

# Half-Day Retreat

## Suggested schedule

Practicing quiet days and times of retreat is intentionally choosing to lay aside our plans and agendas, our doing and achieving. For a set period, we seek to be attentive to God – enjoying time with him.

A certain amount of direction is helpful as you do this. Yet, with that said, I offer these suggestions tentatively. Please do not feel any need to use them prescriptively. Be at liberty to adapt it and skip over sections if it feels ill-fitting or burdensome. These reflections and prayer practices could equally work well over a full day, by allowing a longer period to slow down during the first half of the day and extending the times for each prayer practice.

You will notice “pauses” are littered throughout – the intention is to allow the pace of the retreat to be unhurried and restful. Don’t race to ‘complete’ the exercise, it really doesn’t matter if you do everything included here or not. The heart behind this is for you to have time to connect with God, who loves you dearly and delights in you spending time in the presence of the Trinity.

## Introduction: time of centring

Find a quiet spot and sit comfortably. Become attentive to your breathing, relax your muscles.

*“Rest assured O my soul,  
for the LORD has been good to you”*

*Psalm 116:8*

Allow yourself to notice God’s presence with you  
– God’s delight in you and grace for you in this moment.

Rest in this space.

## Reflection

Consider these questions and note down your responses in your journal:

*How am I doing now at this point in time?*

*What is it I desire as I go into this time of retreat?*

Ask God for the grace you desire today.

## Pause

Ponder this poem by Mary Oliver. Try reading it out loud a couple of times, pausing between each reading.

### Today by Mary Oliver

*Today I'm flying low and I'm  
not saying a word.  
I'm letting all the voodooos of ambition sleep.  
The world goes on as it must,  
the bees in the garden rumbling a little,  
the fish leaping, the gnats getting eaten.  
And so forth.*

*But I'm taking the day off.  
Quiet as a feather.  
I hardly move though really I'm traveling  
a terrific distance.  
Stillness. One of the doors  
into the temple.*

## Walk

*Allow half an hour or so for this time outside.*

I invite you to spend time outside: either sit or go for a walk. In this time be attentive to what you are grateful for. As you notice things by sight or from memory, express a short prayer of thanks for each. Repeat this throughout the time.

## Pause

Find somewhere to sit still and rest with God.

# Meditation

Allow about half an hour for this next section.

Take some time to engage in the prayer practice known as Lectio Divina – “sacred reading”.

## Enging with this meditative practice

With Lectio Divina we engage with the Bible in the presence of God, with an openness to receiving what he has to say to us today. Do this in a prayerful and meditative way. The intention is to go *deep* not wide. We are ‘sipping on scripture’ as one writer put it – savouring the flavour – like a fine wine.

## Overview

During this time of prayer I suggest you read the first few verses from a Psalm – if you are unsure which passage to use today, perhaps use Psalm 27.

Go through four stages as you do this. They will be: *read, reflect, respond, rest*

## Read

First, read the text slowly. Listen to it, as if hearing it fresh.

## Reflect

Now read the text a second time. Notice what draws you in as you read. Let one word or phrase become the focus of your attention today. Give yourself plenty of time to reflect and meditate on this – ponderer it and mull it over.

## Respond

Read the passage a third time and respond to God in prayer.

## Rest

Finally *rest* – a key feature of lectio and of contemplative prayer in general. We resist the urge to race through on to the next thing. We give ourselves time to simply ‘be’ – to treasure what you have been given with God.

### Psalm 27:1,4-6

The LORD is my light and my salvation  
– whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the refuge of my life  
– of whom shall I be afraid?

One thing I ask from the LORD,  
this is what I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the  
LORD all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and  
to seek him in his temple.

For in the day of trouble he will keep  
me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his  
sacred tent and set me high upon a  
rock.

## Pause

If you feel there is time, consider spending time outside, find somewhere comfortable to sit or go for a walk.

## Drawing to a close

*Allow half an hour to an hour for this last section*

### Examen

Engage in a prayer of examen. This prayer practice comes to us through the Ignatian tradition. It provides us with a way to reflect on our day with God. Use this time to reflect on the last few hours, with these five stages of the examen.

#### 1. Ask God for grace

Allow yourself to be open and attentive to the presence of God. Slow your breathing and settle yourself, become still and centred. Ask God to shed light on your day.

#### 2. Give thanks

Ask the Spirit to help you remember the past hours with thanks. Allow one or two moments to be brought to your attention. With gratitude treasure this with God.

#### 3. Review

Be attentive to your inner movements and emotions from the last few hours. What has drawn you to God? Where have you noticed difficult feelings?

#### 4. Pray

Talk to God about what you have noticed. Perhaps you have noticed shortcomings; ask for the grace to receive God's forgiveness and mercy. Perhaps you have noticed new invitations; ask God to help you to respond with wisdom and courage.

#### 5. Looking forward

Look toward to the coming day with hope. Ask God for what you need as you move forward into the coming day.

### Journal

End with a time of journalling. What has been significant from this retreat time that you would like to treasure?