

## GUIDELINES FOR A CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE IN NATURE

- A. Take a walk alone for a half hour or so. As you walk begin to take note that you are here and not elsewhere- not in your usual “place”. Turn off any electronics. Be *here*. You are here in very special surroundings for a special purpose. What is different about this place? Name the differences, reflect on them.
- B. LOOK around you. What do you see? Look at the trees and plants- the variety of colors, textures. Look at the grass and flowers or maybe a bird or animal. When was the last time you stopped to really look and celebrate nature, not as nature but as creation? Creation: being sustained in existence and beauty by the loving Will of God who in the love of the Spirit created and continues to create. What is different about seeing beauty, harmony, and order as related to God’s plan?
- C. As you have been walking...and looking... there have been sounds all around you. Stop from everything and simply LISTEN. Listen to all the sounds: then pick out individual sounds, birds, bugs, wind, machinery, people’s voices, whatever. Listen to the variety, the individuality of each sound. Listen to the symphony of them all. Don’t rush. Spend time listening. How closely can you listen, how attentively with that concentration? What difference does it make when you listen this way? Isn’t it wonderful to listen and to know that you are listening, and that this is a particularly wonderful human gift?
- D. FEEL the ground beneath your feet. Weight, gravity, standing upright... all are gifts. Notice the air, the breeze. Touch a branch, a twig, pick a blade of grass, touch your face. Have you ever reflected on the gift of touch... the touches of care and love you have experienced and continue to experience in your life? Think of the touches of love when you were an infant, a child, an adolescent, an adult.
- E. What do you SMELL clean air, trees, flowers, the water. Think of the uniqueness of the various aromas coming from food, flowers, etc. What a wonderful gift smell is.
- F. Keep walking and get a little thirsty. Experience thirst. Imagine a glass of refreshing spring water, the TASTE of fresh berries or your favorite food. Let your hunger and thirst awaken your sense of taste. Isn’t taste a remarkable experience?
- G. What thoughts have been awakened as you walk along, have been trying to break into your stream of consciousness? What people of your memory have filtered through and seem to demand your grateful attention? Loved ones, relatives, friends? Let GRATITUDE well up: but be grateful first of all to God. For God brought you here to this place, at this time, for this experience. From all eternity God has singled you out to give you more, to awaken you to the gift of Himself deep within. You are God’s dwelling place. Remove all thoughts but gratitude. Let words and thoughts of gratitude well up, let joy well up, admiration, wonderment, awe. Stop thinking, simply let God give Himself to you. Let God love you. God desires to love you because Love is God’s nature. Experience the peace that surpasses all understanding.
- H. Have you been following a path- a path already marked out for you? Did you have any thoughts where this path might lead? Was there some insecurity about where you might end up? Did you think you were absolutely alone on this path? In a sense, while it may have been marked out by others, didn’t it seem like it was peculiarly you who were making the path for the first time? The wonderment, the insecurity—a concentration of the Journey of life and faith? Think about the path you are taking in life- your spiritual path, your human path, your vocational path. Have you taken these for granted? Let your gratitude well up as you think of the privileged journey that you awaken to each day.

Write a poem, a song, a psalm of Thanksgiving to God. Let the words come spontaneously without labor or calculation. Do not worry about the appropriateness, their beauty, their poetic value. Simply let them be YOU. Express your gratitude for being here, for those who led you here, for those who have been significant in your life, for being human, for the gifts of thought, imagining, remembering, thinking, knowing, loving (also being thought of, being imagined, of being remembered, of being known, of being loved). What about the gift of speech, of hearing, of seeing, tasting, smelling, touching. Then there is the gift of being able to communicate, to interrelate. The gift of faith, fellowship, prayer. The gift of God. Keep what you write.

Take it home with you. Read and reread your thoughts. Explore them in such a way that they reawaken your most intimate desires for God. What direction for your life is being given by God through this experience? What changes are suggested regarding your prayer life, your life with others, the nature of your commitments? "What you have received as a gift, give as a gift, says the Lord."

Have you received a new peace, reconciliation? What, how, will you give "as a gift"?

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