

Why Not Soar?

This short retreat is based on a prayer-poem written by a woman mystic of the 1200s. Mechtilde of Magdeburg. This translation is from *Praying with the Women Mystics* by Mary T. Malone (Columba Press, 2013).

Part 1

**You have the wings of longing.
You know the pull of hope.
You feel the flowing of desire.
So why not soar?**



Four short lines. Easy to read. Easy even to study. Begin your retreat by giving yourself a moment to close your eyes and breathe in and breathe out for a moment or two. Feel your body expand and relax. Let your mind go to the source that calms you and makes you feel safe—God, the angels, your family saints, a beautiful place.

Follow the directions below. Take as much or as little time as feels good. Be ready for feelings of delight.

In each of the first three lines of the poem the subject is YOU. Name the you that you bring today. Tired you. Anxious you. Hopeful you. Wanting you. Bless that you. You are unique in God's eyes, the only you there is. Love the you as God loves you, as your family saints love you, as the angels see you.

Read the three lines aloud, noticing the action words—longing, pull, flowing. Find the Holy Spirit in these action words. Longing for you. Pulling you to keep on. Witnessing the flowing of who you are. Let yourself dwell in these words until you recognize they are you.

Try the nouns. Wings, hope, desire. Close your eyes again and see the images each word suggests.

- *Wings* Angels, birds, flying. Where have wings taken you? How do you imagine yourself above the earth, flying? What do you see? What does it feel like? "I feel _____."
- *Hope* Gentle, daring, brave. To whom do you express your hope? How do you imagine your hope coming true? Who hopes with you?
- *Desire* Something forbidden or something from God? Desire asks us to respond. Name a desire you have. Where does your desire take you? How is it part of the you God made and loves?

Read the sentences again, slowly. Then answer the poet's question as best you can. Why not soar?

Close your retreat time by thanking everyone who was with you today.

Part 2



**Fish cannot drown in water
Birds cannot sink in air.
You cannot fall from my sight.
So why not soar?**

Begin your retreat by breathing in and breathing out for a few moments. If you like, say this mantra to yourself. “I breathe in the Holy Spirit. I breathe out worry and anxiety.” When you are ready, read the four lines above.

Fish. Birds. You. What do you have in common? All life has a special place in the unfolding of God’s love in creation. All thrive in the place where they live. All are safe in the place they are suited for.

Pay attention to the verbs.

Cannot drown.
Cannot sink.
Cannot fall.

Cannot can be a punishing word. “I just cannot do this.” “You cannot be my friend.” “Girls cannot play sports.” Mechtilde’s prayer-poem turns *cannot* into a positive, a cannot that frees us from worry. The fish, the symbol of the Christian from earliest times, cannot drown. The bird, the symbol of the soul, cannot sink. You, the Christian with God’s spirit within you, cannot fall into oblivion. You are always in God’s sight.

So why not soar? If you cannot drown or sink or fall, what can you do but soar? How can you soar? Not how can a Christian soar, but how can *you* soar? What does soaring look like for you? Where do you soar? What does it feel like? What do you see? How do the air and the sun and the breezes feel as you soar? What is the wind beneath your wings as you soar?

Thank God for holding you safe from falling. Thank God for the gift of soaring. Ask for attention to the Spirit in your life. Sing or say Amen.

Part 3

**Woman, I have adorned you.
Woman, I have delighted in you.
Woman, I have made my home in you.
So why not soar?**



This verse reminds us of the women Jesus interacted with in the gospels. You can probably recall the story of one or more of these women.

- Mary, Jesus’ mother
- Mary Magdalene, apostle and witness of the resurrection
- Syro-Phoenician woman with the possessed daughter
- Woman with the flow of blood
- 12-year old girl on the brink of death
- Samaritan woman at the well
- Women at the cross
- Women at the empty tomb
- Woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.
- Peter’s mother-in-law, whom Jesus healed

Become one of the women. Where is she? What is she doing? How does she feel when Jesus comes near? Does she talk to him? What does she say?

Now say Jesus' words to her, the three lines from the poem above. Can she hear his love, his respect? How does she feel? How will Jesus make his home in her? If this woman were to become a flower upon hearing Jesus' words, what flower would she be? How does her beauty affect the world around her?

You are the woman Jesus is addressing. He adorns you, delights in you, makes his home in you. How does this change your life? How can you not love the person Jesus loves and delights in?

Breathe in and picture the beautiful woman or man you are. Breathe out and thank God for your beauty. Breathe this way until you feel beautiful and cherished and ready to soar. Soar gently towards the sky. Look at the world where you walk every day. Picture yourself blooming in that world.

Give thanks for all the beautiful women in your life.

Part 4



**Be as the dove, I soar in her.
Lighten your heart, I soar in you.
Uplift your being, be an Easter song.
Why not soar?**

When did we learn religion was hard and punishing and scary? Not from Mechtilde of Magdeburg. She has the firm belief that we are made in the image of God and made for God. Her prayer-poem is filled with longing for union with God, whose image she is and in whose love she exists.

Be as the dove, I soar in her. The dove is a pigeon, not an elegant bird. Mechtilde could have named an eagle or a falcon. But God soars in our humanity, even if we are lowly pigeons. Just as Jesus showed God in his life, our cluckings and hanging out on ledges and other pigeon activities show forth God, too. God is that linked to us that God soars in us. When we smile, God soars in that smile. When we grieve, God soars in that grief, too. Jesus had every emotion we have, and God soared in him. Can you believe God soars in you?

Lighten your heart, I soar in you. Soaring does require lightening the load. The Wright brothers' early experiments depended on dropping ballast to keep their flying machines up and on track. What ballast can you drop? What would lighten your heart? What would free you to soar? Can you decide how to lighten your heart in just one way?

Uplift your being, be an Easter song. Can you uplift yourself, or do you need help? Who is a person whose presence in your life uplifts you? Someone at church, at work, at the coffee shop? How do you let that person in? What does being uplifted feel like? If you become an Easter song, what song are you?

Why not soar? Since his resurrection and ascension Jesus is with his Father in a human body with a human soul and human affections. Mary is there, too, in all of her humanity. We will soar to be with them when we die. In the meantime, why not soar every day?

We are made for relationship with God, with one another, with all of creation. We soar in every friendship and feel the barriers between us fall away. What we see from the heights of our soaring is what we can embrace in love. So why not soar?

Sing an Alleluia to close your retreat.