

## Dialogue with God: The diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943

My life has become an uninterrupted dialogue with You, O God, one great dialogue... Things come and go in a deeper rhythm, and people must be taught to listen; it is the most important thing we have to learn in this life...

All my creative powers are translated into inner dialogues with You. The beat of my heart has grown deeper, more active, and yet more peaceful, and it is as if all the time I were storing up inner riches.

*An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941 -43.* Persephone Books, London 1999

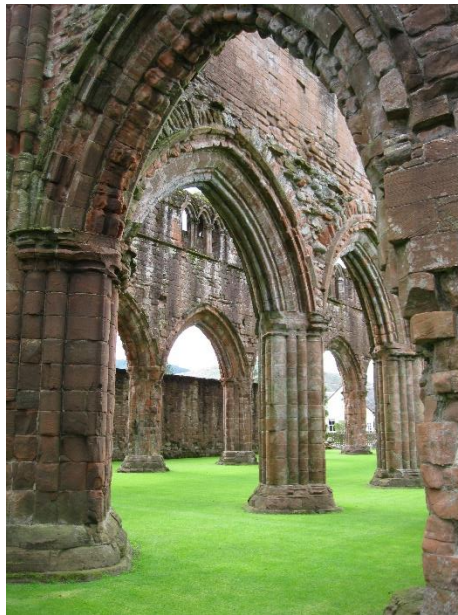
**A spiritual journal:** In a journal we are not so much recording the events of the day as being in conversation with them. As we write we are exploring our own thoughts, feelings and reactions. It's as if the written page and the pen are asking us 'what was going on for you there?' 'Why did that moment in particular feel significant?' We are not just talking on the page – we are also listening. As we write the scattered fragments of the day begin to be gathered together; and then, not always, but often – a fresh insight emerges – or writing takes us on from where we started to connect us with a deeper current within our own being – or with God's being. We are talking with ourselves and then we are talking with God – or to give the fuller picture – we are also listening to ourselves and listening to God as we write.

### Some practical suggestions for beginning a journal

- Decide whether or not you are going to use a notebook or a file on your computer. While many of us are used to typing rather than writing, it may be helpful to use pen and paper. The different mode may help you move into a different space from when you are working or emailing.
- To begin with, commit yourself to keep your journal every day for a week. Hopefully, at the end of the week you will want to continue.
- You may want to date your entries to help with navigation as you read back.
- Each day, start with one experience that in some way felt significant for you – even if you are not sure why this is so. It might be something you saw, a comment someone made, or an inward reaction you had to an event.
- Alongside describing what happened, explore the thoughts, feelings and responses that arose for you.

- As you write, be aware that you are in a listening space where God is present for you. You may want to express your thoughts directly to God – as Etty Hillesum found herself doing.
- Sometimes drawing describes your experience more fully than words can. Since your journal is for your eyes alone, what matters is what this sketch expresses for you.

### Using the pattern of *Lectio Divina* with our life experience



#### *Lectio* [Reading / hearing]

We 'hear' what has been happening for us. 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. We listen out for experience that seems to hold significance for us. The movement is one of noticing – or of being guided to notice.

#### *Meditatio* [Pondering]

Remaining in the presence of God, we ponder this experience. Pondering suggests the active use of our minds. Why do I notice this event 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 this experience. 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? Imagine rain falling on 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 rain does its work.