

CONTEMPLATIVE RETREAT PREPARATION: **How to Have a Truly Contemplative *Virtual* Retreat**

Is it really possible to experience *a truly contemplative retreat* when you are not physically at a retreat center with the facilitators and other retreatants? We believe it is... and **PREPARATION is the key.**

At an in-person retreat, much of the preparation is done for you before you arrive. The retreat center prepares to house you and feed you, the retreat facilitators prepare the large and small group spaces and create the retreat experience you will enter into while you are away from home. Your part is to pack a bag, get to the retreat center, allow yourself to step out of the “usual” and open yourself to encountering the Holy.

But a virtual retreat is a different thing, isn't it? While the facilitators still envision the movements of the retreat and plan how they will create and hold sacred space for you, more of the preparation now falls to you. In fact, your preparation for the retreat will determine whether or not you will experience a truly contemplative “time away” with God.

Here is a list of suggestions for you to consider as you plan for your special virtual retreat time. We recommend that you incorporate as many of these as you can and that you start your planning now. As you do, know that we are praying for you!

1. **Consider the possibility of finding another place to be for the duration of your retreat time, whether it is for a few hours or longer.** This can be challenging in a pandemic and your finances may not allow for this option but do think about this before you dismiss the idea entirely. ☺ Some retreatants choose to rent a hotel room. Or perhaps you know someone who has a vacation house or cabin that could be made available to you. *If you choose this option, make sure there will be a good internet signal!*
2. **If going to another location is not possible, the next best thing is to give thought to how you can create a retreat space at home.** Is there a spot indoors that is not your “usual” place to be? Perhaps you could move some furniture around to create a space that feels new and different? Do you have a second bedroom that you could be in instead of where you usually lay your head at night? And once you create a new space that is just for “retreating”, what can you have in that space that will support you as you step out of the “usual” and into sacred space with the Holy One? *Some ideas:* a candle and lighter; a little table with a special cloth to hold your laptop, journal and other retreat items; a vase of flowers in the room; a cozy blanket and a pillow so you can be as comfortable as possible, etc. Create a place to be that invites you out of the ordinary and into sacred space.
3. **If you are retreating at home and you share your home with others... help them understand what you will need from them during your retreat time.** Have a conversation and give them specific information about how they can support you during this time.

Perhaps put the retreat schedule where they can see it and be reminded to give you space and as much quiet as possible. Think about how you could take some of your retreat time away from your home to give them some “normal” time (see #4).

- 4. Give thought to how to get some time in nature during the retreat:** often those at in-person retreats have the opportunity to encounter the Holy in Creation... early in the morning, on breaks and especially during longer stretches of time that might be set aside for silence and solitude. When you go for a walk or hike during those times, be open for how God may be speaking to you through the beauty around you, or simply savor the gifts of nature to you.
- 5. Simplify your space so it doesn't “call” to you for attention during your retreat.** For example: close the door to where your laundry is, tidy up a bit before your retreat begins, put your work out of sight, etc.
- 6. Plan ahead for the following practical things so they are not distractions:**
 - *Meals and beverages:* In the Jewish tradition, food is prepared ahead of time so that everyone can rest on the Sabbath. Consider doing this or perhaps getting prepared food ahead of time from the grocery store/deli. At in-person retreats, the meals are prepared for you and they do the dishes, so give thought to how to bring simplicity to this aspect of the rhythm of your retreat. It is best to not get caught up in cooking for yourself or others while you are on retreat.
 - *Pets and/or children:* if you have living “creatures” that depend on you, what can you do to have someone else tend to their needs? If this isn't an option, how can you plan ahead and simplify so the necessary tending can be woven into your retreat experience rather than distract you from it?
 - *Devices and other means of connection to people/the world:* the essence of a contemplative retreat is saying *yes* to God's invitation to “Come away, My beloved”. Give thought to how you can disconnect from people/the world- turn off your phone and only check it once or twice (or not at all!), choose to “fast” from the news during your retreat time, let people know you won't be available during that time, etc.
- 7. When the time for your retreat draws near:**
 - Make sure you have everything you will need. Your laptop or other device, the link to join the retreat, a printed copy of the retreat booklet that you received via email, journal/pen, a candle and lighter, other retreat supplies and anything you were asked to bring. Perhaps a beverage and a snack...
 - Try to create some time between the end of your “work/chores” for that day and the beginning of the retreat. Perhaps plan to take a walk for 30-60 minutes before it's time

to get on Zoom ...and as you walk, talk with God about your hopes for this special time, what you need to let go of, etc.

- Right before you join the Zoom meeting, go to the space you have prepared and imagine meeting God/Jesus/(insert your favorite name) at the door to the room. Invite the Holy into that sacred space, then join the retreat, ready to receive all that the Spirit has for you.

Create your own unique plan here so that you can experience a truly contemplative retreat!