



ST AUGUSTINE'S
COLLEGE OF THEOLOGY

Turning Lockdown into a Retreat

Week One: Seeking God in a time of change

What is more delightful than this voice of the Lord calling us? See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life. Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide. [The Prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict]

With all the freedoms we lack, we retain the freedom to seek a greater depth of relationship with God. The loosening of the familiar invites us to explore the unfamiliar: the depths of who we are and what our lives are for; the depths of God. We can make this lockdown a retreat through the conscious choice to seek God within what we are experiencing. Then lockdown can become – in Benedict's words 'a school for the Lord's service' and a 'workshop' where God continues to form us.

Stance: Set yourself to meet all that this experience stirs up in you, in the company of God. This season of lockdown - when we are going out less and have fewer people to impress - invites us to be honest with who we are and how we are before God. As our options narrow, we have more opportunity to be present to Presence: to God in what 'is'.

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

[Psalm 25.4-5 NRSV]

A rhythm: Benedict set out a way of life to give practical expression to the desire to seek God in all things. Within this way or 'rule' Benedict insisted on the importance of balance within activities: time to more consciously pray and reflect on God's word; time to eat with care and attention; time for work; time to rest.

Reflect on a rhythm for your day that will help you look after yourself well, be present to the people you share your life with and sustain you in remaining open to God. This rhythm may already be emerging.

Stability: Benedict helps us to accept struggle as normal. We won't always find it easy live in close company, or to live alone, or to live with ourselves. We need to be grounded in God to endure the loss we experience in one moment and enjoy the wonder we sense in another.

Lectio Divina

Hearing the Word of God in the Scriptures

Lectio [Reading / hearing]

We 'hear' the scripture reading. This implies more than simply reading the words – as we might with a newspaper or book. This is a relational exercise: we begin and continue in the presence of a God who is always reaching out to us, and is doing so now through these words. We listen out for words, phrases or images that seem to touch us. The movement is one of noticing – or of being guided to notice.

Meditatio [Pondering]

Remaining in the presence of God, we ponder those words and any linked images of feelings that seem to be for us today. Pondering suggests the active use of our minds. Why do I notice these words or have this inner response? While our minds are actively engaged, this is more than a mental puzzle awaiting a solution that lies within the power of our reach: we must remain open, for it is the Spirit that is our guide and teacher here. 'Pondering' suggests this stance of active, yet patient attentiveness.

Oratio [Responding]

As meaning unfolds we respond to how God meets us in these words. How am I called, challenged, invited or comforted by God present to me now? Our response may take the form of words, or be made in some other way. I continue to listen to how God responds to me.

Contemplatio [Resting]

Here it is enough to be with God who reaches out to us in this way. Thoughts and feelings are there, but less actively pursued. We rest as God continues to work for us, taking us deeper into what we have received. The temptation might be to move along quickly; we have got our word for the day, what else do we need? Imaging someone watering plants in dry ground: it is not enough to make the ground wet; the water must continue to flow until it reaches down to the deepest roots. So we abide here while the gardener does his work.

Some suggested readings for this week:

Psalm 25; Mark 16. 1-8; Isaiah 55. 1-11; Psalm 42; Hosea 6. 1-3

Listen to your experience: During this week notice anything that you see, hear or feel that particularly strikes you. Use a similar process to Lectio Divina to reflect on its significance: drawing these moments back into your memory, considering them prayerfully, talking about them with God and letting God take you more deeply into their meaning for you. You may find it helpful to keep a prayer journal to help you remember and reflect.