things live around you

speaking (I do not hear)  
to your own being,  
speaking by the unknown  
that is in you and in themselves.

"I will try, like them  
to be my own silence:  
and this is difficult. The whole  
world is secretly on fire. The stones  
burn, even the stones they burn me.  
How can a man be still or  
listen to all things burning?  
How can he dare to sit with them  
when all their silence is on fire?"

We cannot find God in noise and agitation.

Nature: trees, flowers, and grass grow in silence. The stars, the moon, and the sun move in silence.

What is essential is not what we say but what God tells us and what God tells others through us.

In Silence God listens to us: in silence God speaks to our souls.  
In silence we are granted the privilege of listening to God's voice.

Silence of our eyes.  
Silence of our ears.  
Silence of our mouths.  
Silence of our minds.  
...in the silence of the heart  
God will speak.

--Mother Teresa, from *No Greater Love*