Welcome to this retreat! Please take a moment to read over this Retreat Guide which explains a bit more about how the material is arranged and presented, and will help you get the most out of the experience.

The Material

- There are seven reflections in this retreat. The first six follow a path, mirroring a journey into the desert, to a deep place of discovery and encounter, and back out. The final part is a chance to gather up the threads of the journey and reflect on what has been helpful.
- The **transcript** of the audio reflection is available, along with a selection of other **reflection material**, in the printed booklet or as a PDF by email.
- It is generally a good idea to listen to the audio reflection first, and then use the written material in whatever way suits you best. You can return to the audio as many times as you want.
- A range of material is offered within the audio reflections and in print, giving you freedom to stay with something which feels fruitful, or use something new each day.

The Reflections

- All the audio reflections use the same basic structure. They are usually between 14 and 20 minutes long.
- First there is a little bit of **introduction** to that week's material.
- Then there is a short **stilling exercise** to help reach a place of quiet reflection amid the busyness of life. If you are familiar with this practice,you might like to use your own exercise.
- The **reflection** on the theme for that week will often include Scripture, poetry and other creative or spiritual writing.
- You can pause the audio if you'd like to spend more time with something, or you might prefer to listen all the way through once then return to elements of it.
- On other days of the week, you might like to return to the audio reflection, or dip into the other material in print. The material is designed to be flexible and could be used in 'quiet times' over the course of the week, or in one or two more concentrated periods.
- Towards the end of a time of reflection, you might find it beneficial to make what Ignatius of Loyola calls a **colloquy** — have a talk with Jesus or with God about the experience, speaking as freely as you can, and leaving some time in silence to sense any response.

In General

- It can be helpful to set aside both a **physical space** (a particular chair or corner) and a **time** for prayer. Going to the same space for each reflection time helps us prepare mentally as well as physically. Some people mark the time by lighting a candle.
- Begin each reflection time by taking a few moments to **be still**. Make sure you can sit quietly and comfortably, and put your phone on silent if you can. You might use a body awareness exercise, a breathing exercise, or the quiet repetition of a word or phrase. 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. A good rule of thumb is that it is usually better to go deeper with a few things than to 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!
- **Art** and **poetry** can be helpful in shining fresh and unexpected light on a subject. It is worth spending a few minutes just looking at a image — you will notice more the longer you look — or reading a poem over several times. Notice details, phrases, moods, colours. Follow what is standing out, and ask where it might be leading you.
- Repetition can be valuable. Returning to a piece of material can yield fresh treasure the second time around.
- 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?

Some ways to reflect

Many of the guided reflections use elements of these traditional practices which have been used in spiritual reflection for centuries.

Lectio Divina

Read the passage slowly. Try to read with the eyes of the heart, rather than the head. Notice anything that's standing out to you, perhaps just a word or a phrase.

Meditate If something is standing out for you, stay with that, repeat it inwardly. Ask questions of it. Don't analyse it with your head, let it speak to you, let it tell you what it is about.

Pray Is there a response welling up in you? Is there something you would like to say to God, a question you would like to ask? Let that response come to the surface. Make that part of your prayer.

Contemplate You might find you reach a point where words are not necessary, where you want to sit with that image or idea, and let it sink in. Resting with it in God's presence, perhaps even the words melt away. This is the essence of contemplation.

Imaginative Contemplation

- Begin by acknowledging that you are in the presence of God, offer God your time and your imagination.
- Read the passage several times until it starts to feel familiar. Then take time to picture the scene in your imagination, use your senses, notice what you can see, hear, smell, taste, touch.
- Think about where you are as you watch the story unfold. Are you in the midst of things, one of the leading characters, or someone watching from the sidelines?
- Let the scene unfold naturally, without forcing it. If it starts to depart a bit from the biblical story, don't worry.
- If Jesus is in the story, what is he like? How does he deal with people? Do you approach him yourself, have a conversation with him? Notice what's going on in you as things are unfolding.
- When the story has finished, make a colloquy. Talk as freely as you can to God or to Jesus about what has happened for you.

Wisdom from the Desert

Retreat Guide