

Dear Friend

Today, I'd like to follow the theme that Richard started on Thursday in talking about the Saints and also Simon's mediation of yesterday when he talked about the increased fears we feel now that the lockdown is being relaxed.

It's now nearly eight years since I started my training as a lay minister with SEITE. This organisation has now changed its venue and name – now being called St Augustine's College. I still get their newsletter emails and a while ago they mentioned their development of an online retreat. They have recently launched another one, so there are two available to use. I thought it might be a good idea for us to consider this sort of practice.

The Christian retreat can be defined most simply as a definite time (from a few hours in length to a month) spent away from one's normal life for the purpose of reconnecting, usually in prayer, with God.

The practice of leaving one's everyday life to connect on a deeper level with God, be that in the desert (as with the Desert Fathers), or in a monastery, is as old as Christianity itself. However, the practice of spending a specific time away with God is a more modern phenomenon, dating from the 1520s and the composition of the Spiritual Exercises by Ignatius Loyola – the founder of the Jesuits and one of the Saints. The fasting of Jesus in the desert for forty days is a biblical example of a retreat.

If you have not been using this time of lockdown for deeper exploration of your relationship with God, now might be a good time to think about it. It may not be for you if you are too stressed to do some deep thinking. On the other hand, sitting calmly to meditate on the talks that form part of the St Augustine's online retreats might just allow the peace of God to seep deeply into your inner self.

The first retreat was for the period before Easter and the introduction goes like this:

"When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them." (John 20.19)

"This Coronavirus season has disturbed us out of familiar routines, rearranged our calendars and introduced uncertainty into our lives. We are more aware of our vulnerability. And, perhaps surprisingly, we are also more alive to new possibilities. It's as if we have joined a retreat none of us planned for. What is God's invitation to us individually and collectively during this time?"

This all sounds just what we might need at this time. When you've done the first retreat there's another one to check out. All you need to do is go to their website:

[www.saintaugustines.ac.uk](http://www.saintaugustines.ac.uk)

and register for the retreat which gives you access to the Members Area. Have a look and see whether you think this might be helpful for you.

So let us pray

May your love that never fails strengthen the weak,  
encourage the fearful, calm the anxious, heal the sick  
through your church – your washed hands and feet on earth –  
distant but still present, virtual but still connected, apart but still helping.  
God in your mercy, hear our prayer.  
Amen.