



Spiritual Retreat
5 weeks

Source of Living Water

Marie Azzarello, CND
Rachel Gaudreau, CND



www.cnd-m.org/source/en/



Source of Living Water

“Source of Living Water,” a retreat for daily life, invites us in the midst of our busy lives to rest awhile in the centre of our being.

Marguerite Bourgeoys lived her life as Mary, mother and first disciple of Jesus, lived hers. Marguerite invites us like Mary “to live always in the presence of God as a mother who loves her child intensely does not lose him from her sight.” (Writings p .73)



In the silence, we are invited to be attentive to God who loves us personally, and with God, let us turn again and again towards our neighbour, towards all creation.



“Everyone who thirsts, come to the water” (Is 55:1).



Marie Azzarello, CND



Rachel Gaudreau,
CND

“Source of Living Water” offers writings, reflections and art work of Marie and Rachel.

We offer a daily reflection for five weeks. Choose the amount of time and the place most suited for reflection.

Perhaps you would like to keep a journal of your reflections. You might also want to gather other people together and share your reflections with them.

To contact us: cnd@cnd-m.org.

We wish you a “pleasant journey.”



Source of Living Water

All Who Are Thirsty

Day 1 : Sunday, week 1



Mandala created by Rachel

Reflection on LOGO

A Spiral ordinarily indicates the evolution of time and/or life in process. In particular, a spiral signifies the cyclical nature of our lives.

- How does this Logo help me to reflect on my life's journey?

Prayer

Psalm 139

God, you have searched me and you have known me...



Source of Living Water

All Who Are Thirsty

Day 2 : Monday, week 1

O, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!

(Isaiah 55:1-2)

For many years, we have sought to satiate our thirst in all the wrong places. Our work schedules continue to leave us little personal time for ourselves. Despite our love for our families and our communities, responsibilities for them often seem like added pressure. For some, children's sports' schedules or artistic ventures become even more items to add to never ending 'to do' lists. Inundation of advertising assures us that pitching our tent amidst 'things' will make us feel good about ourselves and assuage our loneliness and our fears. 'Sabbath rest' is often interrupted by trips to the shopping mall. Busyness encompasses everyone's lives. We have everything and yet it seems we have nothing. At times, a sense of disconnectedness, even from the world around us, can make us feel that life is passing us by.



Despite all we have acquired, we yearn for something more—a source that will quench our thirst that remains forever unsatisfied. Eventually, we may realize that this inner groundswell of desire in our hearts is God's desire rising within us. We know now that we yearn for a deep connectedness with God, as "deer yearn for flowing streams" (Ps. 42:1).

An inner stirring awakens us to the call of the prophet Isaiah inviting Israel to abundant life. "Let all who are thirsty come to the water," he said. "There you can buy and eat with no money (Isa 55:1). At first, we may wonder, what this stirring may mean. What water was Isaiah referring to? Today, we know more clearly that Jesus is the source of this life-giving water.

Reflection

Re-Read the text slowly,

- What word, phrase, image speaks to my heart?
Rest there and listen...
- What do I hear? What do I feel?
- Does the word, phrase or image that speaks to my heart raise other questions for me?
- Am I aware that the inner groundswell of desire in my heart is God's desire rising within me?
- How do my desires correspond with God's desire for me rising within?



Prayer

Ps 42:1

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul yearns for you,
O God.

My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

Your Personal Prayer



Photo Ein Guedi



Source of Living Water

In Search of Living Water

Day 3 : Tuesday, week 1

Read John 4:5-15, 20-24

Consider the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman fetching water at the well (Jn 4:14). At first, she is taken aback that Jesus would ask her for a drink because culturally Jews and Samaritans did not speak to one another. Jesus' words which follow surprise her even more. "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' Jesus says, "you would have asked him, and he would give you living water" (Jn 4:10). For the Samaritan woman, Jesus' words suggest that the water he would give to her would end her need for a daily trip to the village well. She soon learns that this is not the case. What follows might be described as a theological dialogue about the right place to worship: Mount Gerazim, the place of Samaritan worship, or, as the Jews in the Jerusalem temple. At stake is a question of identity: Which place of worship allows them to be in right relationship with God?



Photo bibleencyclopedia.com

Reflection

Re-Read John 4:5-15, 20-24 slowly

- 💧 What is my place of worship?
- 💧 How and when do I worship God?
- 💧 “Living Water”: how do I access this promise of Jesus?



Prayer

Isaiah 12: 1a, 2b, 3

You will say in that day;
I will give thanks to you, O Lord, ...
For the Lord God is my strength
and my might; He has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water from the wells
of salvation.

Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

Your Personal Prayer



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In Search of Living Water 2

Day 4 : Wednesday, week 1

Read John 4:16-26

The conversation which follows between Jesus and the Samaritan woman concerning her husbands is especially puzzling. At no time does Jesus accuse the Samaritan woman of being a sinner. So what lies behind this discussion?

Well, it appears that the Samaritans during their captivity in Assyria had intermarried and adopted the false gods of five foreign tribes into their worship (2 Kgs 17:13-34). When the remnants of the people eventually returned to Samaria, they brought these additions to their worship with them. So, when the woman says to Jesus that she has no husband and he agrees with her, we understand this as a classical, prophetic way of denouncing false worship.

This may well be the most logical interpretation of this text but why is this woman fetching water alone at noon the hottest time of the day? By tradition, village women ordinarily fetch water in the freshness of the early morning or in the early evening. Perhaps the familiar understanding of the text that her life-style ostracized her from the other women still holds some weight.



Reflection

- Who are the false Gods whom I worship?
 - Have I ever felt excluded from a group? How did I handle this situation?
 - Are there times when I have gone out of my way to avoid meeting a person?
- Why? These questions invite me to take time for a personal conversation with God.



Prayer

Isaiah 12: 1a, 2b, 3

You will say in that day;
I will give thanks to you, O Lord, ...
For the Lord God is my strength
and my might; He has become my salvation.
With joy you will draw water from the wells
of salvation.

Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;
make known his deeds among the nations;
proclaim that his name is exalted.

My Personal Prayer



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In Search of Living Water 3

Day 5 : Thursday, week 1

Read John 4:25-39

As the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman unfolds, it becomes evident in the text that something, someone grasps her heart. In a heartbeat, she accepts Jesus' claim that he is the Messiah; she becomes his disciple and runs back to the village to invite her people to "come and see a man who told me everything I [we] have ever done" (Jn 4:39). ...

Examining the narrative more closely, we realize that Jesus in offering living water to the Samaritan woman, a source in her springing up into eternal life (Jn 4:14), is inviting her to tap into an inner source of life, an intimate relationship with him. And the worship of false gods at the centre of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman seems to us to be a metaphor for all that consumes our busy lives.

Seen through this lens, Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman take on new meaning for us today. Jesus is speaking to each one of us, personally, saying, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. In other words, Jesus is saying, "faith in me is the way to drink the living water, the way to drink life that is no longer threatened by death."



Reflection

- What most occupies my daily life?
- Is there a similarity between the experience of the Samaritan woman with Jesus and my relationship with him?
- Is faith in Jesus a source of living water for me? How do I explain this relationship?

Prayer

I let the words of Isaiah 55:1-3 "Come to the water all you are thirsty..." find a home in my heart.



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In Search of Living Water 4

Day 6 : Friday, week 1

Re-read John 4:29-30; 39-42

Reading the scriptural text, we realize that the Samaritan woman and the villagers had been empowered through their encounter with Jesus. We desire the same for ourselves. This means cutting into our busy schedules to create an environment of silence where we can also sit by the well with Jesus; that is, risk being within our own inner space. The Samaritans, after their encounter with Jesus, invited him to remain with them, so, too, we invite Jesus to remain with us.



Reflection

- What decision must I make to take time each day to enter into my inner space?
- What does it mean for me to live with Jesus?
- There are many other ways of finding contemplative moments in our day:
 - standing in line at the store,
 - riding the bus or subway,
 - journaling,
 - coloring a mandala,
 - writing a poem,
 - gazing at a sunset, the moon, a tree...

Can I name others?



My personal prayer...



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In Search of Living Water

Day 7 : Saturday, week 1



Mandala created by Rachel and Marie

At the close of this week's journey, we offer this mandala created by Rachel and Marie to deepen our reflection on the Word of God, John 4: 5-42.

A mandala is a circular design symbolizing that life is never ending. Coloring a mandala or creating one based on the Word of God is an aid to meditation and contemplation.



Réflexion

- I place myself in the presence of God.
- I take time to gaze at the mandala, allowing the mandala to draw me inward.
- What do I see, what do I hear God speaking to me?
- How do I receive God's word spoken to me?



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Call to Intimacy with God

Day 8 : Sunday, week 2

Abba Father



Mandala created by Rachel

Reflection

In the spirit of Jesus, can I embrace the Spirit in me who cries “Abba” Father? (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6)



Source of Living Water

Call to Intimacy with God

Day 9 : Monday, week 2

A Listening Heart

Jesus said, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides on the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me” (Jn 15:4).



In the Gospel of John, the fourth gospel, the verb “to remain” or “to dwell” implies “union with Jesus.” Jesus is the “dwelling place.” The heart of our desire for Jesus to remain with us then is really a desire for intimacy with him. The courage to take a first step towards making time for solitude comes from Jesus and from his mother Mary’s example.

Scripture notes that Jesus would often leave the group early in the morning to go and pray. In those times of solitude, Jesus entered into communion with his God whom he called his ‘Abba’ (Lk. 1:35; 4:42; 6:12; 6:46). Mary’s attentive, listening heart to God’s word so evident at the Annunciation also inspires us (Lk 1:26-38).

Following their example, mindful of others who find time for solitude with God in their busy lives, we take Jesus’ words to his disciples seriously. “Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door” (Mt 6:6).



Teresa of Avila, that feisty woman reformer of Carmel, saint and Doctor of the Church, said that “making time to enter within ourselves to be with our God, we will not fail to drink from this fount that springs from God, the Source, and the very centre of our being.” Her words encourage us.

Reflection

- Do I sense a desire growing within me for an intimate relationship with God? Or What does having an intimate relationship with God mean for me?
- Jesus called God, 'Abba' Father. Paul affirmed in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 that when we cry 'Abba Father' the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. How do I see myself as a son, daughter of God whom Jesus reveals as Father?
- Am I able to find time for silence in my busy life?



Prayer

Ps 25: 1-2, 4-5

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God in you I trust; ...
Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
Teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
For you are the God of my salvation;
For you I wait all day long O.



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Call to Intimacy with God

Day 10 : Tuesday, week 2

Encounter in Silence

Daily, we have the possibility of creating private spaces where we can close the doors of our hearts. Drawn inward by God, we can make the journey to the centre of our being. There, freed from the many voices and forces that relentlessly seek our attention, we can be silent, still, alone with our God. In the silence we can let God look at us, love us. Often time escapes us.

In the silence, we can listen to the “still small voice” rising from within: “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10), “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...” (Jer.1:5; Ps 139), and “I have called you by name, you are mine” (Is 43:1).



In these precious moments, God’s tenderness embraces and nurtures us like a mother does her child (Is 66:13). Our hearts fill with joy and awe. Sometimes we are “like a weaned child with its head on its mother’s breast” (Ps. 131:2).

We might appreciate the words of Meister Eckhart, who said, “Nothing in all Creation is so like God as Stillness.”

Reflection

- Take time to pause awhile on the scripture quotations in the text above.
- Reflect on Meister Eckhart's statement, "Nothing in all Creation is so like God as Stillness."

How do his words speak of my relationship with God?



Prayer

Ps 36: 7-9

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge
in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house,
And you give them drink
from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.



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Call to Intimacy with God

Day 11 : Wednesday, week 2

One with God

Listen to God speak in the depths of our being “Be Still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10).



Thomas Merton, the prolific writer and explorer of spirituality, and T.S. Eliot in *Four Quartets* refer to these unique moments of silent encounter with God as the ‘Still Point’ where all sense of time disappears. Both speak of our entering into the ‘Cosmic Dance’ where we discover the hidden ground of love. For Cynthia Bourgeault, here we begin to touch God’s infinite mercy, the source of our hope.

In this moment of union, only this breath, only this moment exist. All is now. Fear and anxieties melt away. We sense that the mystery of God embraces us.



If we were able to capture our experience in words, we might say, over and over again, as Thomas Kelly suggests that we have discovered that “deep in us is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we must continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astonishing destiny, calling us home unto itself.”

Reflection

- How do I receive the suggestion that daily I am being invited with God to enter into the cosmic dance where we discover the hidden ground of love?
- Let us begin to abandon ourselves to this infinite ocean of God's mercy, the foundation of our hope. How does this find a way into my life?



Prayer

Ps 131: 1-3

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forever more.



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Call to Intimacy with God

Day 12 : Thursday, week 2

Late Have I Loved You

It is not a cause of shame to admit that we perhaps come late to this intimate relationship with God. As our relationship with God deepens, like so many of those who have gone before us, St. Augustine's prayer rises from our hearts.

Late have I loved you, O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were with me, but I was not with you. ... Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You shone, and you dispelled my blindness. ... I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst; for more. You touched me and I burned for your peace.



Reflection

- Reflect on the prayer of St. Augustine. Can I make this prayer my own?
- How do my five senses connect with this "Beauty" ever new?



Prayer

Mindful of my relationship with God, my feelings, I compose my personal prayer.



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Call to Intimacy with God

Day 13 : Friday, week 2

Seeking Balance in our Lives

Such profound intimacy with God is often ruffled by an endless list of things beckoning our attention. We learn that it takes real discipline to turn off the computer, the Internet, the never ending -mails and text messages with their hidden urgency for an answer.

Walking away from the television screen, the DVD, the CD player, the iPod, or shutting off the cell phones or smart phones isn't any easier. We don't necessarily see these conveniences as evil. Rather, we become aware how our need to be always connected outside ourselves consumes us, leaving little quality time for others, let alone time to consider the carbon footprints we are leaving on our earth, eating up its energy and resources.

In these precious times of solitude we often feel the need to gently call ourselves back to the Source of our life. Our objective is never to flee the world but to find what Henri Nouwen describes as seeking a "careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community life."



Reflection

- What does the word 'urgency' mean for me? How do I handle this feeling in me?
- Do I know how to wait? ... to be kept waiting?
- What reality is hidden in the verb 'to wait'?
- Do I sense the importance of seeking a careful balance in my life as Henri Nouwen suggests?



Prayer

Ps 62: 1, 2, 5

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.

God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress, I shall never be shaken. ...

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.

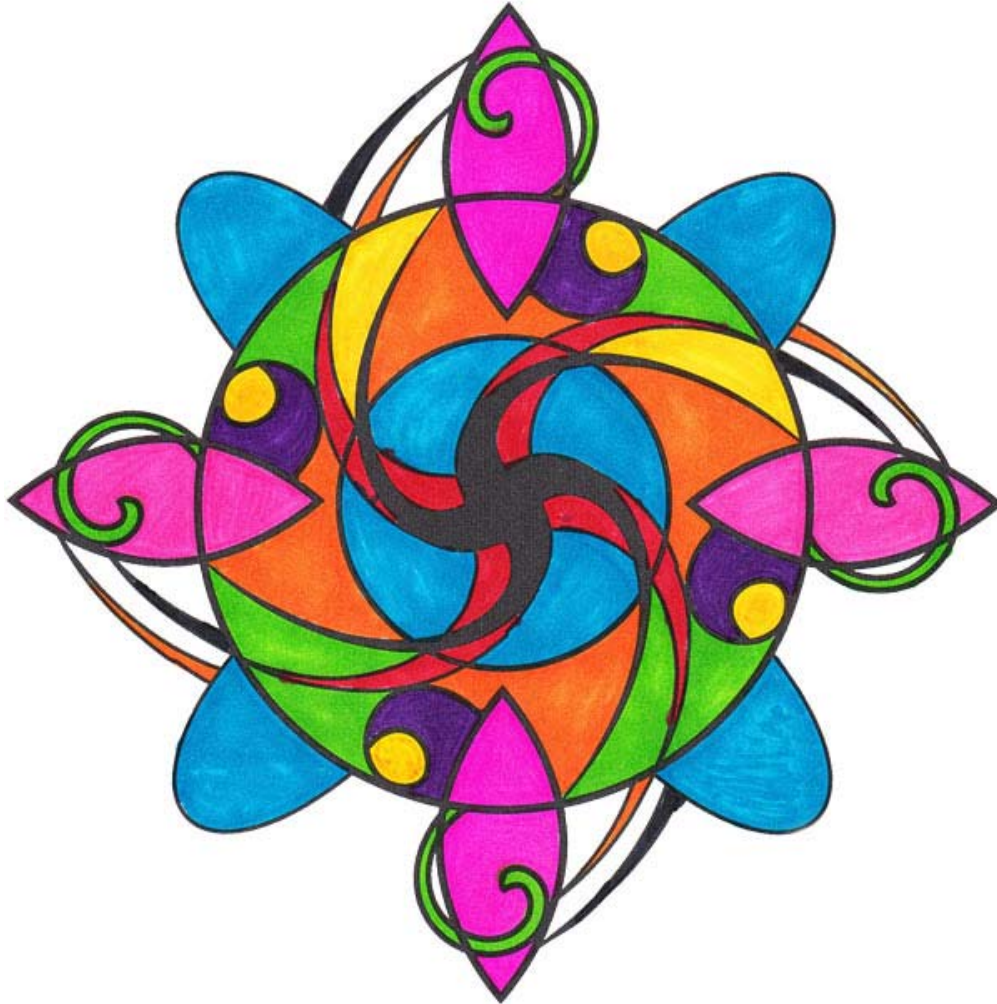


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Call to Intimacy with God

Day 14 : Saturday, week 2

Join in the Dance



Mandala created by Michelle Normand / Marie Azzarello, CND, 2014

- What connection do I see between this mandala and my lived experience of this week?
- What characteristics does this mandala highlight with regards to my intimate relationship with God?
- How would I illustrate one of my encounters with God?

Personal Prayer



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As Life Unfolds

Day 15 : Sunday, week 3

Before Life's Challenges



Image FOTOLIA

Reflection

- 💧 How do these paths in the woods invite me to take another step in my journey with God?
- 💧 How would I describe the forest in which my life's journey unfolds at this time?



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As Life Unfolds

Day 16 : Monday, week 3

Before Life's Challenges

In spite of an attempt to bring balance into our lives, unexpected events can shatter the comfort arising from our conscious moments of union with God. Fear of losing ourselves does have its way of surfacing, disturbing our inner peace.



There are other experiences when we feel shattered by the Good Fridays and Holy Saturdays in our lives. Like Mary and the disciples in the darkness of the hours before and after Jesus' death, we know moments of shattered dreams, of misunderstandings, times when who we know ourselves to be and/or what we stand for simply do not hold together anymore. These experiences often arise when it seems that nothing is actually happening. Time seems to stand still. It is a kind of winter in our lives. Darkness hovers over us. The desert beckons. In these times, it is easy to forget God's comforting, caring presence which we had previously known.



In the process, we face our ego's ongoing struggle for dominance. It is as if we have entered a dance where opposites struggle with each other: letting go and holding on. Whatever is sinful in our lives, rising from the complexity of our beings, our woundedness, turns in on us, causing us to miss out on real love or loving. It takes perseverance to hold on in faith that God, who is seemingly absent, is actually there in the darkness and the living water flows under the desert. We gain some form of personal insight into Jesus' feeling expressed in his cry from the cross: "My God, my God why have you abandoned me?" (Mk 15:33, Ps 22)

Reflection

- I take time to reflect on the above. Ponder the word, phrase or image that grasps my heart. What meaning does it have for me?
- Can I identify moments in my life where I inwardly I said to myself:
 This is Good Friday for me...?
 Today is Holy Saturday...?
- What has helped me to walk in times of darkness, the uncertainty, the ambiguity that such moments bring? What continues to help me?
- What sustains my faith in times of doubt?
- How are these experiences related to my 'call to holiness'?

Prayer

Ps 22: 1, 2, 9,10

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry to you by day, but you do not answer;
and by night but find no rest. ...
Yet it was you who took me from the womb,
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me
you have been my God.



Source of Living Water

As Life Unfolds

Day 17 : Tuesday, week 3

Facing My Inner Self

At other times, the disturbance can take quite a different form, as inner, conflicting feelings and desires swell up from within. Their subtlety sometimes escapes us. But as the days go by and we struggle against the onslaught, we never cease to be surprised by what emerges. Swirling and rising up from deep places in our hearts are all the energies of our emotions—our restlessness, our loneliness, our wounded hearts, our love and our lust, our deepest fears and failures, our anguish, our joys and successes, our past hurts and the deepest yearnings of our hearts. It seems that we are rudderless in a stormy sea.



We can be tempted to divert attention back to our work or whatever else we are called to do, often with little or no satisfaction. Most of all, we are surprised by the anger that sometimes surfaces from deep within.

Wanting to lash out at everyone and anything, going as far as to wonder whether in other circumstances we might yield to the temptation to kill, to torture or to betray our brothers and sisters to save our own necks or uphold some misguided perception of truth.



As we feel these deeply disturbing personal reactions we see media reports that show so many places in the world where genocide and ethnic cleansing are rampant. It is painful to note that as extreme as these horrific acts are they might have something in common with our own disturbed feelings.

Teresa of Avila describes an experience like this in her life. “At these times,” she writes, “I experience a ferocious anger: I want to eat everybody up!” Her words bring us some comfort. We are not as unique as we might hope.

Reflection

- The above describes feelings that often surge from within us for a variety of reasons. No matter how hard we try, we are unable to ignore them. Can I find my personal life experience here?
- Knowing that there is also gold in the shadow side of my personality, how do I integrate this negative side?
- How do I recognize that the roots of war and violence as peace lie in my relationship with others?



Prayer

I pray Paul's prayer for myself and in union with all who are making this retreat:

Eph 3: 14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory,
he may grant that you may be strengthened
in your inner being with power through his Spirit,
and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend,
with all the saints,
what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,
so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly
far more than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus to all generations,
for ever and ever.

Amen.



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As life Unfolds

Day 18 : Wednesday, week 3

Staying the Course

Riding out this dark storm with its uncertain outcome is never easy. Sustaining time for prayer is difficult. Issues and doubts related to faith and to Church inevitably surface. Intellectually we know that this is a new moment of transformation. However, knowing this does not make the process any easier.

Struggling with questions of faith is especially difficult when the surrounding culture no longer supports and often ridicules faith in God and adherence to Christian community for that matter. We know that we are not the first to experience this. Generations of people before us have, and no doubt generations of people who will come after us will also have their own experience of this.



Jesus seemed at one moment to have questions about his own identity when he asked the disciples, “Who do people say I am?”

Listening to their answers, he puts the question to them, “Who do you say I am?” (Mk 8:27-29).

Peter answers “You are the Messiah” (Mk 8: 29).

Reading the scriptures, it seems that Jesus’ understanding of what it meant for him to be the Messiah, the extent of the suffering entailed, became clearer as he made his way to Jerusalem. As for Peter, after Jesus’ arrest, his behavior and denial of ever having known Jesus suggest that the meaning of his having named Jesus as the Messiah was unclear for him.



We understand then that we will always have to seek the answer to Jesus’ question “Who do you say I am?” within our own life experiences. We sense that no one answer is right for all time. Given our own personal uniqueness, our relationship with Jesus will have many nuances. One thing remains certain: His way of life challenges the way we live. His death and resurrection bring comfort and assurance that life is not in vain, even in the dark and chaotic times and in the midst of the crosses we face individually and communally. Yet, this certainly does not put an end to all of our questioning.

Reflection

- As I look over my faith journey, how have my perceptions of God changed?
- Have there been moments in my life:
 - a) When I doubted the existence of God?
 - b) When I asked what faith in God means for me?
- Given my present life experience, how would I answer Jesus' question: Who do you say I am?



Prayer

I listen to God speak to my heart:

Is 43:1-3

But now thus says the LORD,
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the LORD your God.



Source of Living Water

As Life Unfolds

Day 19 : Thursday, week 3

Courage to Walk with the Questions

The example of Mary, mother and first disciple of Jesus, offers us courage to walk with these questions.

Mary's prayerful pondering heart seems close to our own experience. Scripture notes that Mary turned events over and over again as she sought to understand the meaning her son's life and ministry had for her and those around her (Lk 2:19; 51). We sense that understanding of her son's mission likely comes with His resurrection and with Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4 ff.).

Mary's patient walking with her questions, treasuring and turning things over in her heart shows us that our faith questioning is not a sign of weakness. Rather, our questions summon us to search for a deeper understanding of the faith to which we have been called. Not always a comfortable place to be.

Eyes on Mary, we sense that walking with our questions is a likely path toward finding our answers. Rainer Maria Rilke advised a struggling young poet to have patience, to live the questions now. Perhaps gradually, without even noticing it, he would live his way into the answers.



Reflection

- How comfortable am I with personal issues of faith? Can I walk patiently with the questions?
- How do I listen to other peoples' faith issues, doubts, search for answers? Am I able to walk patiently with them?
- Do I believe that times of questioning hold the potential for growth in union with God?



Prayer

Psalm 61: 1-2

Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
From the end of the earth I call to you,
when my heart is faint.



Source of Living Water

As Life Unfolds

Day 20 : Friday, week 3

Transformation into God's Image

In times of transformation we grow to trust that the Spirit is always there to help us in our weakness. When efforts at prayer seem in vain, we trust that “the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8:26).

So, surprisingly, while devoid of feeling, someone, something within always stirs our souls to trust the darkness and allow it to take us deeper into our centre. We grow to understand that intimacy with God never releases us from our human condition but rather sheds light on it.



The dark times that spiritual writers like John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila call “dark nights” help us to recognize that our emotions, love and hate, joy and sadness as with all other emotions are merely single threads in the dense fibre of our lives. Integrating our emotions is part of our growth to maturity, an ongoing challenge in the evolution of our faith journeys—our transformation into the image and likeness of God.

The prophet Malachi wrote “God sits as a refiner and purifier of silver” (Mal 3:3). Now a refiner and purifier of silver sits and holds the silver, keeping his eyes on it the entire time it is in the fire. He knows the silver is fully refined when he can see his image in it. We trust that God holds us in the fire of the longings in our dark nights, and in the process, God's image and likeness emerge in us as more visible.



We take courage from Mary, mother and first disciple of Jesus. At the Annunciation, God's power overshadowed her. God's darkness made the child holy (Lk. 1:35). Likewise Peter, James and John at the Transfiguration of Jesus, overshadowed by a cloud, heard God's revelation, "This is my Son, My Chosen, listen to Him" (Lk. 9:34-35).

Only when Mary and the men and women disciples entered into the darkness of the Cross were they able to receive the light of Jesus' resurrection.

Later, gathered in prayer in the Upper Room, waiting for Jesus' promise to unfold in their lives, the Spirit of the Risen Jesus rising from within, empowered them for a new mission (Act 1:12; 2:1-4).

Our dark night experiences then are a summons to befriend the darkness, to be in the Mystery of God "alone in the silence, waiting quietly in hope" (Lam 3:24-28).



Reflection

- Re-read the above text slowly. How is God speaking to my heart? What is my response?
- Do I believe that God's power is active in darkness as well as in light?
- How do I perceive that integrating my emotions is part of my growth to maturity, an ongoing challenge in the evolution of my faith journey—my transformation into the image and likeness of God?



Prayer

Psalm 139:11-18

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you. ...



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As Life Unfolds

Day 21 : Saturday, week 3



Image FOTOLIA

Contemplating this reflection, I gather together my reflections of this week...

Personal Prayer



Source of Living Water

Receptivity

Day 22 : Sunday, week 4

Journey to the Centre

How does this mandala reflect various moments in my journey to the heart of my being, the Divine Centre where God loves me infinitely?



Mandala created by Michelle Normand /
Marie Azzarello, CND, 2014



Source of Living Water

Receptivity

Day 23 : Monday, week 4

Call to Receptivity

Life experiences when we sense deeply God's presence or when we feel God's absence, darkness clouds our spirit, invite us to consider our understanding of receptivity.

As a Christian community, we support one another's call to holiness, recognizing the uniqueness of each person's relationship with God. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, in describing their experiences of union with God, show us clearly that there is not one spirit for men and another for women; namely, male souls do not differ in essence from female souls. They recognized that a capacity for receptivity is not a female attribute alone but one that belongs equally to men.



Receptivity was and is "every man and woman's capacity to be still, alert to what is coming from inside and outside, listening with inner ear; seeing with inner eye." Receptivity was and is the ground of our being which enables us to receive God's love and to love in return. Receptivity was and is the ground of mutuality in our relationship with God and with others.

Unfortunately, Christianity when viewed from a patriarchal mind set continues to see receptivity as an exclusively feminine characteristic, identified with the female body. Humanity identified as feminine, weak, sinful receives God's gratuitous love from God who is always imaged as a masculine being. Scriptural texts such as Hosea chapter 2 where Israel, having turned away from God, is described as a whore underline this image of God.



This perception of God and humankind has led to dualistic thinking whereby a secular culture considers life with church, family, friends, community, neighbours to be symbolically feminine and soft. A stark contrast to the exterior macho world of technology, centralized bureaucracy, and institutions. These two worlds are to be kept separate.

Reflection

- Do I agree with John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila that men and women share a similar capacity for 'receptivity'?
- How do I respond to the following statement?
Receptivity, long considered a feminine characteristic, is the ground of being in women and men that enables us to receive God's love and to love in return calling us into mutuality in our relationship with God and with others.
- What evidence do I have that Church teaching continues to promote a dualistic understanding of what it means to be masculine and feminine rooted in biological differences? How is this evident in the secular culture around me?
- How do I try in my life to move beyond dualistic thinking, to see myself as interconnected with all humankind, all creation? Do I believe that my behaviour impacts far beyond my immediate environment?
- What gives me hope that I and others can be instruments of change, that together we can help bridge the differences that erupt in global violence and warfare?



Personal Prayer

At the close of my reflection, I thank God for the gift of receptivity – my capacity to be still, alert to what is coming from inside and outside, to listen with inner ear, to see with inner eye.



Source of Living Water

Receptivity

Day 24 : Tuesday, week 4

Moving Beyond Stereotypes

Our recognizing that receptivity is an innate capacity in both men and women has moved us beyond the limitations of “God imagined as a great patriarch in relation to a subordinate humanity, all people imaged as feminine, that is weak, worthless, and sinful in relationship to God.”

We come to appreciate that to be fully human means that there is not one set of characteristics for men and another for women. Rather, men and women share similar human characteristics. Both have intelligence, the ability to be rational, to bring order and control, to be firm and gentle, tender and compassionate, intuitive and so forth. Their expression differs in men and women in their day-to-day work and relationships by personality not by biological differences.



Reflection

- As noted above, men and women possess similar characteristics. How do I experience this in my day-to-day relationships?
- How would this understanding of ‘receptivity’ help to bring an end to sexism in our church and world?
- How do I perceive that my capacity for receptivity is a prerequisite for listening to and being transformed by the Word of God.



Personal Prayer



Source of Living Water

Receptivity

Day 25 : Wednesday, week 4

We are Holy Ground

As life unfolds, we come to know our being as holy ground, for God dwells in each of us. In the centre of our being a wealth of sustenance awaits us. Often, as we listen to “the gentle whisper of God” (1Kings 19:12), an inner wisdom will rise, to be listened to not once, but many times—guiding us, calling us to live in hope in the midst of the ambiguities and uncertainties that emanate from the darkness engulfing our world.

We relish these gifts of the Spirit, trusting that we will be given good counsel and encouragement in times when cares weigh us down and grief over losses envelops our hearts and the ability to discern right and wrong (Wis. 8:9; 9:1-11; 1 Kings 3:5-12). We knew all along that this was never going to be easy. Circumstances can be ambiguous, making choices difficult even at the best of times. This ‘voice’ calls us beyond ourselves, to see that a Divine Centre lies within every person.



Maintaining such reverence for every person remains a challenge. In difficult times or moments of conflict, often, we see only people’s differences which challenge us and make us uncomfortable. Were it possible to hold such reverence for each person, we sense that wars, political, economic or religious conflicts of values and culture, might cease to be the way differences are regulated.

Polarizations in our Church usually described as being on the right or the left of the theological divide would fall away. If we begin to really listen to one another, we might well discover that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. The challenge is to stay the course with the hope that new life will emerge out of the tensions of opposite opinions.

Reflection

- Perceiving myself as 'holy ground', is another daily invitation for me to sit in stillness and allow my heart to rest in the awareness that God loves me at the very core of my being. Is this true for me?
- How am I aware that to give myself this sacred time in the presence of God carries the potential for:
 - inner wisdom to rise in me, guiding me how to live in hope
 - in the midst of the ambiguities and uncertainties that emanate from the darkness engulfing our world?
 - the new to happen in me – new ways of being, new ways of doing?
- How would my recognizing that that a Divine Centre lies within every person help the way I perceive and approach others, especially, the stranger?



Personal Prayer

I gather my reflections into prayer...



Source of Living Water

Receptivity

Day 26 : Thursday, week 4

Staying the Course

As we learn to trust our experience, strange as it may seem, a deeper sense of our true selves unfolds. Rather than turn us inward, the more we drink of God's love, the more we become aware that we are all brothers and sisters. In these moments, ethnic differences and our sense of being separate from all creation fade. As St. Francis reminds us in his Canticle of the Sun, "the sun is also our brother, the moon our sister, and the earth our mother."



The diversity of God's creation has the capacity to awaken awe in us. Suddenly, the earth is no longer a set of resources to be abused and used at will but, in Teilhard de Chardin's words, forms "The Divine Milieu".

We grow comfortable saying that "the Earth with all its creatures is the original sacrament. Charged with the glory of God, as the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins penned, "the world with its beauties and terrors makes present the loving power of the Creator whose image it reflects."



We marvel that the whole universe has a pulse, God's spirit guiding its process of evolution. We are not separate but interconnected with all God's creation in an evolving universe.

Marion Woodman, the Jungian analyst, describes this unique moment of human consciousness of the totality of all things as 'Conscious Virginity.' Woman or man has an inner freedom of heart to connect with the divine body of love that holds all creation together. Conscious Virginity is to live in the present moment. There, faith and hope in union with charity can thrive.

Reflection

- I name moments when God's creation has awakened awe in me?
- How comfortable am I saying that "the earth with all its creatures is the first sacrament"?
- Am I conscious of being one with the universe?
- Do I feel that all whom I encounter during the day are images of God?
- At Eucharist, we pray "by the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity."
What feelings does this prayer rouse in me?



Personal Prayer

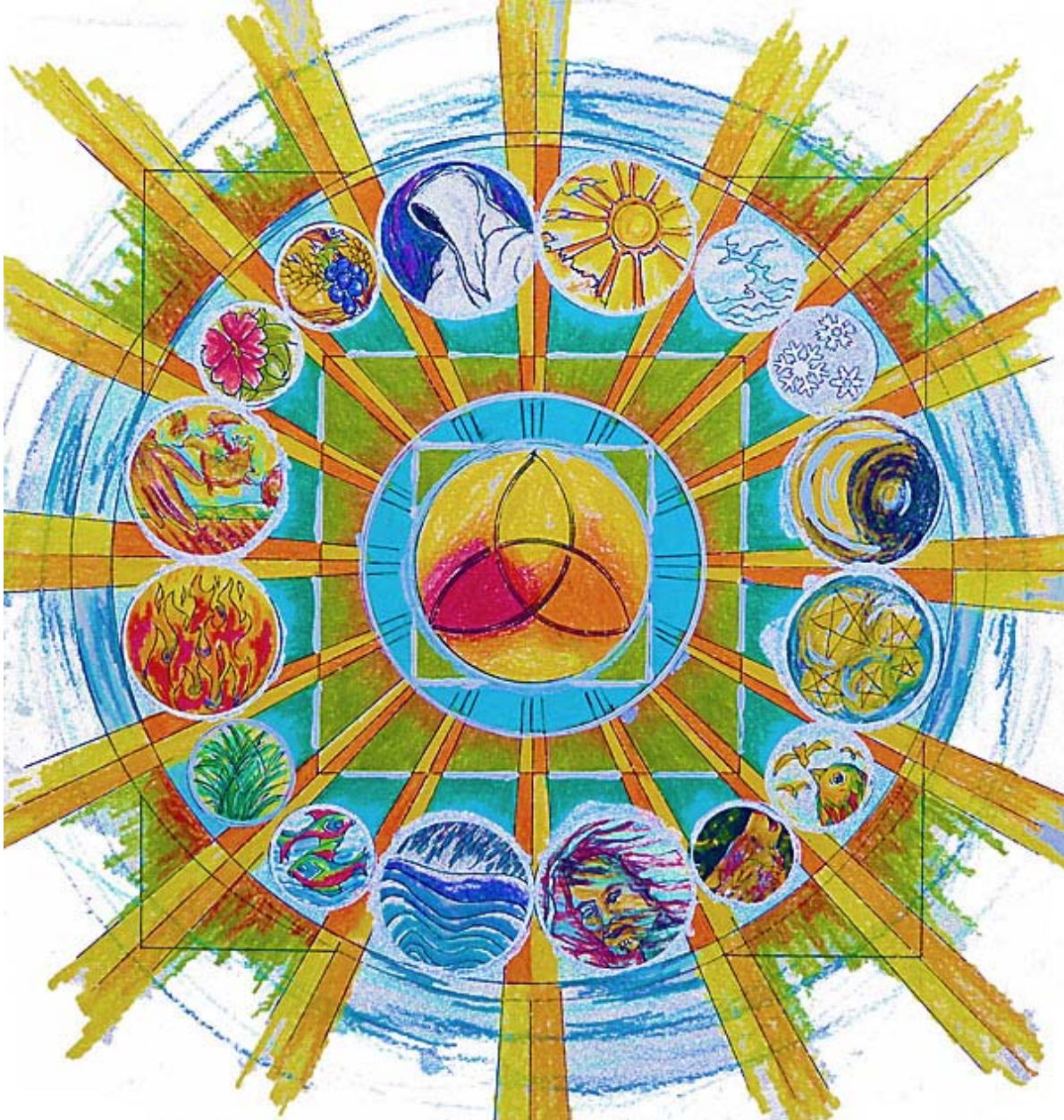


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Receptivity

Day 27 : Friday, week 4

As I gaze at the mandala, I pray the Canticum of the Creatures Saint Francis of Assisi



Mandala created by Rachel

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who brings the day and through whom You give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through
the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned. ...



Source of Living Water

Receptivity

Day 28 : Saturday, week 4

Burst Energy

How does this mandala gather together my reflections of this week?



Mandala created by Marie



Source of Living Water

In Union with Mary

Day 29 : Sunday, week 5

The Annunciation (Luke 1: 26-38)

And the Word was made flesh...

Am I conscious that my life as it unfolds is my “Yes” to God?



Mandala created by Rachel



Source of Living Water

In Union with Mary

Day 30 : Monday, week 5

The description of “Conscious Virginity,” as that inner freedom of heart that enables us to be in the present, captures a sense of Mary’s experience at the Annunciation. Mary embraced by God’s love, responded in love, embracing God, the Author of life; and opened her virginal heart to the divine love that holds all humankind, all creation together. Here we see that Mary’s “Yes” to God spoken in freedom at the Annunciation is the archetype for our vocation as Christian women and men who likewise wish to say “Yes” to God’s call in our lives and carry out the personal mission for which we are created. God, respectful of the uniqueness of every person “is always working obscurely within us. And even more mysteriously, some part of us is always saying ‘yes’ to God’s invitations.”

Reflection

Re-read the Annunciation narrative in Luke’s Gospel, Lk 1:26-38.

- 💧 What is my experience of being loved personally by God?
How do I name God’s love for me?
- 💧 How do I see God’s love present in all creation?
- 💧 Name moments in my life when I have trusted that ‘Nothing is impossible with God’
What were those experiences like for me?
- 💧 What does answering God’s call in my life mean to me?

Prayer

Psalm 63: 1-4

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.



Source of Living Water

In Union with Mary

Day 31 : Tuesday, week 5

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56)

It is not surprising then that the Magnificat rises from our hearts. Like Mary we have grown in gratitude as we grew in awareness of our uniqueness as persons. Yes, we are grateful for all God has done and is doing in us.

As we pray the Magnificat, we are also grateful for our new-found trust in the depth and integrity of God's love—God's Mercy present from generation to generation for those who fear God; namely, those who recognize their need for God, for others and for all creation (Lk 1:50).

Thomas Merton in his essay on The Good Samaritan points out that the word mercy in the original Semitic describes God's unconditional love that binds us to God, which never fails and expects nothing in return. For Cynthia Bourgeault God's mercy holds everything in existence and sustains the world in unbreakable love. God's love is everlasting, as the psalmist says, ever constant, unconditional, enduring (Ps. 107). It is not tied to any outcome.



In and through life's journey, we realize that, in this now, where past and present open onto the future, God's promise remains true: "Be not afraid. ... Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it. I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (Isa 43:18, 19).

This brings us full circle. Life experience is not static. We trust, that in many different ways, we will continue to spiral into an ever deepening intimacy with God all the while embracing life: the joys and the pain, the light, the darkness and ambiguity, the risks taken in view of new life which had often called us to let go of known and secure ways.



Reflection

Our world is filled with violence, the number of persons who are poor and oppressed, and refugees increase.

- 💧 Do I believe that God's promise remains true: Be not afraid. ... Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it (Isa 43:18)?
- 💧 Where do I perceive God's promise being realized?

Mary's personal 'Yes' to God in a society where women had no voice called her to move beyond known and secure ways.

- 💧 Name times in my life when personal choices have called me to let go of known and secure ways.



Prayer

Write your own Magnificat



Source of Living Water

In Union with Mary

Day 32 : Wednesday, week 5

Our Inner Sacred Garden

Through these times (which can extend from days, months, and even years) we learn how important it is to care for what we might think of as our inner sacred garden. Through the different seasons of our lives, a winter-time where nothing seemed to be happening, the sudden appearance of spring, bursting with new life, a summer's warmth or an autumn season where we can reap the fruit of what we have sown, our sacred garden has been ploughed, again and again. In this ongoing process, we recognize the importance our capacity for receptivity has played in those gift times of communion with God; in all our relationships and in our openness to receive the gift and the beauty of creation.

Reflection

- How do the seasons of the year, 'winter, spring, summer, fall' capture various moments of my life experience?



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- Reflect on those times when I felt new life, new energy burst forth in me.
- How has my presence, my way of life helped awaken faith and hope in others?

Personal Prayer



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In Union with Mary

Day 33 : Thursday, week 5

Mary and the Symbolism of the Garden

The garden considered as a positive symbol in dreams is seen as a place of growth, a place where inner life is cultivated. Chinese gardeners always maintain a harmonic ratio between empty and filled space, reflecting the principles of Yin and Yang, the masculine and the feminine. In Christian iconography the enclosed garden represents virginity, namely, inner freedom of heart, and Mary in particular. This invites us to look more closely at Mary in the Annunciation narrative in Luke's gospel. What else might we learn from Mary's freely given 'Yes' to God?



Rowan Williams describes Mary as the first explicit believer in Jesus; from her womb flows the river of life. And when we echo her 'Yes,' the freshness of God in Jesus flows from the centre of our being too.



Mary then in her experience at the Annunciation symbolizes our vocation to be totally available to God, our hearts free, unencumbered by those things that can distract us from connecting to our sacred inner garden from where the living water of love surely flows (Jn 7:38). As for Mary, the gift of ourselves to God leads to the gift of ourselves for others. (Cf. Wisdom 7:13-14; 1 Peter 4: 11-14)



Mandala created by Rachel

Reflection

- How will I make time to tend my inner garden each day, mindful of God calling me to “Be not afraid, know that I am God” (Ps 46:11)?
- What does my inner garden look like? I find an image or draw one.



Prayer

The prophet Isaiah says:

Isaiah 58:11

The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places;
and make your bones strong.
And you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water whose waters never fail.



Source of Living Water

In Union with Mary

Day 34 : Friday, week 5

Gathering the Threads

T.S. Eliot wrote in Four Quartets 'in every end there is a beginning'.

The late Karl Rahner, a Jesuit theologian, reminds us that all Christian women and men are called to contemplation. He notes that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all. By mysticism, Rahner means "a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence." He adds that a deep experience of God, constantly renewed in prayer, supported by participation in the Christian community, is necessary for Christians to live their faith, to sustain hope and not succumb to fear in the face of an often hostile secular culture.

Reflection

- I choose a word, a phrase, or a scripture passage that best captures my experience of these five weeks.
- How do the words of T.S. Eliot encourage me?
- Do Karl Rahner's words resonate with my experience during this retreat and life within my Christian community?

Prayer

At the close of this retreat, I pray for the grace



Free photo



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Conclusion

Day 35 : Saturday, week 5

In every end there is a beginning...

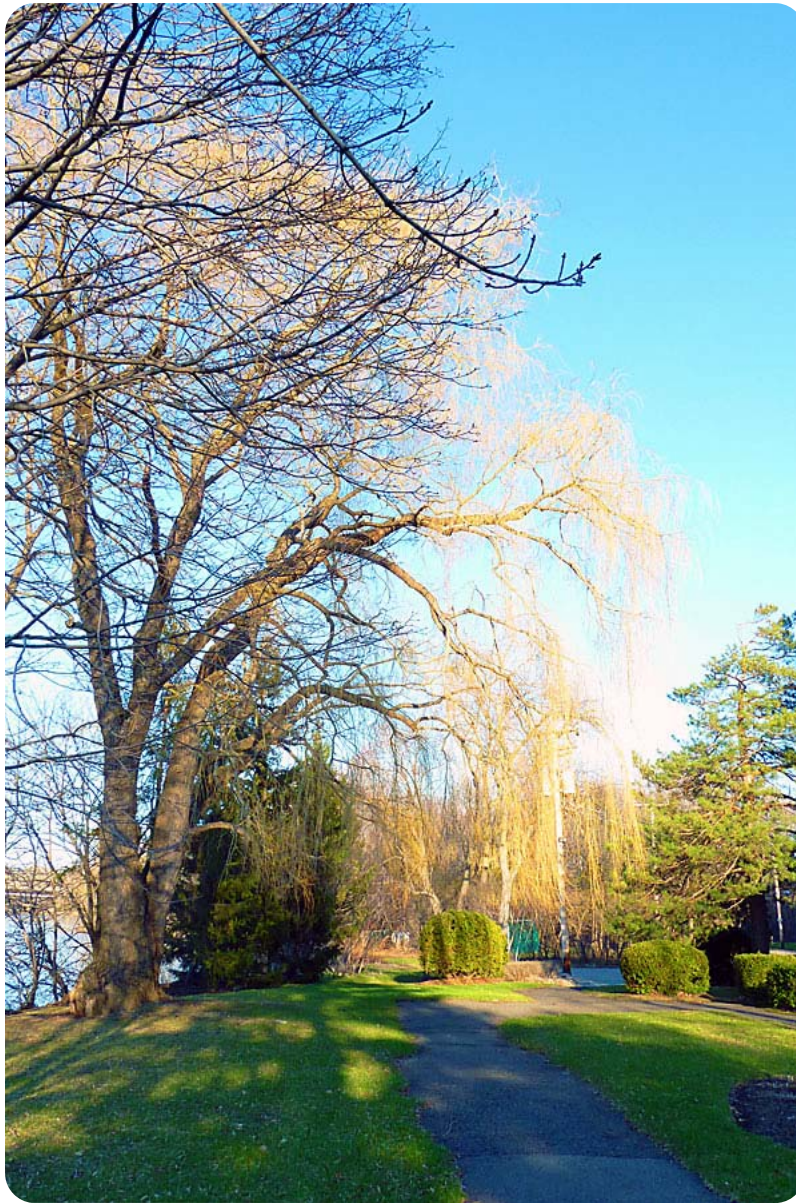


Photo taken by Rachel

The Journey Continues...



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