

See how the flowers of the field grow...

THE BACKGROUND

I think this retreat probably began in my head when I first heard Lynn Ungar's wonderful poem (which is part of the first reflection), though it took a little while to reach its current shape! I was thinking about summer as a season of growth, and also a time for exploring about new possibilities, taking time out to think and dream. I was also thinking about the world emerging from two years of pandemic and how (though it is not without setbacks) we are beginning to think more about what it means to thrive, not just survive. You might notice strands which weave in and out of several of the reflections — there are a lot of fields, for a start! I was also aware that summer is a time for lightness and ease and I have tried to reflect that. I'm aiming for material which feels substantial without feeling heavy.

As always, there are books which have been companions on this journey, for this retreat Fintan Creaven's *Body and Soul* (SPCK, 2003), Macrina Wiederkehr's *A Tree Full of Angels* (HarperCollins, 1990) and Henri Nouwen's *With Open Hands* (Ave Maria Press, 1972) in particular. Some favourite poems (and poets) make an appearance as well!

THE PRACTICALITIES

The retreat is in five parts. Each section has an audio reflection of between 10 and 15 minutes - these are posted on the web page. A written transcript of each reflection is also available, and there is a document with additional reflective material: Scripture, poetry, pictures and other devotional writing — please do dip into this! You will receive these by email, and they are also available on the website.

The material is designed to be reflexible, to fit in with life. How long you spend with it is up to you. The five sections could be used in extended quiet times over five days, or in a more intensive retreat period, or slowly over five weeks. They can be used at home, on holiday, or on retreat. If you are on an individually guided retreat, it would be a good idea to mention to your guide that you are using this material.

All the audio reflections follow the same pattern: a short introduction to the topic, a stilling exercise, then a reflection, usually including Scripture, a poem or piece of devotional writing and questions to consider. The last page in each of the selections of printed material is a 'Page to Ponder', with a quote, a picture and a question — they might relate to one another directly, or bounce off one another in potentially interesting ways. The invitation is to sit with them and see what arises.

SOME HINTS THAT MIGHT HELP

- Consider setting aside a physical space (a particular chair or corner) and a regular time for prayer. Some people mark the time by lighting a candle.
- Begin each reflection by taking some time to be still, either using the exercise on the audio reflection or another method which suits you. Remember, being still rarely comes naturally, and we need to be gentle with ourselves if we get distracted.
- Don't feel under pressure to get through everything. It is usually best to go deeper with a few things that try to cover everything.
- Stay with what you feel drawn to, and if something is not suiting you, feel free to put it to one side and move on. That said, if something is disagreeing with you in a way which feels productive, it might be worth examining!
- Images and poetry might need particular time and attention to reveal their riches, but no prior knowledge of either is required. Notice what is standing out, and ask where it might be leading you.
- Walking can be an aid to reflection. Take a few lines with you to reflect on while you walk. Use your senses and notice what is around you, and let that become part of your prayer.
- You might find it helpful to make a few notes on each time of reflection in a notebook or journal. What have you noticed? Have there been fresh insights? Is there anything you would like to go back to?
- Ignatius of Loyola was good at inviting his followers to go back and repeat material they had prayed with. You might have a sense at the end of a time of reflection that there is "something more" there for you. Looking back over journal entries can be a useful way to review what has been significant.

May you be blessed on this journey!